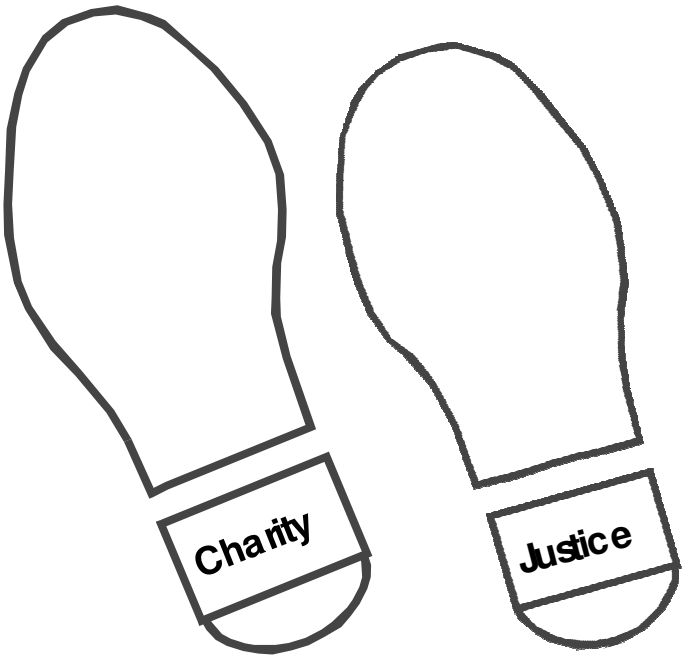
Charity and Justice: Walking the Social Mission



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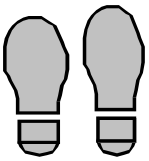
Charity and Justice: Walking our Social Mission



This reflection piece is designed for parishioners who serve people living in poverty. It is a two session format.

There are many individuals in many parishes who respond to the needs of others by offering time, money, and organization. These service providers know the stories of individuals in need, have insights into the difficulties they confront, and learn about poverty issues firsthand. These two sessions offer time for reflection on what has been learned, and encouragement for continuing to serve and build bridges between charity and justice.

Each session is 1 ½ - 2 hours long with any one group or several groups of service providers. All that is needed is the material included here and one person to facilitate the sessions. All directions and tips are available in this easy to follow packet. We'd love to hear about your experience using this material, or if you have any questions, please call:

S. Kerry O'Reilly: 651-291-4482
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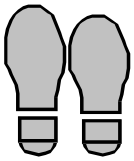
Charity and Justice: Walking in our Social Mission
NOTES FOR THE FACILITATOR



The First Session has the following goals:

- To explore what parishioners, as service providers, have learned about poverty and the issues that people are facing.
- To recognize the short-term impact of their service and the need for long-term policy solutions.
- To foster a sense of satisfaction and appreciation for the service that parishioners have given to people facing crisis.
- To create energy for seeing the relationship between this service and longer term solutions.

The conversation of this group is based on the experience of the volunteer service they provide. These individuals offer their time and talent to assist people living in poverty. It is directed toward a specific need. They are to be commended for their work.

This kind of direct service is necessary to prevent the immediate repercussions of poverty which could result in greater illness, broken families and even death. It is a service that is needed again and again. The conversation during this first session asks people to share reflections on how they feel about their work, how they may have changed or grown in this service and what questions they may have about their experience doing social ministry.

THE ROLE OF THE FACILITATOR

Your role, as facilitator, is to provide the opportunity for people to talk together. There are no correct answers as people reflect on their experience.

A few hints:

- Start and end on time – it is respectful and will bring people back.
- You need not use ALL the questions. Use the questions to keep the conversation going. The early questions on feelings are important, the conclusion is important.
- Use the middle questions as needed to invite greater participation.
- Involve participants in the prayers. See separate prayer sheets. If you wish to make copies for the group, feel free to do so.
- Both sessions begin with a scripture reading, a short reflection and a prayer. Before the scripture reading, welcome people and have each person introduce themselves. (This can be done informally.)
- If there will be a number of people who do not know each other; name tags would be a good idea.

For Session I: Make copies of the article, *Justice and Charity,* by Jim Dinn of Pax Christi before the reflection meeting.

Session II asks the participants to continue the discussion and include the lens of justice in their perspective. Charity or direct service deals with immediate symptoms of larger issues. Justice looks at WHY the symptoms exist and points to systemic problems. For example: Families are homeless, why? The parent(s) may not be able to find work or a living wage. That is a larger issue that is related to the business sector of our economy. The family provider may be untrained or uneducated. That is a larger issue related to the educational system.

When we treat the underlying issues we create social change which leads to more people being able to meet their own needs. Thus the need for direct service/charity is reduced and people become more able to care for their own needs.

It would be good if we sought, as a society, to work for more just systems and institutions so that eventually charity would no longer be necessary.

Session II has the following goals:

- To explore the meaning of root causes and systems from the perspective of direct service.
- To recognize the necessary, but limited impact of direct service and the need for long-term policy solutions.
- To identify a connection to the people they serve as part of the community.
- To identify their role in animating the parish to engage in charity **and** justice.

Materials needed before the meeting:

- Provide small colored paper and colored markers for group names.
- Provide large white paper and colored markers for "Why Web".
- Make copies of "Two Feet".

Before the meeting begins, ask one person from each group represented to write the name of the group in large letters on a piece of paper.

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Charity and Justice, Walking in our Social Mission

Session I

(Before reading the passage, ask people to listen for what strikes them.)
Scripture reading: James 2, 14-17

What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if a person claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save? Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says, "Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about the physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

- After reading the passage, allow some time for quiet.
- Then ask people to indicate what word or phrase struck them. There is no need to explain, simply indicate a word or phrase.
- Another short pause for quiet, then offer the prayer on the separate sheet.

Invitation:
Invite each person to + introduce her/himself and the volunteer group they work with and + how long they have done so and + indicate how many people participate in the service they offer.

Conversation:
Ask the following questions, allowing time for people to respond and develop a conversation:

- What strikes you about what we just heard from each other?
- What did you hear in terms of the numbers of people served by this group?
    - What is rewarding for you in the work you do in this service?
    - What is most challenging for you?
- In what way does the work you do meet the needs of those you serve?
- In what way does it not meet their needs?
- How have your feelings or expectations about "the poor" or immigrants changed since beginning this work?
- What would you like to change about the service you provide?
    - In what way do you see your work connected to the scripture reading from James?
    - What conclusions would you draw from this conversation?

Before next gathering:
Ask people to read the short article on *Justice and Charity* for the next gathering.

Conclusion:
Ask the group to raise up groups and individuals from their work to remember in prayer. Conclude with closing prayer on prayer sheet.

PRAYER SHEET
Session I

Scripture Reading: James 2, 14-17

What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if a person claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save? Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says, "Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about the physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

Opening Prayer:

DARE TO HOPE

We dare to imagine a world
where hunger has no chance to show its face.
We dare to dream of a world
where wars and terror are afraid to leave their make.
We long to believe in a world
of hope unchained and lives unfettered.
We dare to work for the creation of a world
where your people are free from poverty.
Dare we open minds to difference?
Dare we open our lives to change?
Your Kingdom come, O Lord, Your will be done. Amen.

(Linda Jones)

Closing Prayer:

Good and Gracious God, Source of all Life,
All creation is charged with your Divine Energy.

Ignite your Spark within us that we may know ourselves as truly human and holy, forever part of the Web of Life.
All Creation
Each star and every flower, each drop of water and every person, each atom, down to its very electrons,
explodes with the revelation of your Sacred Mystery.
May we always walk gently up on this earth, in right relationship,
Nurtured by your Love, taking only what we need
giving back to the earth in gratitude, mindful of those who will come after us.

Grant us the Strength and courage, we pray
for such radical transformation into your Kin-dom. Amen.

(Michelle Balek,OSF)

JUSTICE AND CHARITY

By Jim Dinn, Pax Christi

Social justice and charity are sister values, but charity seems to be the sibling that people give the most attention to. Social justice, on the other hand, is more easily overlooked or given a back seat.

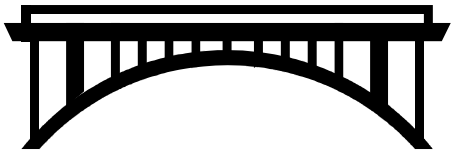
The past 100 years have seen a dramatic development in the Catholic Church's emphasis on social justice. As Pope John Paul II emphasizes in Centesimus Annus, religious teaching today "must include among its essential elements a proclamation of the church's social doctrine." It is as if the teaching of the church needed to gradually grow into that recognition and emphasis just as we individually must do also.

Justice and charity are both rooted in the social dimension of the gospels. Both reflect the same gospel mandates. The Beatitudes, the Sermon on the Mount, and such parables as the Last Judgment, the Good Samaritan, the Rich Man and Lazarus, the Pharisee and the Tax Collector—these and dozens of comparable passages inspire acts of justice and charity.

Both can be powerful Christian responses to human need. The dividing line between them is often blurred and, in reality, many a response is a dynamic blend of justice and charity. For descriptive purposes, however, some people find it useful to see charity in terms of giving direct aid and justice in terms of correcting structures.

For example, if we see someone drowning in a river, we try to save the victim. But suppose we find another person struggling in the water an hour later at the same place, then two or three the next day. If we finally realize that they are falling in the river because there is a hole in the bridge, we might change our response. We could still wait by the riverside to aid victims or we could take a hammer and nails to try to rebuild the bridge.

...move us out of the more comfortable zone of charity into the challenging zone of justice.



Of course, more often the structure that needs changing is built of wood or steel. It is more likely a social structure. And the biggest obstacle is that all of us grow attached to social structures just as they are. The more comfortable we are, the less need we feel for change.

Even the more flawed structure is an extension of ourselves. It is hard to dissociate ourselves from it, hart to endure others' criticism, hard to undertake or permit change. Our defensiveness about the status quo of our institutions is entangled with our defensiveness about ourselves. We instinctively sense that if the institution needs to change, we may well be forced to change with it. And the institutional shortcomings to which we are blind are often reflections of the same shortcomings in ourselves. So we smile on the charity that assists the needy within the existing structures and resist or resent the justice that threatens to reform the structures.

Archbishop Camera of Brazil has commented, "When I tried to help the poor, people said I was a saint. When I asked why they were poor, people called me a communist." The archbishop touches on a rather widespread irony. Sometimes people applaud those who try to help the needy through direct assistance but they are critical of any attempt to change the structures that put people in need.

Even within the system of slavery, being "nice" to a slave did not provoke the kind of resistance and opposition from the slave owners that working against the structure did. Within our own system that fosters private ownership and competitiveness, nobody feels threatened at the idea of sponsoring programs to help the needy or donating to causes. But suggesting responsibility for others' needs or implying that the poor are entitled to share in our resources—these ideas disturb us because they move us out of the more comfortable zone of charity into the challenging zone of justice.

This is why working for social justice can be controversial. If we respond to ozone depletion by giving direct aid (nursing the skin of cancer victims) nobody would object. But if we work to pass and enforce laws to eliminate the chemicals that deplete the ozone, some companies and investors are sure to oppose us. If we knit bandages and collect medicine for war casualties, we will be universally admired. But if we work to prevent war, we risk being branded as unpatriotic or subversive.

...working for social justice can be controversial.

In our imperfect world, of course, there will be continuing need for direct aid to be rendered even as we struggle for structural solutions. As for the competing claims that justice and charity make on us, Archbishop Camara offers this suggestion: "In the war against injustice, 80% of our time and effort must be devoted to changing structures and promoting human advancement; but 20% must be set aside for tending the wounded and the victims of war."

There are no limits to the variety of arenas that need our attention. Education, civil rights, environment, war and peace, rights of the elderly, rights of the handicapped, women's rights, immigration, literacy, employment, etc., all cry for our commitment.

Any method of involvement is possible. It may initially be a matter of learning more about a particular issue. We might join or form a group of people to share ideas or prayer about a local need. We might get involved in contributing to a cause, or fundraising for it. We might find ourselves getting into letter writing, demonstrating, lobbying. No issue is too minor or insignificant to provide an outlet for our principles.

In all of this we are reminded that we need to be guided by the Spirit and sensitive to our own gifts. Precisely because structures are extensions of ourselves, we must undergo and must help others undergo a change of heart. Our U.S. bishops in their pastoral letter on economic put it this way: "the transformation of social structures begins with and is always accompanied by a change of heart."

8th Day Center for Justice
www.8thdaycenter.org

Charity and Justice, Walking in our Social Mission
Session II

Before the meeting:
Ask someone from each service group represented to write the name of the group in large letters on a piece of paper.

Scripture: Matthew 5:1-10
When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down.
His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them saying:
"Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
Blessed are those who mourn,
for they will be comforted.
Blessed are the meek,
for they will inherit the earth.
Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
for they will be filled.
Blessed are the merciful,
for they will be shown mercy.
Blessed are the pure in heart,
for they will see God.
Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they will be called sons of God.
Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

- After reading the passage allow some time for quiet.
- Then ask people to indicate which of the beatitudes strikes them most at this moment. There is no need to explain.
- Another short pause for quiet, then offer the opening prayer on the separate sheet.

Introduction:
You read the short article on *Justice and Charity*. You may have learned something new, or it may have put things together in a different way for you.

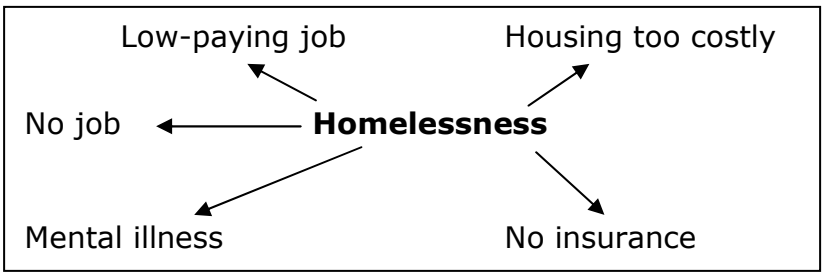
- What key point struck you?
- Where did you find your experience reflected in the article?
- Where did you find yourself annoyed while reading the article?
- If you were to indicate a color for how you felt when reading the article, what would it be? Why?

***Hand out the "Two Feet" and read together.

Conversation about "Two Feet"
- In what way is the work you do like the charity foot of social ministry?
- In what way is it like the justice foot?
- What do people who you are serving indicate as reasons for needing the service you provide?

Develop a "Why Web"

1- Lay out on a table, wall or the floor the names of the various service groups that are represented among the participants.
2- Ask them to indicate the underlying issue or problem that requires this service. (Example: Families Moving Forward = Homelessness; A food shelf = Hunger)
3- If the group is large, invite people to form small groups and to choose an I ssue/problem and ask the question, WHY? If the group is smaller, choose one issue and work all together.
4- On a large piece of paper, write the issue in the very center. Within the group, ask "Why are people homeless? or "Why are people hungry?" or _____?
5- As the various responses are indicated, draw an arrow from the issue outward indicating the various reasons. (Something like below):



6- Put the Why Web up so all can see it. If more than one web is completed, ask if any of the Why?s indicated are the same.

Conversation:

- From what you see on the Why Web, how could the issue be addressed in ways that provide solutions? How would it need to be accomplished? *(This refers to the underlying systemic problem)*.
- What are the challenges in approaching an issue in this manner?
- What are the positive aspects of approaching an issue in this manner?
- How is this Why Web related to the Two Feet?
- In the parish, what groups do we have that are looking at issues from a systemic or justice point of view?
- In what way is it important to look at issues from both perspectives of symptoms and causes?
- How could we involve more people in the parish in this task?
- What recommendations do we have?

Conclusion:

Ask people to evaluate the two meetings:

- In what way were they helpful?
- What would they change?

Conclude with the closing prayer on the prayer sheet.

PRAYER SHEET: Session Two

Opening Prayer

Good and gracious God,
we thank you for touching our lives
and calling us to witness to the love of Jesus.
As we acknowledge our failings,
make us a people of forgiveness and welcome,
creating in us a place of justice and peace.
As we open our minds and hearts to the guidance of your Holy Spirit,
Make us a Gospel people.
May our hearts burn within us, as we help others discover
Your gracious presence.
We pray in the Holy Spirit through Jesus. Amen.

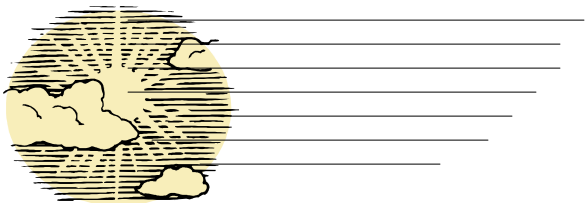
Scripture: Matthew 5:1-10

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them saying:
"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.
Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.
Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.
Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.
Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.
Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.
Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

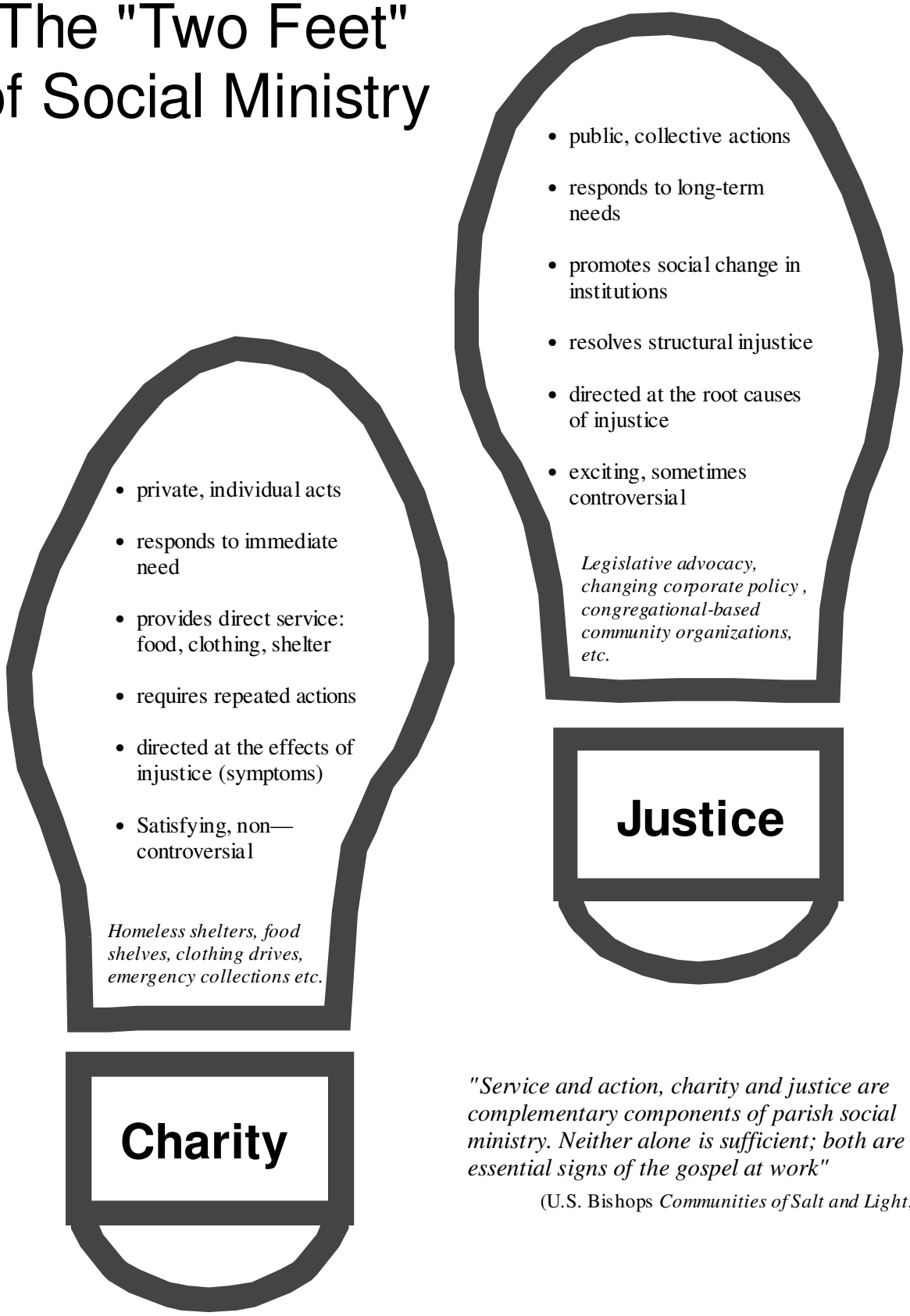
Closing Prayer

Spun into being from the sum by the whole breath of God, we came forth beautiful to behold.
Each of us is word of God meant to spell with one another, a harmony of spirit, a sacred poem to sanctify the centuries.
But now the sacred poem of humankind is being rent with accents foreign to the harmony the Holy One intended.
There is terror. There is fear. There is dissipation of energy, as cruel and violent forces break a part the sacred syllable of the poem, and frighten earth's children.
How can we spell again words to keep up close and safe?
How can we birth hope and nourish it?
We can today in this place vow in our hearts to reverence from our depth of being the loveliness we know in one another, the harmony of spirit we wish to share with the world.
We can kindle today the energy within us to change the universe with the inner poetry of our souls.
We can make a commitment to confront continually the systems that violate the reverence we feel toward the earth and all creation.

We pray in the name of Jesus. Amen.



The "Two Feet" of Social Ministry



"Service and action, charity and justice are complementary components of parish social ministry. Neither alone is sufficient; both are essential signs of the gospel at work"

(U.S. Bishops *Communities of Salt and Light*, 1993)