**The Social Ministry Project**

**Rationale**

The deacon’s service is a sign or “sacrament” of Jesus, who came not to be served but to serve. The charge given by the ordaining bishop at ordination, as found in The Book of Common Prayer, page 543, is as follows:

**In the name of Jesus Christ, you are to serve all people,**

**particularly the poor, the weak, the sick and the lonely.**

**As a deacon in the Church, you are to study the Holy Scriptures,**

**to seek nourishment from them and to model your life upon them.**

**You are to make Christ and His redemptive love known, by word and**

**example, to those among whom you live, and work and worship.**

**...At all times, your life and teaching are to show Christ’s people that**

**in serving the helpless they are serving Christ Himself.**

Inherent in this instruction and charge is the spirit and the rationale for the required Social Ministry Project.

**What is Expected**

* The Social Ministry Project must be completed prior to an individual’s Field Education Assignment by the bishop in the second half of the formation program, usually by the beginning of the fourth semester of study. Those in the process are strongly encouraged to complete the project during postulancy, so as not to become unduly burdened during the second year of formation (if an aspirant is hoping to complete the formation program within 2 years).
* The focus of the Social Ministry Project must be based on real need or needs existing within a community or communities “outside” the regular and ordinary life of one’s parish. Thus, a very good place to begin is by doing a “needs assessment” by which to determine if in fact a certain ministry would be of potential value to an identified population outside the walls of the parish. If one, for example, were to choose a ministry to those experiencing homelessness, it would be important to ascertain whether there were such persons in the target community. It would also be helpful, in order to accomplish some degree of learning and success, to determine: (1) what current services are being offered to this population, (2) whether those providing services might benefit if you partnered with them, (3) whether there is some sorely needed service that is not being provided, (4) whether you could be more effective by educating and eliciting volunteers from your parish community, (5) what local officials might be able to assist you, etc. The information you will gather is dependent upon the nature of the ministry which you envision.
* You should be in conversation with your parish priest, the chair of COM, and the Director of the School for Deacons to help ascertain that you “are on the right track,” and that the ministry which you are envisioning will, in fact, meet the Diocesan requirement.
* Once you have done the above, submit a “Social Ministry Project Proposal” to the chair of COM and the Director of the School for Deacons. They will assist you in having your proposal approved.
* Some additional considerations: The duration of your ministry project will necessarily vary according to the nature of the project. You should carefully consider a timeframe, so as not to propose or attempt something that is brief and unessential, on the one hand, or overly ambitious on the other. In order to assist yourself, include an approximate start date and concluding date in your proposal. Secondly, be aware that “results” are not the only important consideration in this effort. Experiencing, learning, growing and serving are those things which it is hoped will be the more definitive outcomes.
* At the end of your project, submit a 2-3-page summary of what actually occurred at the end of your project ministry. What did you do? Whom did you encounter? Do you feel that you made a difference? Why or why not? What did you learn? Do you have a better “feel” for what service as a minister of Jesus Christ is all about?
* Submit your written report in triplicate: to the Chair of COM, to the Director of the School for Deacons, and to the Canon to the Ordinary.

**Examples**

Here are some samples of what others from within and outside our diocese have done as their Social Ministry Projects:

* Spend a week in Panama working with the Episcopal Church there in ministry to the less fortunate.
* Spend a week in Northern California helping to provide drink and food and “company” to victims of the fires, to firefighters, etc. This person called an Episcopal Church in the area and asked if there was a parishioner that might house her, as she partnered with the Red Cross.
* Work with the local Gospel Mission (Salvation Army, Food Pantry) for 2-3 months, on a regular basis, as one’s schedule allows, to be in ministry to those who are there. The directors of such social service organizations would help determine what the needs are.
* Initiate a “Latino Ministry” in one’s parish. Since this would be the start of something that is ongoing, one would identify with one’s parish priest exactly how many and what steps were to be accomplished, with the understanding that the priest would be responsible to assure the continuation of the ministry.
* Start a Youth Interfaith Group in one’s community. Again, success in this endeavor would require that someone from one’s parish or the community would “take over” when the person in formation has included the initial work.
* Start a food pantry in one’s parish.
* Work with Family Promise to schedule a week when the parish would host (housing included) families who have no place to live. Family Promise is an organization that strives to keep families together, which is not possible should they go to the Salvation Army or similar shelters.
* Contact “Faith in the Valley” chapter (local branch of “Faith in Action,” formerly PICO) to help create “Rapid Response Teams” in the community to assist immigrants when they are “visited” by ICE.
* Serve as a “chaplain” for a period of a few months at an immigration detention center or a prison.

Remember: these are only examples; there are myriads of needs, hopes and dreams out there. Look at your community through the eyes of Jesus, and ask Him to lead you.

**Please Note: The following components should be included in your written proposal:**

**Purpose; Prepared by; Goals; Action Plan; Time-frame.**

**(Attached is a copy of what one postulant proposed, which has been approved. It is neither given as a template, an example that is deemed appropriate in all cases, etc. It is offered merely as a point of information regarding what one individual has done.)**