



THE ROUNDTABLE

STANDARDS AND EXPECTATIONS FOR DIOCESAN SOCIAL ACTION OFFICES & DIRECTORS

ASSOCIATION FOR DIOCESAN SOCIAL ACTION DIRECTORS

“[The Church] cannot and must not replace the state. Yet at the same time she cannot and must not remain on the sidelines in the fight for justice. She has to play her part through rational argument and she has to reawaken the spiritual energy without which justice, which always demands sacrifice, cannot prevail and prosper.”

- Pope Benedict XVI, Deus caritas est, 28.

All dioceses are responsible for planning, organizing and implementing activities that promote social justice because, as Scripture and Catholic social teaching underscore, this ministry is central to the mission of the Church. We believe that the unique and challenging demands on this ministry require the establishment of a Diocesan Social Action Office (DSAO) in every diocese.

Dioceses currently structure their social action efforts in various ways. This diversity is reflected in the varied organizational structures which house diocesan social action offices and the many names associated with these offices. These names include: justice and peace, social concerns, Catholic social teaching, Christian service, human concerns, human rights, social responsibility, parish social ministry, and others. For the sake of simplicity and consistency, this document uses the designation Diocesan Social Action Office (DSAO).

Respecting the legitimate diversity arising from the particular contexts of local dioceses, this document proposes elements essential to an effective DSAO and can be used:

- *To help current directors become more effective through their individual self-evaluation processes;*
- *To help dioceses develop job descriptions, encourage diversity in their candidate searches, and articulate the mission of the social action office;*
- *To offer a rationale, clear options, and encouragement to dioceses open to establishing a DSAO;*
- *To guide those involved in diocesan reorganization or restructuring; and*
- *To give new directors a greater sense of a beginning direction for their office and goals for their own development.*

The Roundtable Board and Coordinator stand ready to help dioceses and social action directors to use this document effectively by providing peer-mentoring and consulting services.

STRUCTURE OF A DIOCESAN SOCIAL ACTION OFFICE

“[T]he restoration of justice, reconciliation and forgiveness are conditions for building true peace. The recognition of this fact leads to a determination to transform unjust structures and to restore respect for the dignity of all men and women, created in God's image and likeness.”

- Pope Benedict XVI, Sacramentum Caritatis, 89.

Dioceses currently structure and organize their social ministry efforts in many different ways. Related to differences of size and budget are varying relationships to USCCB/Justice, Peace, and Human Development, USCCB/Migration and Refugee Services, USCCB/Pro-Life Activities, Catholic Charities-USA, Catholic Relief Services, JustFaith Ministries, and other social justice formation projects and Catholic advocacy organizations.

Every DSAO needs a clear statement of mission and a work plan (complete with an annual evaluation process), that is worked out in dialogue with the bishop or his designee and others who have responsibility for the overall planning of ministry in the diocese.

Organization

The DSAO should exist in the diocesan administration structure with standing equal to other diocesan offices and with equal access to the bishop. Special care should be given to create productive partnerships between the DSAO and all other diocesan offices. The Roundtable takes no position regarding whether or not the DSAO should be located within a Catholic Charities structure, noting that the central issue is whether the location within diocesan structures facilitates reasonable access to the bishop and strong relationships with diocesan colleagues and parishes.

Staff and Budget

A full-time qualified director, appointed by the bishop or his designee, is essential to lead and manage the DSAO. Enough professional and support staff ought to be provided to staff the bishop and implement the basic agenda of the office. Funding should be comparable to that for other major diocesan offices and ministries. Appropriate support for continuing education, professional development, and spiritual refreshment of the office leadership ought to be provided.

Relationships

The DSAO maintains working linkages with the bishop, other diocesan offices, and with parishes (often enhanced by a well-defined advisory board or commission). In addition, the DSAO works with community organizations, civic coalitions, state Catholic conferences, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, Catholic Charities-USA, the Catholic Campaign for Human Development, Catholic Relief Services, and other groups whose missions help to constitute a network to promote action on behalf of justice.

FUNCTIONS OF A DIOCESAN SOCIAL ACTION OFFICE

Given the varieties of diocesan needs, sizes, administrative structures and capacities, it is difficult to be specific about the full agenda of a DSAO. However, every DSAO should have a clearly defined process to determine, in collaboration with others, how it will:

- Promote among the people of the diocese a wide understanding of Catholic social teaching: the life and dignity of the human person; the call to family, community, and participation; rights & responsibilities; option for the poor and vulnerable; the dignity of work and the rights of workers; solidarity and peace; and care for God's creation;
- Call the diocesan community to an understanding that action for justice is a constitutive dimension of Christian life and spirituality;
- Advise, staff, and represent the local bishop on public policy matters, which may, at times, entail a *convener* (bringing all parties to the table) role, at other times a *prophetic role* (taking a strong position rooted in biblical justice and Catholic social teaching);
- Coordinate or collaborate closely with respect life ministries;
- Collaborate with the education and liturgy offices of the diocese to help them infuse Catholic social teaching into all educational, catechumenal, and liturgical activities;
- Serve as a catalyst and ongoing resource to parishes to develop and maintain parish efforts which link prayer and worship, preaching and education, direct service, legislative advocacy, community organizing and solidarity activities in the spirit of the U.S. bishops' statement *Communities of Salt and Light*;
- Coordinate and stimulate legislative advocacy on local, state, and federal issues through education about the issues and legislative processes in collaboration with state Catholic conferences, promoting voter registration, and creating and maintaining a parish legislative network that fosters authentic faithful citizenship;
- Create and implement consciousness-raising programs and advocacy projects on local, national, and international justice concerns as they relate to papal documents and positions, bishops' pastorals and other statements and strategies of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops;
- Coordinate the Catholic Campaign for Human Development, Catholic Relief Services, and JustFaith groups in the diocese;
- Cooperate with and/or coordinate the diocesan efforts which focus on direct services, rural life, African-American, Hispanic and other ethnic ministries, Respect Life, campus ministries, Family Life, Immigration Services, and any ministry with marginalized people, including people with disabilities;
- Serve as a catalyst and ongoing resource in the diocese for community and economic development efforts; and
- Collaborate with interfaith and community coalitions in efforts consistent with the DSAO agenda.

COMPETENCY AREAS FOR DSAO DIRECTORS

Diocesan Social Action Directors should have the following skills acquired and demonstrated through related fields of study (e.g. theology, social work, social sciences, law) and/or experience. Where skills or knowledge in any of these competency areas need further development, we recommend on-the-job mentoring. Appropriate continuing education and peer consultation with other diocesan social action directors may also be helpful. The Roundtable Board and Coordinator stand ready to provide such mentoring and consultation.

The DSAO Director should have:

- A life that demonstrates personal commitment to the Gospel, Catholic social teaching, and discipleship;
- Concern for her or his own spiritual development and the spiritual dimensions of justice and peace ministries;
- Awareness of the need for solidarity with the poor and knowledge of and ongoing involvement with people who are poor and disenfranchised;
- Sensitivity to the variety of cultures; and
- An understanding of and appreciation for church structures and ecclesiology.

Theological and Spiritual Formation

Every Diocesan Social Action Director should have knowledge of Catholic social teaching and be able to articulate it clearly. The Director should have the knowledge and demonstrated ability to bring Scripture, and Catholic social teaching to bear on social analysis. The Director must be able to present a theological rationale for the positions and strategies of the DSAO.

Social Action Skills

The Director's role is to lead, inspire, challenge, and symbolize a realistic sense of hope. A sense of humor and openness to the ideas and assistance of others remains vital. A good understanding of the linkages among direct service, education, advocacy, community organizing and community development is also essential. An ability to do social analysis by reading the signs of the times, knowing the local actors, demonstrating sensitivity to the poor, and possessing an understanding of how change actually happens in that environment is crucial. Every Diocesan Social Action Director should demonstrate and utilize adult education and community organizing skills.

Management Skills

Every Diocesan Social Action Director should demonstrate managerial ability including:

- Planning, implementation and evaluation of goals and objectives for various kinds of social justice programs;
- Utilizing information technologies;
- Communicating through public speaking, writing, diocesan newspapers and new media;
- Cooperating and coordinating with supervisors, boards, and peers;
- Recruiting, motivating, leading, and managing staff and volunteers;
- Doing resource development and administering a budget and office;
- Negotiating and conflict resolution skills; and
- Time management and establishing priorities.