



What is “PEAR?”

PEAR is an acronym standing for **P**rayer, **E**ducation, **A**ction, and **R**eflection. These are the components of the St. Mary Student Parish Social Justice Ministry. These four components, when combined, work to create a cohesive and comprehensive social justice ministry fulfilling, in part, our parish mission.

PRAYER

Prayer is where we begin—our meetings, our actions, all that we do. Jesus Christ is our starting point. All that we do is in response to what Jesus Christ has already done for us.

Unlike other social justice organizations, St. Mary’s Social Justice Ministry does not begin with discerning our desires, our plans and ambitions—good intentioned as they may be. Rather we begin, through prayer, in discerning where Christ is calling us to serve.

In prayer we beg for God’s mercy and help for those whom we serve. We pray for compassion, for ourselves and for the world, that we may see those in need as our brothers and sisters in Christ.

It is our prayer that sustains us, when our striving for justice meets resistance, rejection or apathy. For in prayer we are reminded that Christ experienced the same.

In prayer we come to rely not on our power, strength, intelligence, but God’s, coming to us through the Holy Spirit in an abundance of graces.

Finally, it is in prayer that we give thanks and gratitude to God for what God is able to accomplish. Through service of others we often experience ourselves being served.

EDUCATION

Education about social issues is crucial before the next step of taking action. Too many good intentioned people make matters worse because they lacked the knowledge regarding a particular situation.

As far as possible, St. Mary’s Social Justice Ministry aims to provide opportunities for parishioners to learn the complexities of social justice issues including the history, the various positions regarding an issue, the cultural and/or religious background of those involved.

Education includes learning the impact of public policy, of social values, on the lives of real people. It also involves a reflection upon our Sacred Scriptures and Catholic Social Teaching as the lens through which to evaluate such policies and values.

Education involves not only an academic approach to social justice issues, but “hands on” participative experience as well. Experience is perhaps the best of teachers. St. Mary’s

sponsors various programs and events that involve its parishioners in personal encounters with the people and circumstances affected by social injustice.

Education is never completed. Each experience, each discussion should lead to new questions, new and deeper areas for exploration so as to lead to a greater service of God and one another.

ACTION

As we read in the book of James, “What good is it if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him/her?” *James 2:14*

Integral to the mission of St. Mary Student Parish is putting our faith into action. This is the mission of the universal Church:

“Action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world fully appears to us as a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the Gospel, or in other words, of the Church’s mission in the redemption of the human race and its liberation from every oppressive situation.” *“Justice in the World,” Synod of Bishops, 1971.*

There are two types of social action: Service and Advocacy. Both are necessary for a comprehensive social justice ministry. People have immediate needs: food, shelter, health care, for example. Social Justice Ministry must attend to those needs. With our limited resources, we do what we can. Service involves volunteering at social service agencies and/or directly with persons in need. Service can also include fundraising that benefits agencies serving those in need.

Advocacy involves working to address the causes which lead people to being in need of assistance. “Campus ministry is called to be a consistent and vigorous advocate for justice, peace, and the reverence for all life.” *Empowered by the Spirit: Campus Ministry Faces the Future, 1985.*

Advocacy is hard work. It often leads to tensions and conflict as it calls others (individuals, government agencies, corporations, for example) to change. Bishop Helder de Camara is often quoted regarding this: “When I give to the poor, they call me a saint. When I ask why the poor have no food, they call me a communist.”

REFLECTION

The fourth component of St. Mary’s Social Justice Ministry is Reflection. One of the great quotes from Socrates is, “the unreflected life isn’t worth living.” Unless we take time to reflect upon our experiences we are sure to repeat our mistakes. But more, it is through time in reflection, individually and as a group, that we are able to integrate the experiences into our lives, allowing those experiences to change us.

Reflection involves two aspects: Evaluation and Integration. After a social service project or education program it is important to evaluate the experience in order to make improvements for future programs.

The second aspect of reflection is integration. The focus here is to invite those who’ve participated in social justice ministry programs to reflect on how the experience had an impact on their life. *How did the experience change your thinking on a given topic? What’s different about you now that you’ve had this experience? What does this experience tell you about who*

God is in your life or to what God might be calling you? These are some of the reflection questions that help participants to integrate their experience into their lives rather than simply making it a “photo album” experience that remains on a closet shelf.

The PEAR model for St. Mary’s Social Justice Ministry is intended to guide a cohesive and comprehensive parish social justice ministry. The presumptions of this ministry, derived from the Gospel and our Church’s body of social teaching are:

1. A commitment to social justice is “constitutive” of our faith. That is, it is not optional.
2. A commitment to social justice is for all members of the Church, not for a designated few.

Social Justice Ministry, as part of the mission of St. Mary Student Parish, provides programs and services to prepare community members to become servant leaders, formed in faith, to be intellectually competent, committed to service and advocacy, and reflective of God’s will in their lives and the world. Therefore, the essential components of our ministry include: **Prayer, Education, Action, and Reflection (PEAR)**.