



FORMING OR ENHANCING SOCIAL JUSTICE/CREATION CARE COMMITTEES

The purpose of a social justice/creation care committees are to help the congregation and members of your neighborhood and region to do justice locally, statewide and nationally.

Membership can be as few as three as many as 12. Consider adding non-members activists, and others to your committee.

CAVEATS AND ASSUMPTIONS

1. Remember, the committee is not there to do all the work but to enable others in the congregation to do the work and live into their baptisms (for Christians), sense of discipleship and/or out your faith's ethical principles. The committee should not do everything for the congregation. Your pastor, rabbi and Imam or other clergy person are not there to do social justice on your behalf but to do it with you. They must equip congregants to do the work and join.
2. The committee could be a subcommittee of pastoral care, Trustees or the governing body. Remember the work involves making connections with other aspects of a congregation's ministry. Don't work in isolation.
3. Worship is a good place to do social justice work (preaching, music, continual examination of how you include and welcome people, stewardship moments). In Christian terms, worship is a foretaste or a dress rehearsal for the reign of God.
4. Reflect theologically and continually examine both interpersonal and structural racism (know the difference) and help congregants make the connection between the two. Anti-racism work is an ongoing activity and process which affects everything you do. Routinely create space in your meetings, worship, and community gatherings for anti-racist and theological reflection.
5. Social justice committees should have an ecumenical and interfaith mindset. In addition, include and embrace people of no-faith and support their leadership. Social justice is not a branding opportunity for your congregation or denomination although if you are known in your community for working well with diverse groups of people it reflects well on you.
6. Charity is a very important vehicle to build relationships (food drives, school backpacks, gift cards, cash assistance, gun buy backs) and is a good pre-cursor for organizing. It is not, however, a substitute for helping congregants to do justice in their community (ie. establishing state and Federal funding for food banks, addressing food deserts, and

strengthening social safety net including health care, building clean energy infrastructure, childcare, home care, and enacting Federal gun legislation).

7. Harness the organizing capacity and staffing of other groups (ie. secular and religious, New York State Council of Churches, Poor People's Campaign etc.). There is no need to duplicate staffing and resources.
8. Remember that local, national, state and global justice work is all interrelated (Don't fall into the trap of "taking care of your own first". Generosity begets more generosity and creates more lifegiving relationships in the process.

ACTIVITIES

1. Participate in New York State Council issue seminars and contribute to the creation of the Council's annual state legislative ask. Also sign up people in your congregation to participate in the Council's Ecumenical Advocacy Day (held on February 15, 2023)
2. Identify leadership in your congregation who will participate in trainings sponsored by the Council on community organizing and advocacy.
3. The committee sponsors and organizes one on one conversations in their congregation and with members of the community (activists, neighbors, businesses, unions, workers, elected officials, homeowners and residents) Encourage people to show up at community events, rallies etc. government hearings and community meetings) to listen, meet people and speak. Learn during your conversations how parishioners are already engaged in the community and ask how the congregation can support their work already underway. Move out of your comfort zone. Show up, serve, participate, listen and receive and give hospitality.
4. Collaborate with those entrusted with stewardship of your property to ensure that the building and land is furthering the mission of your parish (clean energy upgrades, accessibility, community space, building affordable housing on your property). Remember your property is a tool for outreach and justice. The building is not a country club for its members—it is there to serve the community.
5. Serve as a clearing house to identify ways that congregants and community members can attend and participate in social justice activities underway in their community. You do not have to organize all events (in fact most of them you will not and should not organize) but encourage people to go to events sponsored by others and lend your congregation's name as a sponsor. Show up!!
6. Familiarize yourselves with and catalog all social justice pronouncements from your denomination or judicatory (ie. gun violence, access to affordable housing, environmental racism) and also information from local, state, national and global religious bodies.
7. Link pastoral care activities of parish with social justice. For example:
 - How many people in your parish struggle to pay utility bills and/or suffer from environmental and climate hazards in their home or community (truck emissions

causing cancer or asthma, fossil fuel emissions from furnaces, poor infrastructure or drinking water)? What can you do to make utility bills more affordable while eliminating environmental hazards in rental and owner-occupied housing stock? Sell solar subscriptions to renters and homeowners. Help the community advocate for policies which make clean energy and solar conversion easier and more cost effective.

- How many parishioners are rent burdened (spending more than 30% of their income on housing) and what can you do to advocate for legislation which expands housing supply and makes housing affordable? Are there affordable housing and home ownership opportunities or proposed buildings in your community which need your support? How can you lend your support and counter Not in My Backyard (NIMBY)?
- Find out who are the homecare givers or receivers are in your congregation. What are their needs? What are their working conditions? What does it cost for your parishioners to get home care? Can they afford it? Can they access caregivers? What legislation might improve the situation? How much do your parishioners pay for skilled nursing and how can you alleviate their cost burden?
- How many people in your parish are currently or formerly incarcerated or have family and friends who are justice involved? What immediate care can be offered and how will you work to change criminal justice policy on the local, state and Federal level to attend to this pastoral need?
- Identify landlords in your parish and the community who will accept housing vouchers. Advocate for policies which make rental housing more affordable and to prevent eviction. Encourage landlords to fix up their property and adopt clean energy technology. Help them access subsidies and help.
- Other.....

The New York State Council of Churches.....

1. Can help your congregation set up a social justice/creation care committee in your congregation and make you aware of resources and events to do your work. We sponsor a state ecumenical advocacy day every year in February and develop an annual legislative ask along with sponsoring seminars on legislation and policy.
2. Offers no-charge clean energy consultation for congregations and encourage congregations to promote access to solar for renters and homeowners through a grant from NYSERDA and in collaboration with Crauderueff and Associates.
3. Access pre-development assistance to re-purpose their property to build affordable housing or make their space more available for community uses. See WWW.IAHCNY.org.

Subscribe to our mailing list by going to WWW.nyscoc.org and check our website frequently for coming events. For more information, contact The Reverend Peter Cook, Executive Director, New York State Council of Churches and Pcook@nyscoc.org or 508-380-8289.