**Lessons Learned**

Some parishes have found ways to more fully integrate Life, Justice and Peace ministry in their community others have been less successful. Along the way we have learned some lessons that we want to share with you.

**Respecting Diversity**

We are a very diverse community of faith racially, ethnically, economically, and ideologically. This diversity should be respected, reflected, and celebrated in our life, justice and peace ministry. For example, what works in a predominately African American parish in an urban neighborhood may not be appropriate for a largely white suburban or rural congregation. The issues, approaches, and structures may differ, but our common values unite us. Life, justice and peace ministries across racial, ethnic, and geographic lines can be an impressive sign of the unity of the Body of Christ.

**Some Difficulties and Dangers**

In reflecting on the social mission of the parish, the opportunities seem clear. So do some of the difficulties. One danger is the tendency to isolate life, justice and peace ministry, to confine it to the margins of parish life. Another is for life, justice and peace leaders to isolate themselves, treating the parish as a target rather than a community to be served and empowered.

Another danger is potential partisanship, the temptation to try to use the parish for inappropriate political objectives. We need to make sure our faith shapes our political action, not the other way around. We cannot forget that we pursue the kingdom of God, not some earthly vision or ideological cause.

A significant challenge is to avoid divisiveness; to emphasize the common ground among social service and social action, education and advocacy, pro-life and social justice, economic development and environmental commitment.

We need to work together to reflect a comprehensive concern for the human person in our parish.

Another danger is to try to do too much on too many issues, without clear priorities and an effective plan of action. Not everyone can do everything, but the parish should be a sign of unity in pursuing a consistent concern for human life and human dignity.

The final and most serious danger is for parish leaders to act as if the social ministry of the Church was the responsibility of someone else. Every believer is called to defend life, serve those in need, to work for justice, and to pursue peace. Every parish has the mission to help its members act on their faith in the world.