

Learn how our Outreach Ministry has developed:

The history of Social Concerns at Holy Spirit

It all started about 15 years ago when “We almost had \$50,000,” and Rector Steve Oreskovich approached Bob Deaton about starting a Social Concerns Committee in the parish. The Memorial Board endowment was about to reach a million dollars, and Steve planned to ask the Board for \$50,000 to do a “big community project” in Missoula. However, the “dot com bubble” burst, and almost half the fund disappeared in the ensuing recession. Several church members and the Rector decided to go ahead in 2002, without any special funds, and capitalize on the personal resources of our talented, smart, committed members. Soon, we had a Social Concerns Committee of about a dozen members.

In 2002, Partnership Health Center (PHC) emerged as our first major project. PHC was ready to rapidly expand, but needed volunteers to fill non-medical jobs. So 20 volunteers from our parish began to do these jobs for several hours a week. Our volunteers filed records, called patients to remind them of appointments, stocked medications, read stories to children in the waiting room, and greeted patients as they came in. In addition, two Holy Spirit members served on the Board of Directors of PHC. Another church member was volunteering in the behavioral health program at PHC. Another was a licensed mental health professional who had recently retired from a family service agency and was serving at PHC. The Social Concerns Committee was successful in applying for two different grants—totaling about \$90,000—from the United Thank Offering of the Episcopal Church, to assist PHC during the growing years. In 2016, we still have 12 volunteers at PHC.

In 2002, the Social Concerns Committee also began sponsoring an annual blood drawing, coordinated by Orson Murray. It has been held every year with great success.

Around 10 years ago, the Committee started doing fund-raising events for special projects. They raised between \$6,000 and \$10,000 per project for the following: medical supplies for a clinic in Africa, supportive funding for a school in Haiti following the catastrophic earthquake, a generous yearly gift to Missoula’s Habitat for Humanity, and scholarships for six young women in Myanmar in their senior year in high school and through tests for admission to university studies.

About five years ago, the church’s Memorial Board decided to give the Social Concerns Committee about \$6,000 yearly for social concerns projects of the parish, which is 3% of the average balance in the fund over the previous three years. Social Concerns makes annual allocations to local, diocesan, national and international charities and social service projects. Recently, as part of its allocation of funds, the Committee has invited parish members to apply for “Butterfly Grants” of up to \$300 each, which may be used for any charitable purpose. Members have gotten grants to help ex-offenders with personal expenses when they get out of jail, to help dying persons with a special music CD, to transport unsold rummage to a reservation, to leverage funds from Kohl’s to buy clothing for poor children at Lowell Elementary School, and to repair the 9-Mile Community Center, to name a few.

The Social Concerns Committee has had steady leadership these past 16 years. Bob Deaton was the first chair and served for three years. Then Clem and Lucia Work co-led the Committee for ten years. The group decided to elect chairs annually in 2014, and Joyce Latimer and Glenn Hladek were each chosen for a year. Carla Mettling is the current chair for 2016.

The Committee has always sought to use the funds and volunteers it has in the most useful and powerful ways. Our work has put members in direct contact with human needs that would not have been met without them. But we’ve also seen a lot of unmet needs in the local community and wider world.

Missoula Interfaith Collaborative has provided a way for Holy Spirit Parish to be more widely involved in meeting local needs by joining in the cooperative efforts of more than 20 faith congregations. This year, HSP formally became a partner, and after a series of discernment meetings, the parish chose two projects to take on, starting this fall:

1. Along with St. Paul Lutheran and other congregations, we will collaborate with Hellgate High School to tutor, mentor, or help students in whatever ways we can.
2. We will work with Parenting Place to help the parents and children that Parenting Place serves.

The Social Concerns Committee is ever mindful of the many contributions made by individual members and the church as a whole, beyond the direct planned efforts of the Committee. Some examples are donating to Episcopal Relief & Development and United Thank Offering, at the wider church level, and volunteering for Family Promise, the Poverello Center, Food Bank, and Senior Citizens Center here in Missoula.

As a committee of the Vestry, Social Concerns initiates and receives requests from several sources for service projects that the parish could undertake as part of its responsibility in organized efforts to help others.

The Holy Spirit Social Concerns Committee has much to be proud of in its 14 years of development and service to the Missoula community and wider world. The Committee seeks to maintain its continued collaboration with the Holy Spirit congregation, the Missoula Interfaith Collaborative, and others in the community and beyond to follow Jesus Christ's command to serve others.

– BOB DEATON, MEMBER
SOCIAL CONCERNS COMMITTEE