

HOW TO DEVELOP A SOCIAL CONCERNS COMMITTEE IN YOUR LOCAL CHURCH

Prepared by the Social Concerns Committee
Fellowship of Grace Brethren Churches

1A. Why have a Social Concerns Committee (SCC)?

Jesus said to His followers, "You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has become tasteless, how would it become salty again? It is good for nothing anymore, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men. You are the light of the world" (Matt. 5:13, 14a). The role of the Social Concerns Committee should be to create an interest in appropriate social issues that will enable Christians to fulfill their role as "salt" and "light" in the world. A Social Concerns Committee can become a tool that a local church can utilize to stay informed and take appropriate action on current social issues.

(For a biblical basis and rationalization for social concerns, read *Canons of Christian Social Action* listed in the resource list.)

2A. What is the pastor's role in the development of a SCC?

1B. Be convinced - Study the biblical basis for social concerns and develop your own set of convictions as to why this should be a burden and ministry of the local church.

2B. Be visionary - Like all other efforts, the development of an SCC needs vision. The pastor's support and assistance in the development of this ministry is critical, especially in light of frequent resistance among some evangelicals to involvement in social issues.

- **3B. Be informed** - A pastor will often receive information related to local, state and federal issues. In order for the committee to be properly directed, the pastor needs to be personally acquainted with current social issues through periodicals and other current literature.

- **4B. Create a proper atmosphere** - Too often social concerns are relegated to an insignificant role in the ministry of a local church. Christians need to recognize that ministering to the needs of people was a vital part of the ministry of our Lord. Therefore, involvement in social action can be considered a demonstration of Christlikeness. Involvement in social issues also provides ample opportunities to meet great spiritual needs in the lives of people.

5B. Provide special Sunday services - The pastor may want to establish a "Social Concerns Sunday" when he speaks on an appropriate theme. He also may choose to invite an outside speaker (Christian politician, community leader, expert) at least once a year to share insights with his congregation.

6B. Develop or become involved in a local evangelical ministers' association.

Encourage the association to become a local ministers' chapter of the National Association of Evangelicals.

7B. Affiliate with the National Association of Evangelicals -- either individually as a pastor or corporately as a church.

8B. Feature a ministry of the SCC during a Sunday morning "spotlight." These should be brief, motivational reports which expose the congregation to what laypeople in the church are doing or can begin to do. Emphases which are focused on compassion and relational ministries are preferable to an emphasis on political activism, though the latter should not be neglected.

3A. How Can A SCC Be Started In A Local Church?

1B. Obtain the backing of the church's governing structure. Laypeople should not attempt to generate a social concerns program in the church without fulfilling this step. If social concerns is the pastor's burden, the pastor should not "walk alone" on social concerns. The support of the church's governing structure (pastor, staff and governing board) is essential. The governing board must establish positions on key moral issues, create the Social Concerns Committee, provide funds and approve a certain level of pastoral/staff time in social issues (if this is a ministry area in which the pastor or staff can competently serve).

2B. Analyze/survey congregational interest - The pastor should seek to determine in what areas the congregation is demonstrating an interest. He might choose a Sunday to preach on the issue of "social involvement." The response to that message could be the basis for a task force which would study the role of the local church in social issues in the community.

3B. The task force should develop a *purpose statement* and *job description* for the local church SCC. The following represents an example of one Purpose Statement and Job Description:

JOB DESCRIPTION FOR SOCIAL CONCERNS COMMITTEE

PURPOSE: To discover and review the current social, moral, media, and political issues that face our local, state and national community which if not changed, reversed, or stopped would have significant anti-Christian or anti-family consequences. Significant and timely issues will be carefully selected for submission to our congregation for their understanding and action.

JOB DESCRIPTION:

1. To keep abreast of current issues as described under Purpose. To act as a link between national Christian leadership groups and our local congregation.

2. To meet periodically, monthly or as needed to list and discuss the problems discovered.
3. To choose from among those issues four to eight annually that the committee believes to be of greatest current significance with respect to the Biblical principals which we hold dear.
4. To develop methods of bringing these issues to the attention of our congregation and to help them see the need for action.
5. Suggest the most appropriate actions that members of the congregation may take.

4A. What Is The Work Of The Local SCC?

1B. Develop a Social Concerns Library - The SCC could recommend and select appropriate literature to be placed in a Social Concerns section of the church library.

2B. Support local ministries - The committee may choose to promote various needs of local ministries (eg. need for volunteers and funds) like Crisis Pregnancy Centers, jail ministries, etc.

3B. Develop a Local Church Exhibit for Social Concerns - Since this will be viewed by a "general audience" including visitors, care should be taken to use materials which are in good taste, artistic and which accentuate the positive.

4B. Cooperate with other common interest groups on the local and state levels. A state-level office of the NAE or another evangelical group. Local and state offices of right-to-life groups exist almost everywhere. Locate groups devoted to "family concerns." "Habitat for Humanity" is established in many localities.

5B. Learn about the local community - Know the "points of power" and how to have access to these. Become acquainted with city council representatives whenever possible. Review the published agendas of the city council, school board and other crucial city commissions. Learn how to submit names for appointment to local commissions. Understand the various social action groups already active in the community.

6B. Organize a "Rapid Response" list for community action and for legislative contact (at the local, state and federal levels). This might take the form of a newsletter to people who will agree to write or call legislators on appropriate actions. The committee needs to distill an issue carefully and recommend wording people can use.

7B. Publish a list of public officials - Be sure people know how to contact local, state and federal elected representatives.

8B. Teach people how to communicate with public officials - they should learn how to write and phone their officials purposefully and succinctly.

5A. What Is The Role Of The District In Social Concerns?

1B. Local churches can be networked together for appropriate action on state-wide issues. This network must be adapted according to whether a district is smaller than or larger than a state.

2B. The district may wish to establish a Social Concerns Coordinator who will facilitate the networking of the various churches on social concerns.

3B. "District Conference" needs to give appropriate focus to social concerns, through exhibits, reports, highlights and speakers.

4B. A district social concerns project should be adopted and developed.

6A. What Appropriate Resources Are Available For The Development Of A Social Concerns Committee?

1B. *Winning The New Civil War* by Dexter Duggan.

2B. "Citizen Magazine" by Focus on the Family

3B. *Canons of Christian Social Action* by Donald Shoemaker, chairman of the Social Concerns Committee in the FGBC.
(from: Grace Community Church, 138 8th St., Seal Beach CA 90740)

4B. The Christian Action Council - 101 W. Broad St. Suite 500, Falls Church, Virginia 22046. Phone: (703) 237-2100

5B. The National Association Of Evangelicals - 1023 15th St, NW, Washington, D.C. 20005. Phone: (202) 789-1011

6B. The national Social Concerns Committee of the FGBC. Your denomination's Social Concerns Committee is available to you any time for guidance. The committee has several printed items on abortion, euthanasia, "Operation Rescue", and other issues. Ask for a "packet" of material. Sample "Church Bylaws" material and employment policies are also available.

7B. *Decisive Issues Facing Christians Today* by John R. W. Stott (Revell, 1990).

8B. *Christian Ethics* by Norman Geisler (Baker Book House, 1989).

9B. *The Body* by Charles Colson.

10B. "Church Law & Tax Report" (a bi-monthly review of legal and tax developments affecting ministers and churches), Christian Ministry Resources, P.O. Box 1098, Matthews, NC 28106

7A. What Cautions Should Be Noted In The Development Of A SCC?

1B. *VERY IMPORTANT*: Communication alone (whether with your own people or even to the outside world) is *not* social action. It is much more important to make a difference than it is just to make a statement.

2B. This ministry must move from simple "communication" to "community involvement." A church must not be satisfied simply to know what is happening, but should seek to make an impact in light of what is happening.

3B. Don't focus on narrow-interest issues. Choose your "battles" carefully, in light of the magnitude of the issue and the resources you have. Avoid selecting subjects that have only a limited scope. Avoid giving boring details during a church service.

4B. Each pastor must determine his personal "comfort zone" concerning which issues his church may address and how they should be addressed. This "comfort zone" should be clearly communicated to social concerns workers and respected by them.

5B. Avoid polarizing issues and highly volatile statements during the Sunday morning service when many guests and "seekers" might be present.

6B. *Never*, as a church, endorse a political candidate church. Your tax exemption could be in jeopardy. This includes allowing your church facilities, equipment or staff time to be used to assist a candidate for office. Avoid using a "substantial" (more than 5%) of church resources (including the value of staff time) to influence legislation.

A church must not publish or distribute candidates' statements or campaign on behalf of any candidate for public office. A church cannot endorse a candidate, make donations, engage in fundraising, or do any activities which might be beneficial to or detrimental to a candidate. (Taken from "Church Law & Tax Report," September/October 1992, p. 8). The pastor should also not indicate his own choice of a candidate in a sermon, church bulletin or newsletter or in any other official church medium.

7B. Above all, remember the power of God and the power of the "Enemy." Satan seeks to limit the effectiveness of Christians in this world. Because he is the "prince of this world," the issues addressed by an SCC will face strong spiritual opposition. The committee must generate prayer in order for its work to be successful.