



Archdiocese of Chicago

Mission Workbook

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***“I hope that all communities will devote the necessary effort to advancing along the path of a pastoral and missionary conversion which cannot leave things as they presently are. ‘Mere administration’ can no longer be enough. Throughout the world, let us be permanently in a state of mission.”
(Pope Francis, The Joy of the Gospel, #25)***

PARISH TRANSFORMATION

Mission Workbook

Parishioner Edition

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PARISH TRANSFORMATION

INTRODUCTION: MISSION

Welcome to Parish Transformation!

Our Catholic parishes have been the spiritual home to Catholics from one generation to the next. Most Catholics can recall happy memories of parish life that take them back to their childhood, even if they've moved many times since and have been a member of many different parishes. Although diverse in make-up, style and customs, resources and staffing, our parishes continue to play a very significant role in the lives of baptized Catholics and in the important work of continuing the mission and ministry of Jesus.

Recognizing the importance and potential of our Catholic parishes and the changes and challenges that the Church and its parishes face today, Parish Transformation aims to revitalize our parish communities as they strive to remain faithful to the mission Christ has imparted to us. Parish Transformation is a valuable pastoral tool that can help a Catholic community:

- Renew its commitment to the Mission of Christ as its primary vocation
- Make the parish stronger, more effective, holier, welcoming and responsive to the human needs and spiritual hungers in contemporary society
- Form missionary disciples who are prepared to share the joy of the Gospel
- Establish a strong spirit of Christian stewardship to support the mission of the parish
- Formulate and realize a unified pastoral vision with a concrete plan that links mission and resources

The work of Parish Transformation is an experience in spiritual discernment. It is not a corporate business meeting with quick fix solutions. Parish Transformation begins with the vision Jesus gave us to further the Kingdom of God, to bring hope and meaning to a world in need. Pope Francis warns us not to engage in a process of self-preservation whereby we just look inward and fail to recognize that our mission requires going beyond the internal affairs of parish life. Parish Transformation challenges us to go beyond our buildings and familiar systems and to unite and focus more intentionally on the ministry and mission to which Jesus calls us in this time and place. Parish Transformation calls for faith and trust, creativity, imagination, honest assessment, firm commitment, prayer and spiritual courage to "make all things new" in Christ.

May your experience of Parish Transformation be a new Pentecost for your Parish!

Fr. Ron Lewinski

Editor, Parish Transformation Workbook



Foundations for Mission



I. Grounded in the Mission of Jesus

"As you go, make this announcement: 'The reign of God is at hand!' Cure the sick, raise the dead, heal the leprous, expel demons. The gift you have received, give as a gift." (Mt. 10:7-8)

"I came so that they may have life and have it more abundantly" (John 10:10)

The Parish Transformation process takes us back to our roots: the mission and ministry of Jesus. He told us he was the Light, the Good Shepherd and the Gate, the Bridegroom, the Way, the Truth and the Life. He said he was the vine and we were the branches. Jesus said, "Everyone who lives and believes in me will never die" (Jn 11:26). When Jesus stood up in the synagogue at Capernaum he read from the text of the prophet Isaiah: "He has sent me to bring glad tidings to the poor, to proclaim liberty to captives, recovery of sight to the blind and release to prisoners, to announce a year of favor from the Lord." Then he said, "Today this scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing" (Luke 4: 16-21). The theme of Jesus' preaching and ministry was that the reign of God was at hand. He assured us that he came so that we might have life and have it more abundantly (c.f. John 10:10).

The Kingdom of God

The Gospels stand as a witness to Jesus' mission. At the heart of his preaching Jesus proclaimed that the reign of God was near at hand (Mark 1:14). He could say that the Kingdom of God was in our midst because he himself embodied the reign of God among us.

The miracles he performed were signs of God's power breaking through and making all things new (cf. Rev 21:5). Jesus proclaimed the wideness in God's mercy when he encountered the adulterous woman and told her: "Neither do I condemn you. Go and from now on do not sin any more" (John 8:11). Through Jesus' death and resurrection we would come to know that the good news of God's Kingdom is the saving power of God conquering sin and death and giving us hope of eternal life.

In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus gave us a picture of what the Kingdom of God looks like: "Blessed are the poor in spirit.....Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness... Blessed are the peacemakers..." (Mt 5: 3-12). To be a disciple of Jesus is to live as a faithful citizen of God's Kingdom, a people of the Beatitudes. Jesus' mission was to proclaim the Kingdom and to call everyone to a conversion of mind and

heart so that their lives were in sync with God's Kingdom.

In his mission to transform the world Jesus often preached what sounded like contradictions or paradoxes to life as we usually interpret things. Jesus taught that:

- The first shall be last and the greatest will be the servant of all.
- We are not to worry about what we are to wear or eat.
- We must love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us.
- We are to deny our self and take up our cross and follow the master.
- The poor and the peacemaker will be blessed.
- We are to have the heart of a child.

Being grounded in the mission of Jesus is to live in harmony with the Kingdom of God. We pray for this constantly: "Thy Kingdom come." *Parish Transformation* is an opportunity to become more Kingdom bound, more aligned with the mission and vision of Jesus for the life of the world. The Kingdom of God is not completely identified with the Church, but we can see the signs of God's Kingdom in the Church. The Kingdom is found wherever peace and justice prevail, where love and truth and holiness and grace abound. (cf. Preface from the Mass for the Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe).

Individuals, parish communities and the Church at large are called to rediscover the good news of Jesus' mission and to share the joy of God's Kingdom with everyone. Pope Francis tells us:

"In virtue of their baptism, all the members of the People of God have become missionary disciples (cf. Mt 28:19). All the baptized, whatever their position in the Church or their level of instruction in the faith, are agents of evangelization, and it would be insufficient to envisage a plan of evangelization to be carried out

by professionals while the rest of the faithful would simply be passive recipients” (Joy of the Gospel, #120).

We cannot fall into the trap of withdrawing into ourselves and fail to move outward in mission to transform the world. Pope Francis reminds us: “If we wish to lead a dignified and fulfilling life, we have to reach out to others and seek their good” (Joy of the Gospel, #9).

There are Different Gifts

St. Paul wrote: “There are different kinds of spiritual gifts but the same Spirit; there are different forms of service but the same Lord” (1 Corinthians 12:4-5). Some individuals in your team will have the gift of a vivid imagination. Other individuals will have the gift of turning ideas into concrete plans. Your collective gifts will lead to a wide variety of ideas. We encourage you to build on each other’s talents and ideas. In dialogue among yourselves, you will discover that one idea inspires other ideas. Withhold judgment during the initial stages of brainstorming. Even the most unconventional idea may lead you to the vision around which you will rally. Be open to the Holy Spirit and allow your communal vision for the parish to grow. Quoting a statement from the Fifth General Conference of the Latin American and Caribbean Bishops, Pope Francis urges us:

“Life grows by being given away, and it weakens in isolation and comfort. Indeed, those who enjoy life most are those who leave security on the shore and become excited by the mission of communicating life to others” (Joy of the Gospel, #10).

A Transformed People

Being grounded in the mission and ministry of Jesus is the beginning of the *Parish Transformation* process. From there as individuals and as parish communities we then begin to ask:

- How will we translate what the mission of Jesus is meant to be in our parish?
- What is the joy of the Gospel that our community and our larger mission field needs to hear?

While Parish Transformation focuses on the renewal and growth of our parishes, its success is dependent on the transformation of every parishioner. The purpose of Parish Transformation is not to just reorganize our parish ministries and administrative practices. Parish

Transformation invites us to listen afresh to the wisdom of Jesus, his call to holiness, and his invitation to discipleship. Ultimately it is a call to conversion followed by action for the sake of furthering the Kingdom of God.

A transformed parish evolves from a transformed people who recognize that the parish is not an end in itself but the greenhouse that grows missionary disciples. We are a Church on the move; a Pilgrim People. While we call this pastoral initiative Parish Transformation, in truth the vision is much bigger: our vocation is to transform the world.

“The central theme of the Gospel is the Kingdom of God. Jesus is the kingdom of God in person; he is Immanuel, God-with-us. And it is in the human heart that the kingdom, God’s sovereignty, takes root and grows. The Kingdom is at once both gift and promise. It has already been given to us in Jesus, but it has yet to be realized in its fullness. That is why we pray to the Father each day: “Thy kingdom come”. (Pope Francis, *Message for the Twenty-Ninth World Youth Day, January 2014*)



II. Making Christ's Mission Our Own

"Behold I am making all things new" (Rev. 21:5).

I will pour out my spirit upon all humanity. Your sons and daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions; even upon your servants and the handmaids, in those days, I will pour out my spirit" (Joel 3:1-2).

The parish can be a very busy place. The needs and expectations of the faithful are many. Multiple ministries and parish programs, liturgies, school related responsibilities, religious education programs, committee meetings, caring for the sick and homebound, outreach to the poor, fundraisers, etc. fill the parish calendar and require oversight, leadership, and coordination on the part of many. Pastors often find themselves overwhelmed with administrative tasks. In the midst of busy schedules, it is easy to lose focus of the mission Christ has given us. Pope Francis encourages us to break through the sea of busyness and place mission at the heart of all we do:

"I dream of a 'missionary option,' that is, a missionary impulse capable of transforming everything, so that the Church's customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures can be suitably channeled for the evangelization of today's world rather than for her self-preservation" (Joy of the Gospel, #27).

The questions we want to keep asking ourselves in the *Parish Transformation* process are:

- How does our parish reflect the mission and ministry of Jesus?
- What does Jesus ask of us at this time in our parish to be faithful to his teaching, to further the reign of God, to carry on the ministry he began with his first disciples?

Being busy is not always a guarantee that we are keeping Jesus' mission in the forefront. Through the *Parish Transformation* process we may discover that there are some things we have taken for granted in our parish's daily list of activities and services that are no longer needed or prevent us from devoting our time and resources to a new set of priorities that more clearly respond to the mandate of Christ to transform the world.

Learning to be a Missionary

The best way to approach the challenge of transforming our parish is to think and act like a missionary. This will require an open mind and a willingness to assess the state of the parish without prejudice. We may have been members of a particular parish for many years and have come to love and value all that the parish has meant to our family. Without disregarding the love we have for our parish, we also have to be willing to take a sober look at the current state of the parish and its place in the larger community. Some of the points we will want to consider like a true missionary will be:

- Getting to know our fellow parishioners better as well as our neighbors who may live on the fringe of church life.
- Discerning the human needs and spiritual hungers.
- Understanding the culture in which our parishioners live, including the generational differences in thinking and approaches to life and faith.
- Identifying who we are failing to reach in our daily ministry.
- Listening patiently to those who express disinterest, indifference or even hostility toward religion or the parish.
- Asking ourselves what is the Good News that needs to be told in our parish mission field?
- How would Jesus extend his ministry in our area?
- What are the gifts that we can identify in our community that will enable us to be effective missionaries?

Identifying our Mission

Answering the above missionary-like questions will help us to identify and articulate what our parish mission is meant to be at this moment in history. To speak about mission is not first and foremost our parish sys-

tems and organizational structures. Parish Transformation is not about adding another program or getting a new webpage – although all that could be helpful – it’s about making sure that we are an authentic community of disciples grounded in Christ and the reign of God. *Mission* refers to everything we attribute to Jesus in his ministry to redeem the world, to raise up the lowly, to extend the mercy of God to sinners, to bring hope to the world and lead us on the road to heaven. And so, for example, one parish may identify their mission as an intensive outreach to the poor. Their vision will tell us how they will serve the poor. The structures and systems, staffing, resourcing, programs, etc. will be the vision or the steps we take to enable the mission of Jesus to be realized in our time and in our communities.

From Mission to Vision

Mission needs to be translated into a particular *vision* for each parish so that the heart of Christ’s mission isn’t lost in abstract language or pious ideals that are hard to get our arms around. To articulate a vision that gives us life and has the power to move us forward, there needs to be passion and conviction behind our words. We need to use our imagination to dream, and to dream big! We can’t be afraid to think outside the box, to envision new ways to carry forward the mission of Jesus, new ways to envision parish. We have to be willing to take some calculated risks and not be afraid that we might fail. Roadblock thinking that comes from naysayers who say, “We’ve always done it that way” or “That could never work here,” must be put in check.

Throughout the *Parish Transformation* process we will rely on the movement of the Holy Spirit directing and guiding our efforts. Reliance on the inspiration of the Holy Spirit is critical to the process and keeps *Parish Transformation* from becoming just another program or corporate fix. Ultimately it’s not about what we want for our parish but about what God is asking of us.

Inspired by the mission and ministry of Jesus you will be asked to put together a concrete vision for the future. This will include specific strategies, benchmarks to assess your progress, timelines and the designation of who will be responsible for the steps that need to be taken to accomplish the vision.

Pope Francis has issued a challenge to us all as we engage in *Parish Transformation*:

“In all its activities the parish encourages and trains its members to be evangelizers. It is a community of communities, a sanctuary where the thirsty come to

drink in the midst of their journey, and a center of constant missionary outreach. We must admit, though, that the call to review and renew our parishes has not yet sufficed to bring them nearer to people, to make them environments of living communion and participation, and to make them completely mission-oriented.” (Joy of the Gospel, #28)

Patient Trust

Cultivating a spirit of prayer and openness to the movement of the Holy Spirit as we engage in *Parish Transformation*

Above all, trust in the slow work of God. We are quite naturally impatient in everything to reach the end without delay. We should like to skip the intermediate stages. We are impatient of being on the way to something unknown, something new. And yet it is the law of all progress that it is made by passing through some stages of instability—and that it may take a very long time.

And so I think it is with you; your ideas mature gradually—let them grow, let them shape themselves without undue haste. Don’t try to force them on, as though you could be today what time (that is to say, grace and circumstances acting on your own good will) will make of you tomorrow.

Only God could say what this new spirit gradually forming within you will be. Give Our Lord the benefit of believing that his hand is leading you, and accept the anxiety of feeling yourself in suspense and incomplete.

—Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, SJ

For Our Meditation

“Go therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold I am with you always, until the end of the age.” (Mt. 28:19–20)

“Every Christian is a missionary to the extent that he or she has encountered the love of God in Christ Jesus: we no longer say that we are ‘disciples’ and ‘missionaries,’ but rather that we are always ‘missionary disciples.’” (Pope Francis, *The Joy of the Gospel*, #120)

“If indeed, the parish is the Church placed in the neighborhoods of humanity, it lives and is at work through being deeply inserted in human society and intimately bound up with its aspirations and its dramatic events. Oftentimes the social context, especially in certain countries and environments, is violently shaken by elements of disintegration and de-humanization. The individual is lost and dis-oriented, but there always remains in the human heart the desire to experience and cultivate caring and personal relationships. The response to such a desire can come from the parish, when, with the lay faithful’s participation, it adheres to its fundamental vocation and mission, that is, to be a ‘place’ in the world for the community of believers to gather together as a ‘sign’ and ‘instrument’ of the vocation of all to communion: in a word, to be a house of welcome to all and a place of service to all, or, as Pope John XXIII was fond of saying, to be the ‘village fountain’ to which all would have recourse in their thirst.” (Saint John Paul II, *The Lay Members of Christ’s Faithful People*, #27)

“Our times are both momentous and fascinating. While on the one hand people seem to be pursuing material prosperity and to be sinking ever deeper into consumerism and materialism, on the other hand we are witnessing a desperate search for meaning, the need for an inner life, and a desire to learn new forms and methods of meditation and prayer. Not only in cultures with strong religious elements, but also in secularized societies, the spiritual dimension of life is being sought after as an antidote to dehumanization.” (Pope John Paul II, *Mission of the Redeemer*, #38)

“We have to face the difficult mystery of those people who leave the Church, who, under the illusion of alternative ideas, now think that the Church—their Jerusalem—can no longer offer them anything meaningful and important... We need a Church unafraid of going forth into their night. We need a Church capable of meeting them on their way. We need a Church capable of entering into their conversation. We need a Church able to dialogue with those disciples, who, having left Jerusalem behind, are wandering aimlessly, alone, with their own disappointment, disillusioned by a Christianity now considered barren, fruitless soil, incapable of generating meaning.” (Pope Francis, *Address to Bishops of Brazil, World Youth Day 2013*)

PERSONAL REFLECTION

- What do I understand to be the mission and ministry of Jesus?
- How is the mission and ministry of Jesus reflected in my life?

PARISH REFLECTION

- How will our parish demographics affect the shape of our parish mission?
- Is our parish more about self-preservation or about missionary outreach? Explain.
- What difference is our parish making for the neighborhood?
- Which of the following metaphors best describes what I would like my parish to be:
 - ◇ The Village fountain where all come to quench their thirst
 - ◇ A greenhouse growing missionary disciples
 - ◇ Oasis of hope
 - ◇ Place of Divine Encounter
 - ◇ Launching pad for mission
 - ◇ A living sacrament of Christ and a moral voice in the world
 - ◇ Other



Reflecting On Our Mission

What insight can I draw from this essay about mission being at the heart of parish life? Does my reflection on this chapter influence my thinking about the identity and purpose of a parish?



III. Parish Overview— Understanding Who We Are

In order to discern where the Lord is calling our parish, it will be helpful to reflect upon our parish's history, as well as who we are as a parish today. Appreciating our past and present helps to set the foundation for discerning and articulating where we are called to go in the future.

During one of your early *Parish Transformation* meetings, you will review general information about your parish, which includes a snapshot of:

- Parish history
- Story of your parish's patron saint
- A summary of the current state of the parish
- An overview of current parish ministries
- Sacramental trends, e.g., number of weddings, baptisms, funerals
- Demographic trends in the community surrounding the parish
- Financial overview

This discussion is intended to help all members of your *Parish Transformation* team begin with a common point of understanding of your parish. Before we can reach consensus about future directions as a parish, we need to understand where we are today. From this common understanding, we can then collaboratively reflect, discuss, discern, and plan where we are called to go as a parish in the weeks ahead.

The information contained in the Parish Overview should be used as a resource throughout the *Parish Transformation* process. Stories about your parish history and patron saint may provide important foundations for your vision for mission, which you will articulate in your Mission Narrative. Understanding demographic trends in your local community and sacramental trends within your parish could help prioritize the objectives and actions you will include in your action plan.

Review the following together:

Parish History

- How did the parish begin?
- Who were the founders? What might have been their vision and hope for the parish?
- How has the parish changed in the past 5 years? 10 years? 20 years? 50 years? 100 years?
- How has the local community around the parish changed in the past 5 years? 10 years? 20 years? 50 years? 100 years?

Current Situation

- Who are you today? What is the demographic make-up of the parish? Are you a neighborhood parish or a gathering spot for worshippers from miles around?
- How does the parish interact with the local community? Is the parish a hub of community activity?

Patron Saint / Other Charisms

- What is the story of your parish's patron? Does your patron have a particular charism that could serve as inspiration for your parish's particular mission?
- If your parish is served by a Religious Order, what particular charism might that Religious Order provide that may offer inspiration for visioning and planning?

Parish Ministries

- What are the parish's various ministries?
- Who is involved?
- Whom do these ministries serve?

Parish History: Our Lady of Guadalupe Church is the first Spanish speaking parish in the upper Midwest. It opened on December 8, 1923. In 1924, the Claretian Missionaries, started to minister to the local Mexican community until the present. In 1929, the Shrine to St. Jude grew in response to people immersed in the Great Depression. In 1948, the School opened, becoming another community anchor for South Chicago. In 1980-90, the steel mills closed and the south-east side became economically challenged. The parish, under the leadership of the Claretians, responded to three fundamental needs by opening Claretial Medical Center (Health), the Villa Guadalupe (Elderly) and the Claretial Associates (Housing). Throughout its history, Our Lady of Guadalupe has become part of the fabric of South Chicago and North West Indiana.

Current Situation: At the present time, our parish is 99% first, second and third generation Mexican-American. A small percentage of our regular parishioners are Haitian. In addition, because of the St. Jude Shrine, our parish is enriched by the pilgrims that come constantly from different states and countries. Through history, our parish has become a place where a large number of new families continue to come looking for spiritual and moral support, particularly in moments of vulnerability as well as moments of new life and new beginnings. Even though our parish community is mostly Latino, our neighborhood is predominately African-American. For several years, we have been working to build a Christian relational with our neighbors through interreligious dialogue and common events.

Patron Saint: On 9 December 1531, Juan Diego, a recently converted Aztec peasant, had a vision of a young woman, while on a hill in the Tepeyac desert, near Mexico City. The lady in the vision asked him to build a church where they stood on a hill. Juan Diego told the local Bishop, Juan de Zumarraga, of the apparition; doubtful he asked for proof. Juan Diego later returned to the Tepeyac desert hill; again, the lady appeared to Juan Diego, who told her of the bishop's request for proof of her apparition. The lady then instructed Juan Diego to go to the hill top, where he found Castillian roses – native to Durango, the bishop's Spanish home town – and which did not bloom in winter. Juan Diego cut the roses, placed them in the apron of his *tilma* cloak, and delivered them to the bishop; an imprint of the Blessed Virgin Mary appeared on the *tilma*, formed by the soil and the Castillian roses.



IV. Pearl of Great Price

The kingdom of God is like a merchant searching for fine pearls. When he finds a pearl of great price, he goes and sells all that he has and buys it. (Mt. 13:45–46)

Every parish is blessed with treasure – pearls of great price. The treasure may be a beautiful church, a successful school, a multicultural community, a long history of serving the poor, talented lay leaders, a choir that draws people to worship. Even when a parish finds itself struggling because of changing circumstances or dwindling resources, there is always something good that is at work in a parish. It is easy to become fixated on what we are lacking or what is problematic. Without ignoring the issues that need attention, we need to set our hearts in search of the pearls of great price, that is, the blessings and all those things for which we can rightly be proud. While no parish is perfect, every parish can claim something that is valuable and worthy of preserving as a “pearl of great price.” It may be a long tradition of good liturgy or adult education programs or a food pantry that serves hundreds. It may be parish involvement in community affairs, its prime location or the genuinely welcoming spirit of the congregation. Whatever the “pearl of great price” may be, a parish that fails to recognize its gifts can lose the very gift that may be the key to renewing the mission and vision of the parish.

As you continue your early reflections in the *Parish Transformation* process, take whatever time is necessary to name the “pearl of great price” in your parish. This is intended to be a very positive exercise. Start from your strengths. Name them. Take pride in the good gifts of the community. Highlight the great traditions. Share with each other:

- Why did I choose this parish as my spiritual home rather than any other parish that may be equally close to where I live?
- What is appealing about our parish?
- What does our parish value the most?
- What difference does our parish make to the larger civic community?

The answers to these questions should bring you closer to identifying the “pearls of great price” which are a source of pride to parishioners. Naming the “pearls of great price” and the values for which they stand are the firm foundation upon which the remainder of the *Parish Transformation* process will build.

When you find your hidden treasure, thank God for your discovery and celebrate your gifts, the pearls of great price. These treasures of the parish are not just possessions to brag about or hold on to like trophies. The gifts of a parish are given by God for its mission. They have the potential of being signs of the kingdom of God in our midst. And remember, furthering the reign of God is at the heart of a parish’s purpose.

EXAMPLES

- Blessed Titus Brandsma Parish discovered that they have an unusually large number of attorneys in the parish. They hope to form their own Christian legal Ministry to assist parishioners with special legal needs and assist the elderly poor in obtaining medical and other benefits they are entitled to by law. The Christian Legal Ministry is also committing itself to being the voice for peace and justice issues that are of concern for parishioners.
- Christ Our Hope Parish has one of the best pipe organs in the Archdiocese and one of the most talented musicians as their director of music. The parish plans to use its Pearl of Great Price by creating a Religious Arts Council that will plan music and art festivals, drawing a wider number of people to the church through art.

FOR OUR MEDITATION

“The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure buried in a field, which a person finds and hides again, and out of joy goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. Again, the kingdom of God is like a merchant searching for fine pearls. When he finds a pearl of great price, he goes and sells all that he has and buys it.”

(Mt. 13:44–46)

“What we focus on becomes our reality. If we focus on what is wrong or what is missing, we tend to see everything through that filter and frame.”

(Sue Annis Hammond, *The Thin Book of Appreciative Inquiry*, Thin Book Publishing Co., Bend, OR, 1996).

“We believe simply that this old and venerable structure of the parish has an indispensable mission of great contemporary importance: to create the basic community of the Christian people; to initiate and gather the people in the accustomed expression of liturgical life; to conserve and renew the faith in the people of today; to serve as the school for teaching the salvific message of Christ; to put solidarity in practice and work and the humble charity of good and brotherly works.”

(Pope Paul VI, *Discourse to the Roman Clergy*, June 24, 1963)

PERSONAL REFLECTION

- What do I value most about my parish? What are the “pearls of great price”?
- What advice would I give to someone who is looking for a parish to join?
- What are the three most important things I believe we should be able to say about every parish?

PARISH REFLECTION

- What positive feedback do I hear about our parish from visitors or neighbors?
- How can we build on our *pearls of great price* to accomplish Christ’s mission in our parish?

What I want to remember about this chapter for myself and my parish:





Writing a Mission Narrative

One of the tasks of the Parish Transformation team will be to put into writing an overall spiritual vision for the parish. We will call this the “Mission Narrative.” The purpose of the Mission Narrative is to ground all our plans for the future in a spiritual vision that authenticates our work as an extension of Jesus’ ministry and mission. The Mission Narrative will be an enduring testimony that parishioners and parish leaders can return to for inspiration and to remember the dream and vision that emerged from the Parish Transformation Process.

At this point we are only in the early stages of drafting a Mission Narrative. We will return to writing a specific Mission Narrative later in the process. But looking ahead, we can begin now to record some initial thoughts and ideas.

St. Barbara Parish

SAMPLE

We, the people of St. Barbara parish, believe we are called to be a People of the Pentecost. United in faith, hope and love, we proclaim the truth and beauty of Christ’s gospel.

We are a diverse community and we celebrate our differences, our talents and gifts. We seek to use these as we join together to bring the good news of Christ to all people and to build up God’s Kingdom.

A Missionary Spirit has always been a pearl of St. Barbara Parish through its 100-year history. As St. Paul writes in his letter to Timothy, (2 1:14), “guard the good treasure entrusted to you with the help of the Holy Spirit.” We have done just that as a parish. Today, that Spirit continues to guide us as we reach out to the poor and needy in our midst, bringing comfort to the sorrowful and hope to the downtrodden. It is in works of charity and justice that people see what the church is all about and who we are as Christians.

As People of the Pentecost, we are evangelizing witnesses to our Catholic faith by proclaiming the Gospel in what we say and do, just as Jesus commissioned his disciples to go forth to all the ends of the earth. At home, school, work or in the community, our mission is to be Christ to others and always reflect the love of the Lord regardless of the challenges we face.

Just as important, is catechesis. As we strive to deepen our knowledge and faith, and develop our relationship with Christ, we will become more Christ-centered and be able to share the love and faith we have with others.

All of these efforts are centered in our love for the Eucharist, which is the source and summit of our Catholic faith. It is in the sacred body of Christ that we are nourished and fortified to go forth and do the work that Jesus asks of us.

These are the building blocks upon which we develop our mission as a parish and a vision for the future.

The fire of the Holy Spirit not only lights our way, but burns in our hearts sparking a zeal for our God, His people and His church. In Romans, 15:13, Paul says: “May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.”

Through our efforts and willingness to serve, to evangelize and catechize, and with the help of the Holy Spirit, we can become a beacon of Christ’s love to the people and communities around us.

Questions:

What imagery comes to mind when reading St. Barbara’s Mission Narrative?

How does Scripture provide inspiration to St. Barbara’s Mission Narrative?



SAMPLE

St. Catherine of Siena—St. Lucy Parish

We, the People of God of St. Catherine of Siena-St. Lucy Parish, strive to be a school of holiness for people of all ages and from all neighborhoods. Through prayerful study of the Bible and of our faith, we are nourished as a pilgrim church responding to our common call to holiness. Transformed by the Holy Spirit, we embrace and proclaim the Good News of the Gospel and the presence of the risen Jesus in the world.

St. Catherine of Siena and St. Lucy would be proud of us. St. Catherine, who lived in the fourteenth century, is a model of strength, keen intellect, willingness to talk to authority, compassion for all, and devotion to reforming the Church. St. Lucy, our other patron, though blind, could see with light and clarity her role in the Mystical Body of Christ. Tradition has it that even while she was being tortured, she continued to teach the glories of God.

We are all in this together; after all, we are the body of Christ. We are a parish at the crossroads. With a large and aging facility and a relatively small congregation we are called to revitalize and evangelize in order to grow our personal faith and our church family.

We are a parish at the crossroads. With our position on the literal border between urban and suburban we are called to teach, lead, and serve with people from Chicago, Oak Park, and the many other neighborhoods from which our parishioners come. We have a long tradition of inclusiveness and welcoming diversity that will serve as the foundation of our efforts.

It is like we are in a new Pentecost. The disciples were sent out into the world, “whereas we shall devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.” (Acts 6:4), and now we are called to live an abundant life filled with the Holy Spirit.

We trust in our Catholic faith and Scripture and remember the story of Jesus’ appearance on the road to Emmaus: Were not our hearts burning within us while he spoke to us on the way and opened the Scriptures to us?” (Lk 24:32)

Questions:

How does St. Catherine—St. Lucy’s Mission Narrative acknowledge the cultural factors that influence the parish’s mission?

How might the stories of the parish’s patron saints influence the mission of the parish?

Beginning to Formulate Our Mission Narrative

As we continue to build upon our reflections, we will want to take note of some themes that surface which could form the basis of our parish mission. Thinking about our parish mission through a variety of lenses may help us to surface fresh themes for our parish Mission Narrative.

Lenses	Possible themes influencing our parish mission
The charism of our patron saint or the religious order that serves our parish	
Demographic challenges and opportunities we face	
Our Pearls of Great Price	
Biblical story or scriptural passage of particular relevance for our parish	
Particular spiritual challenge of our parish	
Census or composition of the parish (e.g. professions and vocations)	
Other possible lenses	

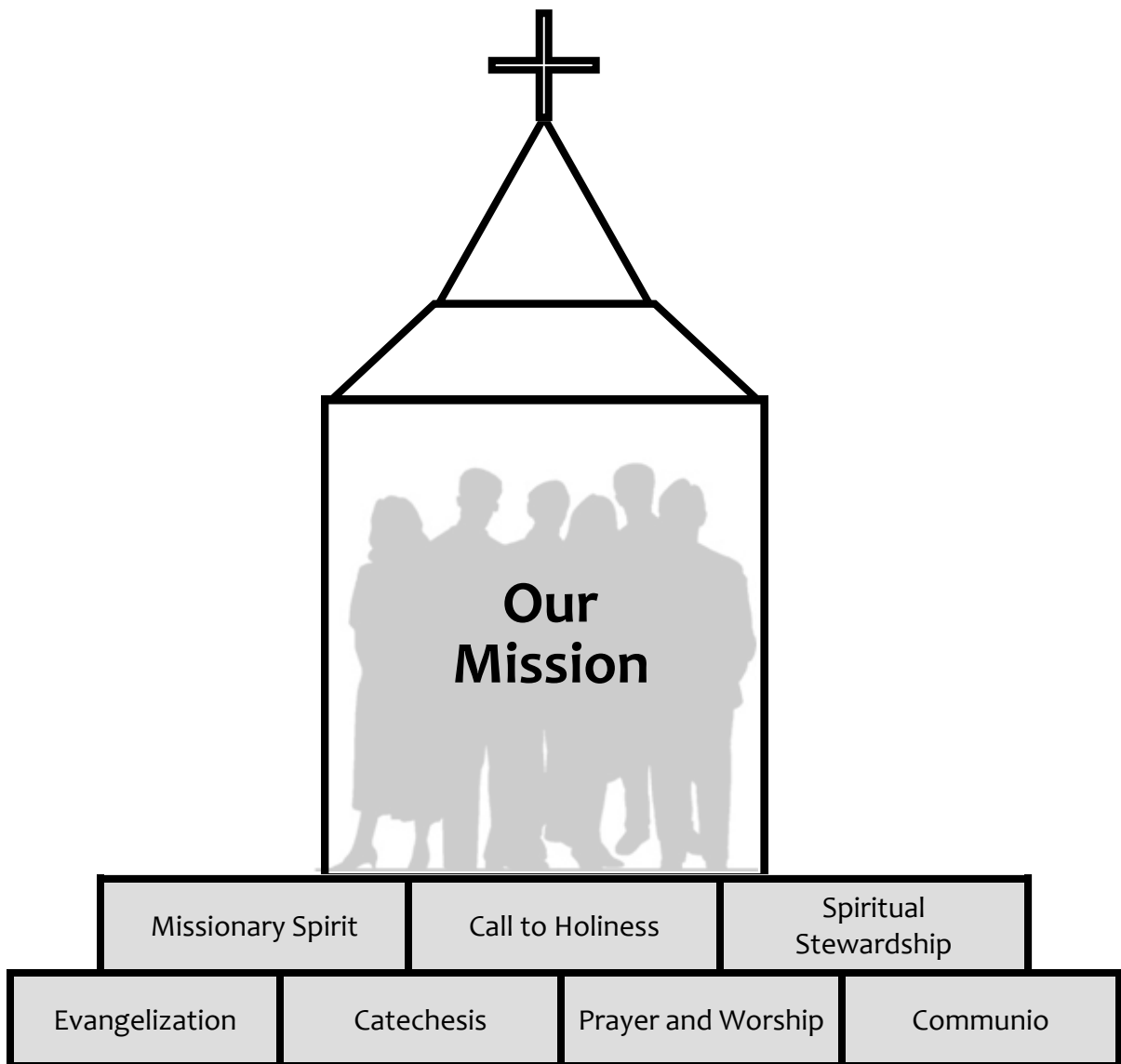
We will come back to this page through the process to continue to identify and redefine possible themes. Later in the process, we will narrow them to determine the core theme(s) that will define our parish mission.

As we begin to draft a specific Mission Narrative, we should keep in mind the attributes of a strong Mission Narrative and revisit these often.

Attributes	Explanation
Our Mission Narrative has a foundation grounded in Scripture, the Liturgy, and/or the charism of our patron saint.	It is important to ground the mission in Scripture, the Liturgy, and/or the charism of the parish's patron saint so that there is a credible driving force behind the mission. We want to draw our inspiration from these sources rather than simply selecting a Scripture verse after we've already written our Mission Narrative to fit what we want to do.
Our Mission Narrative stirs the imagination by using concrete and vivid language.	It can be easy to write a 'Hallmark card' mission that applies to all Catholic parishes in the world. E.g., 'We are called to love one another as members of the Body of Christ.' <i>Parish Transformation</i> challenges you to stretch beyond where the parish is today, consider new ideas, take risks, and articulate a narrative that calls the parish to action.
Our Mission Narrative clearly articulates how we are uniquely called to live out the mission and ministry of Jesus at this time and in this place, and has been shaped by the particular circumstances, history, and culture of our community.	Local context shapes the needs of the community and how we, as missionaries, are called to respond to those needs. As demographics, economics, etc. change, the needs of the community change. Similarly, we must recognize that the way in which we are called to respond to those needs and our unique mission as a parish also changes.
Our Mission Narrative calls us to rethink and strengthen our relationships, not just initiate changes to programs.	Creating a new program may not be the first solution to more deeply engaging the parish and broader community. We may first need to change our relationships and the language and ways in which we communicate with others.
Our Mission Narrative is relevant to parishioners already actively engaged in the parish, as well as those who may not currently take an active role in parish life.	<i>Parish Transformation</i> is not meant to serve only the needs of those already active in parish life. Rather, it is an opportunity to find new ways to engage others, whether they regularly attend Mass, have fallen away from the Church, or have not yet encountered Christ in their lives.



Building Blocks for Mission



We are now ready to consider the "Building Blocks" of parish life. These "Building Blocks" are the core foundations for all parishes through which they carry out the mission and ministry of Christ and grow in his likeness. The key to understanding a parish's mission is usually embedded in the building blocks.

As you reflect on each of the following chapters in this section, please consider the following questions:

- Does this Building Block provide insight for us into what our parish's particular mission might be? For example, a parish might choose Evangelization as a key theme in its Mission, focusing on evangelizing an increasingly secular society. Another parish might focus on Catechesis, working to provide a fresh approach to catechesis for young adults who might not have a strong religious foundation from their earlier years. How will the mission of the parish be served through these Building Blocks?
- Is this a strong Building Block for us? Do we need to improve in this area to ensure that our parish's foundations are secure? For example, a parish might discover that it lacks specific opportunities, spiritual disciplines or spiritual mentorship options for Catholics seeking a deeper spiritual life and engagement in the Church (Call to Holiness). Another parish might realize that it needs to revisit its liturgical planning, improve its music and offer better formation of liturgical ministers (Prayer and Worship).

After reflecting on these Building Blocks, we will return to determining our overall parish Mission, as well as the foundational Building Blocks which might need a more intensive focus in our parish.



I. Evangelization:

Introducing the living Christ and his Gospel as an invitation to a conversion of mind and heart that is rooted in Christ

Mary Magdalene went to the disciples. "I have seen the Lord!" she announced. Then she reported what he had said to her. (John 20:18)

The reaction of Mary of Magdala to finding the empty tomb was running back to the community to tell the other disciples what she had experienced, announcing: "I have seen the Lord" (John 20:18). When Peter went to the tomb, Scripture says "he went home amazed at what had happened" (Luke 24:12). The two disciples on the road to Emmaus discovered the risen Jesus in the breaking of the bread and then ran back to Jerusalem to announce to the eleven and those gathered with them that they had encountered the Lord (Luke 24:33-35). There is a joy and excitement in these accounts. The disciples could not keep what they had experienced to themselves. Their experience lies at the heart of what evangelization means: to know the Living Christ and to share the Good News with others.

Meeting the Living Christ

Have we met the Lord and heard his voice? We need to be clear that the heart of Christianity is not a philosophy or ideology, but the person of Jesus Christ. To be a Christian is not only to be a believer in the Christ of the Gospels but to have a relationship with the risen Christ living and present among us. Perhaps we can find consolation in the apostles who seem to have been slow to understand and believe as they grew in their relationship with Jesus. Recall Thomas who said to Jesus: "Master, we do not know where you are going; how can we know the way? Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:5-6). Philip said: "Master, show us the Father and that will be enough for us" (John 14:8). Jesus had to tell him boldly, "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:9). Evangelization stirs up the desire to know Christ more intimately and to follow him more closely.

Evangelization calls for bold witness and listening

When some Catholics hear the word "evangelization," they may think of TV evangelists or they may confuse evangelization with catechesis. Evangelization is sharing the Good News of our faith in words or actions so that Christ may be revealed through us. Evangelization leads to conversion, a surrender to Christ as the foundation of our lives. Too often we want to bypass evangelization and rush into catechesis before an individual

has met the Living Christ. Catechesis follows evangelization.

One of the most effective means of evangelization is openly sharing our relationship with the Lord and giving witness to his love at work within us. As Catholics, we tend to be rather shy or reserved when it comes to talking about our relationship with God. We may fear that someone might think that we are proselytizing or being overly religious. But it is only natural to share with others what we value and what we find hopeful and meaningful in our lives and for the good of society. Our witness to God's love and mercy needs to be so evident that others begin to ask us why we have so much joy and hope. As we read in 1 Peter 3:15, "Always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope."

Has our witness to the Gospel been bold enough and joyful enough to break through the barriers and obstacles that keep individuals from discovering the Lord in our midst? Have we been clear enough that we are not followers of a spiritual philosophy but the followers of a person, the Living Christ? Do our actions match our beliefs? Is there an appealing simplicity to the way we follow Jesus that leaves others wondering what makes us tick? Are we prepared to challenge, as well as comfort the consciences of those who seek the truth? Reflecting on our vocation as evangelizers might lead us to honestly admit that we need better training and guidance as Catholics to become more effective at sharing our faith.

We cannot be afraid to listen to the stumbling blocks that prevent our neighbors from hearing the Gospel. We need to be genuinely compassionate and free of judgment as we try to understand where people are coming from when they express their belief and disbelief. This takes time and patience. It also serves to remind us, as Pope Paul VI did, that, "The Church is an evangelizer, but she begins by being evangelized herself" (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, #15). We are always being called to a deeper conversion.

Time for "re-proposing the Gospel"

Pope Benedict XVI made an urgent plea for a New Evangelization and said it was time to "re-propose" the

Gospel. He expressed an urgency about reaching out in a special way to those areas of the world that have been known to be Christian and yet in recent decades have lost interest or enthusiasm for the message of Christ, if in fact they ever truly heard the message of the Gospel.

The influence of secular culture, rapid changes in society, relativism, reliance on scientific proof, and disillusionment with authority have all played a role in the way in which individuals relate to religion. We all know neighbors or relatives who no longer go to Mass or participate in the life of the Church. Many still claim to believe in God but are not influenced by religious teaching when making decisions in life. God may no longer be at the center of their lives. Still others search earnestly for God.

Our task is to think creatively about how we can show the relevancy of the Gospel to contemporary society by using language, new methods and communication systems that speak to today's modern culture. The creative use of technology is truly invaluable for our ministry and can no longer be dismissed as optional. Employing our imagination to show a new face for our parish may be the open door that leads others to rediscover Christ alive in his Church.

There is much hope for the future

There is a positive side to today's urgent need for evangelization. While many have disengaged from actively practicing their faith, many still thirst for meaning, hope, and truth. Contemporary society leaves many feeling empty and isolated from others. Many young people have a generous heart and want to make a difference in the world but are often unsure about where or how to invest their lives. As views about family and marriage change and traditional values are disregarded, good people are left confused and unsure about what direction to take. The search for truth continues.

In this brief snapshot of life, we can see how the Church could have a real impact on individuals and ultimately on society. But it all begins with listening with an open heart and a joyful, loving spirit. As we learn what lies in the hearts of those who search for meaning and hope, we will be in a better position to be the evangelizers that Christ calls us to be. The quality of our communal worship, our confidence in confronting evil and injustice, our ability to forgive when no one else will, to be a welcoming and inviting community, to lay aside our prejudices, to take a stand with the poor, to be hopeful even in difficult times – all of this is the fertile field of evangelization. The saying attributed to St. Francis of Assisi is good to remember: "Preach the Gospel and if necessary use words."

FOR OUR MEDITATION

"Having been born consequently out of being sent, the Church in her turn is sent by Jesus...thus it is the whole Church that receives the mission to evangelize, and the work of each individual member is important for the whole." (Evangelii Nuntiandi, #14-15)

"The concern to evangelize must never be left on the margin of ecclesial activity and of the personal life of the Christian, but it must be strongly characterized by the awareness of being recipients and, at the same time, missionaries of the Gospel."

(Pope Benedict XVI, January 25, 2012)

"To be sure, the testimony of faith comes in many forms. Just as in a great fresco, there is a variety of colors and shades, yet they are all important, even those which do not stand out. In God's great plan, every detail is important, even yours, even my humble little witness, even the hidden witness of those who live their faith with simplicity in everyday family relationships, friendships. ...Let us all remember this: one cannot proclaim the Gospel of Jesus without the tangible witness of one's life. Those who listen to us and observe us must be able to see in our actions what they hear from our lips, and so give glory to God!"

(Pope Francis, April 14, 2013)

"At times we lose people because they don't understand what we are saying, because we have forgotten the language of simplicity and import an intellectualism foreign to our people. Without the grammar of simplicity, the Church loses the very conditions which make it possible "to fish" for God in the deep waters of his Mystery.

(Pope Francis, Address to Bishops of Brazil, World Youth Day 2013)

"In our day Jesus' command to 'go and make disciples' echoes in the changing scenarios and ever new challenges to the Church's mission of evangelization, and all of us are called to take part in this new missionary 'going forth.'"

(The Joy of the Gospel, #20)

PERSONAL REFLECTION

Pope Francis said at World Youth Day 2013, “The experience of this encounter [with Jesus] must not remain locked up in your life or in the small group of your parish, your movement, or your community. That would be like withholding oxygen from a flame that was burning strongly. Faith is a flame that grows stronger the more it is shared and passed on.”

- How can I strengthen the flame of faith? How am I called to go beyond my comfort zone to share and pass on my faith?
- What do I believe is the Good News of the Gospel that many people are not hearing today?
- How am I exercising my vocation as an evangelizer?
- What opportunities do I have for evangelization in my workplace? In my everyday relationships? What do I need from my parish to help me be an effective evangelizer?
- Jesus asked his disciples, “Who do people say that I am?” Then he asked them, “Who do you say that I am?” What is my answer to Jesus?
- How have I experienced the joy that comes from knowing Christ?

PARISH REFLECTION

- How can we apply Pope Francis’ charge to be “missionary disciples” in our parish and neighborhood?
- What are ways in which our community is listening to the hearts of those who no longer practice their Catholic faith?
- What is the most powerful sign of hope and compassion that our parish has to offer?
- Who are the effective evangelizers in our parish?
- What is the new face that our parish needs, if it is going to catch the attention of those who have dismissed the Church as having nothing to say to them?
- How does our parish serve as a compelling witness to the world around us the Joy of the Gospel ?



Reflecting On Our Mission

What insight can I draw from this essay about the role of Evangelization in mission and parish? What do I want to remember about this chapter for myself and my parish?



II. Catechesis

A lifelong process of learning the teachings of Christ and his Church that builds upon evangelization and conversion to deepen one's relationship with Christ and his Church

Were not our hearts burning inside us as he talked to us on the road and explained the Scriptures to us? (Luke 24:32)

Evangelization and catechesis go hand in hand. Through the Church's ministry of evangelization, we hear the Good News of the Gospel and are introduced to the Living Christ. We are called to a conversion of mind and heart as we learn to walk along the path that Christ sets before us. Catechesis builds upon conversion and aims to deepen our relationship with God. Catechesis helps us to know the person, the message, and the mission of Christ so that our entire lives are Christ-centered. As St. Paul said so beautifully, "It is no longer I that live, but Christ who lives in me." (Gal 2:20). In other words, the primary purpose of our catechetical efforts is to deepen our relationship with the Lord. It is not simply passing on doctrine, as important as that is, but nurturing a relationship with God that stirs up our hunger for the truth.

The Church has always valued enlightened faith. This means that faith is more than just a matter of feelings or emotions and certainly more than just one's personal opinion. There is objective truth that has been revealed to us by Jesus Christ. The Church teaches this truth through its ministry of the word, its commitment to catechesis at all stages of life. Our Catholic schools, our Catholic universities and all of our religious education programs for adults and children rest on the belief that a deeper understanding leads to a stronger faith. The more we come to know our faith, the better our faith can resound within us and move us to put it into practice.

Catechesis is multi-faceted

There is first of all a catechesis that introduces us to the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Catechesis brings us to the Cross and draws us into the mystery of Christ's Resurrection. There is also a catechesis for discipleship as we learn to practice our faith in society, working for peace and justice and learning to live a holy and virtuous life.

We may be most familiar with the catechesis we receive in preparation for the sacraments. An effective sacramental catechesis stirs up the gift of faith and predisposes us to receive the sacraments worthily and fruitfully. Catechists prepare youth for Confirmation,

an RCIA team catechizes catechumens in preparation for the initiation sacraments, a minister of care prepares a homebound parishioner for the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick. Whether it is a young couple preparing for marriage, a first communicant, or parents preparing for the baptism of their child, effective catechesis fosters faith.

We Are All Catechists

The ministry of catechesis is not reserved for a few professionals or trained volunteers. We can all be catechists in the daily experiences of life. Parents, for example, have primary responsibility for instructing their children in the ways of faith. A child first hears the name of God from the lips of his/her parents. We can be catechists in the workplace when coworkers ask us questions about the Church or a neighbor in a time of crisis questions the love and mercy of God. Our own ongoing catechesis helps us to be prepared for these unexpected opportunities for catechesis.

Life Is Also a Teacher

The Catechism of the Catholic Church is an excellent resource. However, our growth in faith is not limited to what we find in a book. At every stage of life and with every experience, we have a new opportunity to integrate the Gospel and the teaching of the Church into our spirituality. At times of crisis and loss, for example, our faith can be tested. But with prayer, counsel, and a deeper examination of what we believe as Catholics, we can arrive at a stronger faith and commitment to Christ. We can be of enormous help to one another in getting to know our faith better as we walk together through life.

Catechesis for adults is critical because the questions we have as adults are not the questions we had as children. Life introduces new questions, doubts and challenges. We need to create a climate in which parishioners are not afraid to raise their questions or to seek help to understand what many parishioners may take for granted. We must learn how to meet people where they are on their faith journeys. The way in which we approach catechesis for someone who is just beginning to believe in God is necessarily different than for someone who already has a strong belief in God. We

need to foster a climate in our parishes in which individuals will feel comfortable raising questions without fear of judgment.

Contemporary Catechesis Calls for Creativity

The challenges of our time require us to be creative in the ways in which we foster faith and pass on the teaching of Christ and his Church. Pope Benedict XVI made a strong appeal for using modern technology in passing on the faith. The Pope said:

“New horizons are now open that were until recently unimaginable; they stir our wonder at the possibilities offered by these new media and, at the same time, urgently demand a serious reflection on the significance of communication in the digital age.”

The impact of modern technology today is as revolutionary as the invention of the printing press, and we can no longer consider these new technologies and media as an option or luxury if we are to reach younger generations.

Media and technology are not the only answers in the search for a more effective catechesis. We need to consider other new learning techniques for children and adults. A traditional classroom format, for example, is not the only format for catechesis. Are there other models for catechesis that we haven’t explored? Do we need to reconsider how we train catechists for our parish programs? Do we presume to teach the faith in the same way we teach history, science or math? What are the obstacles that get in the way of communicating the faith of the Church? How do we engage the whole family in ongoing catechesis? Different age groups and cultures may learn differently, so our catechetical approaches need to be adapted to accommodate different learning patterns. Catechesis is not just a matter of passing on a body of doctrinal knowledge. Catechesis aims to integrate the faith of the Church with the spiritual life of the individual and family. There is much room for development here.

The Primary Tasks of Catechesis

The National Directory for Catechesis presents us with six primary tasks for catechesis. We can assess the strength of our parish’s efforts in relationship to these six tasks of catechesis:

- Promoting knowledge of the faith;
 - Promoting a knowledge of the meaning of Liturgy and Sacraments;
 - Promoting moral formation in Jesus Christ;
 - Teaching how to pray with Christ;
 - Preparing the Christian to live in community and to participate actively in the mission of the Church;
 - Promoting a missionary spirit that prepares the faithful to be present as Christians in society
- (National Directory for Catechesis, #20)

From these six tasks we can review our parish’s catechetical ministry. The above tasks present only a preliminary overview, however. It is the responsibility of each parish to fill in the blanks, to seriously consider what needs to be presented. We are not training future theologians, but rather we are training disciples who will be confident enough in their own faith to effectively pass on to others the joy of believing.

Learning from Each Other

What can we learn from the pastoral experiences of our neighboring parishes? Collaborating with neighboring parishes in offering creative programs for adults and children may be more effective than if every parish were to create and plan all of its own programs.

FOR OUR MEDITATION

“For ‘everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.’ But how can they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how can they believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone to preach? And how can people preach unless they are sent? As it is written, ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!’”
(Romans 10:13-15)

“The object of catechesis is communion with Jesus Christ. Catechesis leads people to enter the mystery of Christ, to encounter him and to discover themselves and the meaning of their lives in him....The definitive aim of catechesis is to put people not only in touch but in communion, in intimacy, with Jesus Christ: only he can lead us to the love of the Father in the Spirit and make us share in the life of the Holy Trinity.”
([National Directory for Catechesis](#), U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, Washington, DC, p. 55)

“It [the baptismal catechumenate] reminds the Church that her catechesis accompanies a continual conversion to Christ and an ongoing initiation into the celebration of the sacraments and the life of the Church. Just as the baptismal catechumenate is the responsibility of the entire Christian community, so too does the whole Church bear the obligation to provide an ongoing catechesis for the faithful.”
([National Directory for Catechesis](#), #35.D)

“If used wisely, they [technologies] can contribute to the satisfaction of the desire for meaning, truth and unity which remain the most profound aspirations of each human being.”
(Pope Benedict XVI)

PERSONAL REFLECTION

- In my life, what has been most effective in helping me learn the faith of the Church?
- What are some of the questions I hear people asking about faith? What questions do I have?

PARISH REFLECTION

- What are the opportunities for adult catechesis and faith formation in our parish?
- How would we describe the quality, creativity, and effectiveness of our parish catechetical programs for children and youth?
- How effective is our parish school in forming a new generation of enlightened Catholic leaders?
- What are some new directions we can dream about for family catechesis and ongoing adult catechesis?
- Do we provide opportunities for different audiences, at different times, and in different formats?
- How can we collaborate with our neighboring parishes to provide catechetical events that can have a strong impact in our local area?



Reflecting On Our Mission

What insight can I draw from this essay about the role of Catechesis in mission and parish? What do I want to remember about this chapter for myself and my parish?



III. Prayer and Worship

Developing a parish culture of prayer with well-prepared liturgy and the Eucharist as the source and summit

Come, let us ring out our joy to the Lord; hail the rock who saves us. Let us come into his presence, giving thanks; let us hail him with a song of praise. (Psalm 95)

Prayer and worship are fundamental to the Christian life. They provide the foundations of our relationship with God as individuals and as parish communities.

Despite the fundamental role of prayer and worship to our Catholic faith, many Catholics may need a general reintroduction to, and deeper exploration of, prayer. Catholics sometimes speak about discouragement in their prayer life, noting that they do not know how to give voice to their prayer or that they do not hear God responding to them. It is very possible that they have not discovered a Catholic style of prayer that is most effective at nurturing their relationship with God. The Catholic Church is blessed with a rich Tradition and variety of prayer styles. While most Catholics learn at an early age to recite traditional prayers such as the “Lord’s Prayer” and the “Hail Mary,” they are not always introduced to other forms of prayer, such as meditation, Lectio Divina, Liturgy of the Hours, Adoration, the Rosary, etc. Nor do parishes always provide ample opportunities to experience and explore individual and communal prayer beyond the Sunday Mass.

Parishes can support their people on their journeys to richer prayer lives. Parishes can train prayer sponsors to accompany individuals who are learning to pray. Parishes can also provide a ‘school of prayer’ series to introduce parishioners to a variety of styles of Catholic prayer, as well as provide families with guidance and examples to help strengthen the role of prayer in the regular life of their ‘domestic church.’

Learning to pray the liturgy, which is the Church’s official form of communal worship, may require even more attention. We cannot presume that everyone has learned the significance of our ritual prayer, which includes the signs and gestures we use at worship, e.g., bowing or signing ourselves. These too are genuine forms of prayer in which our whole body is engaged. We should be concerned that when some Catholics find it difficult to understand and pray the liturgy, they may lose interest and gradually stop coming to Mass. Meaningful and vibrant worship is fostered in a community that takes its prayer life seriously.

No doubt our learning to pray is what led Saint John Paul II to say that our parishes need to become “schools of prayer.” Have we offered adequate catechesis in prayer and ritual? Is the congregation clear about the difference between private prayer and liturgy? We do not come to the liturgy as independent worshippers set on saying our own prayers for our own needs. We gather as the Body of Christ, offering one prayer and interceding for the needs of all the world. Communal prayer requires an attitude of “communio,” that is, seeing ourselves joined together with others as the one Body of Christ at prayer.

Cultivating the practice of various forms of personal and communal prayer is essential to developing the liturgical life and experience of a parish. Teaching the art of prayer will help to form a liturgical community, that is, a community that draws its spiritual life and mission out of the liturgy. This requires reflection on the words and actions of the liturgy and learning how to connect the language of the liturgy to one’s personal life, to mission, and to the state of the world. Our faith formation programs and parish gatherings are potential venues through which the parish’s life of prayer and worship can be nurtured. The stronger the prayer life of a parish, the more likely its communal worship will be vibrant and engage the whole congregation in the action of the liturgy.

Liturgy as Source & Summit of the Church’s Life

The liturgy has great influence on us as Catholics. Some of our most treasured memories are family celebrations of baptisms, first communions, weddings, and funerals. These sacred occasions in our lives leave a lasting impression upon us. They shape and form us as Catholics. Together with our weekly celebration of Mass, these sacramental experiences give us our Catholic identity and continue to hold us together as a Catholic people. As St. Pius X said: “The liturgy is the indispensable source of the true Christian spirit.”

Why is the Liturgy so important?

The liturgy, which is the Church’s official ritual prayer, ranks far above every other activity in the parish. This is why the celebration of Mass on the Lord’s Day has always been part of our Catholic Tradition. From earliest times Christians gathered on the Lord’s Day to

remember their identity in Christ. The meaning and significance of the Lord's Day and what we do at Mass come from the same tap root, namely, the saving life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. What is important to remember, however, is that the liturgy is not limited to what we do at worship; it is also about what God does for us. In the liturgy Christ is at work saving his people. Any thought of staying home to pray privately instead of participating at Mass overlooks the most important dynamic of the liturgy.

Another reason why the liturgy is so important for us Catholics is that the prayers of the liturgy are also our creed. What we pray is what we believe. And so each time we pray together as a community, our faith is reinforced.

We all play an important role in the liturgy

We are all the celebrants of the liturgy. There are no passive spectators at worship. "It is the whole community, the Body of Christ, united with its Head that celebrates" (Catechism of the Catholic Church, #1140). This should encourage us to make sure our worship is inclusive of the entire community and leads everyone to active worship. While the ministry of the assembly is of paramount importance, we also need to call forth the laity to assume particular liturgical roles in service to the community. Parish leadership should regularly extend invitations to all parishioners, including youth, families, seniors, and singles to be trained as readers, Extraordinary Ministers of the Eucharist, and for other liturgical ministries.

Even if we do not assume a role as a designated liturgical minister during the Mass, we are called to active worship by our Baptism. This is why the Bishops at the Second Vatican Council taught that full, conscious, and active participation of the baptized in the liturgy "is the aim to be considered before all else" (Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, #14). Our interior disposition, that is, joining our sacrifice with that of Christ's, is the first and most important way in which we participate in the Mass.

Care for the Liturgy

Because the liturgy is so central to the life of the Church, the care and performance of the liturgy is of utmost importance. Liturgy celebrated with dignity and reverence inspires us and shapes us in the mind of Christ. When the liturgy is celebrated well, it becomes an open door to the mystery of Christ. Poorly celebrated liturgy can fail to inspire us, distort our understanding of what is being proclaimed and celebrated, and even discourage us from attending Mass. This does not imply a stiff approach to the liturgy where the only concern would appear to be a strict observance of the rubrics. Even the most solemn liturgies need to be cele-

brated with sincerity and joy, with a human face that reflects the love and mercy of God at work among us. In the presence of so great a mystery, the human dimension to the liturgy should not be neglected lest the faithful fail to understand what is being celebrated or left to feel excluded from a more intimate participation in the liturgy.

Good liturgy requires that all who minister are well trained and capable of performing their ministry with reverence and grace. Training readers, greeters, ushers, servers, cantors, etc. should be an ongoing practice in every parish. Priests and deacons need to review their presiding style periodically and commit themselves to ongoing study and reflection on the liturgy. Consistent parish practice should be based on the promulgated norms of the liturgy and not the particular whims or personal styles of any one presider, musician, or director of liturgy.

Music holds a special place in the liturgy and requires us to provide music of the highest quality that is suitable to the rites and leads parishioners into more active worship. The flow between the ritual action and words and the music should be such that they come across as one piece in the whole of worship.

Our attention for the liturgy also includes our care of the parish church in which we worship and all of the necessary elements used in the liturgy.

- Are our church and our sanctuary beautiful, uncluttered, and accessible to everyone?
- Are our church and sanctuary clean and well maintained?
- Are the sound system and lighting adequate?
- Are the books, vessels, vestments, musical instruments, etc. worthy and appropriate for the liturgy?

Because we tend to overlook things close to us when we do things routinely, it may be wise to solicit the perspective of someone from outside the parish community to review our liturgical spirit and practice. Objective observers can be very helpful.

FOR OUR MEDITATION

“Pray without ceasing. In all circumstances give thanks, for this is the will of God for you in Christ Jesus.”
(1 Thess 5:17-18)

“Miracles happen. But prayer is needed! Prayer that is courageous, struggling and persevering, not prayer that is a mere formality.”
(Pope Francis, May 24, 2013)

“The liturgy is the summit toward which the activity of the church is directed; it is also the source from which all its power flows. For the goal of apostolic endeavor is that all who are made sons of God by faith and baptism should come together to praise God in the midst of his Church, to take part in the Sacrifice and to eat the Lord’s Supper.”
(Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, #10)

“Our Christian communities must become genuine ‘schools’ of prayer, where the meeting with Christ is expressed not just in imploring help but also in thanksgiving, praise, adoration, contemplation, listening and ardent devotion, until the heart truly ‘falls in love.’”
(Saint John Paul II, Novo Millennio Ineunte, #33)

“Effective liturgical signs have a teaching function and encourage full, conscious, and active participation, express and strengthen faith, and lead people to God. Poorly utilized or minimal signs do not enliven the community’s faith and can even diminish active participation. It must likewise be kept in mind that the liturgy and its signs and symbols do not exercise merely a teaching function. They also touch and move a person to conversion of heart and not simply to enlighten the mind.”
(Built of Living Stones, USCCB, p. 26)

“The Church evangelizes and is herself evangelized through the beauty of the liturgy, which is both a celebration of the task of evangelization and the source of her renewed self-giving.” (Pope Francis, The Joy of the Gospel, #24)

PERSONAL REFLECTION

- How would I describe my prayer life outside of Mass? Where could I improve? What support do I need from my parish?
- To what extent is my participation at Mass full, conscious, and active?
- How does my participation in the Mass lead me to share in the mission of Christ?

PARISH REFLECTION

- Is the Eucharist the “source and summit” of our parish life? What are the indications that the liturgy is important to our parish?
- What are the ways in which our parish community is regularly catechized in the life of prayer and the meaning of the liturgy?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of our parish’s worship?
- If we are a multi-cultural community, how does our worship reflect our diversity?
- What are the ways in which our parish’s celebration of Sunday Eucharist make a connection to the parish’s commitment to missionary discipleship?
- If someone who hasn’t been to Mass in years came to our parish for Sunday Mass, what would they see and experience?



Reflecting On Our Mission

What insight can I draw from this essay about the role of Prayer and Worship in mission and parish? What do I want to remember about this chapter for myself and my parish?



IV. Communio

Forming a genuine Catholic Community that is conscious of its solidarity in Christ even in the midst of diversity and conflict

Behold, how good it is, and how pleasant, where brethren dwell at one! (Psalm 133)

Most Catholics would like to say that their parish is welcoming and hospitable. We all know what it is like to enter a place where we feel uncomfortable and out of place, like a stranger. We also know what a joy it is to enter a place where someone greets us with a smile and helps us to feel at home. As Catholics, we believe that all who are baptized form the Church, the Body of Christ. And so our practice of greeting one another as we come to Mass and treating one another as family is not something separate from our basic beliefs but an essential part of our creed. The teaching of the Church goes so far as to say that together we form a sacrament that reveals Christ to others and extends his presence and ministry into the world. The witness of our gracious hospitality and our mutual charity and respect for one another is something we hope to find in every Catholic parish.

Our solidarity as Catholics does not just rest on the fact that we all believe in the one same Christ, but that through him and with him we form a *communio*. The *communio* we hope for is not something we create ourselves. When we use the word “*communio*” to describe who we are, we are moving to a deeper level of community than that which is formed by our human efforts of hospitality and fellowship. We use the Latin word “*communio*” to distinguish what we mean by this more profound union we share with and in Christ. Many Church documents refer to this more profound sense of community as *communio*.

The *communio* of which we boast is a gift of God that needs to be discovered and revered. The mystery of the Holy Trinity dwelling within us unites us together at a level we could never achieve on our own. Saint John Paul II stated: “A spirituality of communion indicates above all the heart’s contemplation of the mystery of the Trinity dwelling in us, and whose light we must be able to see shining on the face of the brothers and sisters around us.” (*Novo Millennio Ineunte*, #43).

Because through Baptism we are bound together in Christ, we need to work at living out our *communio*, if we are going to give credible witness to others of the mystery of Christ dwelling within us. Like family members who are related by blood but still have to work at being a family, so too do we as Church need to work together to be the *communio* we are called to be. The Eucharist fosters that

communio in a unique way. In the words of St. Paul: “Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.” (1Cor 10:17). Saint John Paul II adds to this: “In the mystery of the Eucharist Jesus builds up the Church as a communion, in accordance with the supreme model evoked in his *priestly prayer*: ‘Even as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they may also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me’ (John 17:21).” (*Mane Nobiscum Domine*, #20).

When seekers or new parishioners come to our parishes, what do they find? Professing to be one body in Christ is insufficient, if others see only division and polarization. Do they see inclusiveness, where the diversity of a congregation leaves no one on the fringe? Do they find a place where healing and reconciliation are at work? Will they find signs of extraordinary charity and respect across all ages? Will they see the joy of the Gospel in us?

It is the genuine experience of *communio* that enables us to participate at Mass anywhere around the world. Away from home we may not know anyone by name or even speak their language. But we are accepted and feel at one with this congregation because we understand that we share in common the values of the Gospel, a relationship to the person of Christ, the significance of the sacraments and the mission of the Church. We are at home because what unites us with those with whom we worship are not simply the externals of a human community but the Mystery that underlies our worship experience and identity as Church. This reality is at the heart of a true Christian community like the one we find in Acts 2, where “They devoted themselves to the teaching of the Apostles and to the communal life, to the breaking of the bread and to the prayers.” (Acts 2:42-47).

The efforts we make to be hospitable and inclusive, getting to know people by name, socializing with fellow parishioners, attending to the needs of others – all these efforts can prepare us and lead us to the deeper experience of *communio* where we regard our brothers and sisters in faith within the profound unity of the Mystical Body, and therefore as “those who are part of me.” (Saint John Paul II, *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, #43).

FOR OUR MEDITATION

“Let mutual love continue. Do not neglect hospitality, for through it some have unknowingly entertained angels.”

(Hebrews 13:1–2)

“Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.”

(Matthew: 18:20)

“To make the Church the home and the school of communion: that is the great challenge facing us in the millennium which is now beginning, if we wish to be faithful to God’s plan and respond to the world’s deepest yearnings.

A spirituality of communion indicates above all the heart’s contemplation of the mystery of the Trinity dwelling in us, and whose light we must also be able to see shining on the face of the brothers and sisters around us. A spirituality of communion also means an ability to think of our brothers and sisters in faith within the profound unity of the Mystical Body, and therefore as ‘those who are part of me.’ This makes us able to share their joys and sufferings, to sense their desires and attend to their needs, to offer them deep and genuine friendship. A spirituality of communion implies also the ability to see what is positive in others, to welcome it and prize it as a gift from God: not only as a gift for the brother or sister who has received it directly, but also as a ‘gift for me’.

A spirituality of communion means finally, to know how to ‘make room’ for our brothers and sisters, bearing ‘each other’s burdens (Gal 6:2) and resisting the selfish temptations which constantly beset us and provoke competition, careerism, distrust and jealousy. Let us have no illusions: unless we follow this spiritual path, external structures of communion will serve very little purpose. They would become mechanisms without a soul, ‘masks’ of communion rather than its means of expression and growth.”

(Saint John Paul II, *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, #43)

“Everything is related, and we human beings are united as brothers and sisters on a wonderful pilgrimage, woven together by the love of God and for each of these creatures and which also unites us in fond affection with brother sun, sister moon, brother river and mother earth.”

(Pope Francis, *On Care For Our Common Home*, #92)

“When properly understood, cultural diversity is not a threat to Church unity. The Holy Spirit, sent by the Father and the Son, transforms our hearts and enables us to enter into the perfect communion of the blessed Trinity, where all things find their unity. He builds up the communion and harmony of the people of God. The same Spirit is that harmony, just as he is the bond of love between the Father and the Son. It is he who brings forth a rich variety of gifts, while at the same time creating a unity which is never uniformity but a multifaceted and inviting harmony.”

(Pope Francis, *The Joy of the Gospel* #117)

PERSONAL REFLECTION

Pope Francis said at World Youth Day 2013, “Jesus did not say: ‘One of you go,’ but ‘All of you go:’ we are sent together. Dear young friends, be aware of the companionship of the whole Church and also the communion of the saints on this mission. When we face challenges together, then we are strong, we discover resources we did not know we had. Jesus did not call the Apostles to live in isolation, he called them to form a group, a community.”

- How have I experienced the companionship of the whole Church and communion of saints in my life?
- How have I experienced *communio* in my parish?

PARISH REFLECTION

- How do others see us as a parish? Is our solidarity in faith evident to others?
- How can we foster a deeper sense of *communio* in our parish?
- Are we a welcoming community? Is our environment welcoming? Are we culturally & generationally inclusive? Do we pay attention to the stranger in our midst? Do our facilities provide easy access for the physically disabled?
- When we meet as committees or boards of the parish, do we operate out of a sense of *communio*? What difference might that make?
- What have been some of our parish experiences when we have recognized that we were being held together by something more profound than that of our own making?



Reflecting On Our Mission

What insight can I draw from this essay about the role of Communio in mission and parish? What do I want to remember about this chapter for myself and my parish?



V. Missionary Spirit

Fostering missionary discipleship by preparing and sending parishioners into the world to transform society with the joy of the Gospel

Your light must shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your heavenly Father”
(Matthew 5:16)

We can all be grateful for the important role our parishes play in our lives. In our parishes, the Word of God is proclaimed and preached, the Mass and Sacraments are celebrated, young and old are taught the faith, and the witness of a strong community helps us to appreciate the gift of being a member of Christ's body. Our spiritual lives are continually nourished through the pastoral care and ministries in our parishes. What we sometimes fail to recognize, however, is that the purpose of our parishes is not only to nurture the personal faith of its people but to prepare its people for service in Jesus' name. We call this our missionary vocation. This means we are called by God, by virtue of our Baptism, to share in the mission and ministry of Jesus. As Pope Francis wrote, “All of us are asked to obey his [the Lord's] call to go forth from our own comfort zone in order to reach the ‘peripheries’ in need of the light of the Gospel” (The Joy of the Gospel, #20).

The parish is not an end in itself. Its purpose is not just to care for our personal spiritual needs, but to be a center where disciples are prepared and sent out with the Joy of the Gospel into action. We are repeatedly reminded of this when we are sent forth at Mass with the charge: “Go and announce the Gospel of the Lord.”

The sign of an effective parish is not the size of the Sunday bulletin, nor the amount of the offertory collection, nor the number of weekly meetings. Rather, the well-being and integrity of a parish is best measured by how well parishioners have learned to become missionary disciples who gladly share in the mission of Jesus. A healthy and vibrant parish calls its parishioners to mission, offers a number of concrete possibilities for service and provides spiritual formation, as well as necessary training and support. The thing to remember is that mission is not one of many ministries in a parish; mission is intended to be the heartbeat and purpose of every parish.

We Are All Missionaries

The whole idea of being a missionary may initially cause us to wonder whether this vocation is something

reserved for a special group of people, beginning with clergy and religious. We might think that to share in the mission of the Church, we need to travel far from home. The truth is that we are all called to share in the mission of Jesus, each in our own way for the life of the world. “Every Christian is a missionary to the extent that he or she bears witness to God's love.” (Pope Francis, May 5, 2013).

You can be a missionary disciple in your hometown, in your own parish, at work or play, in school or in the neighborhood. What matters is that you move beyond your own needs to serve others in the name of Jesus. As missionaries, we pattern our lives on the ministry of Jesus as he reached out to the poor, the sick and the sinner. Parishes that are strong and vibrant are parishes where parishioners gladly share in the mission of Christ. They further the reign of God in our world by embracing the Gospel mandate to be “the light of the world” (Mt 5:14).

Missionaries Must Look Beyond Themselves

Thinking of ourselves as missionaries leads us to go beyond our psychological comfort zones. Our service in the name of the Gospel may call us to places we have never been, to people we do not know, into circumstances we have never encountered. We follow Jesus without fear, and we rely upon the Holy Spirit's guidance. Engaging in mission means taking peacemaking seriously and working for justice. Mission may move us to visit an elderly neighbor, to volunteer at a soup kitchen, to write a letter to the local congressman, or to participate in a parish mission trip to Appalachia, Haiti or far beyond.

Being an effective missionary disciple begins with learning to listen carefully to others in our community, including those who are not part of our circle of engaged believers. Our task is not to impose our spirituality on others, but to draw out the good from others by sharing the joy of our own faith. Like every missionary, we need to learn the language of the people we hope to reach and to communicate in a language others can understand. Think of the enormous implications of technology in today's culture. It is a new language upon which many people rely. This is just one example of how understanding culture goes beyond ethnic or racial background. How do people think? What do they value? What are they looking for in life? These are some of the questions missionaries ask.

Living as a Missionary Is a Process

Engagement in mission is meant to be more than becoming an occasional volunteer. For the baptized Christian, the spirit of mission is an integral part of one's life. We may begin our missionary vocation by learning how to look beyond our own personal needs to understand the broader needs around us. We may want to apprentice with someone who has more experience. We may take small steps at first but then discover that we can assume more responsibility and eventually become a mentor in preparing others for mission. We are more than humanitarians, for it is the love of Christ that compels us to reach out to others. We take seriously the mandate of Jesus who said, "As often as you did it for one of my least brothers, you did it for me" (Mt 25:40). We take the Beatitudes (Mt 5:1–12) as our missionary charter, the defining wisdom of our vocation as missionary disciples.

Mission Flows from the Eucharist

Mission flows from the Eucharist. We are sent forth at Mass to: "Go in peace, glorifying the Lord by your life." We are charged to imitate the love and reconciliation we celebrate at the Lord's Table in all our relationships in society. Blessed Pope John II put it this way:

"The authentic sense of the Eucharist becomes itself the school of active love of neighbor... The Eucharist educates us to this love in a deeper way; it shows us, in fact what value each person, our brother or sister, has in God's eyes, if Christ offers Himself equally to each one, under the species of bread and wine."
(The Mystery and Worship of the Eucharist, 1980, #6)

Through the process of *Parish Transformation*, parishes are being called to foster a mission-minded culture. Parishes with a missionary spirit do not get overly concerned about their own internal issues which can lead to spiritual narcissism. They heed the call of Jesus that "demands that we go out from ourselves, and from living a tired and habitual faith" (Pope Francis, March 27, 2013). They see their vocation as a missionary disciple, sent to serve and not be served. A parish with missionary zeal is a joyful community because it has learned to be one with the One whom the Father sent.

FOR OUR MEDITATION

"The Eucharist is a missionary sacrament. It calls people to give all that they are and have to God, to seek his blessing and then take his love to the world." (Pope Francis, *Pilgrimage to Latin America*, July 9, 2016)

"For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink. I was a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me. I was ill and you comforted me, in prison and you came to visit me." (Mt 25:35–36)

"The need for the faithful to share in this responsibility [missionary activity] is not merely a matter of making the apostolate more effective; it is a right and duty based on their baptismal dignity, whereby the faithful participate, for their part, in the threefold mission of Christ as Priest, Prophet and King." (*Mission of the Redeemer*, #71)

"Since the entire Church is missionary by its nature and since the work of evangelization is to be viewed as a fundamental duty of the people of God, all the Christian faithful, conscious of their own responsibility in this area, are to assume their role in missionary work." (*Code of Canon Law* 781)

"Now is the time for a new 'creativity,' not only by ensuring that help is effective but also by 'getting close' to those who suffer, so that the hand that helps is seen not as a humiliating handout but as a sharing between brothers and sisters." (*Saint John Paul II, Novo Millennio Ineunte*, #50)

"In virtue of their baptism, all the members of the People of God have become missionary disciples (cf. Mt 28:19). All the baptized, whatever their position in the Church or their level of instruction in the faith, are agents of evangelization, and it would be insufficient to envisage a plan of evangelization to be carried out by professionals while the rest of the faithful would simply be passive recipients" (*The Joy of the Gospel*, #120).

PERSONAL REFLECTION

Pope Francis said at World Youth Day 2013, “Jesus is calling you to be a disciple with a mission! Today, in the light of the word of God that we have heard, what is the Lord saying to us? Three simple ideas: Go, do not be afraid, and serve.”

- How am I living as a disciple?
- What is the mission to which Jesus is calling me?
- Is “mission” a one time project for me or my orientation to the world?

Pope Francis also said at World Youth Day 2013, “Do not be afraid to go and to bring Christ into every area of life, to the fringes of society, even to those who seem farthest away, most indifferent. The Lord seeks all, he wants everyone to feel the warmth of his mercy and his love.”

- How can I bring Christ into new areas of my life?
- How can I share the warmth of Christ’s mercy and love with others through my life?

PARISH REFLECTION

- How does our parish call parishioners to share in the mission of Jesus?
- What is a good example of the missionary spirit in our parish?
- How can our parish become more mission directed? What needs are not being met in fulfilling the mission of Jesus?
- How might we change a mentality that mission is an “extra” we add to parish life rather than understanding mission to be the heart of parish?

In The Joy of the Gospel, Pope Francis writes, “I prefer a Church which is bruised, hurting and dirty because it has been out on the streets, rather than a Church which is unhealthy from being confined and clinging to its own security.” (#49).

- As a parish, do we challenge ourselves to go “out on the streets” in service? Or do we remain confined within the security of our parish campus? How are we being called to go beyond our comfort zones in service of the Gospel?



Reflecting On Our Mission

What insight can I draw from this essay about Missionary Spirit in our parish?
What do I want to remember about this chapter for myself and my parish?



VI. Call to Holiness

Accompanying the baptized on life's journey so as to be Christ-centered, resistant to sin and committed to charity, peace, prayer and virtue

I have come that you may have life and have it more abundantly. (John 10:10)

The most important goal of every parish is to assist its people in responding to the call to holiness. The First Letter of Peter reminds us: "As he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in every aspect of your conduct, for it is written, 'Be holy because I am holy'" (I Peter 1:15-16).

Talking with others about holiness may feel a bit awkward. The thought of being holy like the Lord and his saints may strike us as either being too far removed from what we know our lives to be or just unattainable given our faults and limitations. To be holy, however, is first of all a gift. We are holy because God made us and still more redeemed us in the waters of Baptism, imparting his life to us and claiming us as his chosen sons and daughters. Living a holy life, then, is being faithful to our vocation as children of God. Growing in holiness is doing the will of God.

Discerning what God's will is for us is our lifelong vocation. We learn to do this when we put on the mind of Christ Jesus. "Your attitude must be that of Christ" (Phil 2:5). Reading and contemplating the Scriptures, a regular practice of prayer, celebrating the sacraments and interpreting our lives in the light of the mystery of the cross and resurrection draw us more deeply into the life of God. We hope that we might be able to say as St. Paul said so eloquently, "It is no longer I that live but Christ who lives in me" (Gal 2:20).

We grow in holiness with the help of others. Spiritual companions on the journey to holiness will not only give us the witness of their lives, but out of love for us will affirm us, challenge us, and help us to hear God's voice and do his will. How wonderful if we can experience this kind of spiritual companionship in our parish. Are we not all on the same path to God? How can we support one another on this journey to holiness? Our culture 'tells' us that faith is 'private' and something that we should keep to ourselves. Better to say that our faith is personal and needs to be shared and nurtured in community.

The lives of the saints teach us that the path to holiness is not confined to within the walls of the church. Like the saints we have come to know and love in our Catholic tradition, we can draw closer to God through our daily work, the care we give our families, and the sacrifices we make for others. We can grow in holiness when we experience significant losses in our lives but allow the power of the Cross to give new meaning to what at first feels only like emptiness and darkness. We may begin to feel the presence of the saints at our side when we stand up for justice or when we are ridiculed for choosing what is morally right but unpopular. The joy we experience at the birth of a child or the good news of a friend's engagement can reveal the gracious love of God and move us to praise the Lord with all our being. There is nothing in our lives that can be excluded from our growing in holiness. For all that we are and all that we experience must be integrated into our lives so that there is a wholeness that is transformed into holiness.

Besides finding good companions in our parish for this journey of holiness, our parish can hopefully provide the counsel and suggestions for spiritual discipline that strengthen one's resolve to follow Christ unreservedly. When seekers come to our parish at a point in their life when they feel ready to take their faith more seriously and to work at becoming holy, what do we offer them? That question isn't answered by a list of programs nor an electronic library. Who will be this seeker's companion? Who will help him or her to put together a personal discipline like a doctor who prescribes an appropriate diet and therapy for good health? If our parishes are going to be effective, they need to do more than offer a calendar of liturgies and devotions. Who will teach the power of prayer to those who thirst for God? Can we offer an introduction to spiritual disciplines so that the initial stirring of faith will mature and foster holiness?

Our parishes must become the fertile ground from which new saints will grow. We need to be intentional about fostering holiness and growing saints in our parishes. And each of us has a responsibility to ensure that this happens.

FOR OUR MEDITATION

“You are indeed Holy, O Lord, and from the world’s beginning are ceaselessly at work, so that the human race may become holy just as you yourself are holy.”

(Eucharistic Prayer for Reconciliation I)

“Holiness is the fullness of the Christian life, a life in Christ; it consists in our being united to Christ, making our own his thoughts and actions, and conforming our lives to his. As such, it is chiefly the work of the Holy Spirit who is poured forth into our hearts through Baptism, making us sharers in the paschal mystery and enabling us to live a new life in union with the Risen Christ. Christian holiness is nothing other than the virtue of charity lived to its fullest. In the pursuit of holiness, we allow the seed of God’s life and love to be cultivated by hearing his word and putting it into practice, by prayer and the celebration of the sacraments, by sacrifice and service of our brothers and sisters. The lives of the saints encourage us along this great path leading to the fullness of eternal life. By their prayers, and the grace of the Holy Spirit, may each of us live fully our Christian vocation and thus become a stone in that great mosaic of holiness which God is creating in history, so that the glory shining on the face of Christ may be seen in all its splendor.”

(Benedict XVI, April 20, 2011)

“It is therefore quite clear that all Christians in whatever state or walk of life are called to the fullness of Christian life and to the perfection of charity, and this holiness is conducive to a more human way of living even in society here on earth. In order to reach this perfection the faithful should use the strength dealt out to them by Christ’s gift, so that, following in his footsteps and conformed to his image, doing the will of God in everything, they may wholeheartedly devote themselves to the glory of God and to the service of their neighbor. Thus the holiness of the people of God will grow in fruitful abundance, as is clearly shown in the history of the Church by the lives of so many saints.”

(Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, #40)

“Do not be content to live a mediocre Christian life: walk with determination along the path of holiness.”

(Pope Francis, May 7, 2013)

“I have no hesitation in say that all pastoral initiatives must be set in relationship to holiness.”

(St. John Paul II, *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, #30)

“In a culture paradoxically suffering from anonymity and at the same time obsessed with the details of other people’s lives, shamelessly given over to morbid curiosity, the Church must look more closely and sympathetically at others whenever necessary. In our world, ordained ministers and other pastoral workers can make present the fragrance of Christ’s closeness and his personal gaze. The Church will have to initiate everyone—priests, religious, and laity—into this “art of accompaniment,” which teaches us to remove our sandals before the sacred ground of the other (cf. Ex 3:3). The pace of this accompaniment must be steady and reassuring, reflecting our closeness and our compassionate gaze which also heals, liberates and encourages growth in the Christian life.”

(Pope Francis, *Joy of the Gospel*, #169)

PERSONAL REFLECTION

- Do I know any holy people in my life? What do they look like?
- Has anyone in the parish asked me lately about my spiritual life? How would I answer that question?
- Do I ever think of being called to holiness as my vocation?
- How have I come to know the will of God in my life?

PARISH REFLECTION

- What does our parish have to offer seekers on the path to holiness? Are there parishioners who are prepared to accompany others on the path to holiness?
- How could our parish become the fertile ground from which saints will grow?



Reflecting On Our Mission

What insight can I draw from this essay about the role of Call to Holiness in mission and parish? What do I want to remember about this chapter for myself and my parish?



VII. Spiritual Stewardship

Fostering a culture and spirituality of gratitude that inspires parishioners to share their gifts of time, experience, and treasure generously

As generous distributors of God's manifold grace, put your gifts at the service of one another, each in the measure he has received. (1 Peter 4:10)

We are a blessed people. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavens" (Eph 1:3). We may be blest, but we often live out of a mindset of want rather than abundance. A constant flood of advertising persuades us to buy more and spend more, always looking for the latest. We are more inclined to talk about what we don't have rather than what we do have. We tend to live with the fear and anxiety of not having enough.

Faithful Christians are grateful stewards. Their lives are characterized by a spirituality of abundance. They are aware and always grateful for whatever God has given them. They recognize that everything they have and all that they are is a gift of God. All that we have has been given to us as stewards of God's creation. We are the caretakers of God's gifts. The more we have received, the more will be expected of us. We have a responsibility to use our gifts, not exclusively for our own advantage, but for the good of others in furthering the kingdom of God (c.f. Luke 12:48).

The Gospel calls us to be generous and responsible stewards. This means that from the youngest to the oldest, our personal gifts, our time and treasure, are meant to be shared, not hoarded or put under a bushel basket. The unique gifts God gives each of us are intended to build up the body of Christ. We share our gifts at all times because we are always grateful, not just when an emergency requires immediate attention.

We need to be aware of how our consumer culture can subtly influence our spirituality. If we are not careful, we can begin to approach our religious practice as consumers rather than as generous partners in God's mission for the world. We may respond to special appeals, such as emergency repairs for the church roof, but then fail to share our treasure on a regular basis. Ideally, we want to thank God at all times with a generous heart for what we have received from God's goodness. We make a return to the Lord first and foremost out of love and gratitude.

Spiritual stewardship includes all of our life, not just our relationship to our parish. How we use our time and resources at home and at work are as important as how much of our time and resources we share with our parish community. People today feel like they have no time to spare. We are always catching up, always running to the next activity, tired and exhausted by the middle of the day. Taking spiritual stewardship seriously leads to an assessment of our commitments and questions whether we are using our time wisely and in a healthy manner. Do we allow time for cultivating our relationships, for getting the rest and exercise we need? Are we eating a healthy diet and taking care of the body God has given us?

A faithful steward does not wait for a special appeal for his/her time, talent or treasure. He/she begins with God. The good steward does not give to God whatever is left over, but gives to God his/her first fruits. A parish of faithful stewards is a joyful parish because its people know that they are blessed and live with abundance. It is through the faithful and generous stewardship of parishioners that the mission of Christ is able to continue.

Pope Francis has widened our understanding of stewardship to include our relationship to the created universe, our common home", he reminds us of our responsibility to care for gifts God has given us all to share. Good stewardship will mean that we do not selfishly hoard nor waste natural resources for ourselves as if it was a right reserved for a few. The way in which we relate to our environment has enormous implications on all our brothers and sisters, especially the poor and the marginalized who are often prevented from having access to natural resources, like water, which we often take for granted. By being faithful stewards we will also be fostering a greater solidarity with all living person's and all living things that are God's precious gift to us.

FOR OUR MEDITATION

“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and decay destroy, and thieves break in and steal. But store up treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor decay destroys, nor thieves break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there also will your heart be.”

(Mt 6:19-21)

“Dear Lord, teach me to be generous. Teach me to serve you as you deserve, to give and not count the cost, to fight and not heed the wounds, save that of knowing that I do your will.”

(St. Ignatius Loyola)

“What identifies a steward? Safeguarding material and human resources and using them responsibly are one answer; so is generous giving of time, talent, and treasure. But being a Christian steward means more. As Christian stewards, we receive God’s gifts gratefully, cultivate them responsibly, share them lovingly in justice with others, and return them with increase to the Lord.

(*Stewardship: A Disciple’s Response*, USCCB, 1993)

“Care of creation is not just something God spoke of at the dawn of history: he entrusts it to each of us as part of his plan.”

(Pope Francis, June 5, 2013)

“The urgent challenge to protect our common home includes a concern to bring the whole human family together to seek a sustainable and integral development, for we know that things can change. The Creator does not abandon us; he never forsakes his loving plan or repents of having created us. Humanity still has the ability to work together in building our common home” (Pope Francis, *On Care For Our Common Home*, #13).

“The only thing we take with us when we die is what we have given away.”

(Cardinal Francis George, April 23, 2015)

“The entire material universe speaks of God’s love, his boundless affection for us. Soil, water, mountains: everything is, as it were, a caress of God.”

(Pope Francis, *Laudato Si*, #84)

PERSONAL REFLECTION

- How am I living as a faithful Christian steward, including my responsibility for caring for “Our Common Home”?
- What holds me back from sharing my time, talent, and treasure with greater generosity?
- How am I encouraging others, e.g., children, co-workers, to live as faithful stewards?
- What are the tensions I experience in trying to live a spirituality of stewardship?

PARISH REFLECTION

- How are we teaching a spirit of Christian stewardship in our parish?
- How are our children learning to live a spirituality of stewardship?
- How is our parish sharing the vision of Pope Francis’ Encyclical, “On Care for Our Common Home”?



Reflecting On Our Mission

What insight can I draw from this essay about the role of Spiritual Stewardship in mission and parish? What do I want to remember about this chapter for myself and my parish?



Our Mission

Formulating Our Mission Narrative

Building upon our reflections from the past few weeks, let us revisit the themes that have surfaced and could form the basis of our parish mission. We will now narrow them to determine the core theme(s) that will define our parish Mission Narrative.

Lenses	Possible themes influencing our parish mission
The charism of our patron saint or the religious order that serves our parish	
Demographic challenges and opportunities we face	
Our Pearls of Great Price	
Biblical story or scriptural passage of particular relevance for our parish	
Particular spiritual challenge of our parish	
Census or composition of the parish (e.g. professions and vocations)	
The inspiration from the process	
Other possible lenses	

Formulating Our Mission Narrative First Draft

Introduction:

Identifying parish and community conditions:

Inspired by:

Our dream for moving forward:

Evaluating Our Mission Narrative

Attributes of a strong mission narrative

Attributes	Strongly disagree				Strongly agree
Our Mission Narrative has a foundation grounded in Scripture, the Liturgy, and/or the charism of our patron saint.	1	2	3	4	5
Our Mission Narrative stirs the imagination by using concrete and vivid language.	1	2	3	4	5
Our Mission Narrative clearly articulates how we are uniquely called to live out the mission and ministry of Jesus at this time and in this place, and has been shaped by the particular circumstances, history, and culture of our community.	1	2	3	4	5
Our Mission Narrative is relevant to parishioners already actively engaged in the parish, as well as those who may not currently take an active role in parish life and those who have no relationship with the Church or the Gospel	1	2	3	4	5
Our Mission Narrative stretches us to go beyond our comfort zone by taking a fresh approach to the future.	1	2	3	4	5

Tools For Realizing Our Mission and Vision

Revitalizing our parish with a stronger mission will require effective leadership, good communication, and an openness to new ideas and fresh approaches in pastoral ministry and mission outreach. Keep these tools for realizing your mission and vision forefront in your planning. Seek assistance from outside sources when necessary to make sure that these tools are being employed effectively.

Keep in Mind:

1) Leadership

Inviting, training, forming and supporting the laity to participate in ministry, mission, and parish governance in collaboration with the pastor and his staff. These are a number of different leadership issues to consider:

- Pastoral Leadership
- Staff Leadership and collaborations
- Lay Leadership, responsibility and accountability
- Management Skills
- Forming effective committees and ministry teams
- Styles of Boards/Consultative Boards
- Using complimentary gifts for the sake of the whole community

2) Communications

Open and transparent communication at every level, using every means possible to not only share information but to listen carefully to the voice of the community

- Internal communications within the leadership circle
- Outward to all parishioners
- Outward to the area community
- Transparency in the use of resources
- Technology / media / written

3) New Wine / New Wineskins

Using imagination and creativity to dream about new possibilities, new ways of doing things, and offering a fresh outlook that is appealing to a broad spectrum of people.

LEADERSHIP

Formulating strategies for the future is very important but so too is the attention given to *leadership*. Without effective leadership all our plans and dreams for the future can just collect dust. Good leadership is critical in the visioning process, but it is also crucial in engaging others in implementing the decisions that were made in the *Parish Transformation* initiative. Parish leadership includes everyone beginning with the pastor and his staff and all those who have come forward to assume responsibility for various aspects of the *Parish Transformation* plan. Because the results associated with *Parish Transformation* may require new approaches to addressing pastoral concerns, leadership at all levels may need to acquire new skills and training to be effective in implementing the new vision.

The following bullets fit a broad spectrum of leadership concerns, but can be used to open a more comprehensive discussion on the state of parish leadership and the need to develop the kind of leadership that is needed in today's parish.

- Focus on the mission and the vision/strategy to achieve the mission
- Choose a governance structure that will work effectively within the parish system
- Actively recruit, train and form lay leaders
- Build a team with complimentary gifts
- Be clear about expectations
- Build trust in the leadership circle
- Expect conflict. Do not be threatened by it. Deal with it patiently and find common ground
- Leaders need to be sufficiently vulnerable so that those he/she leads will not hesitate to speak openly
- Empower lay leaders and delegate but provide the training, tools and support necessary to get the work done
- Be clear about how decisions are made in the parish
- Hold leadership accountable to commitments
- In Leadership meetings, go beyond "good housekeeping" to schedule time for addressing substantive issues and further visioning
- Leadership styles can be different for different situations.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

- Is the parish governance structure clear to parishioners?
- How are potential leaders recruited, trained, supported?
- How does the pastor complement his leadership skills with gifts of the leadership pool?
- What is holding back potential leaders from coming forward?
- Who holds leadership accountable? How is this done?

COMMUNICATIONS

“Communication” is an indispensable but complex set of tools which have to reach out in many directions and target a number of different audiences. The audience will determine the appropriate style and means of communication that is needed to be effective. In a typical parish we will find these multiple – but not exclusive – audiences:

- Internal communications among parish staff, pastoral council, extended leadership circle
- Parishioner based communications that need to reach active parishioners
- Beyond the Sunday Assembly communications which includes non-regular Mass attenders, and all those within the parish ZIP code whose relationship to the Church may be weak or non-existent
- School and Religious Education communications for those who may or may not be participating at Mass regularly
- Homebound communications that reach those who are unable to come to Sunday Mass but consider themselves active Catholics
- Specific ethnic, cultural or language group communications

Means of Communication

- Technology
- Printed material
- Personal communications and live public presentations
- The pulpit
- New media
- Websites, Blogs, Telephone, Emails, Facebook and Tweets
- Mailings
- Radio, Television & Newspaper
- Signage /electronic message boards

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

- Who is responsible for communications in the Parish?
- What is the scope of the Parish Communications plan?
- Is the style and presentation of the communication appealing?
- Do parish communications speak to the needs and mentality of those for whom the message is intended?
- How are the parish’s communications measured for effectiveness?
- What is the parish budget for communications?
- Is parish leadership targeting the right audience?
- Are there parishioners who have a background in communications who can be invited to share their expertise for parish communications?

NEW WINE / NEW WINESKINS

No one pours new wine into old wineskins. Otherwise, the new wine will burst and the skins will be ruined. Rather, new wine must be poured into fresh wineskins. (Luke 5:37–38)

While the Church's faith remains constant, the world continues to change very rapidly. Traditional values, which we might have taken for granted, are not only questioned but overturned. The rise of secularism, religious indifference, and moral relativism are affecting our parishioners more than even they themselves might realize. Add to this the remarkable advances of technology and science, the mobility of people today, new waves of immigration and different lifestyles and you can begin to see that we live in a different world than we did 25 years ago. Not all of these changes are bad, of course; in fact some are very good. The point is that we cannot continue to minister in our parishes without acknowledging how vastly different our culture is today than it was two or three decades ago. Pope Francis addressed this concern when he said:

"In the Christian life, even in the life of the Church, there are old structures, passing structures: it is necessary to renew them! And the Church has always been attentive to this, with dialogue with cultures.....It always allows itself to be renewed according to places, times, persons. The Church has always done this! And so the Church always goes forward, giving space to the Holy Spirit that renews these structures of the churches. Don't be afraid to do that! Don't be afraid of the newness of the Gospel! Don't be afraid of the newness that the Holy Spirit works in us!" (Pope Francis, July 6, 2013).

The sober truth is that we cannot continue to do business as usual in our parishes. We have "to think outside the box", if we are going to be effective in reaching the growing number of individuals who don't see the value in being a member of the Church or for that matter do not have a meaningful relationship with Christ. Without changing our creed, we can learn to do things differently, offer different support systems for growing faith, use language and communication tools that speak to our congregation, project a new spirit of hospitality and inclusion.

Jesus encountered Simon and Peter and his fellow fisherman at Lake Gennesaret he told them to "Put out into deep water and lower your nets for a catch" (cf. Luke 5: 1-11). Peter protested because they had been fishing all night and caught nothing. But doing as Jesus told them they lowered their nets into the deep as Jesus instructed and they were astonished by their catch of fish. We may feel at times that despite all our pastoral efforts we are not catching any fish, making little progress. Jesus speaks to us as well as Simon Peter to put out into the deep. In other words, to go further, to go deeper, to go beyond our accustomed way doing things to discover bigger catch.

Some Tips for Taking a New Wine / New Wineskins approach

- Avoid attitudes like: "We've always done it his way." "That will never work."
- Don't be afraid to take a risk and try something new.
- Have the courage to drop things that are no longer needed.
- Often the most creative solutions come from the outer ring of parishioners, those who may not be very involved at all.
- Don't let a group's creative ideas be squelched immediately with responses like: "We don't have money for that." This is where a budget may need to change to support the new priorities.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

- What are the deeper waters in our parish that we need to explore?
- What are the obstacles to change in our parish? How can we address them?
- Who are the most creative and imaginative members of our community? Have we invited their participation in the process?
- What sacrifices will we have to make in order to have new wineskins?
- Would an outsider look at our parish and see a community that is reaching outward, being prophetic, thinking creatively, and taking risks? Or would they find a parish that is “self-absorbed” and more concerned about its own self-preservation? Maintaining status quo?
- Presuming that our parish is ready take a fresh new pastoral approach, what kind of branding can we do that will convey our new spirit?

“I dream of a “missionary option,” that is, a missionary impulse capable of transforming everything, so that that Church’s customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures can be suitably channeled for the evangelization of today’s world rather than for her self-preservation.”
Pope Francis, The Joy of the Gospel, #27)



Our Action Plan

BUILDING A COMMUNITY OF MISSIONARY DISCIPLES

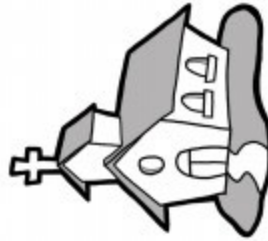
ACTION PLANNING



Tools For Realizing our
Mission and Vision



Community of
Missionary Disciples



Today's Parish

Mission & Ministry of Jesus

Mission Narrative
How you will achieve being a community of missionary disciples given the uniqueness of your parish

What is the parish going to focus on?

Series of actions or activities

Specific, quantifiable, time sensitive milestones

Building Blocks

Missionary Spirit	Call to Holiness	Spiritual Stewardship
Evangelization	Catechesis	Prayer and Worship
		Communion



Our Action Plan/Vision

I. Action Plan/Vision Overview

Once your team has clearly defined the Mission of the Parish, the next step is to outline the measures you will take to achieve the Mission or realize the dream. The Goals you set out

As your team begins to develop its *Parish Transformation* action plan, it is helpful to first review the action planning process. Action planning begins with brainstorming and concludes with a set of concrete objectives and actions for which there are specific goals, timelines, and people assigned to lead each action. The complete picture or plan is your vision.

- 1) Brainstorming aspirations
- 2) Setting objectives
- 3) Brainstorming and prioritizing actions to achieve each objective
- 4) Setting goals, timelines, and action owners

Brainstorming Aspirations

At this point of the *Parish Transformation* process, your team will have likely selected 1-3 Mission Building Blocks for action planning. Before determining which specific actions the parish should pursue for each Building Block, it is important to allow time to dream about what the parish could achieve within each Building Block. Remember that the ultimate goal is to become a more mission oriented parish. Begin by thinking in broad terms before getting to specific actions. Questions that may be helpful to reflect upon and discuss are:

- Where is the Holy Spirit calling us to go within this Building Block?
- If the parish had unlimited resources (finances and time), what would we aspire to accomplish?

At this stage, it is important to stay focused on what the parish should try to accomplish (the **objectives**). If ideas for specific actions come up during initial brainstorming, hold on to them for future discussion (consider keeping a 'parking lot' of ideas on a separate sheet of paper to review at a future meeting). These ideas may spark new aspirations and may be important actions for the final plan. However, at this stage, it is important not to become mired in the details of specif-

ic ideas for actions. Focus on what the parish should aspire to accomplish for the Mission Building Blocks the team has prioritized.

Setting Objectives

After allowing sufficient time for brainstorming aspirations, the next step is to articulate specific outcomes the parish should attempt to achieve through its *Parish Transformation* action plan. This is done by setting specific objectives. An objective describes **what** the parish is aspiring to achieve. An objective is different from an action because an action describes the specific steps (the **how**) the parish will take to achieve overarching goals (the objectives). In other words, objectives come first, and actions follow. Specific examples of objectives and actions are included on the next page for your reference.

For each of the Mission Building Blocks your team has selected as a focus area, setting 1-3 distinct objectives is typically reasonable. Any more than 3 distinct objectives per Building Block leads to the risk of spreading resources too thin.

This is the time to ask:

- What aspirations / goals should we focus on through *Parish Transformation*, given the time and financial resources available in the parish?

Brainstorming and Prioritizing Actions

The next step is to brainstorm and prioritize the specific actions the parish will take to accomplish its *Parish Transformation* objectives. When brainstorming actions, an important question to ask is:

- Which actions would most likely help the parish achieve our objectives?

Similarly, as ideas are brainstormed, ask the question:

- How will that action help the parish achieve the objectives we have prioritized?

If an action does not clearly link to an objective, the team should honestly review if that action should be included in the final version of the plan. That particular idea may spark other ideas for actions, but an action that does not clearly link to an objective is not likely to be an effective use of time and other resources.

Assigning Action Owners

Each action in the *Parish Transformation* action plan needs an owner who will take leadership of implementation. This is critical for maintaining momentum and accountability within the parish team. Signing up as an action owner does not mean that you will need to complete every sub-action that is required for successful implementation. What signing up as an action owner does mean is that you agree to be the point person who will coordinate the volunteers, etc. needed to complete an action.

For example, if a team member agrees to own an action to call all registered parishioners as part of a parish census, s/he will of course not make every phone call herself. However, s/he will take lead to coordinate volunteers and work with staff to complete all of the phone calls and update parish records, etc.

Example objectives, actions, and goals:

Objective 1: Increase weekly collections

Actions:

- Implement Planned Offering Program this Fall
- Promote electronic giving at least once per month

Goals:

- Increase weekly collections from \$5,000 to \$6,000 within 1 year
- Increase the number of electronic givers from 25 to 100 within 1 year

Objective 2: Expand adult catechetical offerings

Actions:

- Launch an adult Bible study in Lent
- Launch a formation program for parents of young children next September

Goals:

- Average of 20 Bible study participants
- 10 couples participating in Year 1 of formation program

PARISH TRANSFORMATION

MISSION ACTION PLAN

See Appendix for complete example.



A) Having prayed over and studied the components that give life to a parish's mission, we the people of _____ Parish propose that the MISSION to which God is calling us is:

Parish Narrative

B) Actions required to achieve our mission.

Objectives and Actions	Time	Owner	Staff liaison	Measurable Goal
1. - - -				
2. - - -				
3. - - -				
4. - - -				

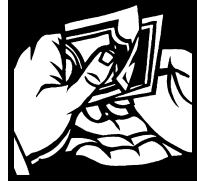
C) Actions required to strengthen our foundations

Our focus areas (select up to 3):

☐ Evangelization ☐ Catechesis ☐ Prayer and Worship ☐ Communio
☐ Missionary Spirit ☐ Call to Holiness ☐ Spiritual Stewardship

Objectives and Actions	Time	Owner	Staff Liaison	Measurable Goal
Focus Area #1:				
1. - -				
2. - -				
3. - -				
Focus Area #2:				
1. - -				
2. - -				
3. - -				
Focus Area #3:				
1. - -				
2. - -				
3. - -				

PARISH TRANSFORMATION FINANCE ACTION PLAN



Our focus areas (check all that apply):

☐ Church Revenue ☐ Church Expense ☐ School Revenue
☐ School Expense ☐ Capital

Securing our Financial Future

Objectives and Actions	Time	Owner	Staff Liaison	Measurable Goal
Focus Area #1:				
1.				
-				
-				
2.				
-				
-				
3.				
-				
-				
Focus Area #2:				
1.				
-				
-				
2.				
-				
-				
3.				
-				
-				
Focus Area #3:				
1.				
-				
-				
2.				
-				
-				
3.				
-				
-				

ACHIEVING THE MISSION—PREPARING FOR IMPLEMENTATION

Question	Comments	
Resource Allocation		
Given our new Mission and focus areas, do we need to review our programs with an eye toward pulling back on some that no longer fit?	___ yes ___ no	
Do we need to raise additional funding for our top priorities?	___ yes ___ no	
Effective Leadership		
Does our action plan require us to reconsider the roles and responsibilities of our staff?	___ yes ___ no	
Should we re-evaluate the way our Pastoral Council, School Board, and our Finance Council serve our parish?	___ yes ___ no	
Do we need to think more specifically about training and formation of our staff and lay leaders?	___ yes ___ no	
Communication		
Do we have an opportunity to utilize more effective communication methods to inform parishioners about our parish life?	___ yes ___ no	
Do we have an opportunity to make better use of technology in our communications?	___ yes ___ no	
Do we have an opportunity to better clarify how decisions are made and communicated in our parish?	___ yes ___ no	
Do we have an opportunity to elicit more ideas and feedback from parishioners?	___ yes ___ no	
Collaborating with Neighboring Parishes		
Can we think of areas where cooperating with a neighboring parish might be beneficial to both?	___ yes ___ no	
Do we have gifts and resources that we can offer to other parishes?	___ yes ___ no	
Do our ministries and advisory boards have an opportunity to share ideas, concerns, and best practices with neighboring parishes?	___ yes ___ no	

For all of the areas above that are checked “yes”: What actions are required to explore these themes further?

Action	Timing	Owner	Staff Liaison	Measurable Goal
1.				
2.				
3.				
4.				

IMPLEMENTATION AND FOLLOW-UP

The work of Parish Transformation does not end here. Parish Transformation is an ongoing commitment to renewal and keeping our mission alive and effective. Implementation of the vision will take hard work, a team effort, and consistent attention to fulfilling the plans and strategies that have been outlined. A frequent review of the overall plan and clear designation of responsibilities will ensure that all the work of the Parish Transformation process will meet with good results.



- How frequently should we review progress (e.g., monthly, quarterly)?
- Who will be responsible for tracking our progress and reporting back?
- Who will be responsible for managing the ongoing process of implementation—i.e., arranging meeting times, setting meeting agendas, etc...?
- How will we communicate to the broader parish community our parish transformation experience and plan?



Prayers

Scripture Passages

Ez 34:11–16 (I will take care of my flock)

Ez 36:23–28 (I will give you a new heart)

Dt 7:6–11 (God has chosen you because he loves you)

Acts 2: 42–47 (communal life of the early Christian community)

Phil 2: 1–11 (plea for unity and humility)

Ephesians 2: 19–22 (members of household of God)

Ephesians 4: 1–6 (one Lord, one faith, one baptism)

Romans 10: 9–18 (How beautiful are the feet of those who announce good news)

I Cor 3: 9–13, 16–17 (you are the temple of God)

Col 3: 12–17 (Do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus)

Mt 9: 14–17 (new wine, new wineskins)

Mt 16: 13–19 (You are Peter and upon this rock)

Luke 5: 1–11 (Cast your nets in deep water)

Mt 5: 1–12 (Beatitudes)

Mt 5: 13–16 (You are salt and light)

John 10:10 (Abundant life)

Prayer before a Meeting

Lord,
may everything we do
begin with your inspiration
and continue with your help,
so that all our prayers and works
may begin in you
and by you be happily ended.
Through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Prayer to the Holy Spirit

We stand before you, Holy Spirit,
conscious of our sinfulness,
but aware that we gather in your name.

Come to us, remain with us,
and enlighten our hearts.

Give us light and strength
to know your will,
to make it our own,
and to live it in our lives.

Guide us by your wisdom,
support us by your power,
for you are God,
sharing the glory of Father and Son.

You desire justice for all:
enable us to uphold the rights of others;
do not allow us to be misled by ignorance
or corrupted by fear or favor.

Unite us to yourself in the bond of love
and keep us faithful to all that is true.

As we gather in your name
may we temper justice with love,
so that all our decisions
may be pleasing to you,
and earn the reward
promised to good and faithful servants.

You live and reign with the Father and the Son,
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

*(This prayer was recited before every session
of the Second Vatican Council)*

Prayer of Blessing Upon the Work of Parish Transformation

[A]

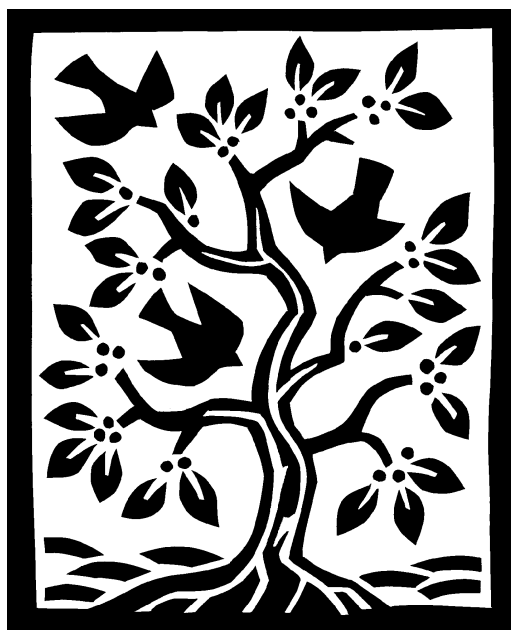
Lord God,
in your loving kindness
you sent your Son to be our shepherd and guide.
Look upon the efforts of our parish community
as we work together to strengthen your Church
and carry on the mission your Son has entrusted to us.
Bless us with wisdom and good judgment
in our planning for the future.
Protect us from all fear and discouragement.
Trusting in the presence of your Son among us,
may we engage in this work
with hope and confidence,
and glorify your name by the work we do.
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in communion with the
Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever.
Amen.

[B]

O God,
you founded your church
upon the faith of the apostles
with Christ as her cornerstone.
Look kindly upon our parish
as we engage in the Parish Transformation initiative.
May our efforts bear fruit for your church
and renew our parish community
in service of the Gospel.
In the name of Jesus the Lord.
Amen.

[C]

Almighty and eternal God,
in Christ your Son
you have manifested your love for all people.
Guide the work of our parish:
help it to proclaim your name,
to persevere in faith,
and to remain united in charity and peace.
Let our commitment to Parish Transformation
renew the mission of your Church
and give you glory and praise.
Through Christ our Lord.
Amen.



APPENDIX

PARISH TRANSFORMATION MISSION ACTION PLAN

SAMPLE



A) Having prayed over and studied the components that give life to a parish's mission, we the people of St. Joseph Moscati Parish propose that the MISSION to which God is calling us is:

Because our parish is responsible as chaplains for two hospitals in our community and so much of our attention at St. Joseph Moscati is focused on those who are ill and their families and those who care for them, our vision as a parish is strongly rooted in the image of the healing Christ. We take for our inspiration Jesus' cure of the paralyzed man as found in Luke 5; 11–26. The paralyzed man needed his friends to carry him to Jesus. **We see our mission in the parish as friends called to bring others to Christ.** The healing required is not just the healing of physical infirmities but the brokenness we often experience in life and the effects of heavy burdens we are called to carry in today's society.

We want our parish to be a place where people can discover the living Christ and find the peace they seek. At the same time we long to have our parishioners freely share their gifts for the good of the community and beyond. Trusting in Christ who heals us and inspired by our patron St. Joseph Moscati, a remarkable holy doctor, our vision includes some of the following: training parishioners to be effective ministers to the sick, offering opportunities for evangelization of young and old, outreach to teens, and opening a family counseling center. We plan to rejuvenate our peace and justice ministry so that we can be a more effective healing element in today's society. We will celebrate a monthly Mass with the Anointing of the Sick and prepare a shrine at which parishioners and visitors can come and place their intentions. In all that we do we will continue to ask ourselves: "Are we bringing our sisters and brothers to Christ?" "Is our parish committed to extending Jesus' healing ministry in today's society?"

SAMPLE

B) Actions required to achieve our mission.

Objectives and Actions	Time	Owner	Staff Liaison	Measurable Goal
1. Establish vibrant ministry to the sick and home-bound. - Publicize significant new parish ministry and recruit new members. - Develop & implement new training & formation program.	Spring 2012	JD, BB	RR	X participants serving Y people
2. Rejuvenate our peace and justice ministry. - Evaluate current programs - Recruit new members.	Fall 2012	FR	RR	Z parishioners involved, serving W people
3. Open a family counseling center. - Research needs - Develop detailed plan	Fall 2015	SD, TH	RR	Y families served

C) Actions required to strengthen our foundations

Our focus areas (select up to 3):

☐ Evangelization ☒ Catechesis ☐ Prayer and Worship ☒ Communio
☐ Missionary Spirit ☐ Call to Holiness ☐ Spiritual Stewardship

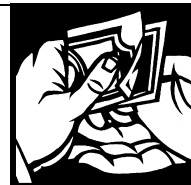
Objectives and Actions	Time	Owner	Staff Liaison	Measurable Goal
Focus Area #1: Catechesis				
1. Enhance our offerings to youth and young adults - Establish new teen program integrating social and apostolic dimensions - Develop electronic catechesis program using social media	Fall 2012	JS, NG, GR	RL	X teens and young adults participating in our programs
2. Develop new family-oriented Religious Education program for our children and parents		CM, MM, MD	RL	Positive reviews from parents in survey
Focus Area #2: Communio				
1. Foster greater unity and understanding among our multi-cultural community - Hold multi-cultural Masses once a month (i.e., combine English and Spanish Masses) - Hold monthly social events that take advantage of our cultural heritage	Spring 2012	BJ, EJ	RL	Greater visible sense of multi-cultural unity; visible crossing of lines of friendship

PARISH TRANSFORMATION FINANCE ACTION PLAN

Our focus areas (check all that apply):

☒ Church Revenue ☐ Church Expense ☒ School Revenue

☐ School Expense ☐ Capital



SECURING OUR FINANCIAL FUTURE

Objectives and Actions	Time	Owner	Staff Liaison	Measurable Goal
Focus Area #1: Church Revenue				
1. Improve communications of our financials by publishing periodic reports				
2. Enhance our weekly collections • Launch planned offering program • Implement electronic giving program	Fall 2012	SS, TT	TW	Increase weekly offering from \$5000 to \$6000
3. Raise \$100,000 to repair our roof	Fall 2012-Spring 2013	HJ, FG	TW	\$100,000 committed by Spring 2013
Focus Area #2: School Revenue				
1. Grow our school enrollment • Develop new marketing materials • Establish a parent ambassador program • Provide greater tuition discounts for needy families	Fall 2012	BJ, AL	JS	20 new students each year for next 3 years
2. Establish a scholarship fund • Develop a database of addresses • Prepare and send mailing(s)	Fall 2013	BT	JS	

The Dynamics of Parish Transformation

FROM		TO
Church of Maintenance	→	Church of Mission
Administration of Systems	→	Dynamic Relationships
Designing Programs	→	Forming Disciples
Maintaining Ministries	→	Motivating Ministers
Exclusive Community	→	Inclusive Community
Leadership & Mission for a Few	→	Leadership & Mission for All
Passive Observers	→	Committed Doers
Naysayers / Stuck in the Past	→	Risk-Takers / Dreamers / Hopeful for the Future
Uninspiring Routine Worship	→	Liturgy as Source & Summit
Traditional Religious Ed. Programs for Children	→	Lifelong Catechists for all Connecting to Life and Building on Conversion
Teaching About Christ	→	Encountering the Living Christ
Finance Driven	→	Mission Driven
Sunday Offertory as Obligation	→	Holistic Spirituality of Stewardship
Pastor / Staff Exclusive Authority	→	Pastor/Staff/Lay Leadership Collaborative Model
Policies & Procedures Bound	→	Instilling a Vision
Quick to Judge	→	Church of Mercy
Self-absorbed Model of Parish	→	Responding to Broader Needs and Changing Demographics