



PASTORAL PLAN FOR SAINT IRENAEUS, OAKMONT, 2018



SAINT IRENAEUS PARISH

Church: 387 Maryland Avenue

Parish Offices: 637 Fourth Street

Oakmont, Pennsylvania

412-828-3065

saintirenaeus.org

**"It is not you who shape God;
It is God who shapes you.
If then you are the work of God,
await the hand of the Artist,
Who does all things in due season.
Offer the Potter your heart,
soft and tractable, and keep the form
in which the Artist has fashioned you.
Let your clay be moist, lest you grow hard
and lose the imprint of the Potter's fingers."**

- Saint Irenaeus of Lyon



January 1, 2018

Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ of Saint Irenaeus Parish,

As we enter a New Year, a time of resolutions when we all think of how we can live better lives, the Pastoral Council of Saint Irenaeus and I wish to present to you our Pastoral Plan for the coming year. After much thought, prayer, and discernment, we have decided to pursue five initiatives for action to improve the vitality of our parish life, and to prepare ourselves to bring strength and energy into the larger parish grouping that will become effective in October as a result of the On Mission for the Church Alive process.

This document is an attempt to explain how our parish and the Church can benefit from new infrastructures, new ways of thinking, and new habits of faith to be a Church fully Alive. You may have noticed that we have been publishing sections of the Pastoral Plan in the parish bulletins during the last several months. We now present the complete document as a whole.

In addition to presenting to you five initiatives that we plan to pursue to improve our parish, we also ask you to consider how you may also make personal goals for spiritual growth and become more involved in parish life during the coming year.

I would like to thank the Saint Irenaeus Pastoral Council for their hard work in this endeavor, as well as our parish staff and parishioners who helped with proof reading and editing, artwork and formatting, and the Diocesan representatives who helped to get us started.

May God bless all of you abundantly in this New Year, and may His many blessings inspire all of us to grow closer to Him and to work together to build up the Church and His kingdom in our community!

Sincerely in Christ,

Reverend George R. Dalton
Administrator



WHO ARE WE?

**PRIMARY
VALUES
THAT GUIDE
OUR
PASTORAL
LIFE**

Communion in Christ as our center of life.

A strong sense of parish community.

Love of God and Neighbor

Unity of faith and life

Hospitality

Worship that bears fruit in Communion

Evangelization and faith formation

Reconciliation, mercy, and healing

Support for families and faith in the home

Good stewardship and service

Strong bonds with the community of Oakmont

Communion with the Universal Church

SAINT IRENAEUS MISSION STATEMENT

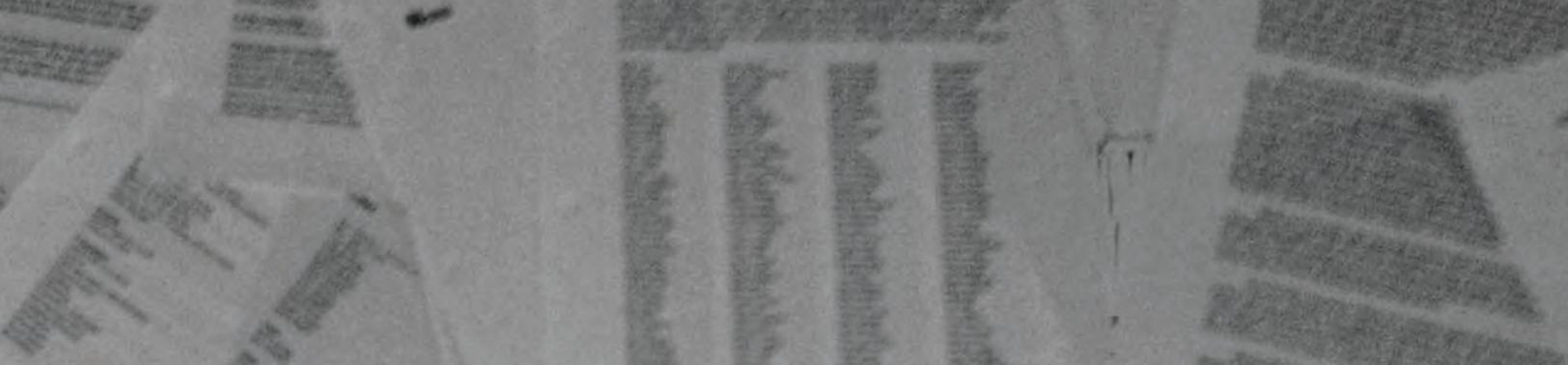
evangelization ◦ *eucharist* ◦ *catechesis* ◦ *stewardship* ◦ *formation*

The Faith Community of Saint Irenaeus strives for knowledge, service, and faith through our patron's guidance and the Holy Spirit dwelling within us. With love, worship, and solidarity, we are building God's Kingdom in our families and communities. Nourished by Word and Sacrament, we give ourselves to Christ and His Church for the greater glory of God our Father.

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WHAT IS A PASTORAL PLAN ?

A Pastoral Plan is a document generated by a parish to prioritize goals and objectives for the coming year or years in order to improve the vitality of a particular Catholic parish. It is the intention of the parish to hold itself accountable for the goals that are established. To discern these goals, parish leaders are called upon to consider intently a number of factors that determine:

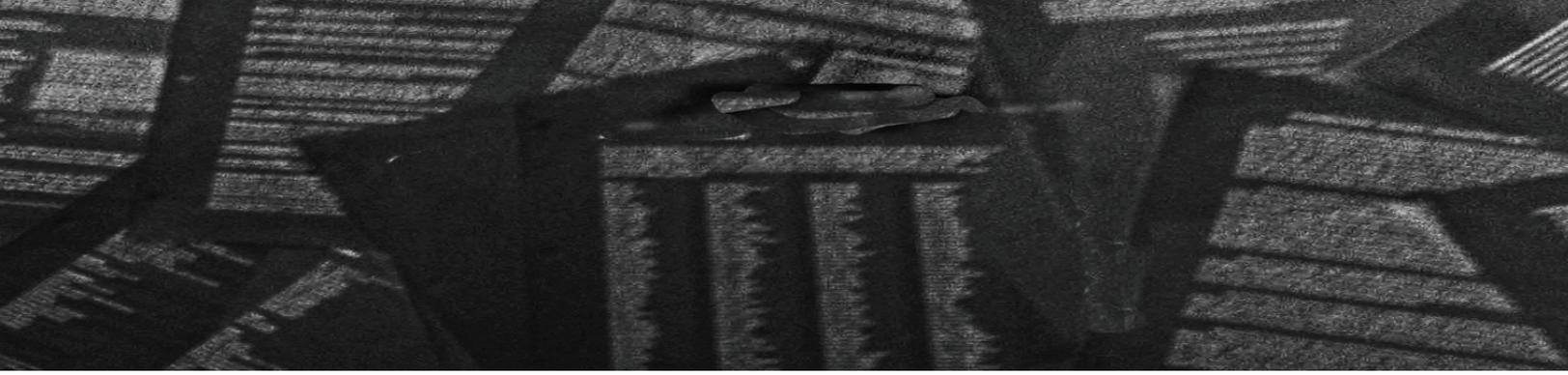
- 1) Parish Identity: the vision of the local Bishop; the parish's mission statement, core values, and vision;
- 2) Parish make-up: current and anticipated demographics; parish activities and programs; and fiscal health;
- 3) Analysis of strengths, needs, opportunities, and challenges in the parish.
- 4) Key aspects of parish life that need to be addressed.

Through this process of discernment, those who have been involved then decide on a number of (usually five) Strategic SMART Goals (Specific, Measurable, Assignable, Realistic, Time-related) along with corresponding objectives. The Pastoral Plan needs to be announced to the parish while it also addresses the recruitment of sufficient numbers of parish volunteers and financial support for the parish to fulfill it's commitments.

Following the implementation of a Pastoral Plan, it is important for parish leaders to follow up with ongoing reviews of timelines and progress, and to take corrective action as needed.

Until now, Saint Irenaeus has not had a Pastoral Plan. Given the current context, where we find ourselves immersed in the uncertainty of the On Mission for The Church Alive process, some may ask why we are developing a pastoral plan now?





The answer is two-fold. First, the need for us to build up vitality within our parish community is not suspended by the On Mission process. Even if parishes are grouped as scheduled in October 2018; it will be another 2-5 years before a merging process is complete. It will be necessary for us as a worshipping community to ensure that we are a Church Alive during the whole transition process. The needs of our parishioners should not become neglected because we allow ourselves to be paralyzed by a spirit of malaise.

Second, we have much to be proud of at Saint Irenaeus. We should commit ourselves to doing the best that we can to bring as much energy, strength and leadership as possible into the On Mission transition. To do this, we need to pull together and build up our faith community so that we can help the transition to be as smooth as possible.





INTRODUCTION: CONTEXT, CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Almost 2,000 years ago, before ascending into heaven, Jesus Christ gave the following commission to his disciples: “All power in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all the 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. 28:18-20). Since then, with the guidance and help of the Holy Spirit, the Church has brought our faith in Christ to the ends of the earth, while also passing that faith on from one generation to the next, and to us. Today, each of us can call ourselves Catholic because others have brought us into a relationship with Christ and with His Body, the Church.

While the number of Catholics continues to grow exponentially on a global scale, our local experience is one of decline and diminishment. Many of us feel the pain of knowing family members and friends who no longer practice the faith, or who no longer even regard themselves as Catholic. Numbers of clergy and religious, attendance at Sunday Masses, and income from offertory contributions have also declined. In America, this problem is not isolated to the Catholic church. Secularism has replaced active faith as a predominant and guiding force in our society. Our culture no longer finds itself rooted in commonly shared understandings of truth, goodness, or beauty. Organized religion encounters a lessening of support and growing hostility in the surrounding community. Religious faith is increasingly viewed by others as backward, outdated, and irrelevant.

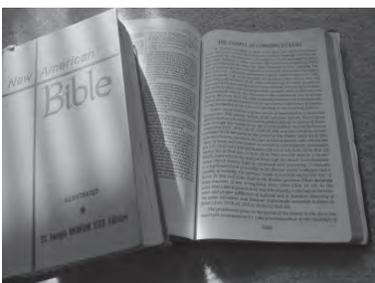




Whereas 50 years ago, average Sunday Mass attendance among American Catholics averaged well over 80%, parishes today are considered fortunate to see 25-30% of their members attend weekly. Among younger Catholics, the situation is even more reversed. Studies conclude that at least 80% of Catholics are now drifting away from the Church before becoming adults.

Fortunately, there are notable signs of revival within the Church. In various places, parishes are experiencing that when old mindsets are changed, new priorities are established, and new Church infrastructures are set up, Catholic communities of faith are able to reverse the national trends of decline; and instead become centers of life, vibrancy, and growth in new membership.

Meanwhile, because the need for communion with God is inscribed in the depths of the human heart, there exist vast numbers of unchurched people who are searching for a meaning and purpose that only a deeply lived relationship with God can satisfy. Whereas the priorities of the Church were once focused on caring for the needs of active, secure Catholics who filled the pews every Sunday, we now need new priorities and methods to reach out to others, as described by Jesus in the parable of the Good Shepherd who left the 99 and went out search for the one who was lost (Luke 15:4).





WHAT ARE THE PROBLEMS? AND HOW DO WE FIX THEM?

An unhealthy dynamic has been dominating the experience of Catholic life in America which, in practice, finds too many Catholics disassociated from the Church, but still expecting that their parishes will be there for them when they want something. There is also a widespread failure to understand that parishes can only offer what the resources and efforts of the parishioners, themselves, make possible.

Parishes were once much healthier when with God's grace, we could rely on a large infrastructure of priests and religious along with larger numbers of lay people who were rooted, active, and involved in parish life, who also involved their children in parish life, and who together supplied the necessary financial means so that Christ's work could be carried out effectively.

Now, however, parishes are breaking down because the shrinking number of people who are willing to be active and involved in parish life is far overwhelmed by the number who seek to benefit from what the parish offers – in short, there is a critically unhealthy balance between many people who expect the parish to be here for them and significantly fewer people who are willing to be here as the parish.

More locally, we must also be willing to identify particular problems within our own parish community, asking whether we are doing our best for Christ and His people, and how we can answer God's call to move our faith community in a better direction toward a healthier and more vibrant future. That questioning process is the background of this Pastoral Plan for Saint Irenaeus Parish.

To seek answers, we need first to remember how God calls us to a fruitful relationship with Him and others in the life of the Church. The concept that best explains the foundation for this fruitful relationship is ***Intentional Discipleship*** (a term coined by author Sherry Weddell). Communion is even more important, but because the fruit of communion is borne from union with God through intentional and faithful discipleship (God abiding in us, and we also abiding in God), we begin with discipleship.



TWELVE KEY ASPECTS OF OF DISCIPLESHIP

Looking at how discipleship is remembered in the New Testament, we can identify at least **twelve key aspects** shared by those who faithfully follow Christ:

- 1) **Disciples have an encounter with Christ that is life changing:** Everyone who became a disciple was invited, either directly by Jesus or led to Him by someone else. This encounter begins a life-long, growing, fruitful *relationship with Christ*. We need to examine our encounter with Christ not just as a parish but, more importantly, as individual Catholics. Have I allowed myself to fully experience the depths of God's love, mercy, and truth in Christ? Has my encounter inspired me to follow a new direction, where my life is led by God? How focused on Christ is my life? Do I pray to Christ daily to help me make the best of what is good in me, to save and protect me from all that is evil, to be saved by Him, to grow and serve Him more perfectly in His grace?
- 2) **Disciples accept and say YES to the call from Christ:** Discipleship always began with a response to the call that came to them from Jesus, or from Christ acting in His Body, the Church. It is important here, to remember that "*vocation*" means "*calling*." We believe that God calls us to what is good for us, what best brings us to our fulfillment. God can see in us far more than we can ever see in ourselves. By being open to our vocation, and asking God for guidance, we let God help us discern the meaning and purpose for which He lovingly created us. We trust God to help us understand ourselves, discern our gifts, go where we are called to go, and do what we are called to do. Intentional discipleship needs to incorporate *active and ongoing discernment* of our calling from Christ!
- 3) **Disciples repent and believe in Christ:** The first words of Jesus' public ministry were "Repent, and believe in the good news!" Reconciliation, healing and restoration are hallmarks of Christ's work. Christ came into the world not just to save us, but also to sanctify us. God's merciful love redeems, renews, and strengthens us for a life of grace. Intentional Discipleship does not just seek a free ticket into heaven; intentional disciples strive for holiness and virtue. *We die to self* (putting off the old, sinful, unredeemed self) in order *to live in Christ* and the Holy Spirit (the new life of grace). We rely on God and participate actively in our redemption and sanctification.

DISCIPLESHIP



DISCIPLESHIP

- 4) ***Disciples follow Christ and grow by centering their lives on Him:*** Faith is not a collection of thoughts, nor an isolated activity, nor hobby, nor detour, nor side trip from life. Faith *is* our way of life. Discipleship involves *freely making the life journey which follows Christ*. Scripture shows that on the journey, disciples have often become confused, made mistakes, acted rashly, even doubted and contradicted Christ at times, but because they've also remained centered on Christ, they've grown and matured, one step at a time. Ultimately, disciples even show a willingness to take up the cross daily in order to follow Christ. Disciples start the journey as sinners, grow gradually, and strive to finish their journeys as Saints.
- 5) ***Disciples learn from Christ in order to live like Him:*** Jesus is the way, truth, and life of every intentional disciple. A major part of the public ministry of Jesus was teaching. To live in Christ requires that *we put on the mind of Christ*, which we can only do to the extent that we learn from Him, seek clarification, and show a willingness to be corrected in how we understand and live our lives in faith. Today, Christ teaches us primarily through His body the Church which, according to Christ's very own promise, is guided by the Holy Spirit in truth. Disciples seek guidance from Christ, and live Christ-centered lives according to His instruction.
- 6) ***Disciples share in Christ's work by working together, preparing His way:*** Disciples learn like apprentices, who learn from their master by working with him and imitating him. Jesus often gave authority to His disciples to go out to dispel evil and bring healing, and to make advance preparations in various places so that the people there would be ready to welcome Him when He arrived. Jesus typically assigned tasks, sending His disciples out two by two, showing that we work not only in union with Him but also in union with each other as disciples. The apprenticeship of disciples continues today as we learn from those who have learned before us what Christ first passed on to the Church, and when we work together with them in Christ's name.
- 7) ***Disciples become One and remain One with Christ:*** Disciples are the branches to Christ, Who is the Vine. We allow nothing to separate us from Him. This involves intentionally arranging all personal priorities so that Christ remains *our first priority*, Who guides all others. Only when we live in a way that keeps Him first can we can rely on Him to provide all the grace we need for a life that is lived for the love of God and neighbor. Our central and most important connection to Christ is in the *Eucharist* where, at Mass, Christ



gives Himself personally to us in fellowship with other believers, in the ministry of the Priest, in His Word, and ultimately in His Body and Blood. We abide in Christ and Christ in us through faithful and regular participation at Mass on Sundays and Holy Days.

8) ***Disciples gather with other disciples to pray, through, with, and in Christ:***

In the Gospels, Jesus repeatedly brought his disciples to the temple in Jerusalem for holy festivals and to synagogues on the Sabbath, provided a personal example of individual prayer, taught them how to pray, exhorted them to pray with Him, commanded them to celebrate the Eucharist in remembrance of Him, and taught that when two or more gather in His name, He is with us. Prayer disposes us to accept God's will and to participate in Christ's offering of Himself to the Father. Prayer also sanctifies space and time, and can consecrate what we intentionally offer to God.

9) ***Disciples receive supernatural gifts from the Holy Spirit:*** In addition to the natural gifts we receive from God, we receive additional gifts that are beyond our natural human abilities. Among these, the first and most important supernatural gifts we receive are Faith, Hope, and Love. Scripture also enumerates gifts of the Holy Spirit as wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety, and fear of the Lord. Some disciples also receive special charisms such as healing, miracles, prophecy, discernment of spirits, and speaking in tongues. Natural and supernatural, all of God's gifts to us are given to be opened, ordered, and put to use according to God's purposes.

DISCIPLESHIP

10) ***Disciples are sent by Christ to make new disciples:*** Just as we are disciples because others once brought us to Christ, we also are sent by Christ to bring others to Him. We as Church did not fulfill our original mandate from Jesus by a "don't ask, don't tell" policy, but through *evangelization*. Faith is given by God to be shared. The history of discipleship is a history of lost sheep being found and brought to Christ. True discipleship is never hidden as something personal and private. It flows to and from communion with Christ to others. Jesus calls us to be the "salt of the earth" and "light of the world." We make new disciples by reaching out in the context of our relationships, by leading and helping others to encounter the infinite truth, love, and mercy of Almighty God as revealed in Christ, and by mentoring and supporting others as they accept and grow in their gifts of Faith, Hope and Love.



DISCIPLESHIP

11) *Disciples exercise ministries for the Church according to their gifts:*

Disciples accept that we do not belong to ourselves, but to God in Whose image we are created, and to Christ who purchased our salvation for eternal life at a great price. Likewise, our life, talents, strengths, circumstances, and opportunities belong to God. As *good stewards*, disciples simply wish to give back to God through faithful service what already belongs to Him. In the life of the Church this involves a process wherein we discern our gifts, cultivate them through parish formation programs, and offer to actively participate in Church ministries that are organized to continue the work of Christ.

12) *Disciples gather and form communities in His Body, the Church:*

Since Christ first founded the Church, Catholics of every age and generation have gathered together in communities of faith to share a common life centered around the Eucharist, growing together in faith, and living in charity. The Gospels and other books of the New Testament were written for these earliest Catholic communities, or for their leaders, to combat threats to unity and to strengthen the relationships of individual Catholics with God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, with the Church, and with each other. Discipleship is about Communion, unity in Christ in His Body the Church, and about being a sign and source of loving unity in the world. God created humanity out of love and for love. Communion is love's highest realization. From the Church's beginning, our communion has been lived out by being rooted and active in communities of faith. Moreover, our faith communities, united with Papal and Apostolic guidance, have always kept in communion with one another. From our earliest days, we as Church have understood Communion in a threefold way: First, Communion is the "love feast" of the Eucharist through which Christ enables us to remain one in Him; Second, Communion is a unity of belief (Creed) which is achieved by assenting to the entirety of Christ's teaching; Third, Communion is a unity of life (morals) that is lived according to God's grace, free from sin and engaged in works of charity. Communion is also shared as we support one another by strengthening the bonds of our faith through Catholic fellowship and by collaborative efforts which bring the public ministry of Christ to others.



As Intentional Disciples, we need to own up to our Catholicism. While aware of the many social forces that seek to privatize and drive faith from the public sphere, we need to show that we can be comfortable with who we are as sincere, loving people of deep faith. While our faith makes us different in some ways, we may need to reassure others that a life dedicated to wholesome love, worship, prayer, service, mercy, compassion, respect for nature, responsible citizenship, and advocacy for peace, justice, and human rights is no threat to them.

As members of society who are commanded by Christ to “give to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s,” we need to be ready and willing to stand up for ourselves. We need to speak up for our right to be faithful to Christ including asking those with positions of authority or responsibility to respect our conscience rights so that we can be faithful to God as good citizens, in the workplace, and in organized community events like children’s sports, etc.. We need to be free to live our lives, practice our professions, and participate in community events without being required to abandon worship or participate in evil and immoral activities.

DISCIPLESHIP

We need to be who we are as the Church, members of the Body of Christ, living stones forming a temple for the Holy Spirit, and actively answering His call. We need to rely on Him, and worship and glorify Him. Led in truth, growing in faith, discerning and cultivating our gifts and putting them to use, we need to work together as active ministers in the Church, living lives of faith, hope, and love of God and our neighbor.

We need to be ready and willing to evangelize, to be voices of conscience, and to explain ourselves lovingly and patiently. We need to correct widespread errors that permeate our surrounding culture regarding God, faith, religion, Christ, the Church and her teachings, and a number of other related topics. We need to let our light shine, our love of God and neighbor be seen clearly, and our presence in society be a positive force for love, truth, goodness, beauty, and renewal for the world.



WHAT DO SUCCESSFUL, VIBRANT PARISHES HAVE IN COMMON?

Many Catholic parishes in America are reversing the national experience of decline. These parishes have become growing, vibrant communities of faith and magnets that draw unchurched people into a fulfilling relationship with Christ and meaningful service to others. While every parish uniquely reflects its own distinct and particular pastoral context, there are certain common traits that successful parishes report about themselves. Among these are:

- 1) **Successful parishes center on worshipping Christ** – priorities include:
 - a) Worshipping Christ as the most important activity in parish life, at Mass, in Eucharistic Adoration, and in other gatherings for Praise and Prayer.
 - b) Liturgical ministers who display a joyful and ardent love for the Eucharist, draw people to love Christ, and evoke a feeling of communion with Him and with each other.
 - c) Homilies that pertain to the readings, speak to life, focus on faith in God, and challenge the faithful.
 - d) Music that fits the readings, stirs the soul, and gets parishioners to sing.
 - e) Parishioners who enter into Christ's self offering by attending Mass faithfully and participating vocally in the prayers and singing.

- 2) **Successful parishes evangelize** – priorities include:
 - a) Creating an environment of hospitality that welcomes newcomers and anticipates special needs at all parish gatherings.
 - b) Ministries of hospitality and welcoming.
 - c) Recruit and train parishioners for programs that are designed to awaken faith in those who are searching.
 - d) Make resources available to introduce people to the basics of faith.
 - e) Efforts to accommodate and engage youth, young adults and families.
 - f) Parishioners who witness their faith in daily conversation and deeds.
 - g) Parishioners who invite others to Mass, events and programs.
 - h) Call and form parishioners to become mission-driven makers of disciples.
 - i) Identify and use effective means for marketing and advertising.



- 3) **Successful parishes build relationships** – priorities include:
 - a) Focus programs on building relationships with God, Christ, the Holy Spirit, the parish and other parishioners.
 - b) Organize events that are designed to build up the parish community.
 - c) Parish ministry employees being involved at Mass and in activities outside their areas of responsibility.
 - d) Multiple parish groups communicating and collaborating with each other.
 - e) Parishioners who are registered, rooted, and support parish life.
 - f) Work on projects together with other parishes and, if possible, with other organizations in the community.
 - g) Parishioners working in pastoral outreach and apostolic service to others.

- 4) **Successful parishes form disciples** – priorities include:
 - a) Faith and spiritual formation aiming at mature discipleship.
 - b) Opportunities for catechetical and spiritual enrichment tailored to 1) awaken faith, 2) enflame and deepen faith, and 3) equip parishioners for ministry.
 - c) Adult formation that empowers parents to be the first teachers of their children in the ways of faith.
 - d) Families that are schools of discipleship.
 - e) Catechesis of the Good Shepherd.
 - f) Robust youth and young adult ministry.
 - g) Relationship based holistic formation: Learn Jesus, Love Jesus, live Jesus; Empower Catholics to live a faith that serves others with courage, collaboration, and compassion.

- 5) **Successful parishes emphasize stewardship** – priorities include:
 - a) Catechesis on stewardship.
 - b) Parishioners know that the parish can be vibrant only if they give intentionally and prayerfully of their time, talent, and treasure.
 - c) Invest in a professional ministry leadership team with Lay Ecclesial Ministers to coordinate gifts within the parish.
 - d) Information sources on parish life and ministry opportunities.
 - e) Clear, regular communication of parish needs.
 - f) Financial transparency.



WHAT DO
SUCCESSFUL
VIBRANT
PARISHES
HAVE IN
COMMON ?

- 6) **Successful parishes empower leadership** – priorities include:
 - a) Parishioners accept they are necessary for building God's Kingdom and that their service is vital for a healthy, vibrant parish.
 - b) Help parishioners to identify and understand their gifts and strengths.
 - c) Place volunteers where they can work well with their strengths.
 - d) Formation of parishioner based ministry teams to support, plan and coordinate various areas of parish life.
 - e) Information on how parishioners can do Christ's work in the parish.
 - f) Celebrate the ways that people's gifts are used successfully in the parish.

- 7) **Successful parishes have competent, responsible ministers** - priorities include:
 - a) Clear responsibilities.
 - b) Training.
 - c) Effective planning, SMART goals, objectives, tasks, deadlines.
 - d) Expectations of competency and accountability.
 - e) Periodic review and evaluation.
 - f) Reallocation of ineffective ministers to areas of greater strength.

- 8) **Successful parishes communicate clearly** – priorities include:
 - a) A Parish Mission Statement and a guide to Parish Values.
 - b) Clear vision and identity shared throughout the parish.
 - c) Document indicating what parishioners can expect from the parish, and what the parish expects from its parishioners.
 - d) Foster an environment of trust and openness.
 - e) Effective communication within and among parish leadership teams.
 - f) Invite input through town halls and other forums, and publish results. Keep parishioners informed on follow up.
 - g) Parishioners are kept up to date regarding all areas of parish life.
 - h) Multi-faceted approach to communication, including current technology.



HOW DO WE IDENTIFY THE KEY AREAS OF PARISH LIFE?

In his first pastoral letter, *The Church Alive*, Bishop David A Zubik stressed the importance of parishes being vibrant in faith, envisioning parish ministries and activities not as “*designing the Church according to my likes but rather as an opportunity for the Holy Spirit to work ‘from the ground up.’*” To this end, Bishop Zubik identified five central experiences of the faith that are essential and central to a healthy Catholic parish: ***Eucharist, Evangelization, Catechesis, Formation, and Stewardship***. Of these five, the Eucharist is at the center of parish life. Evangelization and Catechesis should aim at leading people to the Eucharist; Formation and Stewardship should aim at allowing the Eucharist to bear fruit in a life of intentional discipleship.

EUCCHARIST

(1) The Eucharist – Celebrating our Relationship with Christ

Eucharist is the convergence point of all the vital elements of parish life, the source and summit of the parish’s expression of its life in Christ as the Body of Christ.

What Christ does for us:

When He first offered Himself at the Last Supper, Jesus consummated his whole public ministry and instituted the Eucharist as a lasting memorial to perpetuate His abiding presence in the Church. Ever since, at every Mass, Jesus makes present to us His same saving ministry and His Last Supper. Jesus calls and gathers us together. He leads us in prayer. He reconciles and heals us. By His teaching He helps us to remember what is important for us and for our relationship with Him. By feeding us He renews and strengthens us. He unites us to Himself and each other. He gives us not just earthly food, but Himself: Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity, as food for eternal life. He sends us forth to continue His work. In this we see God’s desire for us to come to Him; to become one in Him; to be formed in Him; to be forgiven, fed, gifted and strengthened by Him; and to serve others in His name.

At the Last Supper, Jesus celebrated the Passover meal where, with His disciples, they entered into the mystery of the Old Covenant when God saved the Israelites from death and slavery in Egypt and led them to new life in the land of promise. In His Last Supper, made present at every Mass, Jesus elevates this participation to a sharing in the New Covenant of His dying and rising. He leads us from slavery to sin to the new life of freedom for grace in God’s Kingdom. At the Last Supper and at every Mass, Jesus is the sacrificial Lamb of God Who takes away the sins of the world. He is the Lamb, once slain, Who gives life to the world. He takes on sin to forgive sin. He takes on death to trample death. He rises from the dead to take those who follow Him into His own glorious and eternal Divine Life. In the Last



Supper, Jesus also washed the feet of his disciples, teaching them to serve others as He has served us. Eucharist takes us up into God's own life, so that alive in Him, we receive the strength to serve others in His name.

PARISH LIFE

In the Eucharist, Christ invites us to enter into a foretaste and a sharing of our eternal life with Him. In the New Testament, heaven is described as the eternal wedding feast celebrating the marriage between Christ and the Church. Mass has always been understood as a participation in that eternal feast, a moment when the eternal is made present to us in the here and now. As we gather before the Altar of the Lord at Mass, we are united to those who have gone before us in faith, the saints, gathered at the table of the heavenly feast. As our Groom, Christ joins Himself to us by giving Himself to us in His Body and Blood. As He joins Himself to us we are also disposed to receive Him with the intention of offering ourselves completely to Him in return. As it is sung in the Easter Vigil, "Heaven is wedded to earth, and man is reconciled to God."

What Eucharist helps us do:

Attending Mass should be for us as important as attending our own wedding – our wedding to God, Himself – for a marriage we want to last forever. Marriage sets the foundation for spouses to build a life together. The words "husband" and "wife" define each other – neither have any meaning without the other. They each find their own meaning by sharing and building a new life together. In the same way, in the Eucharist Christ comes to build a life with us, His bride, the Church. When we choose to intentionally build a life with Him, we understand better how central and indispensable the Eucharist is to our relationship with God. It consummates the mutual self-giving called for in our relationship with Him. Likewise, we understand how our eternal life will continue and fulfill the relationship we currently work on with Christ in our lives.

Following the meaning of "Eucharist," which in Greek means "giving thanks," we set aside time regularly in our lives to personally and faithfully gather together in Christ's presence, to give thanks, adore, and worship Him as our God. We gather in gratitude for many daily blessings in our lives, but especially to remember the ultimate sacrifice He made for our salvation. We do this primarily at Mass, preparing ourselves beforehand by an examination of conscience and making a good confession if necessary, and fasting at least one hour before receiving Communion. During the Mass we continue to prepare ourselves by participating sincerely in the music and prayers. We repent in the penitential rite. We learn carefully from the Word of God in scripture and by listening to the homily. We profess our assent to all

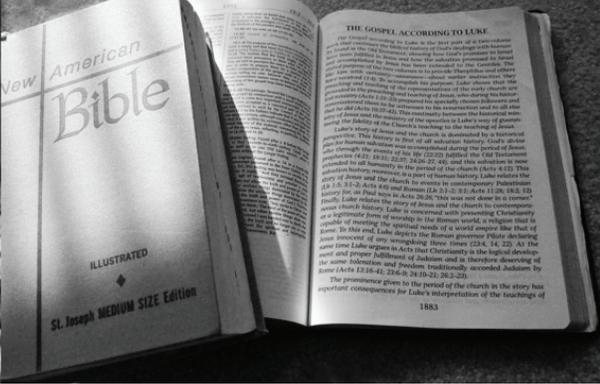


EUCCHARIST

of Christ's teachings in the Creed. We pray for various needs in the world, for the Church and for ourselves. As good stewards we give intentionally and sacrificially to sustain the vitality of our parish and the Universal Church. Then setting aside our earthly concerns to offer ourselves through, with, and in Christ to the Father, we welcome Christ as He comes to give Himself to us in the Eucharist. At Mass, we receive Him to build up who we are as members of the Body of Christ, and to abide in Him. We seek strength and renewal so that, sent forth by Him from every Mass, we go out into the world to be Christ for others, and bring Christ to others. Our pledge is to let Christ, dwelling in us, redeem and guide every area of our lives, and allow Christ to use us as members of His Body working in unity as a force for God's Kingdom for the renewal of the world.

The Eucharist keeps our lives centered on Christ in His Body the Church. Regular attendance at Mass shows God that *we love Him and we want to live in an ongoing, eternal relationship with Him, and with each other in Him*. God Himself helps us to understand that Mass is central to these relationships. God gains nothing from us, but gives us the Mass for the ongoing renewal of our relationship with Him. Mass is how we follow God's Third Commandment, "Keep holy the Lord's Day," and the commandment of Jesus Who at the Last Supper instructed us: "Do this in remembrance of Me." It shows our desire to keep our lives ordered for God, according to His will.

In the Eucharist we celebrate the love of God in unity with our sisters and brothers in Christ so that we can live in the love of God. One of the nicknames for the Eucharist has always been "love feast." We remember God's unfailing commitment to us, His repeated willingness to enter into human history for our salvation, and ultimately Christ's own willingness to empty Himself of all glory and take upon Himself our humanity, to die on the cross and rise from the dead – for us, for me and for you – because God loves us that much. The Eucharist is *God, acting in love to save us*, embraced by us in *our profession that He is worthy of our faith, hope and love, as we renew our commitment to Him*. This commitment inspires us to truly live in Christ as our Way, Truth and Life, to go outside our comfort zones, and *to live radically in Christ, for love of God and neighbor*.



Fruitful reception of the Eucharist inspires us be sent from Mass to engage ourselves in the work of Jesus. ***In the Eucharist we are called to envision ourselves as missionaries – brought to new life in Christ and fed by Him to go forth in Him.*** Our sharing in Christ’s work involves active participation in parish sponsored programs for our ongoing formation and opportunities for ministry and service. It reminds us also that we are missionaries to our families and friends. Just as in the public ministry of Jesus, in our relationships with others Christ can use us as a source of His blessings. We also do the work of Christ by bringing his love and Gospel values into the community and workplace. In the Eucharist we are renewed by Christ so that He can work through us for the renewal of the world.

PARISH
LIFE

Eucharist in the Church Alive:

A Church Alive is a parish in which Christ continues His work in the actions of priests, supported by and working together with other members of His Body, the parishioners, through competent, dependable, enthusiastic ministries, to give Himself in the Eucharist for the redemption of body and soul, and for our spiritual sustenance. By living lives centered in Christ in the Eucharist, parish members feel a deep love for the Lord and a burning desire to unite with Him and worship Him, to receive and rely on His grace, grow in Him, enter into Christ’s self-giving, and to be sent forth to do His work. Ministers who answer God’s call to help at Mass count themselves blessed to embrace the responsibility of helping to bring Christ to His people, whether by a warmhearted handshake and welcome extended to those who arrive, or joyful leadership in songs that inspire active participation, or attentive service at the Altar, or heartfelt proclamation of Scripture, or reverent distribution of Communion. All ministries are an essential part of uniting people in the Body of Christ, and helping to identify the parish as a welcoming home where brothers and sisters grow in friendship and fellowship together as we celebrate our Communion.

A Church Alive is a parish whose mission is to love and serve Christ. At our heart, we are a Eucharistic community. Our communion in Christ defines who we are. In the mutual exchange of Christ giving Himself to us, and of we, ourselves, to Him in our shared discipleship, we give thanks to God for His unfailing love and mercy. We deepen our commitment to our own fulfillment as the image of God and to Jesus as our Way, Truth, and Life. We grow in God’s grace. We deepen our bonds of fraternity and solidarity. We experience ongoing spiritual renewal. We rekindle the mission and purpose that inspires us to work together as Christ’s Body in the world. We prepare ourselves for eternal life. Fed by Christ in Holy Communion, we become what we receive: the Body of Christ, giving Himself for the salvation of the world, and Christ bringing all things in creation together for the glory of the Father.



At the center of our lives, the Eucharist is our foundation for effective success in other areas of parish life. When our focus is on Christ and His mission, we know it is important to look beyond ourselves to bring Christ to others, and others to Christ through *Evangelization*. We learn to put on the mind of Christ and share our faith openly with others through *Catechesis*. We build up our relationships with Christ in His Body the Church and with other parishioners through opportunities for *Formation*. We cultivate and put to use all the gifts that God has given us, for the good of the Christ's work in the Church through faithful *Stewardship*.

EVANGELIZATION

(2) Evangelization – Opening and Awakening Relationships with Christ

In parish life, evangelization is the element which encompasses any way in which the parish continues to spread the good news of Jesus and to bring others to God.

What Christ does for us:

The public ministry of Jesus began with His going from town to town and proclaiming "Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand," and by calling people to become His disciples. Before ascending into Heaven, he commissioned His disciples to go forth to the ends of the earth, and teach and baptize in His name. *Christ evangelized and He expects us, his followers, to do the same!* By engaging us through evangelization, Jesus helps us see more than we see in ourselves, and become more than we think we can become. Jesus is the Good Shepherd who goes out to search for the lost sheep, the Love of the Father who welcomes back the prodigal son. Jesus is the One who visits, forgives and changes the life of the sinner. He brings the sick to healing, and those who doubt to faith. Jesus lifts us out of the ruts in our lives, calms our storms, gives us purpose and direction, invites us to be with Him in paradise, and abides with us to our fulfillment. Our relationship with Jesus is the result of a chain of outreach He, Himself, first began, which has been extended in the life of the Church in His name ever since, a chain we are called to continue to extend today.

During His public ministry, Jesus reached out to everyone: rich and poor, weak and powerful, healthy and sick, religious leaders and sinners, women and men, zealots and tax collectors, etc. He ministered mostly to the children of Israel, but also Samaritans and Gentiles. He spoke boldly to confront injustices, correct abuses, overcome evil, call for conversion, and welcome all whose hearts thirst for the Living God. Jesus was born in the most humble way, in utter vulnerability as a homeless child, to demonstrate God's openness to everyone. The call of God in Christ is intended to leave no stone unturned, no heart untouched, no person unreached.



Through evangelization, Christ is the Word of God, sown in our hearts, given to us to bear fruit of thirty, sixty, or a hundredfold. He is the vine, and we the branches, that in Him we can have fullness of life. Through His relationship with us which begins through our own evangelization, Christ is able to cast out evil, bring peace, humble earthly pride, and restore us to purity of heart. In Jesus we are no longer strangers and enemies. We become friends, brothers and sisters, children of the Father, members of His Body, and His ambassadors in the world.

PARISH LIFE

What Evangelization helps us do:

Evangelization invites us to open the doors of our hearts and minds to a deep and intimate lifelong relationship with God. Through a relationship with Christ's Body, the Church, we can open ourselves to know and love God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Evangelization brings us to faith in the loving and merciful God in Whose image we have been created. We discover in Christ our Lord and Savior, Who loves us, Who died and rose for us. We find in the Holy Spirit a comforter, helper and guide, One who endows us with gifts that enable us to work together in Christ and manifest God's Kingdom in His name. In these relationships, we are never alone, but part of that which is greater than us. In the Church we become part of God's family. We embrace God's kingdom, which Jesus described as a buried treasure and a pearl of great price, for which the wise person invests his whole livelihood. We find in the example and teaching of Jesus wisdom for life's challenges, renewal in spirit, and the strength to be transformed for better lives. Relying on providence, we learn to depend on God, and find the means to live lives that are faithful to Him and giving to others. We are created for relationships, and evangelization opens us to the relationships that can bring us to our fulfillment.

We are called to envision ourselves as evangelists who reach out to others in the name of Christ. Faith, hope and love are the greatest gifts that we can share, especially with people who feel alone, confused, lost, or who are searching. We have the ability to bring meaning and hope to those in need of it. Only by reaching out can we can share God's goodness and wisdom that have been helpful to us. As we ourselves have been blessed, we can help others to open their hearts and minds to encounter His truth, love, and mercy. Jesus calls us to be the light of the world and salt for the earth. Light and salt make a positive difference by reaching out and changing what surrounds them. Christ would not call us to evangelize unless He believed that our witness and faithfulness could make a great difference in the lives of others. When we face misunderstanding we can bring truth and clarification.



Where people feel disconnected and isolated, we can bring comfort and support. We can even show the world that it is possible to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us.

Evangelization in the Church Alive:

EVANGELIZATION

A Church Alive is a parish where Christ continues His work through parish members, through competent, dependable, enthusiastic ministries and in our daily personal encounters with others, to evangelize and help others experience His saving love and mercy, to help them enter into life changing relationships with Him. In parishes fully alive, Christ brings glad tidings to the poor, recovery of sight those who are spiritually blind, and release to those who are oppressed by sin. He searches for lost sheep, welcomes those who seek His love and mercy, and transforms lives for the better. In the Church, Christ calls us as the members of His Body to bring God's wonderful light to the darkness of this world, and proclaim the good news of God's saving love as on a lampstand so all may see our goodness and give glory to God.

Evangelization requires courage, strength and perseverance. It requires a humble and radical reliance on God's direction, providence and grace. For evangelization, just as Jesus sent out His disciples two by two, or in larger groups, Christ continues His work today by our working in unity with each other. It is not our mission, but Christ's, not our effort but His, not done in isolation, but by discernment in communion with other disciples.





The role of the laity for evangelization cannot be stressed enough. Many hurting people will never cross paths with priests or religious, but they cross your paths everyday. Jesus once said, "The harvest is ripe but the workers are few." For the sake of souls that are lost, for those who are unchurched, for those who have abandoned faith in God and the Church because they were baptized but never really evangelized, or because of misunderstandings, or because they were injured by people of faith, Christ calls us to go forth and set right what is wrong, go forth in His name to reveal His truth, love, and mercy. The love of neighbor requires willingness on our part to look beyond ourselves and accept the challenge to evangelize. It does no harm to invite people to encounter God. A simple invitation given with love can begin a process that is truly life changing for others.

PARISH LIFE

The home is the first place where the family, as a domestic Church Alive, passes on the faith. Spouses need to understand their roles evangelically – husbands and wives are ministers of the Sacrament of Marriage, spiritual partners, called to help each other to grow in faith and virtue, instruments of God's saving grace for each other and for all other family members. Likewise, the role of parents is irreplaceable in passing on the faith to the next generation. God has children, not grandchildren. If we want our children to become God's children, we heed the words of Jesus: "Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them." Our children can find a relationship with God only to the extent that we are willing to evangelize them.

In the local community, the Church Alive also evangelizes others simply by our being good workers, leaders, and citizens. Through our intentional Catholic presence, we bring the truth and values of the Gospel into systems that may be afflicted by the misuse of power, greed, corruption, a distorted sense of freedom, an incorrect understanding of the human person and other deficiencies. We introduce truth, respect, love, and principles of justice; we invite harmony, reconciliation, and healing. As a force for renewal in the world, the Church Alive strives to lead social, economic, and political structures away from brokenness and dehumanization and toward the protection and service of human life and dignity.



(3) Catechesis - Informing our Relationship with Christ

Catechesis is the element of parish life which teaches, explains and informs parishioners at all ages in the Scriptures and Tradition of the Church.

What Christ does for us:

Since the beginning of time, God has been revealing Himself: first through the goodness of creation; and then, after Original Sin and the Fall, through the promise of redemption. In salvation history, God called Abraham to be our father in faith. He gave the law through Moses, teaching us how choose life by loving God and neighbor. When Israel turned away, the Prophets encouraged God's people to convert, return to the Lord, and look for the coming of the Messiah. Finally, the invisible God became visible, taking upon Himself our humanity in the person of Jesus Christ. There can be no greater revelation from God than to know Him directly and personally in Jesus. Because it is grounded in God's own revelation to us, catechesis helps us to arrive at a correct understanding of the truth. It fills the gaps that can result from our own human limitations and the possibility of selfish and faulty thinking. As long as we do not distort or misinterpret God's revelation, catechesis guides us toward a deeper understanding of God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; to know God as a loving Father, Christ as Savior, the Holy Spirit as Helper; to know ourselves as the image of God: as created in goodness, as fallen people in need of salvation, as redeemed and called to restoration in Christ; to know how the Holy Spirit helps us share in God's life through Christ's abiding presence in His Body the Church; how we encounter God in the Sacraments; how we can live morally and righteously in Christ; and how to pray.

CATECHESIS

Teaching held a preeminent place in the ministry of Jesus. His earnest desire was for people to understand the nearness of God's Kingdom and how it changes our lives for the better, the importance of humility, conversion, mercy, righteousness and service; the dignity of those rejected by others; that faithfulness shows our love for God and others; and the imperative of putting faith into action. He taught not only by taking the time to instruct people, but also by his example.

Jesus focused on truth: He said "I am the truth." He told Pontius Pilate "I came into the world to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice." Jesus promised "If you remain in my word, you will truly be my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." His question "Who am I" distinguished between the correct faith of Peter, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God," and the many other favorable but deficient opinions that were



circulating about Him at the time. Before His ascension, Jesus promised that He would send the Holy Spirit: “When He comes, the Spirit of truth, He will guide you to all truth.” Jesus prayed to the Father for His disciples, who He sent forth in His name: “Consecrate them in the truth. Your word is truth...I pray not only for them, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word.” In the biblical sense, truth is not just intellectual fact. Truth is also a sustained commitment to be loyal and true. Jesus showed Himself to be true through his perfect obedience to the Father in all things. He was likewise faithful to us. Jesus said “There is no greater love than this, than to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.” Jesus is the ultimate proof of God’s own true, unfailing and loving commitment to us.

PARISH LIFE

Jesus also taught by uncovering paradoxes: As true King, he was born as a homeless child not far from the false king Herod’s palace; He was crowned with a crown of thorns. Though God, He became Man and took the form of a slave. He revealed the blindness of Pharisees by enabling the man who was born blind to see. He revealed those who appeared righteous to be sinners, and enabled those who were sinners to become righteous. By His dying, he revealed the victory of forgiveness over sin, and life over death. The cross, an instrument of execution, became a symbol of triumph. He taught “Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.” In Christ, we discover our greatness by serving others. True wealth is found by giving to others. Taking His yoke upon our shoulders brings us rest. We are in the world but not of the world. In Christ the first are last, and the last are first. By uncovering paradoxes, Jesus taught us to question the many deceptions in the world that are purported to be true but which in fact are false. Only God and His truth, goodness, and beauty are worthy of our trust. Through Catechesis, Jesus opens the door to understanding God and the path by which He leads us to the fullness of life.

As He was preparing the Apostles for His ascension, Jesus indicated His desire for His teaching ministry to continue in the life of the Church: “Go therefore, and make disciples of all the nations...teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.” We can see in the New Testament that Peter and the Apostles worked very hard to fulfill this command. Jesus continues to teach us in His Body, the Church, through the leadership of the Pope and Bishops, who are the successors of Peter and the Apostles. He has sent the Holy Spirit to guide and protect us in truth, so that nearly 2,000 years later, Catechesis in Christ’s body the Church makes it possible for us to know what God has revealed, to deepen our understanding, and commit ourselves fully to God and the mysteries of His Kingdom.



What Catechesis helps us do:

Catechesis helps us to learn, understand, and share the good news of God's creative and redemptive love as it has been received, understood, celebrated, lived and handed down from one generation to the next in the life of the Church. It helps us to open and commit ourselves to a correct understanding of God's truth, so that we can know Him and what is important for our relationship with Him. Catechesis is also how we pass on our understanding of God and His love to others. It may occur in organized parish programs or by informal encounters with other people. Every time we speak of our faith or put it into action, in a way that is consistent with Christ's own teaching in His Body the Church, there is catechesis.

CATECHESIS

With Catechesis, the understanding of God we receive and hand on is rooted not in our imaginations, but in what God Himself has revealed to us. We can know God for who He truly is and understand His will for what it really is. Catechesis also enables us to worship God in Spirit and truth, recognizing how Christ's public ministry continues through His abiding Sacramental presence in the Church. We learn to recognize and love Christ in our Sacramental encounters with Him: how in Baptism we enter into a relationship with Him; how in Penance we repent, confess our sins and receive His forgiveness; how He feeds us with His own Body and Blood in the Eucharist; how the Holy Spirit confirms us with supernatural gifts to do God's work; how in Anointing of the Sick, Christ heals us when we are seriously ill or weak; how He enters into Marriage and confers Holy Orders; how He calls us to and strengthens us for the life of faith where we do His work by sharing in His three-fold ministry as Priest, Prophet, and King.

Catechesis ensures that our understanding of right and wrong, good and evil are rooted not in faulty and selfish thinking, but based on God's own teachings. We learn the 10 Commandments, the Beatitudes of Jesus, the Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy, and other moral principles given by God to protect what is good and necessary for us to flourish in His image and likeness, to help us form our consciences, and to pursue the way which God assures us is the path to eternal life. While it is not always easy to do what is good and right, a well formed conscience helps us to look beyond and resist temptations so that we can embrace what is truly best for us: a loving, faithful, and fruitful closeness to God; respect and love in our relationships with others; honesty and trust, faithfulness to marriage, family commitments and other social responsibilities; just and honorable dealings with others, and purity of heart. The example of Jesus teaches us to practice justice and



charity. In Christ we live in true freedom, not some arbitrary license to choose evil, but actual freedom to do what is good and right. Jesus said “I am the Good Shepherd. I know mine and mine know me. They hear my voice and they follow me.” By presenting us with knowledge of Christ’s teachings, catechesis helps us to distinguish His voice from other competing voices in the world. Through our knowing Him, we can become like Christ, living as He did in obedience to the Father, and in self-giving love for others.

PARISH LIFE

Like the disciples on the road to Emmaus, we can invite Christ to join us on our journey and to explain to us the mysteries of life and God’s revelation to us. In the Gospels, disciples not only listened to Jesus, they allowed themselves to be corrected by Him. They asked Him to explain and clarify his teachings. Jesus welcomed Thomas with all His doubts and helped him to accept the truth. Likewise, we can turn to Christ in His body the Church to find answers to the questions of life that vex us. In His Body the Church, Christ will work with us just as He worked with His disciples nearly 2,000 years ago. The Holy Spirit guides the Church in truth to find answers to questions and issues that were never raised during the lifetime of Jesus; yet, with the Spirit’s guidance, the Church discerns answers to these questions in ways that are faithful to the core of Christ’s teaching. The more we open our minds and hearts, and are willing to put on the mind of Christ, the more we can bring our faith to a deeper level where Christ Himself burns in our hearts and helps us to be on fire for God, and in God for others.

Because of the Holy Spirit’s guidance and Christ’s abiding presence, Saint Paul could identify the Church as the pillar and foundation of truth. This foundation inspires us to be confident and pass on the truth we have received from Christ. We see faith as an asset and strength. Truth sets us free. Our knowledge of God, His truth and love are the greatest treasures that we can share with others. The love and imitation of Christ are the best examples that we can give to others. When we share with others what God has given to us, however, we do so with utmost humility. The truth belongs to God, and is entrusted to us. The Church neither adds to nor subtracts from what God has revealed. Rather, we see ourselves as caretakers and custodians of God’s eternal and unchanging truth. In time, our appreciation and understanding of God’s truth grows and develops, but the truth itself never changes because Christ is the Truth and He never changes.



Catechesis is Christ loving us through His sharing Himself in truth. Likewise it is a way for us to receive the love of Christ's truth, and to love others by sharing it. ***We are called to envision ourselves as catechists.*** In a world where minds are confused, consciences are unformed, and hearts are broken, we can be Christ for others by catechizing in His name, freeing people from the paralysis of uncertainty, correcting misunderstandings and error, helping people to find the goodness of God, discover goodness and dignity within themselves, and respect the dignity of others.

Catechesis in the Church Alive:

A Church Alive is a parish where Christ is working in the work done by all members of the parish, through competent, dependable, enthusiastic ministries, and through personal encounters with others, especially in the family, to give Himself in Catechesis, to teach the Good News of the Kingdom of God, to witness the truth that sets us free, the love of God and neighbor; to impart and pass on the gift of Faith.

The family is absolutely indispensable to Christ's work of catechesis. The home is understood as a Domestic Church, the smallest, most personal and intimate of faith communities, the most basic building block of Christ's Body the Church, and the first and most vital cell of human society. A Church Alive offers support so that parents can be the first teachers of their children in the ways of faith; so that the home can be imbued with a rich culture of faith, where spouses support each other and children receive a solid footing in their knowledge of God and Christ's teachings. It is through their catechesis that parents provide a firm foundation for their children, a foundation upon which the parish can build as the children grow older.

CATECHESIS

A Church Alive is a parish that offers programs for faith development in all stages of life: childhood, sacramental preparation, youth ministry, young adult formation, and adult education. The parish also provides programs that are geared to all stages of faith development: programs of evangelization for people who are searching and are designed to help awaken faith, programs for people who are secure in their faith and are geared to help deepen and enflame their faith, and programs that equip parishioners for competent ministry and responsible service within the parish. Regarding catechesis in particular, an alive parish ensures that those who teach in catechetical programs are well trained and supported so that they are secure, faithful, and effective in witnessing their faith as catechists.



Parishioners in a Church Alive understand that catechetical development is a life-long process that begins with initial conversion, and continues with education and ongoing formation. It is not something from which we ever graduate, but which we continue to deepen in every stage of life. Learning and growing in faith occurs in many activities: by the study of scripture and Church teaching, regular worship of God at Mass and in the other sacraments, through service and participation in parish life. As our faith grows and develops, we are able to perceive, know and love God more clearly; as we grow in the knowledge of God, we also understand ourselves better because we are His image, and in Him we find our fulfillment. That is the goal of catechesis: for us to know and love God, to know and love ourselves and others, to find our fulfillment in Him, and help others to do the same.

PARISH LIFE

(4) Formation – Building up our Relationships with Christ and the Church

Formation is the element of parish life which promotes a lived faith which is bold, courageous and effective.

What Christ does for us:

In scripture, God's interaction with us is described as formation in many ways: God formed the universe out of nothing; He formed Adam from the clay of the Earth. Only God is capable of this kind of formation. Likewise, In the writings of Isaiah and Jeremiah, God's people are described as clay being formed by Him, the Potter; Saint Paul says we are predestined to be conformed to the image of Christ; and "Do not conform yourselves to this age but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and pleasing and perfect." Though many parts, together we form the One Body of Christ. Saint Peter says: "Like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house." These images disclose God's intention for us. They convey working together in intimacy. Like clay in the potter's hands, our existence has a purpose. We are important. To find our reason for being, we need to give ourselves completely to God and let Him unite us, form us, conform us, transform us. Unlike clay, however, we have intellect and free will. Our formation requires a willingness to entrust ourselves to God's hands and yield to His direction. We must participate in our formation.

God has also made a point of confronting influences that prevent Him from forming us and our lives. "I am the Lord, your God. You shall have no other gods before Me," is the first of His ten commandments. A main theme of the prophets was the condemnation of idolatry because idols are put in God's place by those who use



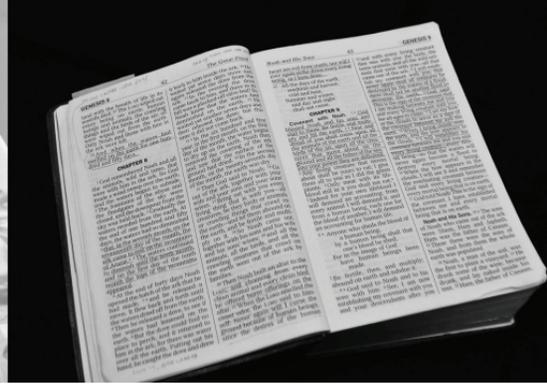
them. In the parable of the sower, Jesus warned that our relationship with God can be stolen away; social pressures can cause it to wither away; worldly concerns and anxieties can choke it off. Jesus said, "No one can serve two masters. He will either hate one and love the other, or be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon." By His forty days in the desert, the example of Jesus showed how we are tempted to allow lesser things to become more important to us than our relationship with God and the purpose He has in mind for us. Jesus showed that such temptations must be resisted. Lesser things can and will shape us if we let them, but God alone can form us toward our intended fulfillment.

In His public ministry, Jesus was engaged in at least three types of formation. Through his teachings, acts of forgiveness, healings, and other miraculous works, He was restoring what had been broken by sin and forming *the Kingdom of God*. Jesus called and formed *His disciples* by living with them and helping them to grow in a relationship with Him. He united His disciples to form *His Body the Church* to continue his work of restoration and renewal in the world.

Through discipleship, God forms us in a relationship of love with Him: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. He also forms us in and through His Body the Church. We are formed as the original disciples were. Jesus calls us through the Church's work of evangelization. In the Eucharist we become one with Him and each other. With other disciples we center our lives on Him, and follow Him. Through catechesis we learn from Him to become like Him. As good stewards we discern and unlock our God given gifts so that we can share in His ministry. In all of these ways Christ reaches out to establish a loving relationship, to guide us, strengthen us, and help us grow. His formation enables us to discover a deep meaning and purpose in life, formed in love, and led by Him according to God's intentions.

FORMATION

We are formed by Christ to be members of His Body the Church. As the Head of the Body, Christ calls us to celebrate our unity in Him, to build each other up, and to work together, to strengthen and be strengthened by each other so that in the life of the Church, each of us, according to our gifts, accept, excel, and serve faithfully in our proper roles. Saint Paul says that we are all indispensable and that we have unity when each part, working properly, "brings about the body's growth and builds itself up in love."



As the One Body of Christ, Jesus calls us to participate in His formation of the Kingdom of God: a kingdom of truth, life, holiness, grace, justice, love, and peace. Jesus trained His original disciples by empowering them and entrusting them to go out in groups to do His work. In the life of the Church, Jesus continues to offer us formative opportunities for ministry through tools and programs that are designed to empower and support us to do His work. Through our involvement in the Church's ministry Christ forms us to help Him manifest God's Kingdom and renew the face of the earth.

What Formation helps us do:

**PARISH
LIFE**

As disciples, led by Christ, formation helps us build up strong, trusting relationships with God and with each other. We all need relationships that help us grow in God's grace and become our very best. As Church, our relationships are rooted in Christ Himself, along with fellow parishioners. Together, we involve Jesus deeply in our daily lives. We identify the Church with Christ's Own language of intimacy, calling God our Father, and each other sisters and brothers. Gathering together and sharing faith, hope, and love, we strengthen each other. In Christ we foster bonds of fellowship, fraternity, and solidarity. As Saint Paul wrote: "If one part suffers, all the parts suffer with it; if one part is honored, all the parts share its joy."

In the home, the domestic church, formation builds and shapes an authentic culture of faith, virtue and holiness. The faithful love of spouses and their unity in Christ are powerful forces that help children grow in God's grace. To save the world, God chose to be born into a family. As a child Jesus taught us how important committed spouses, parents, and families are for children. By embracing and living their vocation, parents work with God to guide and help their children recognize and listen to God's calling in their own lives. By their example of discipleship, parents teach their children how to be formed and thrive in a relationship with God. Homes are meant to be schools of discipleship where Gospel values flourish.

In formation, *we commit ourselves* to a personal, growing, fruitful relationship with God. ***We envision ourselves as being formed by God.*** We allow God to order our lives. Though it may be difficult, we make time because God is our first priority. There may be many good things in life, but we avoid allowing them to take the place of God. Our schedules and priorities are arranged to keep God at the center, where



He belongs. This commitment also pertains to involvement in our parish. We cannot keep a relationship with Christ the Head if we do not keep a relationship with His Body, the Church. We participate in our formation by prayerfully setting and keeping goals that intend to help us grow in loving relationships with God and with fellow parishioners. In the family, this also includes goals for our domestic church.

In formation, we *invest ourselves* in our relationship with Christ in the life of the Church. We know we belong to God. We identify ourselves with Christ. We are registered members who invest ourselves for the good health and well being of our parish. We want to serve others in the name of Christ. We take ownership of the responsibilities that come with being a faithful Catholic. “You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your being, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself.” The Kingdom of God becomes the reference point from which we examine and approach the rest of our lives. We discern daily how God is calling us to live out His will. A regular examination of conscience can be very helpful. If any commandments have been broken, it can be a sign that we have allowed other things to become more important than God or the dignity of others. We immerse ourselves in the things that help us grow in holiness. On Sundays and Holy Days, we worship God in communion with fellow Catholics at Mass, even when on vacation. At home we use sacramentals to remind us that we are people of faith: a Bible, the Catechism, crucifixes, religious art, holy water, a family altar, etc. There are even Catholic board games. We have cultural customs especially during the liturgical seasons that help faith come alive in the home. Such tangible experiences are especially helpful for the religious formation of children.

FORMATION

In formation we show our love for God by *engaging ourselves* and in the life of our parish. Our goal is to live in Christ, grow in holiness, and reach out in love to others. We keep Christ at the center of our communion with God and others by participating vocally in prayers and singing at Mass. The reading of scripture and church teaching help us to put on the mind of Christ, especially when we are confused and searching for answers. We double check what we hear said about the Church and about her teachings. The Church can explain herself much more capably than secular sources who have no authority or training to teach the faith. We take part in spiritual and faith formation programs that bring us together with other parishioners. We volunteer for programs that build up fellowship and strengthen parish life. We make retreats, pilgrimages, etc.. We seek opportunities to use our God given gifts in parish ministries, and in charitable service to others. In the home we pray daily together, especially at meals. We pass on the faith to our children and involve them in parish programs. They learn from our example that a desire for



holiness, prayer, active involvement at Mass, participation in parish life, serving in ministries and kindness to others is what it means to live a good Catholic life.

Formation in the Church Alive:

A Church Alive is a parish where Christ works in the work done by all members of the parish, through competent, dependable, enthusiastic ministries, and through personal encounters with others to give Himself in relationships that cultivate and accompany fruitful growth in discipleship. It is God, Himself, who forms the Church, by giving us the spark of life with His gifts of faith, hope and love. We receive the spark and enflame it through our response of discipleship. A Church is Alive when God works in and through our humanity to get His work done. In a parish alive, relationships are deep, members are active, committed, invested, and engaged. Because everyone accepts their responsibility to work together for the success of the Church's mission, the parish is able to offer much in return.

**PARISH
LIFE**

Formation in the Church Alive always begins through sincere and thoughtful evangelization. A vibrant church is never cliquish and inwardly focused. A Church Alive looks outward seeking opportunities to help people encounter and experience the love, mercy and truth of Jesus Christ. Reaching out to offer a welcoming, affirming, friendly, caring attitude; showing an interest in what people are looking for and what they have to offer; the great first step toward a Church Alive is in calling, accompanying, and forming people to be disciples.

In a parish alive, faithful members embrace formation and are eager to grow in their relationships with God and with fellow parishioners. They seek and engage themselves in opportunities to deepen their understanding of the faith, and to cultivate and put to good use their God given gifts. While communion with Christ is celebrated most centrally through regular participation at Mass on Sundays and Holy Days, a deep, loving relationship with God is also nourished by Eucharistic adoration and other opportunities for prayer, worship and spiritual reflection. By daily discerning and living their vocations in their personal commitments to God and each other, faithful disciples allow faith, hope and love to form the experiences of their daily lives. The Good Shepherd calls us, we listen to His voice, and we follow.



As Christ's Body, we also commit ourselves to forming a robust parish life. Effective parish leadership teams are identified, invited, and supported for good planning and communication. A parish alive provides gatherings and workshops that help parishioners discern how they can become more active in parish organizations and ministries. Parishes thrive best when people are asked to do what they enjoy and are good at doing. Questionnaires, inventories, and assessments can help parishioners identify and share information regarding their leadership skills, talents, and interests for serving. Information explaining all of the parish programs and ministries can also help parishioners to find their niches in parish life.

Because parishioners accept their responsibility to step forward to help out, the Church Alive is able to organize vibrant programs for catechetical and spiritual formation for parish members of all ages: preschool, grade school, youth ministry, young adults, and older adults. In such parishes, parishioners understand that we never graduate from our faith. To live our faith to the full, we know we need more than an eighth grade or high school education. We aim for a deeply formed, mature and secure Catholic identity. Ample resources enable the parish to provide training and support so that teachers and catechists feel secure and capable in doing God's work. Sharing the faith not only helps others, but also makes us more like Christ.

FORMATION

Activity in the parish alive also involves opportunities for building up bonds of friendship and fellowship. Social gatherings help to strengthen a strong sense of community and parish identity. Small faith-based communities bring groups of parishioners together on a more intimate level. Tremendous spiritual growth is possible through the support that individuals offer in these small groups. It's good when parishioners can establish and grow in friendships that are based in faith.

Likewise the parish alive is committed to helping families be everything that God wants them to be: stressing the importance of holy vocations, accompanying engaged couples toward a good start in marriage, strengthening families that are healthy, supporting families in need of healing, and helping faith, hope, and love to come alive in all parish homes. Within the family, the domestic church, tremendous spiritual growth is enkindled when relationships are rooted in faith and our relationship with God. Praying together, openly and honestly before God can build intimacy not only with Him but also between family members. As disciples, children grow when an authentic culture of faith is fostered at home. Children are formed as disciples and members of the Body of Christ through the example and involvement



of their parents. Parents see themselves as ministers for the formation of their children: keeping Christ at the center of family life, regular participation in Sunday worship, catechesis both in the home and parish, parents volunteering and also getting their children involved in parish ministries, programs and events, etc. Parents prepare children to discern a future vocation by teaching them to be open to God's calling and helping them to recognize the gifts that God has given to them.

Finally, a Church Alive evangelizes not only by welcoming people at the beginning of their spiritual formation. The Church also evangelizes by reaching out into the community through charitable works and programs for service. In Christ, the parish alive commits itself to forming the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom is not built by gazing inwardly, but only by a willingness to give generously of ourselves by reaching out to others. Whether they believe in God or not, everyone in the local community should be able to recognize and celebrate the positive difference that we as the Body of Christ are making for our neighbors.

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When we focus on Christ and our formation as His disciples, when we focus on working together to form a robust parish life endowed with ample manpower, talents, and financial resources, the fruits of God's forming us bear fruit in the formation also of His Kingdom in our local area. It falls upon us, however to be intentional disciples who constantly pray and ask, "How is God calling me?" and "How can I work with Christ and others in my parish to make a difference?"

(5) Stewardship - Living our Relationship with Christ as the Church

In parishes, Stewardship is the element which encompasses prayer of thanksgiving for the many gifts of God and the sharing of those gifts through acts of service.

What Christ does for us:

Stewardship is a major theme in sacred scripture. The book of Genesis begins with God creating the earth to take care of us, and creating us to take care of the earth. Formed in God's image, before original sin, we enjoyed a four-fold integrity in our relationships: with God, with creation, between male and female, and within ourselves. Original sin damaged this integrity, affecting all of these relationships. To restore what had been lost or wounded by sin, God then took the initiative to repair and restore our relationships. In a sense, God has revealed that He is the first good



steward who shows an unflinching commitment to care for and restore everything that belongs to Him. Stewardship also plays a major role in our response to God. He only asks us to do for Him what He has already done for us. Good stewardship is best understood as showing love for ourselves, God, others, and the world by taking good care of and using properly the good things He gives us in and around our lives.

STEWARDSHIP

Stewardship was an important theme in the teachings of Jesus. In the parable of the talents, two of three stewards were rewarded for acting prudently with the goods their master had entrusted to them. The third was punished for putting his goods aside and doing nothing. In the parable of the vigilant servants, Jesus said “Much will be expected of the person entrusted with much, and still more will be demanded of the person entrusted with more.” Jesus often taught parables about wheat fulfilling its purpose by producing abundant fruit. He taught that by their fruits you know whether a tree is good or bad. The implication is clear: God has given us life, faith, hope, love, our material gifts and abilities, and opportunities in our personal lives for a purpose – to bear good fruit. We do this by accepting our responsibility to do the will of our heavenly Father through faithful stewardship. Jesus challenges us to be good stewards with the gifts and opportunities God gives us to form ourselves, His Body the Church, and the Kingdom of God.

Jesus also warned against selfish attitudes that impede faithful stewardship: lack of trust, lack of charity, and lack of mercy, etc. In the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, the rich man is punished with eternal fire for having ignored Lazarus who suffered outside his door. In the story of the rich man, Jesus told him that in order to inherit eternal life, he must keep the commandments; Jesus then said “sell what you have, and give to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven.” To his disciples, he then commented: “How hard it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God.” Jesus also taught: “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 your treasure is, there also will your heart be.” In the parable of the rich fool, Jesus warned about storing up treasure for oneself but not being rich in what matters to God. “Do not worry and say, ‘What are we to eat?’ or ‘What are we to drink?’ or ‘What are we to wear?’ Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things will be given you besides.” Teaching about discipleship, Jesus said “Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me.” He added: “What profit is there for one to gain the whole world and forfeit his life?” and “Whoever is ashamed of me and my words in this faithless and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of when He comes in His Father’s glory.” Jesus did not lack clarity when he described and confronted obstacles to faithful stewardship.



Jesus taught stewardship most clearly by His own personal example. As a child, the devout upbringing he received from Mary and Joseph inspired Him to spend three days in His Father's house, the temple in Jerusalem, where He sat with the teachers and discussed the law with them. In the desert for forty days, as the devil presented three temptations to be selfish, Jesus remained steadfastly faithful to the Father. Throughout His whole ministry, Jesus made use of every personal encounter and circumstance, applying any and all resources that were at hand, to manifest God's Kingdom to others by prayer, teaching, healing, reconciling, etc. He opened the scriptures and proclaimed them. He vanquished evil and restored the outcast and those with faith to lives of grace. He received five loaves and two fish, offered to Him in stewardship, and fed multitudes. Exhorting his disciples to humility and service, he referred to His own example: "The Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many." Washing the feet of His disciples, Jesus said "I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you also should do." Jesus became the Good Shepherd who laid down His life for His sheep. He has commanded us: "Love one another as I love you."

PARISH LIFE

Finally, Jesus practiced stewardship by training His disciples to continue His work, by sending the Holy Spirit to be helper and guide, and instituting Sacraments to ensure His abiding presence in the life of the Church. During His public ministry, the disciples learned as apprentices to help Jesus with His work. To His disciples He entrusted the mysteries of the Kingdom. Saint Paul wrote: "Thus one should regard us as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God." At the Ascension, Jesus entrusted His mission to the Apostles so that His work would continue in and through them: "Go into the whole world and proclaim the gospel to every creature;" Peter was assigned the role of leading all stewardship within the Church. One of the titles for the Pope is "Servant of the servants of God." Christ sent the Holy Spirit to endow gifts that enable all of us as members of Christ's Body to work together for the mission of the Church. As Helper, Advocate, Consoler, and Spirit of Truth, the Holy Spirit guides us to all truth, so that we will keep good custody of our faith in Christ, Who is our Way, Truth, and Life. Within the life of the Church, Christ abides in us and we in Him by means of the Sacraments. All of the Sacraments are rooted in the saving events of Christ's public ministry, and have enabled the faithful in every subsequent generation to encounter, live in Christ, and do His work. Among these, the Eucharist is central as Christ's own means of strengthening us with His own Body and Blood. Christ abides in us with His grace and life, as He calls us as good stewards to do His work in His name.



What Stewardship helps us do:

Stewardship flows from our understanding that as disciples we belong to God in Whose image we are created and to Christ who purchased our salvation at a great price. Saint Paul said, “In Him we live, and move, and have our being.” and “Through faith you are all children of God in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ,” and “We are ambassadors for Christ, as if God were appealing through us.” We are members of Christ’s Body the Church, working together in Christ to form the Kingdom. We do this for our own holiness, for the good of one another, and to renew and restore the world to a full and fruitful experience of God’s grace. Our belonging identifies who we are and how we set our priorities. ***We envision ourselves as stewards of Christ’s ministry.***

Scripture reminds us that genuine stewardship is not possible without intentional, personal, sacrificial giving. Jesus said: “If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.” Peter exclaimed to Jesus: “We have given up everything and followed you!” The early disciples willingly endured attacks, beatings, imprisonment, and martyrdom, yet never wavered in their commitment to share the Gospel or engage in Christ’s works of mercy. Describing the apostolic church, Saint Luke wrote: “There was no needy person among them, for those who owned property or houses would sell them, bring the proceeds of the sale, and put them at the feet of the apostles, and they were distributed to each according to need.” Saint Paul praised the Macedonians who, though poor, contributed generously to help the poor in Jerusalem. Jesus commended the example of the poor widow saying “others have made offerings from their surplus wealth, but she, from her poverty, has contributed her whole livelihood.” He taught “Give and it will be given to you. They will pour into your lap a good measure – pressed down and running over. For by your standard of measure it will be measured to you in return.” Saint Paul wrote, “God loves a cheerful giver.”

Stewardship also requires inner growth and purification. This involves **STEWARDSHIP** sacrificing pride and vanity by willingly accepting and embracing the priority of God, His mission in the Church, and our commitment to grow as disciples. We are stewards of our spiritual gifts. We actively cultivate faith, hope, and love in our lives and in our relationships. We rely on God and His grace through frequent and devout reception of the Sacraments, as well as a deepening familiarity with scripture and Church teaching. We follow the Commandments, live the Beatitudes, and practice the Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy. We forgive others as God has forgiven us. We strive for humility and purity of heart. Jesus warned that when we fast, pray,



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and give alms, we should do it not out of vanity but discreetly to avoid bringing attention to ourselves. Saint Paul wrote “Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been purchased at a price. Therefore, glorify God in your body,” and “I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me; I live by faith in the Son of God who has loved me and given Himself up for me.” We count our blessings with grateful hearts. We understand that the Holy Spirit endows each of us with unique personal gifts and calls us to work together to build up God’s kingdom in our parish. We actively discern our personal spiritual gifts that God has given us. We cultivate them, and pursue opportunities to use them through active service and ministry in the Church. We heed Saint Paul’s words: “Do not neglect the spiritual gift within you,” and remember Saint Peter: “As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of God.” Stewardship is never about us. It is about collaborating as members of the Body of Christ and continuing the work of Jesus. It is the love of God and neighbor put into action.

As stewards we order our lives and commit our material resources to build up the Church and the Kingdom of God. We are registered and rooted in our parish as dependable, loyal, active members who put our material concerns into God’s hands and step forward to offer generously from our time, talent and treasure. To ensure that the Church will never suffer from a lack of volunteers, we give our time and talents intentionally and sacrificially by engaging ourselves in parish programs and ministries. We discern our gifts with a view to parish priorities and needs and offer our personal and professional abilities to further the Church’s mission and Her efforts to build the Kingdom of God within the local community. We raise our children to be active in the parish, teaching them that service to God and others is simply part of what it means to be a good Catholic. To ensure that our parish has the financial resources necessary for competent ministries, vibrant programs, and charitable outreach, we also tithe intentionally and sacrificially on a regular basis from our own financial resources.

As stewards, we surrender the circumstances of our lives to build God’s Kingdom and discover the joy, contentment, satisfaction, and peace that come with realizing we are created to give ourselves to God and others in love. Though we are finite and limited, stewardship takes our work up into God’s work, which is infinite. The parable of Jesus describes God’s Kingdom as a tiny mustard seed which becomes an enormous shrub and gives shelter in its branches to the birds of the sky. Likewise, we grow when we extend ourselves and reach out in acts of loving service. Saint Paul said “We hold this treasure in earthen vessels, that the surpassing power



may be of God and not from us,” and “Be a vessel for lofty use, dedicated, beneficial to the master of the house, ready for every good work.” God’s grace ignites our discipleship via stewardship to become like a lampstand by which others can see our good deeds and give glory to God. Acting in ministries, we become co-creators with God and discover who we are as the image of God. Our lives are not given over to selfish gratification which is fleeting, but to a virtuous and God-like life that commits us to healing and blessing others. Saint Paul wrote: “The Kingdom of God is not a matter of food or drink, but of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. Whoever serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and approved by others. Then let us pursue what leads to peace and to building up of one another.” Nothing can be more satisfying than to have the sense of purpose, meaning, direction and fulfillment that comes with living a life that is committed to the love and service of others. Through authentic and generous stewardship we learn by serving others that we serve Christ Himself. By imitating Christ, we become Christ for one another.

Stewardship in the Church Alive:

STEWARDSHIP

A Church Alive is a parish where Christ works in the active giving done by everyone: clergy, staff, and parish members, all offering intentionally and sacrificially of themselves, their gifts, and resources, to manifest the Kingdom of God in the local community. Saint Paul used the image of a body, the Body of Christ, to describe the multifaceted collaboration that occurs within the life of the Church Alive. The body functions well when all members of the parish community actively offer their God given gifts and minister according to them for the good of the whole Church. He wrote: “Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them” and “There are different gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are different forms of service, but the same Lord; and there are workings, but the same God who produces them all in every one.” Saint Paul says that we are all indispensable and that we have unity when each part, working properly, “brings about the body’s growth and builds itself up in love.” In the Church Alive, there can be no room for any member to think that he or she has nothing to offer. Such an attitude contradicts scripture. In fact, for a parish to be fully alive, all members need to work together in unity as the Body of Christ.

Parish leaders in a Church Alive set an example by exercising careful and responsible stewardship with all goods entrusted to the parish through the sacrificial and intentional giving of the parishioners. The vitality of a parish requires generous financial stewardship on the part of all parishioners. A parish can only provide what the gifts and efforts of parishioners make possible. Good stewardship



also requires financial accountability and transparency, collaboration and oversight by the parish finance council and periodic auditing to ensure that the offerings of parishioners are put to the best possible use. Pastorally, it involves asking for and evaluating input from parish members to identify opportunities and needs within the parish and local community, setting annual parish goals and priorities, and allocating available parish resources for the best possible pastoral outcomes. It also includes communicating a vision focused not only on maintenance but primarily on mission, and inviting parishioners to be generous stewards who support success and improvement in all aspects of parish life.

PARISH LIFE

A Church Alive requires a capable professional team of Lay Ecclesial Ministers who assist the Pastor by operating within the means of the parish to organize worship, programs for catechesis and formation, and pastoral ministries for the care of souls within the local community. All aspects of parish life need to be supported also by groups of committed volunteers who provide the means by which the parish can organize ministries in the name of Christ. A Church Alive calls parishioners to step forward, and cultivates leadership for parish ministry teams. These teams can support the Pastor and Lay Ecclesial Ministers by helping to operate an abundance of robust programs, activities, and ministries for worship, evangelization, deepening the faith, discerning gifts, fostering vocations, strengthening relationships within the parish, offering fellowship, organizing pastoral outreach for the poor and sick, etc.

In a parish alive, parishioners know that they have been blessed by God and feel a deep desire to give back to make a difference. Alive parishes help members to soar in ministries by providing opportunities for them to serve in ways that match their talents and interests: what they are good at, and what they like to do. The parish calls forth the talents and gifts of individual parishioners and organizes opportunities for them to identify and discern their gifts. The parish recruits a team from within the parish to help other parishioners discern how they can use their interests and gifts in parish programs and ministries. Ministries are most effective when teams include parishioners with complementary gifts: leaders, organizers, hosts, and workers, etc. Meetings and opportunities for training are scheduled to make sure that activity within the parish is well organized, executed, and evaluated. People who serve in parish ministries excel when they have a clear understanding of their duties and when they know whom to turn to for support.



Part of stewardship has always been to ensure that the work of Christ will continue from one generation through the next. As we share in Christ's work we prepare others to work alongside us and continue Christ's work when He calls us to our eternal home. Christ trained His Apostles and disciples for this. Every faithful generation of the Church has done the same ever since. In the Church Alive, the formation of children as good stewards is determined largely by time management that keeps God at the center of family and personal life, by the example of parents, and through supervised age-appropriate opportunities for service. Through their own service, children grow as disciples in a relationship with God and the Church, understanding at every age that they are called and capable of doing God's work, and that serving the Church and others in the name of Christ is an essential part of being Catholic. To ensure the safety of children, everyone involved in ministry must comply with church and civil laws regarding the Protection of God's Children.

STEWARDSHIP

Good stewardship in an alive parish is made possible by several intersecting factors: Life centered in Christ; discernment of how God is calling us individually and as a parish; recognition of the abundance of God's gifts, cultivation of our gifts, and a generous willingness to share them for the love of God and others; good leadership, organization, hospitality, and hard work; active engagement of all members within the parish community; a shared commitment taking active steps for growth and mutual support for mature discipleship; and a deep desire to glorify God, and build up the Church and God's kingdom with love. The Mission of the Church is to proclaim Christ incarnated, crucified, risen, and returning, to invite others to His new life of grace, to ensure that people can worship and be strengthened by Him in the Sacraments, to provide opportunities for catechetical and spiritual formation, and to care for pastoral needs. St. Teresa of Avila once said "Christ has no body now on earth but yours, no hands but yours, no feet but yours. Yours are the eyes through which to look out Christ's compassion to the world. Yours are the feet with which he is to go about doing good. Yours are the hands with which he is to bless men now." All of us are called to use God's gifts of courage, collaboration and compassion, and to learn Jesus, love Jesus, and live Jesus. Christ fulfills his mission in us through our willingness to work together generously as good stewards of his many gifts.



HOW DO WE WORK TOGETHER TO REVITALIZE THE CHURCH

Thus far, this Pastoral Plan document has reflected on several key concepts that help us to chart our mission as a parish and as a Church Alive:

1. We are called to a loving and life-changing encounter with God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We experience and grow in this encounter through a loving relationship with Christ in His Body, the Church.
2. As members of the Church, we are called to be committed, intentional disciples of Jesus. Discipleship is cultivated as we are formed by Him, and work with Him to continue His mission of saving love in the world today.
3. As members of the Church, we are called to accept, discern, and offer our gifts and talents. Our gifts enable us to work together in unity with Jesus and with each other as the Body of Christ.
4. All members of the Church are called by God to engage in all areas of parish life: Eucharist, Evangelization, Catechesis, Formation, and Stewardship. In these five areas of Church life we are formed in God’s truth and love and we discern how to share our gifts in loving service of God and neighbor.
5. In all of these ways, we live out the mission entrusted to us by Christ. God gives us grace to build up a fruitful relationship with Him, to build up each other as the Church, and to build up the kingdom of God in our surrounding community.

WORKING TOGETHER

Earlier in this Pastoral Plan booklet, we addressed problems that we are facing which need to be addressed in order to become a Church Alive. At that point, it was observed that we face a critically unhealthy balance between many people who expect the parish to be here for them and significantly fewer people who are willing to be here as the parish. But there is more to it than this. Another major part of the problem is that we are facing major shifts that have occurred both in the Church and in the surrounding culture while also operating with an infrastructure, ways of thinking, and old habits that have become outdated and ineffective. To be a vibrant parish in the third Millennium:

- 1) We need a new infrastructure that better equips us for Christ’s mission.
- 2) We need new ways of thinking that suit us to carry out Christ’s mission.
- 3) We need to build new habits that effectively carry out Christ’s mission.

Developing a new infrastructure to equip us for Christ’s mission

Sixty years ago, the Church committed herself to carrying out Christ’s mission by employing a vast global network of institutions for diocesan and parish work, healthcare, education, pastoral outreach, etc. These institutions were organized, led and staffed by equally vast cohorts of priests and nuns. Meanwhile, lay people also did much for Christ, but often in peripheral and ancillary ways. The maxim was for lay people to “pray, pay, and obey.” For the most part, priests and



nuns were seen as those who did ministry. Lay people were those who were ministered to.

Since then, as the numbers of clergy and religious have dwindled, we have witnessed parish mergers and the closure of Catholic schools, hospitals, etc. Lay people have stepped up to fill the gap, but we still operate with an infrastructure that relies on vast numbers of clergy and religious who are no longer here.

NEW INFRA- STRUCTURE

To address this shift we need to work toward a new infrastructure that is both institutional and organic. Saint Paul speaks of the Church as a body with many parts. Each member of Christ's body has a part to play, gifts to offer, a vocation to be discerned so that all of us can work together for the good of the whole body, the Church. In our age, we as Church cannot fully be what God wants us to be unless all of us are stepping up, each in our own way and in our own roles and ministries to do the work of Jesus Christ. In the body of Christ, we are all called to ministry, all of us ministering to and being ministered to by each other, all of us serving as custodians of Christ's saving mission for the world.

This new infrastructure will require the development of lay leadership within the Church and methods for helping people to identify their gifts and discern how God is calling them to be used for service. The role of the laity will be expanded far beyond "pray, pay, and obey." Ultimately, laity will not replace priests and nuns but will support and work with them both as professional Lay Ecclesial Ministers and parish volunteer leaders and helpers who form teams to enrich various areas of parish life.

A new infrastructure should also enable us to examine and reexamine annually the strengths, needs and resources of our parish to determine whether or not we are doing our best, in light of the five areas of parish life, to equip ourselves to work together and carry out the mission that Christ has entrusted to us.

This new infrastructure will be possible and effective only if we also shift from old to new ways of thinking and from old habits to new habits.



Developing new ways of thinking that suit us for carrying out Christ's mission

How we think is vital to who we become. Today many Catholics think of themselves as people for whom the Church exists solely as an institution that can be called upon for various services. What we need are Catholics who understand that we are the Church. God calls us all to help each other, and serve and minister together to help others. The Church can only be fruitful for Christ's mission to the extent that we, together, make it possible for Christ's work to be done. After Christ Himself as the foundation, embracing our Catholic identity is the first building block for a Church Alive. Church is not just something that we do or somewhere we go, it is who we are. Church is inseparable from us. We are the Body of Christ, the Church.

NEW WAYS OF THINKING

We are who we are as Church because we live in a relationship with Christ and with each other as members of His Body. If we are really to be the Church, a relationship with Christ is not optional. Neither is a relationship with each other as the Body of Christ, the Church, optional. Our parish's ability to be a Church Alive depends on the intention of each and every one of us to live these relationships in truth and love. This requires from us a way of thinking that grounds us in our relationship with God and in the parish life that we share. In this context, we can understand why the Sacraments, especially the Eucharist, are so central to us. The Sacraments are God's own way of bringing us to Him, and sustaining us in these relationships. Therefore the Sacraments are indispensable, not optional, to our living out a full and fruitful life as members of the Church.

We are who we are as Church because our relationship with Christ has a purpose – our own salvation and restoration, and the salvation and restoration of the whole world to the full glory of God's kingdom. As the Church, we are commissioned by Christ to carry on His saving mission until He comes again in glory. In this context, we need ways of thinking that will help us to embrace and not flee from the fact that we are called by God to do His work. Each of us has a vocation. In every moment of our lives, we are called to live in ways that glorify Him. No two people are exactly alike. God gives to each of us unique gifts and abilities that enable us to serve His purposes in ways that no one else can. With these gifts, we are also entrusted with the responsibility to use all good things for His purpose. It is up to each and every one of us to discern honestly, trusting God knows what is best for us, what our gifts are and how He wants us to use them to build up each other, to build up the Church, and to build up God's kingdom in the world.

We are who we are because, in our relationship with Him, Christ calls each and every one of us to become His disciples. We need new ways of thinking that



**EUCHARIST
MATRIMONY
HOLY ORDERS
BAPTISM
CONFIRMATION
ANNOINTING OF THE SICK
PENANCE AND RECONCILIATION**



make our discipleship intentional, that commit us to ongoing growth and the unlocking of our gifts in our relationship with God. Our parish cannot fully be a Church Alive if we are not committed to deepening our relationship with Christ through the building of new habits that keep our life centered on Him: habits of regular confession and Mass attendance, prayer, study, and service.

Likewise, as we are called to grow in our own discipleship, we also need to embrace ways of thinking that will enable us to be comfortable with letting our faith be seen and sharing our faith with others. Just as we have been blessed with the opportunity to encounter God because others have passed the faith on to us, it is our responsibility to reach out and help others encounter the good news of God’s mercy and love. In a world where many think of faith as irrelevant, we believe the opposite. Faith in God, and a deep relationship with Him are foundational to having a meaning and purpose in life. It is a great gift that we can share. We need to think in ways that allow God to work through us to awaken faith in others, to call them to discipleship, accompany them in friendship with Jesus, help them recognize and pursue their vocations and help them discern the good purposes of the gifts He has given.

Developing new habits to effectively carry out Christ’s mission

NEW HABITS

Just as we need a new infrastructure and new ways of thinking, we also need new habits that effectively carry out the mission Christ has entrusted to us. The five areas of parish life help us to recognize and identify how we need to develop these new habits. We need habits that will keep the Eucharist at the center of parish life and our individual lives. We need habits that open us to catechesis and formation, and by which we can live out our commitment to catechize and form others around us. We need to practice good stewardship as a habit, giving both financially and through personal service. We need to build habits that make us good at evangelization.

Evangelization is an ongoing aspect in the life of the Church, but as the last several Popes have recognized, the current need for evangelization is more critical than ever. We used to live in a culture that where many more people supported faith in God and the value of religion, and encouraged its regular practice. Even when Catholics did not develop the habits to make us good evangelizers, we could depend on the surrounding culture to do it for us. Because we no longer live in such a cultural context, if we want those we love to know God and grow in faith, we must evangelize them. Additionally, although many in our culture feel no need for God or faith, and it would be counterproductive to proselytize them, there are many others who are searching and experiencing a deep sense of spiritual emptiness and hunger.



For these lost sheep, these prodigal children of God, the lack of evangelization does them a disservice. As Church, we have not persisted for two millennia through a “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy. The foundation to faith is encounter with God, and the foundation to encounter is evangelization.

WORKING TOGETHER

Other shifts in our culture have precipitated the need for other new habits in the Church. Our culture has become much more mobile, and many Catholics practice their faith in ways that are rather nomadic – taking care of their own personal spiritual needs, but in ways that do not foster the building up of a strong and vibrant parish life. For a parish that is a Church Alive, we need Catholics who are registered and rooted in the parish. We need habits that keep registered parishioners engaged in the life of the parish. Habits are formed by repetition. A Church Alive is a church where members form and keep the habits of frequenting the Sacraments, of pursuing programs of faith and spiritual enrichment, and of volunteering their time, talent, and treasure for parish ministries. Keeping Christ at the center of our lives may require giving Him priority on our calendars and saying no to involvement in other activities. When we are willing to do so, we discover many rewards. We know that we are building up a community of love and a world of love. We know that we are keeping God first in our lives. We form friendships with our sisters and brothers in Christ. We know that we are using the good things that God has given to us to carry on the work of Jesus!

New faith-based habits are also needed in our homes. The family is the most basic building block of human society, and the most basic form of the Church. The home is a domestic church where family members form a community of faith. In this community, parents are the first teachers of their children in the ways of faith. Children encounter and grow in Christ when they are evangelized, catechized, and spiritually formed by their parents. Parents need to intentionally develop habits that will enable them to grow in God’s love as spiritual partners, serve each other as ministers of the Sacrament of Marriage, and be leaders in the home where they invite Christ to form a school for discipleship for themselves and their children. Good faith habits in the home open family members to God’s grace, enable them to hear and respond to their vocations, and strengthen them to do God’s work. Such good habits impart to children the values of Christ and the Gospel and strengthen them to live in a culture that may not support their faith. They also provide a solid foundation upon which the parish can build when children participate in formation and catechetical programs.



INITIATIVES OF THE SAINT IRENAEUS PARISH 2018 PASTORAL PLAN

After prayerfully reflecting on the current strengths and needs of our parish, the Saint Irenaeus Pastoral Council has recommended that our parish should establish particular goals to improve the life of the parish and the lives of our parishioners. We have determined and established the five following goals for the coming years:

INITIATIVE #1: IMPROVE THE SUNDAY WORSHIP EXPERIENCE

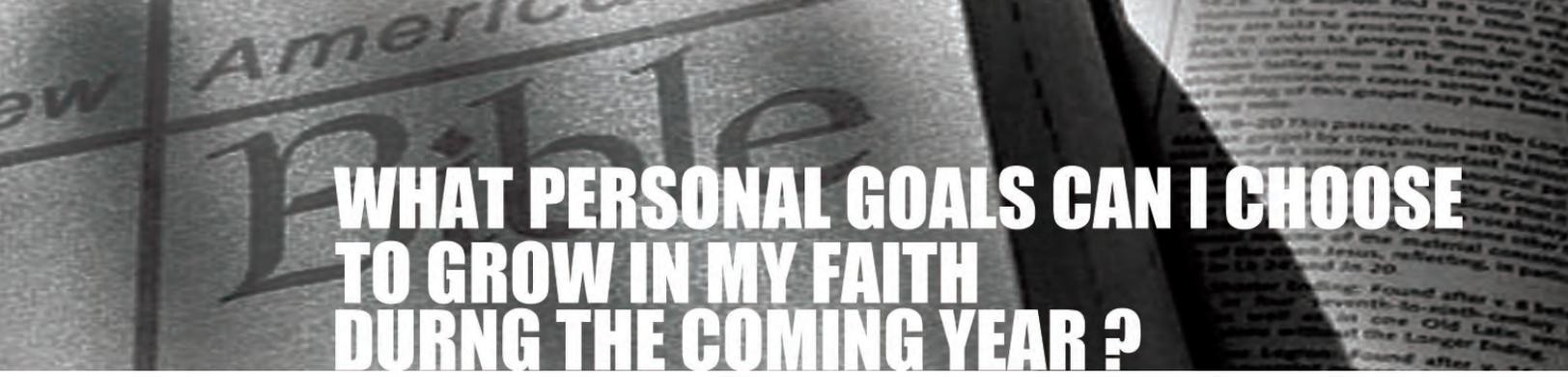
INITIATIVE #2: FORM SEVEN LEADERSHIP WORKING TEAMS FOR PARISH LIFE

- a) **Apostolate** – to coordinate hospitality and outreach in order to help people to feel a strong connection to Christ and the Church.
- b) **Worship** – to ensure that liturgies are engaging, vibrant, and fruitful encounters with Christ.
- c) **Temporalities** (Buildings and Grounds) – to ensure that God’s work may be done safely, and comfortably; and so that parishioners of Saint Irenaeus may have pride in the inviting appearance of our facilities.
- d) **Family Life and Evangelization** – to organize programs and activities for families in the parish.
- e) **Faith Formation** – to ensure that we are doing everything possible to cultivate a deep faith life through sound catechetical and educational formation for our parishioners at all stages of spiritual development.
- f) **Technology and Social Media** - to offer advice, support and services so that our parish can serve everyone’s needs effectively through the effective use of media and technology.
- g) **Ministry Discernment** – to facilitate the calling forth of parishioner gifts and talents.

INITIATIVE #3: PREPARE SAINT IRENAEUS FOR THE ON MISSION TRANSITION

INITIATIVE #4: MAKE SAINT IRENAEUS MORE WELCOMING AND HOSPITABLE

INITIATIVE #5: PROGRAMS FOR SPIRITUAL FORMATION AND ENRICHMENT



WHAT PERSONAL GOALS CAN I CHOOSE TO GROW IN MY FAITH DURING THE COMING YEAR?

We also invite you as members of the parish to set some personal goals for your own spiritual growth in the coming year. Please prayerfully consider setting a goal for yourself in each of the five areas of parish life:

Eucharist:

- If I am not registered as a member of the parish, I will register.
- If I am not coming to Mass regularly, I will commit to participating in Mass Sundays and Holy Days.
- I am coming to Mass regularly, but not really participating. I will commit to participate at Mass.
- Other goal _____

Evangelization

- I am unsure about or would like to strengthen my relationship with Christ or the Church. I will take part in the next Alpha Course at Saint Irenaeus.
- I need to become better at evangelizing others. I will begin by inviting someone to come to Mass with me every month.
- Other goal _____

Catechesis

- I will take part in programs to deepen my understanding of faith and/or scripture.
- I will volunteer to help in a program for CCD or Youth or Young Adult Ministry.
- Other goal _____

Formation

- I want to understand better the personal gifts that God has given me and will be willing to take and discuss assessments to help me discover and share them.
- I will be willing to take part in programs that will help me better understand how to make our parish and my family Schools of Discipleship.
- Other goal _____

Stewardship

- I will give more, intentionally and sacrificially, of my time, talent, and treasure (financial assets) to ensure that the work of Jesus is done effectively in our parish.
- I will volunteer for a parish ministry.
- Other goal _____

How Can You Help?

As you read and learn more about our Pastoral Plan and what it means for you and for the growth of our parish, you will see many opportunities for you to get involved. Please read the following suggestions for ways to assist with the Pastoral Plan. To discern your commitments, consider helping in the areas where the Holy Spirit prompts your interest and desires.

1. I will prioritize attending Mass on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation.
2. I can play an instrument and would like to help develop a contemporary music program.
3. I can facilitate "Praise and Worship" music during Eucharistic Adoration.
("Praise and Worship" is honoring our Lord together. "Praise" is joyfully thanking God for all that He does for us. "Worship" is the uninhibited, joyful surrender of ourselves in personal, verbal communication of our adoration of the Lord in a group.)
4. I can be an usher at some Masses.
5. I can be a lector at some Masses.
6. I can be a greeter for some Masses.
7. I would like to be a Eucharistic Minister.
8. I can serve on the Parish Hospitality Team to welcome new parishioners.
9. I can plan, organize, lead and monitor activities.
10. I can do public speaking.
11. I can offer my technology skills (AV skills, email blasts, website maintenance, etc.).
12. I can serve on a team to help implement the parish goals and initiatives.
13. I can work on advertising parish events.
14. I am a young person and would like to be mentored to effectively serve in a ministry and become a ministry leader.
15. I would like to become a CCD instructor.
16. I would like to help with Catechesis of the Good Shepherd for children 3-5 years old.
17. I would like to become a young adult ministry leader.
18. I would like to help with the youth ministry.
19. I would like to help organize a parish prayer chain.
20. I would like to help with a bereavement committee/group.
21. I have a special gift that I would like to use in a ministry or work of the Parish.

(For example, are you artistic, musical, a planner and organizer, a good listener, good with the elderly, a writer, have a good voice for reading and announcing, good with technology, like to visit people, like to help others, good with teenagers or at babysitting, a data analyzer, a grant writer, good at marketing, good at fixing things, etc.?)

Of the above suggestions, I can help with numbers:

Date

Your Name

Email Address

Cell Phone Number

Home Phone Number

In addition to, instead of, the opportunities listed to help impliment our pastoral plan, I offer to help in the following ways.

1.

2.

3.

4.

Comments



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER READING.

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“The glory of God is man fully alive”

- Saint Irenaeus of Lyon

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