

The Bishop's Parish Visitation

The purpose of a parish visitation is to help me be better aware of the situations and challenges facing the parishes within the Diocese of Springfield. It also allows me the opportunity to provide guidance, encouragement, assistance and direction to support the ongoing effectiveness of ministry in and among our Diocese's parishes. Finally, it allows me a way to appreciate and affirm the abundant, ongoing grace of God evident in the faith and witness of the church in the communities of the Diocese of Springfield.

With these purposes in mind, I thank your Pastor, Fr. Jack Sheaffer, Deacon Bill Brawner, the pastoral staff, pastoral council, the entire parish community and all concerned with this pastoral visit for their consideration and cooperation with me and the staff of the Diocese.

Introduction:

The parish of St. Francis of Assisi, Belchertown was formed in 1923. St. Francis currently has 1737 registered parishioners.

Given the energy and activity I observed, I make the following commendations and recommendations to guide and support the pastor, deacon, professional and volunteer staffs, and all the parishioners of St. Francis parish, as you work together to extend the presence and the power of God's love in Belchertown and the surrounding areas. I recognize the good work done here and I invite you to reflect with me as I review with you my observations and learnings from this recent pastoral visit.

Commendations

Pastor

1. I commend Fr. Sheaffer for his pastoral sensitivity in guiding the parish as the parishioners continue to mourn the sudden passing of Fr. Vern DeCouteau.
2. I commend Fr. Sheaffer for his participation and encouragement of the many ministries of St. Francis parish.

3. I commend Fr. Sheaffer in restructuring the parish website, Facebook and for implementing the new app for the parish social communications.
4. I commend Fr. Sheaffer and the parishioners for finishing the entrance to the church grounds with the stonework and shrubbery.
5. I commend Fr. Sheaffer for continuing the well-established tradition of great attention to the celebration of the liturgies at St. Francis.

Parish Staff

1. I commend Louise Christ for being so welcoming and meeting the needs of parishioners through her roles as Office Manager. I commend Louise for being so well organized, developing the standard operating practices book, and for training people to know and do her job if she were unable to do so herself.
2. I commend Tom Curto, Maintenance Supervisor, and those who assist him with the upkeep and care of the parish properties.
3. I commend Deacon Bill Brawner for his service in scheduling the lectors and extraordinary ministers of the Eucharist for the parish, for coordinating the visitation of the homebound parishioners, and for his presence to the parish during the difficult time of Fr. Vern's illness and passing.
4. I commend the couples of the parish who assist in baptismal preparation and help develop bonds and relationships between new parents and the parish.
5. I commend the parish for sending a Mass card to families who have lost a loved one and for remembering the deceased at a daily Mass.
6. I commend the parish for its bereavement group ministry and recently developing a liturgical planning team for funerals.

7. I commend the parish for creating a family atmosphere among staff, volunteers and parishioners.
8. I commend the parish for its excellent use of social media.

Faith Formation

1. I commend Carolyn Groves for her dedication to the faith formation program and for her enthusiasm for finding new ways to reach out to families.
2. I commend Linda Racicot for her dedication to the First Communion program and for the institution of the “Buddy Program”.
3. I commend the Generations of Faith committee for all of their hard work in making the program such a success.
4. I commend Judy Trickey and the RCIA committee for their ongoing commitment to the RCIA process.
5. I commend Melissa Hurst for her passion for and dedication to the young people of the parish through both her catechetical and youth ministry efforts.

Child and Youth Protection

1. I commend St. Francis for providing a stable, inviting network of activities involving children and youth and a caring and committed presence by clergy and staff.
2. I commend the parish catechists for having been well-trained in Safe Environment curricula and consistently offering annual trainings to the children.
3. I commend Chris Hurst’s work to ensure that all clergy, employees, and volunteers with access to minors participate in the required Safe

Environment processes, and for continually identifying and addressing ways they can be improved upon.

Finance and Building Council

- 1. I commend the members Finance Council for offering their time and talents for the betterment of the parish.**
- 2. I commend the Finance Council for doing its due diligence and for using and studying pertinent available data.**
- 3. I commend the Finance and Building Council for its communication among its members and Fr. Jack for his openness to hearing everyone's input.**

Pastoral Council

- 1. I commend the Parish Council's optimism and hope for the future.**
- 2. I commend the parish for participating in the evangelization process.**
- 3. I commend the members of the Parish Council for offering their time and talent for the betterment of the parish.**

Recommendations

It is clear that St. Francis is a community valiantly working together to be faithful to its mission of faith. In light of the learning from the visit, the following recommendations are offered to the parish leadership for their consideration and dedicated work. I suggest that you continue a dialog with your pastor as you consider these areas for thought and action. Of course, my office and all the Diocesan offices continue to be available to the parish for support and to cooperate in your ministry.

Please consider the following areas for your ongoing planning and ministry development.

Pastor

- 1. I recommend that Fr. Sheaffer work with the members of the Pastoral Council to become a more visioning body in service to the entire parish.**
- 2. I recommend that Fr. Sheaffer work with the Pastoral Council and the wider parish to explore the possibilities of constructing a parish center near the site of the Church.**

Parish Staff

- 1. I recommend that parish staff work with the pastor and parish councils on finding new and creative ways to reach out to young families in town through their needs and interests and in turn inviting them to consider joining the parish.**
- 2. I recommend that the staff engage in long range planning, not just on finances and buildings, but the pastoral and educational needs of the parish as well. Perhaps this can be done during regular staff meetings.**

Faith Formation

- 1. I recommend that all of the groups doing catechesis come together to support and encourage one another and to better understand the goals of each program.**
- 2. I recommend that the parish look into offering young people more service opportunities that flow from the on-going social outreach ministry of the parish.**

Child and Youth Protection

- 1. I recommend that Chris Hurst help identify and train one or more individuals who might take on Safe Environment roles and who could be trained during this year.**
- 2. I recommend as booklets for parents become depleted, order additional Seven Steps for Protecting Your Children from online site or download from the internet.**
- 3. I recommend that links and information regarding Safe Environment programs and personnel be added to the parish bulleting and website.**
- 4. I recommend each building of the parish have the USCCB “Promise to Protect/ Pledge to Heal” poster displayed in foyers and on bulletin boards. These materials are available through the office of Child and Youth Protection.**

Finance Council

- 1. I recommend that the parish dedicate a weekend a year to promoting stewardship and increased giving of time, talent, and treasure.**
- 2. I recommend that the Finance Council work with Fr. Jack on a feasibility study of the need for a social/ ministry center. An architect should be contacted for consultation. Particular emphasis should be given to what the building would be used for, if funding is available not only to build but also sustain it, as well as what can and will be done with the properties consisting of the former Church, former rectory, and K of C Hall.**
- 3. I recommend that the Finance Council work with Fr. Jack to study and implement an online giving option for the parish.**
- 4. I recommend that a safe be purchased for the sacristy to put the collection in during and after Mass.**

Pastoral Council

- 1. I recommend that the Parish Council focus more on visioning rather than maintenance and reports and meetings.**
- 2. I recommend that the Parish Council make time during their meetings for brainstorming and outside the box thinking on a given topic; for example outreach to families, youth, or fallen away Catholics.**
- 3. I recommend that the Parish Council work on improving communication between its committees as well as its relationship with the Finance Council.**

Finally, I thank all who have cooperated in this visitation process. I feel very encouraged by the faith and energy I discovered at St. Francis parish and I look forward to working with you for the glory of God and the benefit of all the people of your area. Be assured of my prayers for all involved in your parish as your work together into the future on your faith mission.

Sincerely.

+ Mitchell T. Rozanski