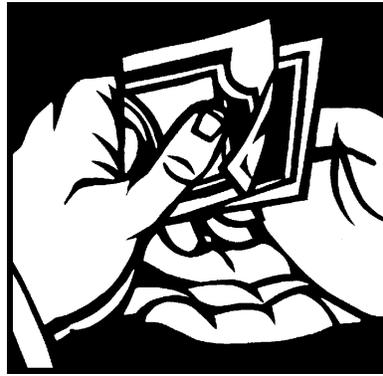


Parishioner Edition



PARISH TRANSFORMATION



Archdiocese of Chicago Mission Workbook

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PARISH TRANSFORMATION
Mission Workbook
Parishioner Edition

Introduction to Parish Transformation: Mission 4

Foundations for Mission

Mission at the Heart of Parish Life 7

Pearl of Great Price 10

New Wine /New Wineskins 12

Examples of a Spiritual Narrative for Mission..... 14

Beginning to Build Our Spiritual Narrative 16

Building Blocks for Mission

Evangelization..... 20

Catechesis..... 22

Prayer and Worship..... 24

Communion..... 26

Missionary Spirit..... 28

Call to Holiness 30

Spiritual Stewardship 32

Our Mission

Beginning to Formulate Our Mission..... 35

Mission Action Plan 36

Finance Action Plan 39

Achieving the Mission—Preparing for Implementation 40

Achieving the Mission—Preparing to “Launch” 43

Prayers 44

Appendix 48



PARISH TRANSFORMATION

INTRODUCTION: MISSION

Jesus didn't establish parishes, but he did gather disciples. He ate with them, taught them, healed them and sent them forth on mission. "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations" (Mt 28; 19). Jesus built his Church on Peter as its rock (Mt 16;18). He promised that wherever two or three were gathered in his name, he would be present among them (Mt. 18;20). The picture of the early Christian community that we find in Acts 2; 42-47 may be an idyllic picture of the Church, but it serves to inspire us all the same as we strive to build strong and vibrant parishes. "*They devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles and to the communal life, to the breaking of the bread and to the prayers.*"

The Mission component in *Parish Transformation* gives communities the opportunity to renew and strengthen their parish by prayerfully reviewing a number of essential elements that we would expect to find in any Catholic Parish. Affirming our strengths and identifying our weaknesses, followed by a creative plan for growth and development, can yield a harvest of more effective parishes which in turn can further the mission of Christ.

Pastors and parish leadership are invited to engage in a self-assessment of their parish's mission in light of the ministry of Jesus and the mission of the Church. After reviewing the Foundations for Mission, you will find seven Building Blocks that support a parish's mission. Without strong building blocks your parish will have a hard time sustaining its mission. As you review these building blocks see what needs to be strengthened or enlivened to make them more effective in creating a more vibrant parish.

In addition to this Mission manual your *Parish Transformation* team will receive a Financial Tool Kit for reviewing the parish's budget and material resources. A portion of participants will focus more intensely on the financial aspects while others will focus on the mission components.

The Mission and the Finance components of *Parish Transformation* are meant to complement each other with the aim of creating a parish that is Mission-driven. Our dreams and plans for the parish require the appropriate resources that will enable to carry on the mission Jesus has entrusted to us.

Your work with the Mission manual and the Financial Tool Kit is intended to help you to gradually arrive at a summary of what your primary mission is in the parish. You will be asked to clearly define the mission of your parish and your vision for achieving your mission. Your vision is expected to include concrete strategies, timelines and the designated persons responsible for carrying the mission forward. The *Parish Transformation* team will also need to outline an implementation plan so that the work of transforming your parish can continue after the formal process is completed.

The work at hand is a process of spiritual discernment not a corporate business meeting. Consequently, it should include prayer, scripture and reflection. The goal of *Parish Transformation* is not to check boxes as if to fill out a report card or survey, but to engage in a conversation about how we can revitalize our parishes. This calls for creativity and imagination, honest assessment, firm commitment from the leadership, along with faith and courage to make necessary changes. Throughout the process keep in mind the promise of the Good Shepherd: "I came so that they might have life and have it more abundantly" (John 10:10).



Foundations for Mission



Foundations for Mission

I. Mission at the Heart of Parish Life

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

The parish can be a very busy place. The needs and expectations of the faithful are many. Multiple ministries and parish programs, schools, meetings, committees, fundraisers, liturgies, etc. fill the parish calendar and require oversight and coordination on the part of many. Pastors often find themselves being stretched in many directions including the demands of administration. In the midst of busy schedules it is easy to lose focus of our mission and why we have parishes in the first place.

The *Parish Transformation* process is intended to take us back to our roots: *the mission and ministry of Jesus*. He told us he was the Light, the Good Shepherd and the Gate, the Bridegroom, the Way, the Truth and the Life. He said he was the vine and we were the branches. When he stood up in the synagogue at Capernaum he read from the text of the prophet Isaiah: "He has sent me to bring glad tidings to the poor, to proclaim liberty to captives, recovery of sight to the blind and release to prisoners, to announce a year of favor from the Lord." Then he said, "Today this scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing" (Luke 4: 16-21). The theme of his preaching and ministry was that the reign of God was at hand. He assured us that he came so that we might have life and have it more abundantly. (c.f. John 10:10)

Reflecting upon the ministry of Jesus in the midst of our busy parishes refreshes our spirits and unleashes new energy for carrying on the mission of Jesus in our communities today. If the Church in the modern world is going to be faithful to her Lord, the Church must continually be renewed in the spirit of Jesus. It is beneficial for us then to return to the biblical account of Jesus' ministry and ask ourselves: "How does our parish and its individual ministries reflect the fundamental mission and ministry of Jesus?"

In formulating our parish's mission we need to know our communities well. We need to discern the human needs and deepest spiritual hungers. We have to take into account the culture in which our parishioners live. It is right to ask: What Gospel message addresses the deepest concerns of our parishioners? What is the good news that has to be told? What is keeping Catholics from practicing their faith? Why is there a disinterest or indifference toward religion on the part of so many? Wrestling with these hard questions gradually keeps us on track in formulating the mission to which we will devote ourselves in the parish.

Faced with so many pastoral responsibilities and administrative concerns we can easily lose our focus on Christ's ministry and our essential identity and vocation as Church. Unless we are grounded in the mission of Jesus and the Kingdom of God which is so central to his mission, we will gradually lose the motivation for making the sacrifices and accepting the labor required in exercising our ministries and caring for the life of our parish community.

The Kingdom of God or the Reign of God is not something far away or completely in the future. "After John's arrest, Jesus appeared in Galilee proclaiming the good news of God: 'This is the time of fulfillment. The reign of God is at hand! Reform your lives and believe in the gospel'" (Mark 1:14-15). Jesus could say that this is the time of fulfillment because the Kingdom of God was embodied in Jesus himself. He proclaimed God's reign over all creation. The miracles he performed were signs of God's power breaking through and making all things new. Through Jesus' death and resurrection we would come to know and believe that the good news of God's Kingdom is the saving power of God conquering sin and death and giving us the hope of eternal life.

The Kingdom of God is not completely identified with the Church, but we can see the signs of God's Kingdom in the Church. Every Catholic parish ought to be a revelation to the world that God's Kingdom is breaking through into our lives. The Kingdom is found wherever peace and justice prevail, where love and righteousness abound. To live under the reign of God is to live in harmony with God's purposes. Our constant prayer is: "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done."

To be a faithful Christian is to live as a citizen of God's Kingdom recognizing that often enough the citizens under God's Reign live in contradiction to worldly values. In Jesus' Kingdom the first shall be last and the greatest will be the servant of all. We are not to worry about what we are to wear or eat. We must love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us. We are to deny ourself and take up our cross and follow the master. The poor and the peacemaker will be blessed. We are to have the heart of a little child. It's not hard to see from this that the Kingdom of God requires a conversion of mind and heart. We can understand why after saying that the reign of God was at hand Jesus added: "Reform your lives."

Being grounded in the mission of Jesus is to live in harmony with the Kingdom of God. In fact, the Reign of God must find a home within us. Engaging in the *Parish Transformation* process is an opportunity to become more Kingdom bound, more aligned with the good news Jesus preached about the Reign of God. We are all called as individuals and as a Church to further God's Kingdom, to spread the good news of God's reign.

The fulfillment of the Kingdom will come at the end of time when Christ returns and presents to God the Father, "a kingdom of truth and life, a kingdom of holiness and grace, a kingdom of justice, love and peace." (Preface from the Mass for the Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe).

There is an urgency to the work we are trying to accomplish with *Parish Transformation*. Recent research indicates that Catholics who drift away from the Church or leave it altogether claim that they could not find sufficient spiritual depth in their parishes. Faced with financial challenges, a low school enrollment, decreasing October counts, maintenance of old facilities, etc. we may be tempted to "fix problems" but fail to proclaim the living Christ and call our brothers and sisters to a deeper conversion of life. Our parishioners will be grateful for the institutional reforms that we initiate. But will they hear the Gospel more clearly? Will their spiritual thirst be satisfied? Will works of peace and justice be accomplished? Will the poor be fed and the lonely comforted? Will new saints emerge from among our parishioners? These are the questions that missionaries ask. And that is exactly what we are called to be. In the weeks ahead as we reflect upon the essays in this manual the hope is that we will gradually begin to formulate the mission of our parish. Through our personal reflections and our conversations with one another our sense of mission will grow.

In the chapters that follow we will look at seven primary building blocks that support a parish's mission. Some of these building blocks might also inspire us to draw our mission directly from one of these building blocks. At other times we may find that one or more of these building blocks need to be reinforced, raised to a higher standard or reconceived to meet the parish's current needs.

We will also need to review the parish's financial picture and how we use all our resources. The goal is to become a mission-driven parish, but to reach that ideal everyone has to work together with openness, honesty and respect. Sometimes hard decisions have to be made because of limited resources. Being clear about our mission and our values will help us to arrive at good and prudent decisions about our financial well-being.

FOR OUR MEDITATION

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

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

(John Paul II, *The Lay Members of Christ’s Faithful People*, #27)

“One of the central purposes of mission is to bring people together in hearing the Gospel, in fraternal communion, in prayer and in the Eucharist. To live in ‘fraternal communion’ (*koinonia*) means to be ‘of one heart and soul’ (Acts 4:32), establishing fellowship from every point of view: human, spiritual and material. Indeed, a true Christian community is also committed to distributing earthly goods, so that no one is in want, and all can receive such goods ‘as they need’ (cf. Acts 2:45; 4:35). The first communities, made up of ‘glad and generous hearts’ (Acts 2:46), were open and missionary: they enjoyed ‘favor with all the people’ (Acts 2:47). Even before activity, mission means witness and a way of life that shines out to others.”

(*Mission of the Redeemer*, #26)

REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

- What do I understand to be the mission and ministry of Jesus?
- How is the mission and ministry of Jesus reflected in my life?
- Has there been a written description of the mission in my parish before this time?
- What is the spiritual/biblical foundation for our parish’s mission and ministry?
- How might our parish mission be shaped by the demographics of our parish?
- What difference does our parish make in our neighborhood?
- Which of the following metaphors best describes what you’d like your parish to be:
 - ◇ Village fountain
 - ◇ Greenhouse growing new disciples
 - ◇ Oasis of hope
 - ◇ Place of Divine Encounter
 - ◇ Center for learning and launch pad for mission
 - ◇ Other



Reflecting On Our Mission

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



Foundations for Mission

II. Pearl of Great Price

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

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

As you begin your participation in the *Parish Transformation* process, take whatever time that is necessary to name the “pearl of great price” in your parish. This is intended to be a very positive exercise. Start from your strengths. Name them. Take pride in the good gifts of the community. Highlight the great traditions. You might want to ask yourself why you have chosen your parish as your spiritual home. As a group share with one another why people chose your parish to belong to rather than any other parish that may be equally close to their home. What is appealing about your parish? What does your parish value the most? What difference does your parish make to the larger civic community? The answers to these questions should bring you closer to identifying the “pearls of great price” which are a source of pride to parishioners. Naming the “pearls of great price” and the values for which they stand are the firm foundation upon which the remainder of the *Parish Transformation* process will build.

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

EXAMPLES

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

FOR OUR MEDITATION

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

(Mt. 13:44–46)

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

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

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

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

REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

- What do I value most about my parish? What are the “pearls of great price”?
- What advice would I give to someone who is looking for a parish to join?
- What positive feedback do I hear about our parish from visitors or neighbors?
- What are the three most important things you believe we should be able to say about every parish?
- How can we build on our *pearls of great price* to accomplish Christ’s mission in our parish?

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





Foundations for Mission

III. New Wine / New Wineskins

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

As you begin your work with Parish Transformation, it may be wise to heed the advice we find in Luke 5:37–38, namely, “New wine must be poured into fresh wineskins.” Pastoral life today requires new creativity and imagination. It takes courage when we come to realize that the ways and means we have become accustomed to no longer work the way they were intended. With the passing of time parish priorities can change because of changing demographics, parishioners’ needs, cultural demands, or available resources. Sometimes our programs, facilities and systems or ways of doing things no longer serve our mission. We cannot put new wine into old wineskins. We have to vision into the future by “thinking outside the box,” trusting in the guidance of the Holy Spirit and taking the necessary but reasonable risks that come with creating a fresh vision.

We may be blessed with wonderful memories of our parish in years past. But unless we are willing to let go and consider new possibilities for carrying on the mission of Jesus today, we may only find ourselves frustrated and discouraged. To advocate new ideas does not negate the good that preceded us. A new and viable vision builds upon the foundations of the past. Developing a new vision is never easy and we have to be prepared to try a number of approaches before we find the right fit. But if we fail to dream and to move forward, recognizing that there’s always some risks involved, we will incur the greater risk of seeing our parishes decline for a lack of enthusiasm and vision.

Our Catholic schools, for example, may profit from some creative new models in the future. Consolidation or mergers are not the only way to address a declining enrollment. We may have to scrutinize whether we have been sufficiently creative in our academic programming, our system of governance and in fostering a true Catholic spirit in our schools. Working collaboratively with neighboring parishes to dream about new ideas and alternative structures for Catholic schools and our religious education programs for children and adults can bear much fruit. Finding new sources of revenue that do not entirely depend on parish resources should also be reviewed.

How do we create new wineskins, a fresh vision? Sometimes the best ideas come from the outer circle of our parish. Our faithful and dedicated leadership may be too close to the picture to see things from a vantage point from which they can imagine new wineskins. Parish and school leadership will be well advised to seek the thoughts, ideas, and opinions of parishioners who are less involved. Participants in the *Parish Transformation* process might begin by naming the assumptions upon which the parish operates. What are the things that are untouchable, unchangeable? Is that perception or truth? Is there room for change?

Another exercise in developing new wineskins is to do some personal research by visiting or talking with the leadership of other parishes. Sharing our best practices can often stimulate new ideas and open new doors for us.

FOR OUR MEDITATION

“And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit on all flesh; your sons and daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. Even the menservants and maidservants in those days, I will pour out my spirit.”
(Joel 2: 28–29)

“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband; and I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Behold, the dwelling of God is with men. He will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away.’ And he who sat upon the throne said, ‘Behold I make all things new.’ Also he said, ‘Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true.’ And he said to me, ‘It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end.’”
(Revelation 21: 1-6a)

“We are born not to be museum keepers, but to cultivate a flourishing garden of life.”
(Pope John XXIII)

REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

- What do I judge to be an “untouchable” assumption about my parish? What ought to change?
- What are the obstacles to change in our parish? What are the unspoken fears?
- Who are the creative and imaginative individuals in our community that can help us freely brainstorm in the hope of new wineskins?
- What are we willing to sacrifice to have new wineskins?
- Does your reflecting on New Wine/New Wineskins stir up any dreams about parish that you have had for a long time?

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





Examples of a Spiritual Narrative for Mission

As you begin to think about how to articulate the MISSION of your parish, read the following two spiritual narratives. These two parishes have tried to include the heart of their mission in these narratives.

St. Bonita Parish

The parish of St. Bonita has undergone many changes in its nearly 100 year history. Today our parish celebrates Sunday liturgy in three languages and is able to identify several ethnic groups. The diverse population has been a source of tension and division in the parish. The parish school's enrollment has dwindled leaving great concern about its viability. Faced with a weak sense of community among parishioners and a deficit budget, our former pastor retired feeling very discouraged about the parish's future. When our new pastor was appointed to St. Bonita, he led us into *Parish Transformation*. While the parish continues to try to understand and orchestrate its diversity, we have begun to see our diversity as our pearl of great price. At one of the meetings the team leadership listened to a reading from Acts 2:42–47 which described the life of the early Christian community. In the discussion that followed someone offered the insight: "Why can't we be that community?" What followed was a new vision for the school as a school of international cultural studies. We began to grow with a sense of pride as we came to appreciate the immense blessings of a multi-cultural parish.

Starting with Acts 2:42–47 the Parish Transformation team in collaboration with the Pastoral Council began to interpret how this passage from the Acts of the Apostles could become the ideal picture for St. Bonita Parish. We pledge to find ways of sharing gifts from our diversity. We pledge to find new meaning in the Eucharist as the Sacrament of unity. And we hope to give credible witness to our communion so that others who have drifted away from the Church may see something they want to be a part of. We desire to be an Acts community and will review all that we are doing as a parish in light of Acts 2.

St. Joseph Moscati Parish

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

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

Studying the Sample Narratives

How has the “pearl of great price” at St. Bonita Parish become the inspiration for the parish’s mission?

How has the presence of two hospitals in St. Joseph Parish become the impetus for formulating a new sense of mission?

Can you name the passion in each of these parishes that is driving their vision?

From where are these two parishes drawing their inspiration?

Which of these two parishes have a clearer set of strategies? What would you want to ask these parishes about their Mission?

Beginning to Formulate Our Mission

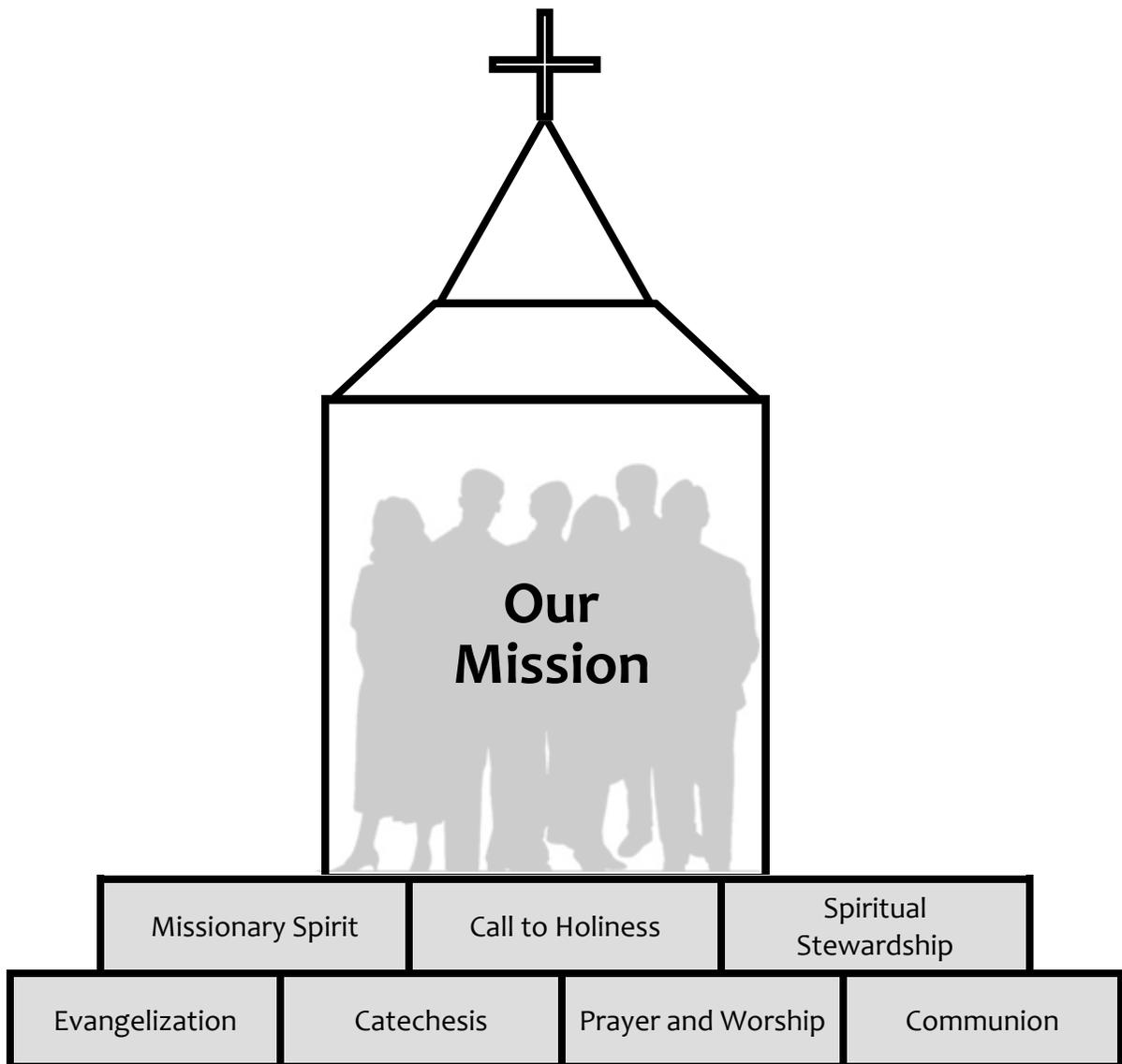
As we continue to build upon our reflections, we will want to take note of some themes that surface which could form the basis of our parish mission. Thinking about our parish mission through a variety of lenses may help us to surface fresh themes for our parish mission.

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

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



Building Blocks for Mission



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

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

- Does this Building Block provide any insight for us into what our parish's particular mission might be? For example, a parish might choose to have Evangelization as a key theme in its Mission, focusing on evangelizing a growing secular society. Another parish might center on Catechesis, taking advantage of nearby seminaries to provide a fresh approach to catechesis for young adults who might not have much a religious foundation from their earlier years.
- Is this a strong Building Block for us? Do we need to improve in this area to ensure that our parish's foundations are secure? For example, a parish might discover that it has no specific opportunities, spiritual disciplines or spiritual mentorship options available for Catholics seeking a deeper spiritual life and engagement in the Church.(Call to Holiness) Another parish might realize that it needs to offer more prayerful liturgies, better music and better formation of liturgical ministers. (Prayer and Worship).

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



Building Blocks for Mission

1. Evangelization

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

Pope Benedict XVI has made an urgent plea for a new evangelization and has said that it is time to "re-propose the Gospel." He has expressed a great urgency about reaching out in a special way to those areas of the world that have been known to be Christian and yet in recent decades have lost interest or enthusiasm for the message of Christ, if in fact they ever truly heard the message of the Gospel. The influence of materialism, religious indifference, relativism, consumerism, busyness, and a growing secularism upon the lives of Christians is not an academic issue. Many baptized Catholics no longer look to the Church to satisfy their quest for meaning and the answers to the deeper questions of life. Some Catholics who disagree with Church norms or only see problems with the management of the Church or the sinfulness of its members become disillusioned and drift away.

We all know neighbors or relatives who no longer go to Mass or participate in parish life. They are often good people but they do not see the value of regular worship or sharing in the life and mission of the Christian community. Many who were baptized in infancy may have been poorly catechized and often not adequately evangelized. Have they met the Lord and heard his voice? We have to be clear that the heart of Christianity is not a philosophy or ideology, but the person of Jesus Christ. To be a Christian is not only to be a believer in the Christ of the gospels but to have a relationship with the risen Christ living and present among us. Perhaps we can find consolation from the apostles who seem to have been slow to understand and believe as they grew in their relationship with Jesus. Recall Thomas who said to Jesus: "Master, we do not know where you are going; how can we know the way? Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me'" (John 14: 5-6). Philip said: "Master, show us the Father and that will be enough for us" (John 14: 8). Jesus had to tell him boldly, "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14: 9). Evangelization stirs up the desire to know Christ more intimately and follow him more closely.

Evangelization is not a parish program but the vocation of the Church at all times. In calling us to "re-

propose the Gospel" Pope Benedict challenges us to find new ways, new words and new images to communicate the heart of the Gospel. Pope Benedict XVI has made a passionate plea for the Church to take advantage of modern technology in its evangelizing ministry. An evangelizing parish, of course, offers more than just words about Jesus. It gives compelling witness to the living Christ so that if anyone asks us the reason for our hope we are prepared to give an explanation (c.f. I Peter 3:16). The quality of our community's worship, our availability to listen, offer counsel and comfort, to confront evil and injustice, to forgive when no one else will, to be a welcoming, hospitable community, to be joyful even in difficult times – all these can be a means of evangelization. The saying attributed to St. Francis of Assisi is good to remember: "Preach the Gospel and if necessary use words."

We face a serious dilemma. There are many who claim to be Catholic but have little idea of who Jesus is and what it means to call him Savior. It's as if we have to start all over again in building up the Church of Christ by calling our brothers and sisters to conversion. We have to find a way to cut through the barriers of indifference and faulty assumptions about God and his Christ.

Catholics need more training in how to approach or respond to a neighbor or coworker on religious matters. We need to be confident about the good news we have to share. This is an enormous issue for our times. We cannot fail to accept the challenge of re-proposing the Gospel. In many cases we are not reaching far enough or casting our nets into the deep. We tend to remain within the comfortable circle of parish life. We either do not know how to reach those who do not know or are indifferent to Christ, or because of our fear of rejection we shy away from those who most need to meet Christ. For the ministry of evangelization is the foundation for everything else we do as Catholics. Without that foundation a parish will eventually falter. Benedict XVI called for a "taking up again [of] the same apostolic impetus of the first Christian communities, which, small and vulnerable, with their proclamation and witness, were able to spread the Gospel in the whole then-known world." (Pope Benedict XVI, January 25, 2012).

FOR OUR MEDITATION

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

“Open our eyes to the needs of our brothers and sisters;
inspire in us words and actions
to comfort those who labor and are burdened.
Make us serve them truly,
after the example of Christ and his command.
And may your Church stand as a living witness
to truth and freedom, to peace and justice,
that all people may be raised up to a new hope.”
(Eucharistic Prayer for Masses for Various Needs IV)

“The concern to evangelize must never be left on the margin of ecclesial activity and of the personal life of the Christian, but it must be strongly characterized by the awareness of being recipients and, at the same time, missionaries of the Gospel.”
(Pope Benedict XVI, January 25, 2012)

REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

- What do I believe is the Good News of the Gospel that many people aren't hearing today?
- How am I exercising my vocation as an evangelizer?
- How are our parish school and religious education program fertile fields for evangelization?
- How can we apply Pope Benedict XVI's charge to “re-propose the Gospel” in our parish and neighborhood?
- What opportunities do I have for evangelization in my workplace? What do I need from my parish to make me an effective evangelizer?
- Jesus asked his disciples, “Who do people say that I am?” Then he asked them, “Who do you say that I am?” What is your answer to Jesus?

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





Building Blocks for Mission

2. Catechesis

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

Evangelization and catechesis go hand in hand. Through the Church's ministry of evangelization we hear the good news of the Gospel and are introduced to the living Christ. We are called to a conversion of mind and heart as we learn to walk along the path that Christ sets before us. Catechesis builds upon conversion and aims to deepen our relationship with God. Catechesis helps us to know the person, the message, and the mission of Christ so that our entire lives are Christ-centered. As St. Paul said so beautifully, "It is no longer I that live, but Christ who lives in me." (Gal 2:20).

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

Catechesis is multifaceted. There is first of all a catechesis that introduces us to the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Catechesis brings us to the cross and draws us into the mystery of Christ's resurrection. There is also a catechesis for discipleship as we learn to practice our faith in the marketplace, working for peace and justice and learning to live a holy and virtuous life. We may be most familiar with the catechesis we receive in preparation for the sacraments. An effective sacramental catechesis stirs up the gift of faith and predisposes us to receive the sacraments worthily and fruitfully. Catechists prepare youth for Confirmation, an RCIA team catechizes catechumens in preparation for the initiation sacraments, a minister of care prepares a homebound parishioner for the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick. Whether it is a young couple preparing for marriage, a first communicant, or parents preparing for the baptism of their child, effective catechesis fosters faith.

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

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

Our parish communities must be lifelong centers of catechesis. The challenge of our modern times requires us to be creative in the ways in which we teach the faith. Pope Benedict XVI has made a strong appeal for using modern technology in passing on the faith. The times and opportunities for catechesis as well as the focus and starting point of our conversations will be critical to our success. Collaborating with neighboring parishes in offering creative programs for adults may be more effective than having every parish create and plan their own same programs.

We can assess the strength of our parish's efforts across six tasks of catechesis: knowledge of the faith; liturgical life; moral formation; prayer; communal life; missionary spirit. From this perspective we can see that catechesis is an essential and comprehensive ministry in every parish.

FOR OUR MEDITATION

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

“The object of catechesis is communion with Jesus Christ. Catechesis leads people to enter the mystery of Christ, to encounter him and to discover themselves and the meaning of their lives in him... The definitive aim of catechesis is to put people not only in touch but in communion, in intimacy, with Jesus Christ: only he can lead us to the love of the Father in the Spirit and make us share in the life of the Holy Trinity.”

(National Directory for Catechesis, U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, Washington, DC, p. 55)

“The baptismal catechumenate is the source of inspiration for all catechesis... While a distinction is made between catechumens and those already baptized who are being catechized, some elements of the baptismal catechumenate are instructive for post-baptismal catechesis. In that sense, the baptismal catechesis inspires a continuing catechesis. It reminds the Church that her catechesis accompanies a continual conversion to Christ and an ongoing initiation into the celebration of the sacraments and the life of the Church. Just as the baptismal catechumenate is the responsibility of the entire Christian community, so too does the whole Church bear the obligation to provide an ongoing catechesis for the faithful.” (National Directory for Catechesis, #35.D)

REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

- What has been most effective in my life for learning the faith of the Church?
- What are some of the questions you hear people asking about faith?
- What are the opportunities for adult catechesis and faith formation in our parish?
- How would we describe the quality, creativity and effectiveness of our parish catechetical programs for children and youth?
- How effective is our parish school in forming a new generation of enlightened Catholic leaders?
- What are some new directions we can dream about for family catechesis, and ongoing adult catechesis?
- Do we provide opportunities for different audiences, at different times, and in different formats?

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





Building Blocks for Mission

3. Prayer and Worship

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

Some of our most treasured memories as Catholics are family celebrations of baptisms, first communions, weddings and funerals. These sacred moments in our lives, celebrated in our parish churches, leave a lasting impression upon us. They shape us and form us as Catholics. Together with our weekly celebration of Mass these sacramental experiences give us our Catholic identity and continue to hold us together as a Catholic people. St. Pius X said: “The liturgy is the indispensable source of the true Christian spirit.” Over the course of a lifetime we come to appreciate the truth of that statement.

The liturgy ranks far above every other activity in the parish. It is not limited to what we do at worship, but what God does for us. We encounter the living Christ who continues the work of our redemption. In the liturgy we are joined to Christ in his prayer and self-offering to the Father. We pray: “Holy Father, we humbly beseech you to accept us also, together with your Son...” (Eucharistic Prayer for Reconciliation II). In the liturgy Christ is at work saving his people. Any thought of staying home to pray privately instead of participating at Mass overlooks one of the most important dimensions of the Mass.

There are no passive spectators at the liturgy. “It is the whole community, the Body of Christ, united with its Head that celebrates” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, #1140). This should encourage us to make sure our worship is inclusive of the entire community. Invitations to youth, family members, seniors and singles to be trained for a special ministry at the altar should be extended regularly. Through Baptism we all share in Christ’s priestly identity by actively participating in the liturgy. This is why the Bishops at the Second Vatican Council taught that full, conscious and active participation of the baptized in the liturgy “is the aim to be considered before all else.” (Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, #14).

Because the liturgy is so central to the life of the Church, the care and performance of the liturgy is of utmost importance. Liturgy celebrated with dignity and reverence inspires us and shapes us in the mind

of Christ. When the liturgy is celebrated well it becomes an open door to the mystery of Christ. Poorly celebrated liturgy can fail to inspire us and distort our understanding of what is being proclaimed. Our attention to the liturgy includes our care of the parish church in which we worship. Is it beautiful, uncluttered, properly lighted, accessible to everyone? Is it clean? Is the sound system adequate?

Good liturgy demands that all who minister at the altar are well trained and capable of performing their ministry with style and grace. Training readers, ushers, servers, cantors, etc. should be an ongoing practice in every parish. Music holds a special place in the liturgy and requires us to provide music of high quality, that is suitable to the rites and is pastorally accommodating to the congregation.

Because the Mass is the Church’s most highly developed form of ritual prayer, some Catholics find it difficult to understand and pray the liturgy. Unable to draw meaning from the richness of the liturgy, they lose interest and gradually stop coming to Mass. Before altering the liturgy as it is given to us by the church, a more intensive catechesis offers a better alternative. Many Catholics would profit from a reintroduction to prayer. Apart from the traditional Catholic prayers we learn by heart as children, there are often few opportunities to learn the many styles of prayer that are part of the rich treasure house of the Church. No doubt this is what led Pope John Paul II to say that our parishes have to become “schools of prayer.” We need to ask whether we have offered adequate catechesis in prayer and ritual and how to relate to the signs and symbols which are integral to our Catholic tradition. “But in order that the liturgy maybe able to produce its full effects, it is necessary that the faithful come to it with proper dispositions, that their minds should be attuned to their voices, and that they should cooperate with divine grace lest they receive it in vain.” (Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, #11).

FOR OUR MEDITATION

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

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

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

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

REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

- How important has the celebration of the liturgy been in my life? What does it mean to me now?
- Is the Eucharist the “source and summit” of our parish life? What are the indications that the liturgy is important to our parish?
- In what way is the liturgy the source of unity in our parish?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of our parish’s worship?
- How can our parish become a “school of prayer”?
- To what extent is my participation at Mass full, conscience and active?
- How would I describe my pray life apart from the Mass?

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





Building Blocks for Mission

4. Communion

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

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

Our solidarity as Catholics does not just rest on the fact that we all believe in the one same Christ, but that through him and with him we form a **communion**. The communion we hope for is not something we create ourselves. When we use the word "communion" to describe who we are, we are moving to a deeper level of community than that which is formed by our human efforts of hospitality and fellowship. The communion of which we boast is a gift of God that needs to be discovered and revered. The mystery of the Holy Trinity dwelling within us unites us together at a level we could never achieve on our own in the hope of **communion**. John Paul II has stated: "A spirituality of communion indicates above all the heart's contemplation of the mystery of the Trinity dwelling in us, and whose light we must be able to see shining on the face of the brothers and sisters around us." (Novo Millennio Ineunte, #43).

Because through Baptism we are bound together in Christ, we need to work at living out our communion, if we are going to give credible witness to others of the mystery of Christ dwelling within us. Like family members who are related by blood but still have to work at being a family, so too do we as Church need to work together to be the communion we are called to be. The Eucharist fosters that communion in a unique way. In the words of St. Paul: "Because there is one

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

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

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

The efforts we make to be hospitable and inclusive, getting to know people by name, socializing with fellow parishioners, attending to the needs of others – all these efforts can prepare us and lead us to the deeper experience of **communion** where we think of our brothers and sisters in faith within the profound unity of the Mystical Body, and therefore as "those who are part of me." (Pope John Paul II, Novo Millennio Ine-

FOR OUR MEDITATION

“Let mutual love continue. Do not neglect hospitality, for through it some have unknowingly entertained angels.” (Hebrews 13:1-2)

“Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.” (Matthew 18:20)

“To make the Church the home and the school of communion: that is the great challenge facing us in the millennium which is now beginning, if we wish to be faithful to God’s plan and respond to the world’s deepest yearnings. But what does this mean in practice? Here too, our thoughts could run immediately to the action to be undertaken, but that would not be the right impulse to follow. Before making practical plans, we need to promote a spirituality of communion, making it the guiding principle of education wherever individuals and Christians are formed, wherever ministers of the altar, consecrated persons, and pastoral workers are trained, wherever families and communities are being built up.

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

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

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

REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

- How have I experienced communion in my parish?
- How do others see us as a parish? Is our solidarity in faith evident to others?
- Are we a welcoming community? Is our environment welcoming? Are we culturally & generationally inclusive? Do we pay attention to the stranger in our midst? Do our facilities provide easy access for the physically disabled?
- How can we foster a deeper sense of communion in our parish?
- When we meet as committees or boards of the parish do we operate out of a sense of being a communion? What difference might that make?

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





Building Blocks for Mission

5. Missionary Spirit

You are the salt of earth...you are the light of the world.

(Matthew 5:13–14)

By virtue of our Baptism and Confirmation we are all called to be missionaries. You can be a missionary in your hometown, in your own parish, at work or play, in school or in the neighborhood. What matters is that you move beyond your own needs to serve others in the name of Jesus. As missionaries we pattern our lives on the ministry of Jesus as he reached out to the poor, the sick and the sinner. Parishes that are strong and vibrant are parishes where parishioners gladly share in the mission of Christ. They further the reign of God in our world by embracing the Gospel mandate to be “salt and light” (Mt 5:13–16). Thinking of ourselves as missionaries leads us to go beyond our psychological comfort zones. Our service in the name of the Gospel may call us to places we’ve never been, to people we do not know, into circumstances we’ve never encountered. We follow Jesus without fear and we rely upon the Spirit’s guidance. Engaging in mission means taking peacemaking seriously and working for justice. Mission may move us to visit an elderly neighbor, to help out at a soup kitchen, to write a letter to our local congressman, or to participate in a parish mission trip to Appalachia, Haiti or far beyond.

One’s engagement in mission is meant to be more than a matter of being an occasional volunteer. For the baptized Christian the spirit of mission is an integral part of one’s life. We may begin our missionary vocation as an apprentice with someone who has more experience. We may take small steps at first but then discover that we can assume more responsibility and eventually become a mentor in preparing others for mission. We are more than humanitarians, for it is the love of Christ that compels to reach out to others. We take seriously the mandate of Jesus who said, “As often as you did it for one of my least brothers, you did it for me” (Mt. 25:40). We take the Beatitudes (Mt 5:1–12) as our missionary charter, the defining wisdom of our vocation as missionaries.

Mission flows from the Eucharist. We are sent forth to: “Go and announce the Gospel of the Lord.” We are charged to imitate the love and reconciliation we celebrate at the Lord’s Table in all our relationships in

society. Blessed Pope John II put it this way:

The authentic sense of the Eucharist becomes itself the school of active love of neighbor... The Eucharist educates us to this love in a deeper way; it shows us, in fact what value each person, our brother or sister, has in God’s eyes, if Christ offer Himself equally to each one, under the species of bread and wine. If our Eucharistic worship is authentic, it must make us grow in awareness of the dignity of each person. The awareness of that dignity becomes the deepest motive of our relationship with our neighbor... We must also become particularly sensitive to all human suffering and misery, to all injustice and wrong, and seek the way to redress them effectively.

(The Mystery and Worship of the Eucharist, 1980, #6)

It is good to remind ourselves that a parish is not an end in itself, but more like a greenhouse that grows new disciples for mission. The true test of an effective parish is neither the size of the parish Sunday bulletin nor its offertory collection. The strength and integrity of a parish is best measured by how well parishioners have learned to become missionaries and gladly share in the mission of Jesus. What is important is that the parish calls its parishioners to mission, offers a number of concrete possibilities for service and provides spiritual formation as well as necessary training along with personal support.

Parishes with a missionary spirit do not get overly concerned about their own internal issues which can lead to spiritual narcissism. They see their vocation as missionary, sent to serve and not be served. A parish with missionary zeal is a joyful community because it has learned to be one with the One whom the Father sent.

FOR OUR MEDITATION

“As the Father sent me, so am I sending you.” (John 20:21)

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

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

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

REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

- How do I see myself as being a missionary?
- How does our parish call parishioners to share in the mission of Jesus?
- What is a good example of the missionary spirit in our parish?
- How can our parish become more mission directed? What needs are not being met in fulfilling the mission of Jesus?

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





Building Blocks for Mission

6. Call to Holiness

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

The most important goal of every parish is to assist its people in responding to the call to holiness. The First Letter of Peter reminds us: “As he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in every aspect of your conduct, for it is written, ‘Be holy because I am holy’” (I Peter 1: 15-16). Talking with others about holiness may feel a bit awkward. The thought of being holy like the Lord and his saints may strike us as either being too far removed from what we know our lives to be or just unattainable given our faults and limitations. To be holy, however, is first of all a gift. We are holy because God made us and still more redeemed us in the waters of Baptism imparting his life to us and claiming us as his chosen sons and daughters. Living a holy life then is being faithful to our vocation as children of God. Growing in holiness is doing the will of God.

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

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

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

Besides finding good companions in our parish for this journey of holiness, our parish can hopefully provide the counsel and suggestions for spiritual discipline that strengthen one’s resolve to follow Christ unreservedly. When seekers come to our parish at a point in their life when they feel ready to take their faith more seriously and to work at becoming holy, what do we offer them? That question isn’t answered by a list of programs or an electronic library. Who will be this seeker’s companion? Who will help her to put together a personal discipline like a doctor who prescribes an appropriate diet and therapy for good health? If our parishes are going to be effective, they have to do more than offer a few programs and a calendar of liturgies and devotions. Our parishes must become the fertile ground from which new saints will grow. And each of us has a responsibility to ensure that this happens.

FOR OUR MEDITATION

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

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

(Benedict XVI, April 20, 2011)

“It is therefore quite clear that all Christians in whatever state or walk of life are called to the fullness of Christian life and to the perfection of charity, and this holiness is conducive to a more human way of living even in society here on earth. In order to reach this perfection the faithful should use the strength dealt out to them by Christ’s gift, so that, following in his footsteps and conformed to his image, doing the will of God in everything, they may wholeheartedly devote themselves to the glory of God and to the service of their neighbor. Thus the holiness of the people of God will grow in fruitful abundance, as is clearly shown in the history of the Church by the lives of so many saints.” (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, #40)

REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

- Do you know any holy people in your life? What do they look like?
- Has anyone in the parish asked you lately about your spiritual life?
- Do you ever think of being called to holiness as your vocation?
- How have you come to know the will of God in your life?
- What does our parish have to offer seekers on the path to holiness?

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





Building Blocks for Mission

7. Spiritual Stewardship

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

FOR OUR MEDITATION

“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and decay destroy, and thieves break in and steal. But store up treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor decay destroys, nor thieves break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there also will your heart be.”
(Mt 6: 19-21)

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

“What identifies a steward? Safeguarding material and human resources and using them responsibly are one answer; so is generous giving of time, talent, and treasure. But being a Christian steward means more. As Christian stewards, we receive God’s gifts gratefully, cultivate them responsibly, share them lovingly in justice with others, and return them with increase to the Lord.
(*Stewardship: A Disciple’s Response*, USCCB, 1993)

REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

- How am I living as a faithful Christian steward?
- What are the tensions I experience in trying to live a stewardship spirituality?
- How are we teaching a spirit of Christian stewardship in our parish?
- How are our children learning to live a stewardship spirituality?
- Does our parish operate out of a spirituality of abundance or want?

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





Our Mission

Beginning to Formulate Our Mission

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

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

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

PARISH TRANSFORMATION

MISSION ACTION PLAN

See Appendix for complete example.



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

B) Actions required to achieve our mission.

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

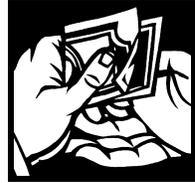
C) Actions required to strengthen our foundations

Our focus areas (select up to 3):

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

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

PARISH TRANSFORMATION FINANCE ACTION PLAN



Our focus areas (check all that apply):

Church Revenue Church Expense School Revenue
 School Expense Capital

Securing our Financial Future

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

ACHIEVING THE MISSION—PREPARING FOR IMPLEMENTATION

Question	Comments	
Resource Allocation		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Given our new Mission and focus areas, do we need to review our programs with an eye toward pulling back on some that no longer fit? 	___ yes ___ no	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is there sufficient funding for our top priorities? 	___ yes ___ no	
Effective Leadership		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does our action plan require us to reconsider the roles and responsibilities of our staff? 	___ yes ___ no	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Should we re-evaluate the way our Pastoral Council, School Board, and our Finance Council serve our parish? 	___ yes ___ no	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do we need to think more specifically about training and formation of our staff and lay leaders? 	___ yes ___ no	
Communication		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are our current communication vehicles effective in informing our parishioners about our parish life? 	___ yes ___ no	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do we have an opportunity to make better use of technology in our communications? 	___ yes ___ no	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do we have an opportunity to better clarify how decisions are made and communicated in our parish? 	___ yes ___ no	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do we have an opportunity to elicit ideas and feedback from parishioners? 	___ yes ___ no	
Collaborating with Neighboring Parishes		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can we think of areas where cooperating with a neighboring parish might be beneficial to both? 	___ yes ___ no	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do we have gifts and resources that we can offer to other parishes? 	___ yes ___ no	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Have our parish ministries and advisory boards considered sharing ideas, concerns, and best practices with neighboring parishes? 	___ yes ___ no	

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

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

ACHIEVING THE MISSION—PREPARING TO “LAUNCH”

- How will the Parish Transformation Action Plan become incorporated into the parish (e.g., Pastoral Council will now take responsibility; Parish Transformation Steering Committee will stay together and continue to oversee implementation)?
- How frequently should we review progress (e.g., monthly, quarterly)?
- Who will be responsible for tracking our progress and reporting back?
- Who will be responsible for managing the ongoing process of implementation—i.e., arranging meeting times, setting meeting agendas, etc...?
- How will we communicate to the broader parish community our parish transformation experience and plan?





Prayers

Scripture Passages

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Mt 9: 14-17 (new wine, new wineskins)

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

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

Mt 5: 1-12 (Beatitudes)

Mt 5: 13-16 (You are salt and light)

John 10:10 (Abundant life)

Prayer before a Meeting

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

Prayer to the Holy Spirit

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Prayer of Blessing Upon the Work of Parish Transformation

[A]

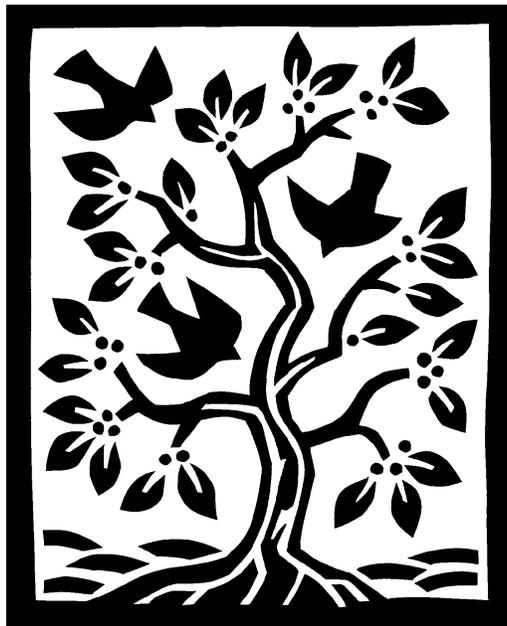
Lord God,
in your loving kindness
you sent your Son to be our shepherd and guide.
Look upon the efforts of our parish community
as we work together to strengthen your Church
and carry on the mission your Son has entrusted to us.
Bless us with wisdom and good judgment
in our planning for the future.
Protect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

[B]

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

[C]

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



APPENDIX

PARISH TRANSFORMATION MISSION ACTION PLAN



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

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

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

B) Actions required to achieve our mission.

Objectives and Actions	Time	Owner	Measurable Goal
1. Establish vibrant ministry to the sick and home-bound. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Publicize significant new parish ministry and recruit new members. • Develop & implement new training & formation program. 	Spring 2012	JD, BB	X participants serving Y people
2. Rejuvenate our peace and justice ministry. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluate current programs • Recruit new members. 	Fall 2012	FR	Z parishioners involved, serving W people
3. Open a family counseling center. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research needs • Develop detailed plan 	Fall 2015	SD, TH	Y families served

C) Actions required to strengthen our foundations

Our focus areas (select up to 3):

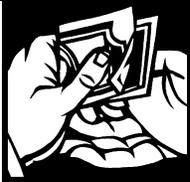
- Evangelization Catechesis Prayer and Worship Communion
 Missionary Spirit Call to Holiness Spiritual Stewardship

Objectives and Actions	Time	Owner	Measurable Goal
Focus Area #1: Catechesis			
1. Enhance our offerings to youth and young adults <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish new teen program integrating social and apostolic dimensions Develop electronic catechesis program using social media 	Fall 2012	JS, NG, GR	X teens and young adults participating in our programs
2. Develop new family-oriented Religious Education program for our children and parents		CM, MM, MD	Positive reviews from parents in survey
Focus Area #2: Communion			
1. Foster greater unity and understanding among our multi-cultural community <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hold multi-cultural Masses once a month (i.e., combine English and Spanish Masses) Hold monthly social events that take advantage of our cultural heritage 	Spring 2012	BJ, EJ	Greater visible sense of multi-cultural unity; visible crossing of lines of friendship

SAMPLE

PARISH TRANSFORMATION FINANCE ACTION PLAN

Our focus areas (check all that apply):
 Church Revenue Church Expense School Revenue
 School Expense Capital



SECURING OUR FINANCIAL FUTURE

Objectives and Actions	Time	Owner	Measurable Goal
Focus Area #1: Church Revenue			
1. Improve communications of our financials by publishing periodic reports			
2. Enhance our weekly collections <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Launch planned offering program • Implement electronic giving program 	Fall 2012	SS, TT	Increase weekly offering from \$5000 to \$6000
3. Raise \$100,000 to repair our roof	Fall 2012- Spring 2013	HJ, FG	\$100,000 committed by Spring 2013
Focus Area #2: School Revenue			
1. Grow our school enrollment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop new marketing materials • Establish a parent ambassador program • Provide greater tuition discounts for needy families 	Fall 2012	BJ, AL	20 new students each year for next 3 years
2. Establish a scholarship fund <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a database of addresses • Prepare and send mailing(s) 	Fall 2013	BT	

