



CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF
PITTSBURGH

Vibrant Parishes for *The Church Alive!*
Forming and Equipping Disciples Who Are *On Mission!*

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**THE EVANGELIZATION STEERING COMMITTEE OF
THE *ON MISSION FOR THE CHURCH ALIVE!*
PLANNING COMMISSION**

VIBRANT PARISHES FOR *THE CHURCH ALIVE!*

Forming and Equipping Disciples Who Are *On Mission!*

On Mission for the Church Alive! is Bishop Zubik's diocesan and parish planning initiative for the new evangelization in our diocese.

Our mission as the *Church Alive!* is the glorification of God and the salvation of souls. In order to fulfill this mission together, each parishioner must embody *The Church Alive!* in all five areas that Bishop Zubik identifies in his pastoral letter: Eucharist, Evangelization, Catechesis, Formation and Stewardship.

The primary concept around which the new evangelization centers is that of discipleship. The key to being a vibrant parish is the proper formation of all the Christian faithful as missionary disciples of Jesus Christ. In his Apostolic exhortation, *The Joy of the Gospel*, Pope Francis calls all Catholics to be missionary disciples. Parishes full of missionary disciples will enable the Church to grow in all five areas of *The Church Alive!*

We can expect our parishes to be centers of missionary activity for the new evangelization with the indispensable leadership of pastors who, along with their parish staffs, have the skills and competencies to lead their parishioners toward a compelling vision for ministry. We need leaders who can create the conditions for all the personal gifts and charisms of the parish community to find their fullest expression in Christ. An effective pastor, with his parish staff, leads the community to proper worship, insures the conditions for the proper formation of parishioners, and orders the gifts and resources of the parish to the common good of the community.

THE CHURCH'S MISSION

The Church is the body of Christ. This body is made up of many members, all of whom are called to make their unique contribution to the mission of Jesus Christ in the world. The Second Vatican Council calls Christ the “light to the nations”. His body is a people that shares in the joys, hopes, grief and anguish of the human family. And yet, to all of these the Church brings a unique gift, namely, the saving mercy and grace of Jesus Christ—the light of the Father’s love for the human family. Every local church throughout the world is comprised of multiple parishes. Each parish is the presence of Christ in that place. The parish is not primarily the building(s) but a community of the faithful responsible for a mission territory within the diocese. While we worship in a building, we are also called to be witnesses and servants to everyone that lives within that parish territory. The parish is a community of the faithful called to be the presence of Christ to those they encounter as neighbors. A vibrant parish is a community of disciples that goes out and welcomes people to an encounter with Jesus Christ, especially those at the margins of our society. A vibrant parish is a place where the faithful gather to offer inspired worship and adoration to God and receive the transforming grace of Jesus Christ that moves us to go out to others as witnesses of the Gospel and instruments of mercy.

What follows is a vision of the vibrancy our parishes are called to embrace so that the mission of Jesus Christ is carried forward in our time, especially to those who do not yet know the love of God in their lives. It is asked that each clergy team, parish staff, and parish council reflect on this vision and keep it at the center of all activity as the work of reorganization begins in earnest.

PRINCIPLES OF PARISH VIBRANCY

Communion with God through Jesus Christ

Our mission is to bring about, by our witness and apostolic endurance, initial and ongoing personal conversion to Jesus Christ, union with Christ, and ultimately union with the Holy Trinity.

Primacy of the Holy Spirit

Ministry is the work of the Holy Spirit. Everything we do must proceed from discernment and thus be Spirit led. Our work is not about what we do for God, but what God wishes to do in and through us.

Charity

People should experience the love of Christ when they encounter the Church and her members. Any strategies which are officious or compliance-driven will turn people away. As Pope Francis says, we have to cultivate the “revolution of tenderness” and “warm hearts.” We are called to be a “field hospital” for the wounded.

The Church

Discipleship happens in and through the Church. Salvation is both a personal and communal reality. *On Mission for the Church Alive!* calls us to build up the body of Christ by making room for and developing every personal gift bestowed on us by the Holy Spirit.

Accompaniment

We build ministry through relationships. We must accompany people along the difficult road of discipleship and holiness to full participation in the Church and eventually to heaven. Parishes must cultivate communities in which the faithful stand shoulder to shoulder to support each other for the long haul.

Gradualness

Accompaniment involves the principle of gradualness. We have to meet people where they are. Growth in discipleship happens slowly and patiently as we help people come to know Jesus and understand the faith according to the unique situation in which each person finds him or herself.

STRATEGIES FOR PARISH VIBRANCYⁱ

A vibrant parish attracts people. An attracting parish requires effective leadership with a clear and compelling vision for ministry. It is also comprised of parishioners who are excited about their faith and want to share that faith with others. The following strategic principles are the foundations of parish vibrancy.

Shared Leadershipⁱⁱ

A vibrant parish is led by a team of clergy, lay ecclesial leaders, and parish advisory councils with the pastor at the head. Each parish team needs to have a full array of gifts and abilities for all the various aspects of parish life to be effectively cultivated. Shared leadership requires collaborative structures, good communication, role clarity and a healthy operational culture.

Cultivation of Mature Disciples

A vibrant parish creates the proper conditions for parishioners to grow as missionary disciples of Jesus Christ through the various developmental stages of Christian maturation. A parish cannot simply dispense sacraments and hand on the content of the faith. Vibrant parishes nurture the call to holiness among the faithful.

The Sunday Experience

A vibrant parish focuses upon the Sunday experience, making it the very best it can be week in and week out. The quality of liturgy, music and preaching has to be insured by proper preparation. Opportunities for community building should occur around sacramental moments. Regular opportunities for spiritual awakeningⁱⁱⁱ and the evangelization of parishioners will also help the faithful participate more fully in the Mass.

Evangelization and Missionary Outreach

A vibrant parish looks out and finds ways to meet the many needs of the parish mission territory. Every parishioner should be given an opportunity to discern their gifts and be called to service in some form of apostolic work. This will build the vitality of the parish and make the parish attractive to others. A missional parish is an attracting parish.

EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP FOR PARISH VIBRANCY

Every priest is called to be a disciple-leader and must lead in an increasingly complex, interconnected world, and Church. At ordination, each priest is anointed to act *in persona Christi* and is thus graced by the three-fold *munera* of Christ to teach, govern and sanctify the people of God. This three-fold anointing is exercised whether a priest is a pastor or not. This anointing is especially fruitful for the people of God when a priest is a deeply spiritual disciple of Jesus in his personal life and a spiritual father to his parishioners.

These leaders must be individuals who convey authenticity, integrity, competence, and vision for the future.

Church leaders are called to be servant-leaders who follow Christ's example of leadership. They need to know Jesus intimately and seek to be leaders with the heart of Christ. The best way to attain this is through a leader's ongoing formation in all four areas of formation.^{iv} This approach addresses the whole person including their mind, heart, personal character, skills and professional competencies. Leadership development builds on the natural talents and spiritual gifts of clergy and laity together to grow *The Church Alive!*.

Effective pastoral leadership requires deep listening and the commitment to help Catholics live out their vocation to holiness, to be disciples in every situation they face, in the pilgrimage of life, by blessing the world in a way that calls forth universal flourishing and wholeness. Pastoral leaders listen to the promptings of the Holy Spirit and respond to the real needs of the world around them.

Pastoral leaders value the importance of human conversation. This art must be learned and is the only path to authentic, courageous, powerful, compelling, and clear communications that make a difference. Leaders must be able to engage those they lead. They must possess the capacity to collaborate in order to address complex problems they cannot solve on their own.

Pastoral leaders learn the skill of developing, empowering, and mobilizing networks within their respective community to transform the culture around us. They are a powerful force for change, recognizing that the art of transformation requires the

mature discernment of spirits. Not every change is desirable or good, but only those which effectively carry out the mission of Jesus Christ.

A PARISH OF MISSIONARY DISCIPLES

As Bishop Zubik's pastoral letter, *The Church Alive!* explains (nos. 22ff), discipleship is lived in three ways. The first is through our baptismal vocation to holiness as followers of Jesus Christ. We are called to sanctify the world and be a leaven to society by our service to God and neighbor. The second is by sharing our personal gifts to build up the life of our local church. Each member of the parish is called to contribute to the mission of their parish and the diocese. And third, for those who are called, some will use their personal gifts as leaders in the Church. In all three cases the disciple needs the proper formation to carry out the specific mission God has entrusted to him or her.

Well-formed disciples are alive in all five areas of *The Church Alive!*: 1) They participate fully in the liturgical life of the Church (Eucharist); 2) they know their faith at age appropriate levels and live it (Catechesis); 3) they share their faith with others as witnesses to their relationship with Jesus Christ (Evangelization); 4) they serve other people with their gifts and build up the mission of their parish (Stewardship); and 5) they embrace life-long formation as the path to holiness (formation).

DISCIPLESHIP IN THE FIVE AREAS OF THE CHURCH ALIVE!

DISCIPLESHIP AND PRACTICES OF INTEGRAL FORMATION

Growth in discipleship is a developmental process. The milestones along the way are: 1) the encounter with Christ 2) the call to follow him in life 3) formation in holiness, in the context of friendship with Christ, through prayer and study 4) the discernment of gifts and 5) the call to mission within our parishes and diocese. The challenge for us is to know what it takes for a parish community to cultivate this developmental process for each of its parishioners. For this to happen successfully and uniformly throughout the diocese for all of our people, the Bishop has initiated the *School of Missionary Discipleship*, which is a global initiative to identify, train and equip leaders in the principles and practices of the new evangelization. Information on this initiative is found on the diocesan website.

As a strategic focal point for parish ministry, forming disciples happens best within the family, because strong families are the solution to every challenge we face in the Church and in society. The Church should not programmatically substitute for what only the family can do. All strategies for ministry will bear fruit if they strengthen and provide formation to the family.

The Four Areas of Formation

A disciple grows continually in his or her vocation to holiness. Traditionally, this happens in four areas: the human personality, knowledge of the faith, pastoral care of others, and in the context of a fruitful spiritual life.

Human Formation: Disciples mature in the moral and Christian virtues. They strive for greater integration of their interior life and external behavior. They are capable of being individuals in whom others encounter Christ. They are effective in advancing the Gospel within their personal spheres of influence.

Intellectual Formation: Disciples understand their faith and are able to speak about it with others, giving reasons drawn from Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition. Disciples develop knowledge of God's Word, Christian doctrine and practice in age-appropriate ways. They never tire in their pursuit of wisdom because faith formation is life-long. They are curious, critical thinkers, open to new insights while embracing the continuity of Sacred Tradition. They are formed in the Catholic intellectual tradition.

Pastoral Formation: Disciples know their personal charisms (spiritual gifts) and are effective in caring for other people. They do not simply receive God's blessing of mercy, but rather, formed by the Eucharist, use their gifts to bless others. They offer their resources sacrificially to grow the mission of the Church.

Spiritual Formation: Disciples have a rich interior life cultivated by personal prayer and communal worship. They can discern the Holy Spirit's movements within their heart as well as grasp the personal mission to which God is calling them. Love for God and neighbor animates them.

DISCIPLESHIP AND PRACTICES OF EVANGELIZATION

Evangelization is, first and foremost, the work of the Holy Spirit. We cannot profess the name of Jesus except by the power of the Holy Spirit. Nor are we able to grow the *Church Alive!* without the work of evangelization through the personal witness of believers. Evangelization is not the same as catechesis, although they intersect in every ministry of the Church. Evangelization primarily touches the heart through an encounter with Jesus. Through the witness of believers, evangelization prepares the soil of the heart to receive the Word of God and take root. Catechesis without evangelization does not fulfill the Lord's intention because it hands on a dead letter and not a living Word.

Evangelization doesn't happen because of a good resource, but because of disciples whose hearts are on fire for the Lord. Evangelization must be fully integrated into every aspect of the Church's life--worship, faith formation, community life, pastoral care, and social outreach.

Proclamation

Disciples proclaim Christ, believing that the basic Gospel message, the kerygma, is the key strategy of evangelization. They profess Jesus the risen Lord and bring all things Catholic back to friendship with him. Disciples are engaging and capable of drawing people to Jesus.

Witness

Disciples are joyful people whose lives testify to the power of grace and who, therefore, attract others to Christ and the Church. Witnessing is different than teaching or defending the faith through apologetics because witnessing predisposes others to receive the Word of God in their hearts. Disciples are merciful people who show apostolic endurance in the face of suffering, either their own or another's.

Narrative

Disciples evangelize because they are comfortable sharing their "God stories," including their personal story of conversion and the subsequent relationship they have with God.

Invitation & Response

Disciples don't wait for people to come. They are courageous individuals who go forth to engage the world and invite others to share in the life of the Christian community. Leaders employ effective communication strategies beyond pulpit and bulletin announcements, especially through strategies that build one-to-one encounters. These strategies cultivate a "come and see" approach to outsiders and remove any unnecessary impediments to a newcomer having a positive experience of the community.

Social Outreach

Disciples go out and practice the works of mercy. A "parish" is not a building but a mission territory in which one finds the marginalized and every human need. Mercy is a disciple's most important expression of the Church's mission to evangelize. Mature disciples witness to justice in social relations and act to make society better aligned with the Gospel.

Hospitality

Disciples go out to others, open their hearts and cultivate relationships. A disciple-leader connects with people through charity, not policy. They put aside an “officious” attitude that leads with legislation or moral platitudes. Disciples welcome people and walk with them. A parish filled with disciples will be warm and welcoming.

Beauty

Disciples are heralds of beauty because they know that dullness and mediocrity impede the work of Christ. Encountering beauty moves hearts. Disciples shape culture rather than scramble to catch up or conform to it. Disciple leaders insure that all we do architecturally, in our décor, within our programs and initiatives, and especially in regard to our communication platforms, proceeds with aesthetic excellence.

DISCIPLESHIP AND PRACTICES OF CATECHESIS

The Church calls us to carry out the work of handing on the faith according to the kerygmatic method of catechesis (*Catechesi tradendae*, no. 18). Kerygmatic catechesis follows the catechumenal model, which attends to all stages of development growth including: pre-evangelization, evangelization, initiatory catechesis and a period of mystagogy. Catechetical pedagogy involves three interrelated elements: 1) proclamation of the Word in narrative form (Scripture) and instruction in the plan of salvation^v; 2) the presentation of a systematic account of the truths of the faith contained in Scripture and how they fit together organically, offering to the faithful over time a coherent view of reality; and 3) the initiation into the full participation of the sacred mysteries (especially the Mass) as a celebration of the truths learned.

According to the kerygmatic approach, all aspects of the Catholic faith are explicitly related back to the person of Jesus Christ and lead the faithful into relationship with him. All catechesis leads to Eucharistic communion.

In more recent years, catechesis has followed a mass education model of learning that revolves around desks and textbooks. This approach is informational as

opposed to transformational, and often overlooks the need for evangelization. The kerygmatic approach to catechesis is experiential, incarnational, substantive, and engaging of the whole person, not just the intellect.

Recent research demonstrates that family-based catechesis, involving the active engagement of the parents as the primary educators of their children is the most effective approach to children practicing their faith into adulthood. Parental involvement in catechesis is indispensable.

Ongoing Formation

Disciples recognize that learning the faith is a lifelong responsibility. They are committed to understanding church teaching from a commitment to faith in Jesus Christ and from a humble desire to think with the mind of the Church. Disciples aspire to be literate in their faith and to be faithful exponents of church teaching.

Evangelical Witness

Disciples are faithful to Church teaching and witness to their personal relationship with Jesus Christ (Paul VI, *Evangelii nuntiandi*, no 41).

The Four Pillars of the Catechism

Disciples embrace the entire deposit of faith without avoiding difficult teachings. They mature in all four areas of Christian faith: the profession of faith (revelation), Liturgy (worship), Life in Christ (discipleship), and Prayer (spiritual communion).

Cultural Literacy

Disciples competently engage the questions of our culture and provide others with the reasons that support our teachings. This is because they prayerfully grasp the cultural context within which they live the faith.

DISCIPLESHIP AND PRACTICES OF WORSHIP

The Church is Alive! when she has disciples who participate fully in the liturgical life of the parish. The Eucharist is the source and summit of the Church. Liturgy is the wellspring from which disciples carry out the Church's mission. A decline in Mass attendance demonstrates a diminishing appreciation of the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist and the indispensable value of the Liturgy. The busyness of

modern society and the rise of an individualistic spirituality can encourage people to adopt an attitude of convenience about liturgy, so that Sunday is seen as just another day of the week. Mature disciples order their life around Sunday Liturgy.

Clergy and pastoral leaders convey the solemnity of the sacred mysteries by sufficient preparation for and the reverent celebration of the sacraments. They adhere to the rubrics and language of the liturgy, which maximize its formative and catechetical dimension. They open up the Word of God to the people, instruct the faithful in the teachings of Christ, and inspire them to deeper conversion. They select and lead music that moves the hearts of the faithful to praise and thanksgiving, to meditation, and ultimately contemplation of the sacred mysteries. They capitalize on the opportunity the sacraments offer to properly form their people and build the community.

Primacy of the Mass

Disciples attend Mass consistently, participate fully in the celebration, and live out the Eucharist the entire week. The Eucharist is the primary means by which they encounter the Lord and is the wellspring of every other aspect of their lives.

The Lord's Day

Disciples observe the Lord's Day as a sign of contradiction to the world. They spend time with family and engage in the life of the parish. If they are able, they cease from labor in order to dedicate this time to deeper communion with the Lord through prayer and service. They recognize that dedicating this time to their faith is essential to their continued growth as a Christian person.

Liturgical Participation

Disciples understand what is taking place in the liturgy and in the devotions of Christian piety. They grasp the relationship between external practices and the interior life. They see Sunday Mass and Holy Days as a privileged opportunity to encounter Jesus and experience the fellowship of God's people. They know how to draw closer to Christ in and through private prayer, community worship and personal devotion.

Adoration

Disciples take advantage of opportunities for adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. Eucharistic adoration strengthens the faithful, effects deeper healing of the body and soul, and provides necessary opportunity for spiritual discernment. A leader provides ample opportunities for Eucharistic adoration, as well as times for other forms of spiritual devotion, such as the liturgy of the hours, praise and worship, and the rosary. All disciples cultivate Eucharistic devotion and inspire other people to center their week on the Mass.

The Word of God

Disciples meditate upon Scripture and how the Word of God relates to their day-to-day living. They think with the mind of the Church and apply the Word to their life, especially through the sacred reading of Scripture (*lectio divina*).

DISCIPLESHIP AND PRACTICES OF STEWARDSHIP

The primary goal of stewardship is the Church's pastoral care of souls. The investment we make in the mission of the Church is what makes possible the many ministries by which people encounter Jesus, are liberated from sin, and are able to become a light to others that transforms the world around us.

Thus stewardship is the deepest expression of a disciple's love for the Lord. We cannot fulfill our mission to be *The Church Alive!* if we do not have disciples who recognize their call to contribute to the work of building the Kingdom of God here in Western Pennsylvania and beyond.

The gift of our *time* demonstrates a commitment to the life of the community and the relationships that develop therein. Financial stewardship results from the generous giving of one's *treasure* as the complete trust in God's providence. An offering of personal giftedness in the service of others recognizes the gifts and *charisms* that God bestows upon each of us at baptism. All of these gifts are to be shared.

Personal Gifts

Disciples know what gifts the Holy Spirit has given to them. They feel inspired to use those gifts for building up the life and mission of the parish and diocese.

Witness to Life

Disciples witness to the sanctity of all human life and promote the culture of life in the home, parish, and the wider community. They work toward the greater recognition of human dignity in the political and economic spheres.

Responsibility for the Needy

Disciples have a preferential love for the poor and marginalized. They are committed to tangible acts of solidarity with the most vulnerable among us.

Spiritual and Corporal Works of Mercy

Disciples practice the works of mercy for those around them, beginning with those nearest.

Financial Stewardship

Disciples are generous with their financial resources and embrace the biblical practice of offering to the Lord from their first fruits. Pastoral leaders establish a culture of stewardship as opposed to turning every community event into a fundraiser.

Pastoral Care

Pastoral leaders ensure that pastoral care is provided by and for the members of the parish, especially those who are grieving, homebound, disabled, ill or socially marginalized.

Ordering Gifts

Pastoral leaders identify, call forth and order the gifts of every parishioner so that those gifts support the mission of the parish and diocese. They make room for all the levels of collaboration needed for the parish to flourish.

CONCLUSION

Parish vibrancy depends upon the full commitment of the parish leadership team to cultivate the life of missionary discipleship among all parishioners in the five areas of the *Church Alive!*. This requires a coordinated effort to develop an inspiring vision and pastoral plan for the parish in all five areas of the *Church Alive!*. The diocese will provide resources and support to every parish as they develop that vision and plan. Forthcoming is a an assessment tool for parish vibrancy and a revised edition of *One Body, One Mission*.

ENDOTES

ⁱ Taken from *Great Catholic Parishes* by William E. Simon Jr. This also reflects the insights of *Divine Renovation: Bringing Your Parish from Maintenance to Mission*

ⁱⁱ Shared leadership respects the distinct roles of clergy and laity, but insures that all the gifts of Christ's body contribute to the common good of the parish and the diocese. A parish is best led by a team of disciple leaders under the direction of a pastor. A disciple-leader is a spiritually mature Christian who is a disciple first and also properly formed and equipped to lead others.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Spiritual awakening* is a term that refers to a profound encounter with Jesus Christ that elicits within the person a deep desire to enter into a personal relationship with him. Jesus' meeting with the woman at the well is a good example of such an encounter. This can often happen through a retreat, a parish mission or an evangelization program like Cursillo, ChristLife or Alpha Catholic.

^{iv} In *Pastores dabo vobis* (no. 42), John Paul II names these as human, spiritual, intellectual, and pastoral formation.

^v *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, nos. 128-130: "The Church, as early as apostolic times,¹⁰⁴ and then constantly in her Tradition, has illuminated the unity of the divine plan in the two Testaments through typology, which discerns in God's works of the Old Covenant prefigurations of what he accomplished in the fullness of time in the person of his incarnate Son. 129 Christians therefore read the Old Testament in the light of Christ crucified and risen. Such typological reading discloses the inexhaustible content of the Old Testament; but it must not make us forget that the Old Testament retains its own intrinsic value as Revelation reaffirmed by our Lord himself.¹⁰⁵ Besides, the New Testament has to be read in the light of the Old. Early Christian catechesis made constant use of the Old Testament.¹⁰⁶ As an old saying put it, the New Testament lies hidden in the Old and the Old Testament is unveiled in the New.¹⁰⁷ 130 Typology indicates the dynamic movement toward the fulfilment of the divine plan when "God [will] be everything to everyone."¹⁰⁸ Nor do the calling of the patriarchs and the exodus from Egypt, for example, lose their own value in God's plan, from the mere fact that they were intermediate stages."