



Prayer - Planning - Possibilities

Key Indicators for a Vibrant Parish in the Diocese of Erie

Definition of a parish for use in pastoral planning

A parish is a certain community of the Catholic faithful stably established in a specific geographic area and entrusted to the care of a pastor. The parish is the presence of Christ and the church in a given territory, an environment for hearing God's word, for growth in the Christian life, for dialogue, proclamation, charitable outreach, worship and celebration.

The parish is the extension of the diocesan bishop's ministry in a specific place.

At the direction of the pastor, and by means of its own human and material resources, the parish is to see that the Word of God is proclaimed in its entirety and that the Eucharist is the center of its life. The pastor, in collaboration with the faithful of the parish, is to provide for: the dignified celebration of the Liturgy, the sacraments, pastoral care and evangelization to those in his territory, in accord with universal church and diocesan laws.

In all its activities the parish encourages and trains its members to be evangelizers. It is a community of communities, a sanctuary where the thirsty come to drink in the midst of their journey and a center of constant missionary outreach. As an extension of the bishop's ministry—and therefore an extension of Jesus' own ministry—the parish must continue to be the church living in the midst of the homes of her sons and daughters.

It is to be an environment of living communion and participation, a place of welcome and patient nurturing. The parish must be a community capable of self-renewal and constant adaptivity.

Ultimately, the parish is an institution completely oriented to the mission and words of Jesus to “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.” (Matthew 28:19-20)

The parish is not an outdated institution; precisely because it possesses great flexibility, it can assume quite different contours depending on the openness and missionary creativity of the pastor and the community. While certainly not the only institution which evangelizes, if the parish proves capable of self-renewal and constant adaptivity, it continues to be “the Church living the midst of the homes of her sons and daughters”. This presumes that it really is in contact with the homes and the lives of its people, and does not become a useless structure out of touch with people or a self-absorbed group made up of a chosen few. The parish is the presence of the church in a given territory, an environment for hearing God's word, for growth in the Christian life, for dialogue,

proclamation, charitable outreach, worship and celebration. In all its activities the parish encourages and trains its members to be evangelizers. It is a community of communities, a sanctuary where the thirsty come to drink in the midst of their journey, and a center of constant missionary outreach.¹

Key Indicators

A. Vision and Leadership

1. The parish follows and promotes the Gospel of Jesus Christ and understands its relationship to the diocese and universal church.
2. The parish develops a local vision for pastoral activity in the coming years which is rooted in the Gospel of Jesus Christ.
3. The parish is staffed by properly trained ministers or shares staff with other parishes to lead and direct all areas of the parish's mission.
4. The parish has a finance council and a pastoral council in place, which meet regularly to engage and involve the faithful to help carry out the pastoral activity of the parish.
5. The parish provides or makes available formation and training for pastoral staff and lay leadership.
6. The parish regularly reviews and evaluates its long-range plans in order to ensure that its human and financial resources are being used in the best way possible to carry out the mission of Christ, and to meet the needs of both its parishioners and the people who live in the area.

B. Worship and the Sacraments

7. Liturgical celebrations are properly and thoughtfully prepared and well attended with full, active and conscious participation.
8. Homilies are relevant, challenging and faithful to the Gospel and church teaching. Parishioners are taught how to grow, and are inspired to live as disciples of Jesus Christ.
9. Sacramental preparation is thoughtfully and properly planned and conducted in accord with approved guidelines and diocesan policies.

¹ Cf. Apostolic Exhortation *EVANGELII GAUDIUM* of the Holy Father FRANCIS. 24 November 2013.

10. The prayer and devotional life of parishioners is supported and nourished beyond the Sunday liturgy and the sacraments.
11. Music as a part of worship is of high quality.
12. Worship space is aesthetically pleasing and appropriate. Liturgical environments are created in accord with the liturgical norms.
13. The RCIA is implemented and its rituals are celebrated at the proper times.

C. Lifelong Faith Formation, Catholic Education and Evangelization

14. The parish provides adult faith formation opportunities which include both study and spiritual formation in accord with diocesan policies.
15. The parish provides comprehensive faith formation for children in religious education programs in accord with diocesan policy.
16. The parish provides opportunities for learning, spiritual growth, participation in the sacramental life, service and community for its adolescents.
17. Parents are involved in the life of the parish and active in the faith development of their children.
18. The opportunity to attend a Catholic school is provided to parishioners including some financial support from the parish.
19. The parish is creating a culture of vocations that actively and prayerfully promotes vocations to the priesthood, diaconate and consecrated life.
20. Catechists, school teachers, and catechetical leaders are trained and competent in their ministries.
21. Parishioners are challenged to reach out to inactive Catholics, inquirers, the unchurched and all others.

D. Service and Pastoral Care

22. The parish is actively engaged in proclaiming the Gospel through service to people in need locally, in the wider community, and the world.
23. The parish collaborates with other churches and civic agencies to serve the wider community.
24. The parish provides ministry to the homebound and elderly parishioners and to those in hospitals, nursing homes, and other care facilities.

25. Ministry is offered to comfort and support to, including but not limited to, the grieving, the separated, and the divorced.

Stewardship / Building Community

26. The parish welcomes new parishioners and invites them to become involved in the parish mission.
27. Parishioners are invited and provided opportunities to better understand their gifts and talents and ways these can be used to minister to others.
28. Parishioners understand stewardship as a response to their discipleship and give of time, talent, and treasure to support the Church's mission.
29. The parish fosters opportunities for fellowship which provide a sense of community for parishioners.
30. A communication strategy is in place using all forms of media to be in regular contact with parishioners, promote events and encourage parish community.

E. Administrative Services

31. The parish operates with a balanced budget and has sufficient operating funds for ministries, programs, facilities and staff in order to meet the needs of the community.
32. The parish has all necessary financial controls and operating procedures in place in accordance with diocesan policies.
33. Financial reporting is done in a timely manner and follows the accounting standards established by the diocese.
34. Parish facilities are well-maintained, attractive, and appropriate for parish ministries and programs. Facilities are handicap-accessible and inviting.
35. The parish has a master site plan for ongoing maintenance and development of its campus.
36. Personnel policies, job descriptions, hiring and interview practices, and salary scales are in place, communicated and followed.
37. Regular staff meetings are held. A performance review process is established for all staff.

38. A technology plan has been developed and is used to keep equipment current, provide training and support to staff, ensure proper security of data, and, most importantly, to support the ministries of the parish through many varied uses.

Closing reflection

Pope Francis addresses the role of the Catholic Church with these words:

“Being Church means being God’s people, in accordance with the great plan of his fatherly love. This means that we are to be God’s leaven in the midst of humanity. It means proclaiming and bringing God’s salvation into our world, which often goes astray and needs to be encouraged, given hope and strengthened on the way. The Church must be a place of mercy freely given, where everyone can feel welcomed, loved, forgiven and encouraged to live the good life of the Gospel.”²

To be vibrant is to “show great life, activity and energy”³. How do we know if a parish is vibrant? A list of indicators has been created that, when taken together, describe vibrancy as it should be found in a Catholic community of God’s faithful people. The parish community may not exhibit all the indicators at a particular time, however the hope and expectation is that parishes are able to exhibit these indicators either independently or in collaboration with other parishes.

Vibrant parishes should be able to secure the resources necessary to provide effective ministries and programs for the long term. Parishes, whether in urban or rural areas, should all be capable of being vibrant. Vibrancy is not to be understood to mean uniformity. Parishes will neither look alike nor conduct their ministries in exactly the same ways. A parish intent upon carrying out the mission of Jesus will do so in conformity with its unique character and circumstances..

The indicators should be adapted to each local situation and provide criteria from which local parishes will develop their own plans. Should parishes collectively or independently discover that they do not have the potential to actualize the key indicators, new structures for organizing parishes or leadership may need to be explored.

True to the Word of God and consistent with the teachings of the Catholic Church, the indicators are the elements of parish life that are necessary and desired.

² Apostolic Exhortation EVANGELII GAUDIUM of the Holy Father FRANCIS. 24 November 2013.

³ “vibrant.” *Meriam-Webster.com*. 2015. <http://www.merriam-webster.com> (19 January 2015).