

St. Michael the Archangel Pastoral Plan 2017

Over the course of the past six months, we have been reflecting on what are the most important initiatives we could undertake to build up and strengthen St. Michael parish. To help answer this question, an organization called Casting Nets led our parish through a pastoral planning process. With the help of a focus group of parishioners, feedback and input from parishioners through listening sessions, and a parish wide survey, three super-priorities were identified for the parish: (1) Deepening Spirituality (2) Evangelization, and (3) Strengthening Marriage and Family life.

1. Deepening Spirituality

In preparation for the new millennium, Pope Saint John Paul II wrote an apostolic letter to all the faithful. In the opening of his apostolic letter, he invited the people of God to “Put out into the deep,” echoing the words of Jesus to St. Peter. This is a reminder of our universal call to holiness. Becoming a saint isn’t reserved for a select few, but the call of all of God’s people.

In an interview in 1975, Mother Teresa said, “You, in the West, have millions of people who suffer such terrible loneliness and emptiness. They feel unloved and unwanted. These people are not hungry in the physical sense, but they are in another way. They know they need something more than money, yet they don't know what it is. What they are missing, really, is a living relationship with God.” (Interview with Dan Wooding.) Mother Teresa’s words still ring true today. There is a hunger in our American culture for God! In the midst of countless distractions, noise, and diversions, we want to help parishioners discover the richness of the interior life. In fact, Pope Saint John Paul said every parish should be a “School of Prayer.” We want to teach people how to pray. Prayer is food for the soul and should be the foundation of all our ministries and be at the heart of our personal spiritual lives. Parishioners expressed not only a desire to grow in personal prayer but a desire to have a rich experience of prayer through the Liturgy. In the survey, many also mentioned how important music is to communal worship and prayer.

The heart of our spirituality as Catholic Christians is our relationship with Jesus Christ. This relationship with Jesus is sustained and deepened only through a commitment to daily personal prayer. Under this initiative, we want to focus on helping parishioners learn daily meditative prayer. Meditation teaches us not only how to talk to God but also how to listen to him.

In addition to prayer, we encounter the Risen Lord through the sacramental life of the Church. The Eucharist is the source and summit of the Christian life. Essential to our spiritual growth is living our lives in Communion with Jesus. Giving our worship and thanks to the Father by participation in the Sunday Eucharist must be a prime focus. Jesus reminds us that “apart

from me you can do nothing.” (Jn 15:5). Also, under this initiative, we want to promote Eucharistic Adoration which will enhance and deepen our experience of Mass.

In 2016, Pope Francis called for the Church universal to celebrate a Year of Mercy. Our current pope has placed increasing emphasis on the sacrament of reconciliation. Making available frequent opportunities for the sacrament of reconciliation will be priority to strengthen spirituality.

Finally, offering opportunities for spiritual mentoring, Stephen ministry, retreats, parish missions, and conferences for both youth and adults will also be a focus under this initiative to renew and enliven our spiritual lives.

2. Evangelization

Recent popes, beginning with Pope Paul VI through Pope Francis have been calling for a “new” evangelization. Archbishop Naumann in his 10-year vision listed “evangelization” as one of his super-priorities for the Archdiocese. St. Michael parish is in-step with both the universal church and our local diocesan church as we too focus on evangelization.

Over the past year, Archbishop Naumann has stated on multiple occasions, “It’s not enough to just keep the faith, we are called to share the faith.” This is the great commission Christ gave to the Church, “Go therefore into the whole world and proclaim the gospel.” (Mk 16:15). By virtue of the sacrament of baptism, all Christians are called to participate in the mission of evangelization. Under this initiative, we want to especially form parishioners to become missionary disciples.

Interestingly, when many think of evangelization, they think of going to foreign lands and proclaiming the gospel to unbelievers. But the “new” evangelization begins by re-awakening the faith of Christians. It is far too easy to fall into routine and to live out a programmed faith instead of having a living and life-giving relationship with Jesus and his Church. Under this initiative, we want to enliven the faith of parishioners. One way to do this is to proclaim the “kerygma,” or the kernel of the Good News. It is important that we know the basics of our Christian story and that we are comfortable bearing witness to Christ’s work in our own lives. The faith of parishioners has been enlivened through the Christ Renews His Parish Retreats and The Vine – a six-week faith sharing experience hosted in parishioner’s homes. After having our own faith awakened, we want to allow the Holy Spirit to direct us to proclaim the joy of the gospel to all those whom we encounter.

Evangelization is not only the personal mission of each disciple, but it is also the role of the parish. We as a parish family are called to be evangelistic! Casting Nets did our 2017 Lenten Parish Mission and shared with us Seven Pillars of an Evangelizing Parish. These are the

guiding values of an evangelizing parish and I am asking all our ministries to reflect upon and implement these 7-pillars:

1. **Prayerful** – All the works of evangelization begin with prayer!
2. **Invitational** – Jesus called people by name. We too are called to extend personal invitations to “Come follow Jesus.”
3. **Hospitable** – The Body of Christ is called to be welcoming and hospitable to whomever walks through our doors. A simple smile and friendly greeting go a long way!
4. **Inspirational** – Living the Christian life well inspires others. Our parishioners have inspiring testimonies. Often joy attracts people to the church more than intellectual arguments! Our parishioners should exude the joy of living the gospel.
5. **Sacramental** – Evangelizing parishes usher people to the sacraments. The sacraments are the source of strength and salvation!
6. **Formational** – We cannot love what we do not know. Evangelizing parishes offer education and formation on how to be a disciple of Christ.
7. **Missionful** – We are not called to merely maintain what we have, but an evangelizing parish is always going out to make disciples.

3. Strengthening Marriage and Family Life

The family is the domestic church. Archbishop Naumann stated, “For the vast majority of us, the context for our growth as disciples of Jesus is within family life.” The listening sessions and survey yielded plentiful comments about the desire to focus on strengthening marriage and family.

When Pope John Paul II visited St. Louis in 1998 he said, “As the family goes so goes the nation.” A strong and holy family has Christ at the center. First and foremost, we want to help parents hand on the faith to their children and to keep their children connected to God’s family – the Church. In particular, we want to promote family prayer, help families live the liturgical year in their home, and incorporate their faith into daily living.

Perhaps one of the best ways we can support parents in handing on their faith is through our Catholic School and religious education program. At St. Michael School, faith is not just one subject among many, but permeates and underlies all that we do. Whether children are in the classroom, at lunch, or on the playground, faith, virtue and Catholic values are instilled. We understand, however, that there are good reasons why a family might choose public schools for their children, and so we want to offer the best religious education program to support parents in forming their children in the faith. Ultimately, both our parochial school and religious education programs are striving to form our children to be life-long disciples of Jesus and the saints God has created them to be!

Under this initiative, we also want to help parents navigate the real-life challenges posed by our secular culture such as: relativism and the disintegration of objective moral truth,

the challenges technology poses - especially the epidemic of pornography, the loss of hope and meaning of an Godless world view, the pressure of measuring human value based upon achievement and material success, just to name a few.

The starting point to strengthening the family unit is to strengthen marriage. Under this initiative we want to offer marriage enrichment opportunities. Any meaningful relationship takes work! Through workshops, classes, and resources such as REFOCCUS, we want to provide couples with the skills to have a thriving and live-giving marriage. In addition, we want to provide the best possible marriage preparation program so that engaged couples receive formation in the Church's vision of marriage and have the support and skills to find joy and fulfillment in this most sacred vocation.

In addition to married couples and families, we also want those who are single or divorced to feel welcome and an important part of our St. Michael parish family. How to best provide resources and pastoral care to the divorced, widowed, and young adults is an on-going discussion of utmost importance.

Conclusion

Many of the initiatives mentioned in this pastoral plan are already underway. In addition, parish wide goals under each of these super-priorities have been planned in consultation with the parish council and many will be implemented this year. Please look for more information with specific details and dates throughout the year. Also, each parish ministry or committee should also be setting goals in keeping with these super-priorities.

Thanks to all who have worked so hard to assist with developing this pastoral plan! Though the intercession of St. Michael may God bless our parish family.