



THE CATHOLIC COMMUNITY OF ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI
2008 STRATEGIC INITIATIVES

PENTECOST 2008

MISSION STATEMENT

The Catholic Community of Saint Francis of Assisi is a gospel faith community baptized into the life, death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. We believe that our earth and all life is sacred, that all people are gifted with God's grace and called to build God's kingdom on earth. We believe that kingdom is a kingdom of justice and peace, faith and hope, love and acceptance. That kingdom belongs to the least among us.

We are one family living in community confronted, challenged and comforted by the word of God, reaching out to all persons and their families. We are contemporary Catholic Christians, sharing the ministry which belongs to each of us in partnership with our Bishop. We are inspired by the simplicity of Saint Francis and his friars. We are responsible stewards of our talents and worldly goods.

We celebrate our faith by worshiping together, experiencing Christ in Word and Eucharist and one another, in natural and simple surroundings. We grow in knowledge of our tradition and the meaning of our oneness in Christ. We welcome with joy all those who come to us and invite them into the life of our community. We bear witness to those who do not know Christ, by living our faith and spreading the good news.

We reach out in a special way to those who hunger and thirst for human dignity: the poor, suffering and oppressed people in our community and in our world.

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LETTER FROM THE PASTOR

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

The Mission of our parish guides us to be a “gospel faith community baptized into the life, death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ,” whereby “we believe that our earth and all life is sacred, all people are gifted with God’s grace, and called to build God’s kingdom on earth.”

As stewards of the mission of our parish, the pastoral council is responsible for ensuring we are faithful to this mission. As the Book of Proverbs reminds us “the people without a vision will perish (Proverbs 29:18)”. The council has once again developed a strategic plan to provide us a practical vision to live out our mission, and focus our energies over the next three years.

In their book “Collaborative Ministry” Loughland Sofield, ST and Carroll Juliano, SHCJ define Collaboration as “the identification, release and union of the gifts of all baptized persons.” Our mission statement reminds us how we are indeed gifted with God’s grace, and are now exhorted to use these gifts for the sake of God’s kingdom, the ultimate mission of our Catholic Church. This strategic plan invites each of us to share our gifts, to bring about the mission of our parish.

Our patron, Francis of Assisi, often exhorted his followers, “let us begin again for up until now we have done little or nothing.” The strategic plan exhorts us to “begin again.” It provides us with a viable way for us to grow in faith together that hearts renewed, we may have new hope for the future.

I am grateful to the pastoral council and the many parishioners, whose thoughtful reflections helped to shape these important initiatives of our parish. May this strategic plan provide a vision for us to proclaim and celebrate the Gospel of Jesus Christ, who calls us to build God’s kingdom on earth.

In the peace of Christ,



Fr. Mark G. Reamer, O.F.M.
Pastor

STRATEGIC INITIATIVES OVERVIEW

Every three years, the Pastor and Pastoral Council undertake the Strategic Initiative process. Out of this process the Strategic Initiatives are generated and shared with the staff and parish. These initiatives focus and guide the direction of the parish in terms of setting and acting on goals and priorities for our community.

The Strategic Initiative process is led by the Pastoral Council. As stewards of the Mission Statement they form themselves in the tradition of the Roman Catholic Church by reflecting upon Vatican and US Bishops’ writings and other resources, which articulate a vision for the diverse aspects of parish life. The Pastoral Council holds a number of listening sessions with parishioners who come from all walks of life, involvement levels and areas of parish life. The parishioners are asked to answer a series of questions about parish activities, challenges, potential issues and past strategic initiatives.

Following the listening sessions, the feedback is organized and presented to the staff for additional input. The Pastoral Council meets over a number of weeks to identify and define the themes heard from the parishioners. From these meetings, the initiatives are drafted, refined and finalized.

After this, the staff is asked to develop goals and objectives that can accomplish the initiatives over the next three years. The initiatives and goals and objectives are then shared with the parish as a whole.

PAST STRATEGIC INITIATIVES UPDATE

The last Strategic Initiative process was undertaken in 2005. Out of the 2005 Strategic Initiative process, five initiatives were identified and implemented. Following is an update on the progress of all initiatives from 2005.

Develop a Comprehensive Senior Program

Purpose: Enhance our support to the seniors and their families with the goal of seeking ways to minister to all seniors. Provide more spiritual, emotional and physical support and intergenerational programs for the benefit of seniors in need and their caregivers.

- ✓ A survey to seniors of the parish to determine their needs.
- ✓ A parish wide survey identified needs of caregivers
- ✓ Monthly opportunities for socializing including an afternoon of "games"
- ✓ A monthly luncheon (Young At Heart) with entertainment or guest speakers re-energized
- ✓ A bi-monthly newsletter to all parishioners aged 62+
- ✓ Morning Retreats
- ✓ Social events such as Oktoberfest party and Valentine Party
- ✓ Cultural events such as music festivals and Theatrical productions
- ✓ Wake County Resource information offered to seniors and caregivers

Develop St. Francis Center for Social Concerns

Purpose: Create a coalition for peace and justice that would serve as St Francis' unifying vehicle for promoting the dignity and respect for all human beings by serving the poor, oppressed, disadvantaged and marginalized people of the greater community. The coalition would strive to engage people of all faiths and parishioners of all ages in education, advocacy and a sense of responsibility to serve those in need and to be lifelong advocates for the poor.

- ✓ Re-structured the Office of Peace and Justice and created the "Franciscan Coalition for Justice and Peace of the Catholic Community of St. Francis of Assisi" to include a Steering Committee, Coalition Director, Service and Advocacy Coordinators.
- ✓ Invite parishioners and others to understand Catholic Social Teaching and apply it to issues of today.
- ✓ Development of Four advocacy teams to apply Catholic Social Teaching: Death Penalty Reform, Immigration Reform, Health Care Reform, and Environmental Justice Advocacy team.
- ✓ Created awareness of Catholic Social Teaching within the parish including dialogue opportunities on how to put our gospel faith into action.
- ✓ Parish wide events including an advocacy workshop, film festival, retreat on spirituality and justice, speaker series including "Faith and Politics" and "Sojourns for Justice".
- ✓ A parish based task force to develop a strategic plan for greening the St. Francis campus.

Communicate and Promote Our Mission

Purpose: To give our Parish Mission life by proclaiming to our Parishioners and Community all that we do in ministry at St Francis of Assisi to realize our Parish Mission.

- ✓ GIFT Capital Campaign rooted in our Parish Mission and Traditions
- ✓ Communications media updated (bulletin, web site, newsletter, mailings)
- ✓ Accountability Sunday annually to review our financial stewardship
- ✓ A new Parish logo to help "brand" who we are and unify the ministries of St. Francis

PAST STRATEGIC INITIATIVES UPDATE CONTINUED

Realize Our Gifts as a Parish and Individuals

Purpose: To Call forth all parishioners to discern and share their gifts in union with our community, with the goal of converting parishioners to embrace stewardship as a way of life.

- ✓ GIFT (Growing In Faith Together) Capital Campaign invited participation of all parishioners
- ✓ 25th Anniversary celebration of our gifts as Catholic Community
- ✓ Formation of Stewardship Committee to provide parish focus
- ✓ Assessment and pilot of gift discernment programs
- ✓ Creation of publications with ministry opportunities to invite parishioner participation

Renew Faith Formation

Purpose: Foster lifelong faith formation for all generations to strengthen parents and all adults in their understanding of their faith and their responsibility to share it. Develop whole community catechesis to bring children, youth and all adults together.

- ✓ Reenergized FIRE (Family Intergenerational Religious Education) to increase to 245 families participating
- ✓ Created Bi-annual Formation Days for Faith Formation and Liturgical Ministries
- ✓ Addition of Coordinator Lifelong Faith Formation-Adult
- ✓ Increased catechesis in bulletin
- ✓ Revised and renewed family focus/parent participation in Confirmation preparation
- ✓ Seasonal intergenerational events such as: Generations of Faith events, Night in Bethlehem, and three Lenten Soup Suppers/Prayer series
- ✓ Increased opportunities for parent participation in Middle School Youth Ministry
- ✓ Creation of Evangelization Ministry Group under leadership of Christine Miesowicz for collaboration among faith formation and liturgical ministries
- ✓ Creation of retreat opportunities for parishioners such as “busy persons retreat”
- ✓ Renew family-based model for initiation of children over 7
- ✓ Parish-wide Lent/Easter resources for parishioners

FOSTER AND CELEBRATE THE DIVERSITY OF OUR COMMUNITY

St. Francis is not a “one-size fits all” parish. We are a diverse, dynamic and growing group of people who have traveled many different roads to be here. It is our differences on that journey that help form us and our shared faith that binds us.

Our diversity as the Body of Christ is varied and vast—encompassing differences of religion, culture, language and race. Our challenge is to ensure that we welcome, understand, foster and celebrate the diversity among us. By doing so, we enrich our faith and each other.

Out of feedback received through the Strategic Initiative process, there arose a strong desire to better understand and foster our diverse population as outlined above. In addition, many parishioners expressed a strong interest to increase our outreach and ministry to the growing Hispanic population in the area.

As this issue was further researched, it was uncovered that we do not currently have an accurate breakdown of the different religious, cultural, language and racial makeup of our registered parishioners. In fact, less than 1% of our parishioners have this data identified in our parish database system. This initial lack of understanding concerning our diverse population hinders us from effectively and actively “reaching out to all persons and their families” in all that we do.

This strategic initiative hopes to address all these issues, and is to include the following:

- Identify the diverse groups within our Parish
- Identify the needs and gifts of these diverse groups
- Develop ways to meet their needs and integrate their gifts within the community
- Increase minority participation in leadership roles at St Francis
- Attract and reach out to minorities with an emphasis on the growing Hispanic population
- Create new outreach programs for immigrants in the area
- Encourage all parishioners to respond to the needs and celebrate the gifts of diverse groups within our parish

“WE ARE ONE FAMILY
LIVING IN
COMMUNITY
CONFRONTED,
CHALLENGED AND
COMFORTED BY THE
WORD OF GOD,
REACHING OUT TO
ALL PERSONS AND
THEIR FAMILIES.”

*(1 COR. 12:11-14)
FOR EVEN AS THE
BODY IS ONE AND
YET HAS MANY
MEMBERS, AND ALL
THE MEMBERS OF THE
BODY, THOUGH THEY
ARE MANY, ARE ONE
BODY, SO ALSO IS
CHRIST. FOR BY ONE
SPIRIT WE WERE ALL
BAPTIZED INTO ONE
BODY, WHETHER
JEWS OR GREEKS,
WHETHER SLAVES OR
FREE, AND WE WERE
ALL MADE TO DRINK
OF ONE SPIRIT. FOR
THE BODY IS NOT
ONE MEMBER, BUT
MANY.*

ENGAGE OUR YOUTH THROUGH FAMILY AND COMMUNITY

It's no secret that St. Francis is blessed to have an incredible number of families with children growing up in our parish and faith. In fact, of our registered parishioners, 37% are under the age of 21 and within this youth group, 43% are between the ages of 11 and 21.

Through the strategic initiatives process, an overwhelming amount of feedback was heard on the importance of engaging and nurturing this critical 11 to 21 age group within the context of our families, the parish and our larger society. Parents are looking for ways to help engage and keep their children engaged in our faith and parish (both while living with them and when no longer under the same roof).

Parents want to ensure that their children are prepared to confront the challenges of our society from a Catholic perspective. We heard that they want their children to feel part of a parish-wide atmosphere that celebrates and encourages the faith and uniqueness of what it means to be a Catholic youth. To do this, we want to find out from the youth their needs to give them voice.

In addition, as our GIFT Campaign moves to the building phase over the next three years, the Assisi Community Center with Youth Center will soon break ground. Supported by the Center, our parish will now have additional space and resources to help foster this positive youth environment.

This strategic initiative is built around addressing this issue as outlined above. The strategic initiative includes:

- Research and investigate the needs of our 11 to 21 year olds through listening sessions with the youth
- Research and investigate the needs of the parents of 11 to 21 year olds through listening sessions with the parents
- Develop or further promote existing programs specifically addressing the needs from these listening sessions
- Develop a human sexuality program for our youth and their families
- Make faith formation for our youth more meaningful by creating outreach activities for the family and youth
- Increase participation in TYM and our confirmation program
- Enhance and create opportunities for youth to encounter and deepen their spiritual relationship with God
- Create ways to reach out to those youth currently lacking or in need of spiritual resources
- Ensure all ministries are calling forth youth for participation in their programs
- Develop a plan to invite adults to be facilitators, mentors, coaches of our youth
- Prepare for the youth center opening
- Develop awareness of vocation opportunities within the church
- Encourage all parishioners to respond to the needs and celebrate the gifts of youth within our parish

“WE WELCOME WITH JOY ALL THOSE WHO COME TO US AND INVITE THEM INTO THE LIFE OF OUR COMMUNITY.”

*(1 TIMOTHY 4:12)
LET NO ONE LOOK
DOWN ON YOUR
YOUTHFULNESS, BUT
RATHER IN SPEECH,
CONDUCT, LOVE,
FAITH AND PURITY,
SHOW YOURSELF AN
EXAMPLE OF THOSE
WHO BELIEVE.*

CREATE A CULTURE OF STEWARDSHIP

St. Francis is an active and vibrant parish where people encounter God in one another. There are over 100 different ministries with approximately 3,000 volunteer opportunities. Our ministries provide us the opportunity to use the gifts of God's grace we have received through our Baptism for the sake of God's kingdom—the ultimate mission of our Catholic church.

Currently, of all available volunteer positions, we only have a ~ 10% participation rate across registered parishioners over the age of 21. Our low ministry participation rate is hindering the ability of our ministries to fully function as needed. This impacts everything from our ability to consistently provide Eucharist to the sick and homebound to having enough ushers at Mass as two examples.

Building upon this, the strategic initiative process brought to light a desire by many parishioners to be more involved in ministry. Many are searching for ways to better understand how and where they could contribute more of their time and talent. Another key insight was that as our parish grows in size, many parishioners are concerned about feeling lost. Ministry involvement was noted as a key way to increase a sense of belonging and small community within the larger parish community.

Another key factor driving this initiative is that it is not just our call to service to one another that must be heard, but also our spiritual obligation to answer the financial needs of our parish and ministries. Over the past 6 years, our average weekly offertory per family has stayed flat. We must explore ways to address this situation and inspire individuals to be responsible stewards of not just their talents, but also of their worldly goods as they are their gifts from God.

This strategic initiative is in response to the issue as outlined above and our challenge to continually reinforce and create opportunities for people to respond to their baptismal call to serve and share our gifts. The initiative will include:

- Provide a program and tools for parishioner gift discernment
- Increase participation in ministries by matching specific ministry opportunities to parishioners' gifts
- Create a program to call parishioners to become active stewards of their gifts
- Make parishioners aware of the opportunities to experience a sense of small community through ministry involvement
- Connect spirituality with people's professional life
- Increase the number of social events to engage parishioners and educate them on our ministry opportunities
- Increase the contributions per family by educating the parishioners on their Christian financial responsibilities
- Increase the frequency of communication and the overall transparency of the parish's finances

"WE ARE RESPONSIBLE STEWARDS OF OUR TALENTS AND WORLDLY GOODS."

*(1 CORINTHIANS 4:1-2)
THUS SHOULD ONE REGARD US: AS SERVANTS OF CHRIST AND STEWARDS OF THE MYSTERIES OF GOD. NOW IT IS OF COURSE REQUIRED OF STEWARDS THAT THEY BE FOUND FAITHFUL TO THEIR GIFTS.*