

A Parish Vision
for
Saint James the Greater Parish
Cincinnati, Ohio

*“Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you.”
Zechariah 8:23*

The Preamble

As Catholics walk toward holiness and the eternal union with God called heaven, they gather in local Churches called dioceses, which are full expressions of the universal Church. As each local Church strives to make present the fullness of the Catholic Church, and strives to live the message of Jesus Christ, it assumes the ministry of Jesus Christ in our time. In every way the work of the Church is rooted and formed by the example of the Lord. The universal Church and the local Churches recognize that its activity must be an expression of the ministry of Jesus.

To carry out this ministry among the people, pastoral centers called parishes are established throughout the local Church. This clustering of the People of God is usually by geographic area or similarities of need, e.g. language. Because of the way they are established, they are by nature temporary and changeable in response to changing patterns of population and need.

The parish of Saint James the Greater is such a gathering of Catholics in the archdiocese of Cincinnati in the suburb of White Oak. For over 160 years this parish has served the Catholics of this area. In response to change, the parish envisions a Pastoral Plan to guide its work in the coming five (5) years.

The Essential Works

Based on the teachings of Jesus as recorded in the Gospels and the activity of the early Church as recorded in the Acts of the Apostles and the letters of St. Paul, there are several essential ministries in the Church. Without these, the local Church or the parish does not fulfill its mission as Church. Many things are assumed to be essential ministries of the Church, but with reflection on the Scriptural bases and the realities of the Church, we find that there are only three essentials. These must be carried out fully so as to guide whatever else a parish wishes to include in its activities. It is also presumed that they will be carried out in love, since we have been commanded by the Lord himself, *“as I have loved you, so you also should love one another.”* (*The Gospel according to John, 13:34, as Jesus talks to the disciples at the Last Supper.*)

It is through these essential works that the Church makes the ministry of Jesus present. It is through them that others are invited to walk with us because they have heard God is with us. All that is done in a local Church or parish is ordered to making others aware of the presence of God in our midst so that they, too, may believe and be saved through Jesus the Christ. In all activity of the Church or parish, the motivation must be to be faithful to the Lord and to work for the salvation of others..

Worship

Amen, amen, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life within you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him on the last day.

(The Gospel according to John, 6:53-54, as Jesus teaches the disciples.)

The first of the essential works is worship of the one God. From its first days, Biblical religion has insisted on the centrality of worship. Every detail of the temple was revealed by God. Rules for the purity of priests and people were part of God's revelation in the first covenant. With the coming of the Son of God worship remained the primary work of the Church. The Acts of the Apostles and the Letters of Saint Paul describe how the Church came to gather in prayer and the celebration of the Eucharist became the foundation of all prayer. Especially St. Paul in his letters to the Corinthians expresses concern about the way the Eucharist is celebrated because it is the death and rising of the Lord, the ultimate sacrifice to the Father.

In a parish plan, the first priority for money and effort has to be worship according to the norms of the Catholic Church. This is the source and summit of all life in the Church. Without it, the parish does not exist, the diocese does not exist. The Church has set down the instructions for the celebration of the sacraments in such a way that preserves the beliefs of the Church and the unity that flows from the common faith. As she reminds us that no one has the authority to change the liturgy, the Church requires us to use the finest resources to carry out the sacrifice of Jesus.

To do that in the parish of St. James we propose:

- To do all that is necessary to retain the full-time ministry of a priest in the parish;
- To work to welcome all parishioners and to encourage in every parishioner the sense of obligation and privilege to participate in the Sunday Eucharist;
- To schedule Masses and other worship events as a complement to the schedules in neighboring parishes;
- To utilize the various roles of deacons and other ministers as much as possible in the prayer of the parish;
- To encourage vocations to the priesthood, diaconate, and consecrated religious life.

Proclamation of the Gospel

He said to them, "Go into the whole world and proclaim the gospel to every creature."

(The Gospel according to Mark, 16:15, as Jesus appears to the disciples after the Resurrection before the Ascension.)

No one could omit the proclamation of the Gospel from the essential work of the Church. Day after day Jesus moved among his people to preach and teach the message of God's salvation. On the Pentecost day, Peter and the other disciples left the upper room to enter the streets of

Jerusalem carrying the Word of God. And three thousand were added to their number (Acts 2:14-41).

The Church must move beyond its own members in preaching the Gospel. It is true that every Christian is in need of constant conversion, and much must be done to strengthen the faith of those who already believe. But it is an essential work of the church to bring new members into the fold of the Church. This makes the proclamation of the Gospel threefold.

Continuing education of the adult members must be a part of the proclamation of the Gospel. Long gone are the days when a grade school level knowledge of the teachings of the Church is sufficient for Christian living. We cannot forget that in the early centuries of the Church the focus of the Church's preaching was to adults. Nor can we forget that all of Jesus' preaching was to adults. For too long we have not had this as a priority in our living out of the mission of Jesus.

Our efforts must be to bring up our young members in the faith. Faith is not infused by baptism but is grown into through the maturation of the individual in a faith filled context. This will require a strong religious education program. It will also require support for truly Christian family life. Efforts have to be made to make the Catholic family a true domestic Church.

Efforts must be made to bring converts to the Catholic Church. The reason for this is not that our numbers in White Oak are declining, which they are, but because we are concerned for the salvation of others. We want them to know Jesus Christ as we do and to be able to experience the fullness of His work through the sacraments in the Catholic Church. There must always be efforts to bring new members into the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church.

To do this in the parish of St. James we propose:

- To increase the availability of adult religious education opportunities in the parish;
- To give full support to the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults so that those coming to the Church may be welcomed fully;
- To establish specific programs of evangelization in the neighborhood to invite those who have no other religious affiliation or seek a change in affiliation to join the Catholic Church;
- To maintain as far as possible the parish elementary school as an excellent vehicle for the handing on of the faith while striving to make this education available to all children of the parish;
- To constantly improve the parish school of religion for those young people who do not attend a Catholic school;
- To work for the advanced certification of all teachers of religion in the day school and the school of religion;
- To continue the development of early childhood religious education;
- To review all parish programs and activities to assure that families have the necessary support for good Christian family life, including one night free from all parish activities so that families can be together;

- To increase the availability of spiritual activities for the teenagers of the parish as the number enrolled at Catholic high schools decreases.

Care for the Poor

Only, we were to be mindful of the poor, which is the very thing I was eager to do.

(Paul's Letter to the Galatians, 2:10, describing the results of his meeting with Peter, James and John at Jerusalem.)

When St. Paul sought to connect with the Church of Jerusalem, he was told by St. Peter that he should always care for the poor. This was supposed to be an essential part of his work. It cannot be anything but an essential work for the local Church or the parish. Care for the poor is not an auxiliary work of the Church to be done when the full list of wants of the community has been met. Rather, before meeting its own desires, the community is to care for the poor among its members and the broader community.

In the Scriptures, the Lord's instructions to care for the poor are relentless. The Hebrew Testament always places care for the poor as a fundamental priority. From instructions about widows and orphans to directives for leaving some of the harvest in the fields to be gleaned by the poor, the scriptures are explicit. The psalms give special place to the poor among God's children. In the Gospel and the New Testament letters the poor continue to have a special place.

We recognize that St. James cannot be a true expression of the Church without a deep commitment to caring for the poor. Acceptance of diverse economic levels among the parishioners has to permeate all activities, making sure that no one is excluded from anything because they cannot afford the activity. Reaching beyond this care for "one's own" the parish reaches out into the broader community to embrace God's poor. The St. Vincent de Paul Society, volunteers for Habitat for Humanity and similar groups have represented the parish well. Now the parish is being called upon for greater efforts.

To do this in the parish of St. James we propose:

- To create an increased awareness of the existing charitable work done by the parish, and to better coordinate the efforts given by the many different entities in the parish;
- To give greater emphasis to those opportunities for individuals to be involved in organizations that transcend the parish in the care of the poor in and out of our community;
- To focus Christians service programs in the parish day school and parish school of religion on help for the poor within and outside of the parish;
- To work toward a biblical tithe of 10% of the parish budget for work with the poor;
- To review all programs to ensure an equality that supercedes the financial ability to participate.

Conclusion

The success of the early Church rested on these three basic areas of ministry. People came to the Church because she did these three things well. Today, people come to the Catholic Church for the same reasons. They can easily tire of other activities or outgrow them. When they do exist in a parish community, these ancillary activities must draw the individual more deeply into the essential three works of the Church. It becomes the constant effort of the parish leadership to reflect on the advisability, scope and desirability of various activities and organizations in light of the essential work of the Church.

No longer do many parishes enjoy the luxury of spreading their resources of people and money across a broad spectrum of activity. This is the practical reason why the sharing of programs and resources between parishes has become necessary. The theological reason is that no part of the Church is isolated from another; no parish exists by itself. A parish is always intertwined with other parishes, both close and more distant. Cooperation between parishes is essential for the three basic ministries. For ancillary programs, it may be the only way that they can exist in any geographic area for any length of time in the future. Cooperation between parishes is an expression of the universality of the Catholic Church.

We look at ourselves in this statement and we set some priorities because we want to be the best expression of the Catholic Church we can be. We realize our attention must be on what makes us part of the Church, what makes St. James the Greater parish a center of pastoral activity in the name of the Roman Catholic Church. That will require focus and change for us all. But it has always been the same. In each phase of our history things have changed both within and outside the parish and the parish has been able to adapt. The future does not hold anything less.

While requiring hard work, we are convinced that the implementation of this vision will guide our parish well. It gives expression to our hopes and dreams for our whole faith community. We are sure that it will enable us to grow in our relationship with our God, and in our relationships with each other. It is a bright, faith-filled future we see.

With a focus on the three essentials of Catholic life, we hope to become a community of stronger faith. And with that witness, we pray that others will say, *“Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you.”* (Zechariah 8:23)

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