

**Diocese of Bridgeport**  
**Our Lady of Peace Parish Pastoral Plan**  
**“Building a Bridge to the Future”**

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Part One: Introductory Information

**Parish:**

Our Lady of Peace

**Pastor:**

Father Nicholas Pavia

**Date:**

September 14, 2016

**Parish Task Force Members:**

- 1) Father Nicholas Pavia
- 2) Thomas Angelo
- 3) Michael Morin
- 4) Julie Norko

**Leadership Position:**

Pastor

**Signature of the Pastor:** \_\_\_\_\_

Pastoral Challenge #1: Increase the Active Engagement of Parishioners.
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**A. Pastoral Challenges to be addressed:**

- Evangelization
- Community Life
- Leadership
- Liturgy and Worship

**B. Rationale for Choosing this Priority Area:**

Practicing the Catholic faith is more than just being enrolled in a parish. It is the active engagement in it, which include regular attendance Sunday Mass, receiving the Sacraments and supporting and participating in its parish life.

Over the past five years, Mass attendance has declined sharply; parish events and parishioner involvement have severely lessened. As a consequence of that weekly offerings have fallen to the point of reassessing how the parish is to meet its obligation delivering spiritual needs and educating its parishioners in the faith.

**C1. Statement of the First Goal to be achieved:**

Increase in volunteers and club/group membership.

**Action Step #1.1 to achieve the Goal:**

There is a need to recruit parishioners to become Lectors, Eucharistic Ministers, Catechists, and volunteers at parish events. In addition, many of the parish clubs and groups have too few members to make them viable, develop contemporary fresh ideas and contribute to the parish life. About seven years ago, the parish addressed this issue by having a one weekend Stewardship Fair. It was held after each weekend Mass in the Parish Hall. A small pamphlet was printed with a brief copy about each function, group, and club. Each group had a table displaying material about the group and a signup sheet to recruit new members and volunteers as well as those who would like to serve on the various parish councils and committees as vacancies occur. The Fair provided face-to-face communication with parishioners and those representing the club or volunteer group. It also provided in one place an impressive manifestation of the scope and breath of parish life at Our Lady of Peace.

We Recommend that the Parish Council organize a new Stewardship Fair similar to the one held about seven years ago. It should be held in January 2017.

**Responsibility:** Parish Council.

**Time Frame:** January 2017.

## **C2. Statement of the Second Goal to be achieved:**

Improve Communication with Parishioners

### **Action Step #1.2 to achieve Goal:**

In order for parishioners to be active, they must be aware of the needs and events in the parish schedules. Often the events seem to be announced last minute in the bulletin, which only reaches about one-third of the parish families at most. Better communication with all parishioners is a must. The quarterly financial report is required to be distributed to all parishioners. This can be mailed to each parish family along with a message from the pastor informing the reader of upcoming events be it a parish picnic, trip, advent play, Holy Week schedule or even a successful function held the last quarter. It would also be a vehicle to make a case or raise awareness of the importance of weekly giving. We have recently appointed a volunteer to be an Events Coordinator. This person should also assure that a calendar of activities is published for the coming months (preferably three). A quarterly "Pastor's Town Hall Meeting" where the pastor can take and answer questions would make for a more transparent and engaged parish community. The parish has also subscribed to Flocknotes, an email notification system. The use of Flocknotes should be judiciously expanded (so as not abused) to deliver the events calendar and other information to parishioners. We need to have a method for parishioners to provide us with current email addresses. We should also look at other Internet based communication methods, such as Facebook, Twitter, etc. We also need to evaluate our web page and tie it into a Facebook and Twitter account.

We Recommend that the parish solicit for and appoint a Data Tech volunteer to evaluate, maintain and expand the Internet communication program for the parish. The parish should prepare and distribute a quarterly calendar of activities.

Recruitment of Data Tech person and implementation of Recommendation should be started as soon as possible and fully implemented by the first of January 2017.

**Responsibility:** Father Pavia to appoint a Data Tech volunteer to implement the enhanced Internet communications methods.

Parish Council and Events Coordinator to assure distribution of quarterly calendar of activities to Data Tech volunteer, mailings will need to be coordinated with the office and additional volunteers.

**Time Frame:** January 2017.

## **C3. Statement of the Third Goal to be achieved:**

Increase parishioner voice and planning activities in the parish.

### **Action Step #1.3 to achieve Goal:**

The Diocese of Bridgeport defines the Parish Council as an "advisory body, comprised of parishioners and Parish clergy, meets regularly with the Pastor to

offer advice and assistance on the short-and- long-term needs of the Parish.” In other words the main work of the council is pastoral planning. However, many parish councils mistakenly think that the job is to coordinate a system of committees. Councils have committees — committees to coordinate ministries, committees to accomplish council tasks, committees to organize parish socials and service projects. To serve as role models for the type of engagement that we ask our parishioners to accept, we believe that Our Lady of Peace Parish Council should assume primary role in pastoral planning and also to expand its membership to include members from the various groups and clubs in the parish. This will provide more input to Parish Planning, increase the availability of volunteers, committee members, and show support and importance these groups have in the parish. Some important groups not represented on the Parish Council are the Men’s Group, Garden Club, Faith Formation, and Finance Committee. There is a need to establish standing committees such as Parish Planning Committee, Buildings and Grounds Committee, Communications Committee and the Annual Picnic Committee. Ad hoc committees need to be established to run and coordinate various projects, which the Parish Council will oversee. The expanded Parish Council will give parishioners more transparency to the operations of the parish and foster inclusiveness among all members of the parish.

We Recommend the Parish Council be expanded as discussed above. This can be started with the convening of the new Parish Council in October, 2016.

Criteria to Measure Achievement of the Recommendations in Pastoral Challenge #1 is: Increase in volunteers and club/group membership.

**Responsibility:** Father Pavia to extend membership by appointing additional members to the Parish Council.

**Time Frame:** Starting October 2016.

Pastoral Challenge #2: Increase regular attendance at Sunday and Saturday Vigil Mass.
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**A. Pastoral Challenge to be addressed:**

- Evangelization
- Liturgy and Worship

**B. Rationale for Choosing this Priority Area:**

Over the past five years, Mass attendance has declined sharply

**C1. Statement of the First Goal to be achieved:**

Increase Mass Attendance at Sunday and Saturday Vigil Masses.

**Action Step #2.1 to achieve Second Goal:**

The Sunday Mass should be inspiring, a joyful and memorable experience. It is interactive as parishioners participate in the service with responses and song. It is not just a time and place meet your Sabbath obligation. When you leave Mass, there should be a change in the way you act toward others and a looking forward to coming back next week. This may be a high standard to meet each week, but still one to strive toward.

The Sanctuary should be pleasing to the eye and draw the parishioner's attention toward it. The altar, tabernacle, Crucifix should be well lit. The tabernacle appears dull.

We Recommend the sanctuary should be better lighted. The tabernacle polished and shined, appropriate seasonal flowers or plants should generously populate the altar, and altar cloths need to be more vivid. An attractive sanctuary is the first good impression one sees when entering the church. Music commencing 15 minutes before Mass will also help create parishioners eagerness for the Mass experience as they walk into church.

Lighting can be done by the maintenance personnel, the increased flowers could be added as soon as possible and music commencing 15 minutes prior to mass can start immediately. Sending out the tabernacle to polish can be done by the end of September. The only major cost would be the tabernacle cleaning which should could be paid by the Sanctuary Fund.

**Responsibility:** Father Pavia, Music Director and maintenance staff.

**Time Frame:** Starting October 2016.

**C2. Statement of the Second Goal to be achieved:**

Increase Mass Attendance at Sunday and Saturday Vigil Masses.

**Action Step #2.2 to achieve Second Goal:**

Our Lady of Peace is fortunate to have four Masses of different themes; the vigil and 8:30 Sunday Mass is most traditional and is attended by mostly an older group of parishioners; the 11:00 Sunday Mass is geared for the family and children; the Sunday evening Mass is a quiet Mass, more meditative without music. These Masses have very different demographics. The music and homilies should be geared to these differences. Homilies must inspire, educate and provide practical recommendations on living the Christian life. Also the Lectors, greeters and ushers/offertory collectors at the Family Mass should be school age children to encourage youngsters that they have an active place in the parish. By continuing to have children's Faith Formation in the Parish Hall, it also would

provide additional convenience for Mass attendance by child and parents. The goal is to have parishioners want to regularly come to Sunday Mass.

We Recommend the presentation of the Masses should be reviewed and changed to accommodate the above comments. Homilies need to be well planned and tailored to each audience in order to be educational, inspirational, and provide concrete examples of how to demonstratively live a Christian life in our daily activities with practical examples. These should be started in September 2016 and fully implemented within a month of the Stewardship Fair recommended previously.

**Responsibility:** Father Pavia.

**Time Frame:** Starting October 2016.

### **C3. Statement of the Second Goal to be achieved:**

Increase Mass Attendance at Sunday and Saturday Vigil Masses.

#### **Action Step #2.3 to achieve Third Goal:**

There are generally five kinds of Catholics:

1. No longer Catholics;
2. Catholics in name only;
3. "Party Catholics" who attend Mass only when there is a party (baptisms, first communions, weddings, funerals);
4. "CAPE Catholics who attend Mass on Christmas, Ash Wednesday, Palm Sunday and Easter. These go to Mass on the major holy days and maybe a few more occasions a year.
5. Practicing Catholics who try to attend Mass every Sunday and maybe some or most weekdays.

CAPE Catholics already go to Mass occasionally. This is low hanging fruit to target to attend Sunday Mass more regularly. The best time to address these parishioners is at the Christmas and Easter Mass.

We Recommend the Christmas and Easter homily should include a section specifically address to welcome, thank, re-evangelize and invite them to become a regular part of our weekly family. Maybe even obtain approval from the bishop to grant general absolution at Mass to further encourage them to return to practicing their faith.

Criteria to Measure Achievement of the Recommendations in Pastoral Challenge #2 is: Increase Mass attendance as reported on the annual diocesan Mass census taken in October of each year. The first measurement period will be October 2017.

**Responsibility:** Father Pavia.

**Time Frame:** Starting Advent 2016.

Pastoral Challenge #3: Improved Financial and Operational Planning.
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**A. Pastoral Challenge to be addressed:**

- Leadership
- Buildings and Facilities
- Finances

**B1. Rationale for Choosing this Priority Area:**

The parish has no clear, written and vetted operational goals as to what it wants to do. The parish needs a written plan that outlines the goals and needs of the parish, which then can be translated into a financial plan.

**C1. Statement of the First Goal to be achieved:**

Create an annual operational plan with clear objectives for the next fiscal year. The fiscal plan is to be prepared in accordance with the operational plan.

**Action Step #3.1 to achieve First Goal:**

Many wonderful activities taking place in the parish seem to be ad lib and ad hoc, usually, with notice in the bulletin a week, maybe a few before the event. Therefore, there is little or no adherence to a budget and often met with hit or miss results. There is a need for short term (six months to a year), medium term (the next two years) and long term (more than two years or recurring) planning and communication of parish activities.

Similarly, there is no forward look at possible capital rehabilitation and repair projects that may be required in the near of mid-term outlook. As a result the parish has no assurances it has current and long-term reserves to meet these contingencies. Budgets are based on prior year activities with no provision for current or next year's agendas, because there are none, or none communicated.

The main work of the Parish Council as previously stated is pastoral planning so it can advise the pastor. Without planning, advice is too late and only reactionary to past issues and not prospective to ongoing and future activities and needs. An annual plan of activities, operational changes, and capital needs should be completed and then given to the Finance Committee to put a financial projection to the plan. The budget comes from the plan, not the plan from the budget. It will also give the Parish Council a means to measure performance to planned activities and operational changes. A published plan and calendar of activities and events would also be a way of encouraging parishioner

participation and engagement. Deviations to plan will be known and can be addressed immediately or in the next year's plan. Communication between the pastor and the Parish Council needs to be current, open and transparent. Recommendation 1.3 needs to be implemented to facilitate the planning process.

We Recommend the Parish Council should prepare an annual plan of activities; review projected operational changes, and projected repairs and capital improvements to be incorporated into the annual budget of the parish. The plan should be published along with an annual calendar so all parishioners know what to expect for the coming plan year.

Criteria to Measure Achievement of Recommendation: Parish Council submission of a plan for Fiscal-Year 2017-2018 by April 30, 2017.

**Responsibility:** Parish Council

**Time Frame:** April 2017

**B2. Rationale for Choosing this Priority Area:**

The parish has no clear, written and vented operational goals at what it wants to do. The parish needs a written plan that outlines the goals and needs of the parish which than can be translated into a financial plan.

**C2. Statement of the Second Goal to be achieved:**

Create a Short-Term and Long-Term plan to address future maintenance and capital needs of the parish so they can be fiscally prepared for.

**Action Step #3.2 to achieve Second Goal:**

Short and mid-term evaluation of possible repairs and capital needs is important to financially prepare for the maintenance of the facilities. There was no assessment of the current condition of the parish facilities. This committee has made an assessment:

Requiring attention over the next two years:

1. Lighting Enhancements (see Recommendation above)
2. Washing inside white walls of church (see Recommendation above)
3. Replacing carpet on altar, and possibly restoring the altar railings (see Recommendation above)
4. Painting outside entrance and trim of parish center
5. Repairing sidewalks where needed.
6. Repairing deteriorating brick and mortar around rose window of church.

May require attention at any time, but mainly beyond two years:

1. Aged air condition units for the church and hall
2. Replace roof of parish center

This list is not all-inclusive and the parish needs require further evaluation.

We Recommend the parish should immediately establish a Buildings and Grounds committee, staffed by knowledgeable people to make a more thorough assessment of the current and future capital needs of the parish and to assign priorities and costs. This committee should become a standing committee of the Parish Council (see Recommendation above). This assessment should be ongoing and formally updated at least annually. The report should be also sent to the Finance Committee to assess financial feasibility.

Establishment and staffing a Buildings and Ground Committee at the Parish Council meeting in September 2016 to implement the Recommendation and submit the first report by April 1, 2017 and then a report every October 1 and April 1 so it can be incorporated into the Parish Council's annual plan and the Finance Committee's annual budget.

**Responsibility:** Father Pavia to appoint a Building and Grounds Committee as a subcommittee of the Parish Council.

**Time Frame:** October 2016.

**B3. Rationale for Choosing this Priority Area:**

Collection revenues continue to decline. The parish needs increased financial reserve restricted to assist meeting future operational and capital needs.

**C3. Statement of the Third Goal to be achieved:**

Increase operational revenues and create a restricted reserve fund, the principal for major capital needs.

**Action Step #3.3 to achieve Third Goal:**

Revenues continue to decline; the just completed fiscal year had Sunday Collections fall below \$300,000 for the first time in 10 years. The ability to deliver sacramental and educational, and social services have come under extraordinary pressure. The parish had addressed one aspect of the problem by eliminating the Director of Religious Education position to save over \$40,000 annually and revamped the Children Faith Formation program—feedback from parents indicates these changes have been for the better. The Annual Collection, which was instituted to be the major fundraiser for the parish, as an alternative to a bazaar or raffle, has only raised about half its annual goal of \$20,000.

The previous fiscal year required over \$60,000 in repair and maintenance expense. This required a substantial dipping into the \$100,000 in reserves. In addition, without an assessment of possible upcoming repair and maintenance needs, the parish cannot appraise the amount of cash reserves needed to meet the ongoing financial needs of the parish over the next few years and further into the future.

To improve operational revenues require parishioner to increase their weekly offering. The best way to achieve this goal is to run an “Enhance Revenue Campaign”. The last time the parish had one was about nine years ago. We still have the material and can organize and run a new campaign without the need of paying an outside company.

To be financially prepared to meet the capital needs of the parish is to establish some form of permanent endowment or restricted fund. (The parish currently has a limited restricted Sanctuary Fund with the Finance Committee as the Trustees. These funds can only be used for capital expenses to improve the Mass attendance experience.) The earning from the new restricted fund would be to fund all major capital requirements. The Sanctuary Fund should be the basis of this new fund by being expanded to cover all capital needs of the parish. The Parish Finance Committee would continue to be the trustees of the new endowment fund.

We Recommend the parish commences an “Enhanced Giving Campaign” chaired by a member of this parish Planning Committee.

We also Recommend the Sanctuary Fund be amended to include all major capital improvements. And a committee be formed and chaired by a member of this Parish Planning Committee, who will be responsible for establishing procedures to solicit additional funds with a “Legacy of Faith Campaign”, to seek parishioner gifts and solicit outside endowment sources.

**Responsibility:** Father Pavia to appoint Chairpersons for the “Enhanced Giving Campaign” and “Legacy of Faith Campaign” to run the campaigns.

**Time Frame:** Organize campaign process and procedures starting in October 2016. Running the Enhanced Giving Campaign in early Spring 2017. The Legacy of Faith campaign should commence in Advent 2016 and would be ongoing.