



Diocese of Bridgeport Parish Pastoral Plan St. Edward the Confessor Parish, New Fairfield, CT

After compiling the results of the Parish Self-Assessment and reviewing the results of the Disciple Maker Index Survey, the Planning Task Force of the Parish of St. Edward the Confessor proposes the following Pastoral Plan to the Diocese of Bridgeport to guide the efforts and ministries of our parish over the next two years. This plan is also proposed to the Parish Pastoral Council and the Parish Finance Council for review and amendment as necessary over time.

The following priorities, highlighted by the Synod, have been identified by the Planning Task Force as needing particular attention in the upcoming years:

- I. There is a need to strengthen and support family life, and to empower and assist parents as the primary teachers of the Catholic Faith.
- II. We must develop a culture that promotes and supports vocation to the priesthood, diaconate, and consecrated life in our Diocese
- III. We must renew the ministry of faith formation, leading people to deepening their relationship with the Lord Jesus.
- IV. During these years when our parish is still burdened with a mortgage, we must maintain financial stability while not neglecting the needs of the parish, both visible and invisible.

Having chosen these pastoral and temporal priorities to guide us, we propose particular programs and initiatives to support the development of these goals over time. The effectiveness of these programs and initiatives will be reviewed periodically so that we can evaluate progress achieved.

- I. There is a need to strengthen and support family life, and to empower and assist parents as the primary teachers of the Catholic Faith.**

The family is the domestic Church, and when there are struggles in the structure and the strength of the family, their relationship with the Church suffers. The Task Force voiced particular concerns about the fragmentation of the family unit, as well as the sad

truth that many young families have become estranged from the life of the Church. Some of this estrangement is caused by the busyness of life, but there is also a cultural movement at work that diminishes the sense of personal responsibility and commitment. Both of these are at the heart of the virtue of religion, and when they falter, a whole generation disappears from the life of the Church.

We propose a number of programs and initiatives designed to help families and family members engage more thoughtfully and thoroughly with our parish church, hoping that by targeting the activity of the children in these families, we can as a parish, help families come to a greater participation in their faith.

- A. Continuation of Sunday 9:00 Masses for Children. *This is a program that has been developing over the last two years to help engage children at weekend Masses. It includes a time for the children to receive a teaching which is age-appropriate, as well as a reminder gift to encourage devotion and prayer in the home. We have also seen an increase in the number of children in our 9:00 choir. We have coupled this with a family fellowship time in our parish hall right after the Mass. This program enables families to choose a Mass which their children can look forward to attending.*
- B. Establishment of Sunday Faith Formation retreats by grade. *Our Faith formation program for grades 1-5 takes place in the public schools during the week. Over the past year, in response to the need to re-integrate families into parish life, we have established special Masses at 11:00 to bring families together for a Sunday retreat day for their children. These take place five weekends in the academic year.*
- C. Establishment of Young Family Ministry program. *In an attempt to reach out to families of first and second grade parents we are beginning a new program of outreach for families with young children. The pilot program will be four meetings during the academic year to encourage family based faith activity, community service for children, and faith enrichment for parents. The program will begin this advent with a workshop day for families to work together to make their advent wreath. We are also connecting with local nursing homes to set up an opportunity for the children to visit with the elderly with parental supervision.*
- D. Reinvigoration the Junior Youth program. *Children in 6th-8th grade are in a very tough time in their development. We have been trying to start a program to engage them more in their faith and give them a chance to feel as if their church is a place where they are comfortable even at an uncomfortable age. A monthly program for our kids, facilitated by parents and a youth minister introduces these young people to the community of the Church and is a great feeder program for the Senior Youth group. This may require hiring someone to fill the position.*

II. We must develop a culture that promotes and supports vocation to the priesthood, diaconate, and consecrated life in our Diocese.

Christ our Savior not only preached the Gospel and healed the sick. He also called people to facilitate the ministry and extend his Word and work to the ends of the earth. Concern over vocation in the life of the Church is a concern that the call of the Lord be extended and heard so that many hearts may respond to his voice.

In our parish we are encouraged that we have a new seminarian at the St. John Fisher residence, and we have at least one other young man who is in the process of discerning the Lord's call personally. But because of the distance between the St. John Fisher residence and St. Edward's parish, we do not have very much exposure to those who are in discernment. We propose that our parish better engage existing structures within our Diocese and promote greater exposure to the Vocation program already established. We do not do nearly enough to promote discernment and vocations for the church's future. We propose the following initiatives to encourage vocational awareness:

- A. Making use of the opportunity to welcome the vocation director of the diocese to the parish to speak at weekend Masses. (Scheduled for December 2016)*
- B. Including our parish seminarian in a visible way in our parish life and activities whenever his schedule will allow it.*
- C. Welcoming a seminarian to our parish for the summer so that the physical presence of a young person in discernment could serve as a witness to others.*
- D. Continuing programs like "Steubenville East" which encourage young people to participate in the sacramental life and extol the virtue of service in the Church.*
- E. Dedicate one Mass and one Rosary each month for the sake of those discerning a vocation to serve in the church.*
- F. Adding a "seminarian profile" column to our parish bulletin to highlight those who are in discernment and increase awareness of our diocesan vocation program.*

III. We must renew the ministry of faith formation, leading people to deepening their relationship with the Lord Jesus.

Jesus commanded His Apostles to go out and teach all nations what He had taught them. Our parish community is a living extension of that call to teach the Word of God and share with others the life he has offered us. While St. Edward's parish is active and vibrant, there is still a great need to share knowledge of the faith with our people, as well as to offer them greater awareness of the many ways our faith is put into practice.

While Faith Formation is often associated with preparing the young for the reception of the Sacraments, we believe that there is a grave need to offer opportunities for instruction and enrichment to adults as well. While it is essential to support the faith of children as they develop, there are many questions of faith that can neither be asked nor answered until a person reaches some level of maturity. Adult education and enrichment programs offer an opportunity to bridge this gap. We propose the following ideas as a way of beginning the conversation and revitalizing Faith Formation for our parish:

- A. Continued renewal of Faith Formation program for Children. *Over the past five years we have radically changed our Faith Formation program to reinforce the importance of the sacraments and prayer. We face particular challenges because our primary grades receive their Religious Education off campus. We have included more enrichment programs for our children to help them become more familiar with the practice of our faith, including retreat days for our lower grades on Sundays at the parish, new workshops for our Confirmation students, and an electronic curriculum for our middle school program. Yesterday's accomplishments will never replace future success. Every summer our Faith Formation Department will review and develop the current program and curriculum, incorporating new ideas and initiatives, so that year by year the program that we offer will develop with new innovations.*
- B. New Emphasis of Adult Education. *We have discovered that there is a greater need for opportunities for our adult population to ask questions about the parish and the faith that we profess. Sometimes those who are the most active have the most questions about how faith and life interact. In response to this need we propose the following initiatives:*
- 1. New programs expanding the content of our existing Wednesday night Adult Education program.*
 - 2. Three to four sessions each year for Adult Catechist enrichment to offer the teachers of the faith the chance to expand their knowledge.*
 - 3. Offering a program of adult Bible Study during the day for those who are not able to travel in the evening.*
 - 4. Opening our doors to use our facilities to host a Catholic Video discussion group 4-5 times a year. Prayer groups in the parish have already take advantage of this opportunity to offer videos and films in our hall with discussion afterwards.*
 - 5. In addition to our men's and women's discussion group, which offer parishioners the chance to gather in small groups to look into questions of faith, we are hosting two open sessions of "Coffee with the Pastor" to give people the opportunity to ask questions about the faith or the parish.*

6. *We are offering the FORMED program to our parishioners so that they can access quality Catholic programming and instructional information in their homes and on mobile devices. Every year the FORMED platform expands its offerings to include new enrichment programs, audio, Catholic movies, and apologetics. We are using some of the FORMED video content as part of our Confirmation preparation program and RCIA as well.*

C. *New focus on Evangelization.* *As a parish we recognize the need that we have to continue to reach out to those who are not as connected to the Faith. We are trying to address that problem, always aware that it is a cultural challenge as well as a religious one. We propose the following initiatives to help in this outreach:*

- 1. In addition to our regular free bookcase which we offer to our parishioners, we will continue the Christmas and Easter Book program through Dynamic Catholic which offers a book to each person who attends Mass at our parish on these celebrations. It is our way to try to reach out to Catholics who are only marginally connected to the faith.*
- 2. We are in communication with Dynamic Catholic to arrange for a large event with Matthew Kelly at our parish sometime in 2017. We hope that by offering this program, we can use this opportunity to invite those who might not be as inclined to attend services unaccompanied. Large speaking events like this one are a chance for a person to “come and see”.*
- 3. Our parish is sponsoring two individuals to attend the St. Paul’s evangelization program offered at a neighboring parish to evaluate the program and see what techniques can be used to enhance our own evangelization efforts.*
- 4. One aspect of evangelization is renewal of devotional life in the Church. While the Mass is the public prayer of the Church, devotional life makes up most of the private prayer of the People of God. We are working on ways to increase awareness and practice of devotion to our Blessed Mother throughout the year. This includes promotion of the devotion to the Miraculous Medal, a weekly rosary group on Saturdays, a monthly public rosary, and several special Marian celebrations throughout the year.*
- 5. Our parish is more aware than ever that we need to be actively involved in our community. As the only Catholic parish in New Fairfield, we need to be visible in our commitment to the town and its needs. In an effort to accomplish this goal, we have set our sights on looking for opportunities to make St. Edward’s more prominent on the local stage. We are trying to be more involved in civic celebrations, and to sponsor local charities and work together with local institutions. Sometimes finding opportunities only happens when you look for ways to be more involved.*

IV. During these years when our parish is still burdened with a mortgage, we must maintain financial stability while not neglecting the needs of the parish, both visible and invisible.

At the request of Bishop Caggiano, each parish was asked to consider one other structural area beyond the Global Challenges proposed by the Synod. Because of our unique situation, St. Edward's parish will consider our financial stability

There is good news to report in this regard. We have managed to stabilize our financial position by managing expenses and the demands of the mortgage that we carry (still at \$1,300,000), and keeping our regular offertory steady. In recent years we have been able to cover all expenses, including the mortgage, without reaching into savings. We are on track to add to savings each year to plan for future capital expenditures.

Our Finance Committee attests to the solvency of the parish. We have a clear budget review process, cost controls reviewed with the Pastor, and reliable collections. In the past several years we have refinanced our mortgage, trimmed our expenses and streamlined our operations to keep the parish fully functioning and in the black. The parish has positive net income and \$500,000 in investments, and our collections have been consistent over the years. There are no immediate significant financial challenges at this time, but our parish Blue Ribbon Committee is constantly reviewing the status of the buildings and facilities so we can stay ahead of problems before they emerge as crises.

The current condition of the Buildings is documented as follows:

- A. *CHURCH* Most of the lights have been replaced with LED Lights. The projected life is 15 years. The building is currently 15 years old. Church roof to be checked this summer for leaks. Skylight issues have been isolated and \$35K of funding is available for proposed repairs in the spring of 2017.
- B. *RECTORY.* The entire exterior and interior was done 4 years ago. The only item which was not replaced is the boiler which is at least 25 years old but appears to be in good condition.
- C. *PARISH HALL* Parish hall is 60 years old. The roof is slate and it is examined each year for wear and repair. The boiler is 60 years old. The Parish hall and offices are in very good condition.
- D. *PARKING* The parking lot gets repaired to some extent every year. The plan is to redo the parking lot add lighting posts within the next 5 years.
- E. *OTHER PARISH BUILDINGS* There is need to build a 3 car garage for storage capability. There is limited storage capacity in the parish.

We are also pleased to report that all of our buildings are reviewed regularly for upgrades and for repairs, and our physical plant is looking better and better each year because of the help of very talented and generous volunteers who look after our grounds.

- V. One final concern is that the Disciple Maker Index showed ambivalence in response to the questions which asked if the parish prepares parishioners to share their faith with others. We noticed that this ambivalence is also present in other Catholic parishes in our diocese, leading us to believe that part of the problem is the wording of the question. However, in keeping with a call to evangelization, we will be piloting a new Lenten program of service and charity that will invite parishioners to not only contribute to various works of mercy that take place through programs throughout the Diocese, but also to volunteer their own time to participate in the works of mercy. We are hoping that when the details of this program are settled, we will be able to offer our people a more dynamic and interactive experience of Lent by planning service opportunities instead of merely offering opportunities to contribute. Time will tell if we will be successful.