



Cultivating
Connections
in Christ

DIOCESE OF DES MOINES

Inviting People to an
Encounter with Jesus

PARISH TOOLKIT

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Inviting People to *Encounter Jesus*

“We love because he first loved us.”

1 JOHN 4:19

THE SEVEN PRINCIPLES

The goal of this toolkit is to instill in the parish communities of the Church of Southwest Iowa Pope Francis' vision of what being a missionary community of Catholic believers means.

The Church which “goes forth” is a community of missionary disciples who take the first step, who are involved and supportive, who bear fruit and rejoice. An evangelizing community knows that the Lord has taken the initiative, he has loved us first (cf. 1 John 4:19), and therefore we can move forward, boldly take the initiative, go out to others, seek those who have fallen away, stand at the crossroads and welcome the outcast. Such a community has an endless desire to show mercy, the fruit of its own experience of the power of the Father's infinite mercy... Evangelizers thus take on the “smell of the sheep” and the sheep are willing to hear their voice. An evangelizing community is also supportive, standing by people at every step of the way, no matter how difficult or lengthy this may prove to be...Faithful to the Lord's gift, it also bears fruit. An evangelizing community is always concerned with fruit, because the Lord wants her to be fruitful... Finally an evangelizing community is filled with joy; it knows how to rejoice always. It celebrates every small victory, every step forward in the work of evangelization. Evangelization with joy becomes beauty in the liturgy, as part of our daily concern to spread goodness. The Church evangelizes and is herself evangelized through the beauty of the liturgy, which is both a celebration of the task of evangelization and the source of her renewed self-giving. (*Pope Francis, Joy of the Gospel, par. 24, 24 November 2013*)^j

Recognizing that any act of evangelization must begin with the mind of the Church as it addresses this place and time, we began our work by reflecting on this vision. In doing so, we derived seven principles to guide our parish communities as they assess their strengths and challenges and decide on the next steps in furthering the evangelization mission within their parishes.

Principle One - God initiates all acts of evangelization in our parish community.

Principle Two - Our parish community responds to people's real needs.

Principle Three - Our parish community bears fruit.

Principle Four - Our parish community is known by its joy

Principle Five - Our parish community is in intentional contact with its individual members.

Principle Six - Our parish community forms members to be evangelizers.

Principle Seven - Our parish community assesses how we align our pastoral priorities and values to the work of the parish.

PARISH ASSESSMENT - PRINCIPLE ONE

Principle One—God initiates all acts of evangelization in our parish community.

1. Do we believe that the Holy Spirit empowers our pastoral outreach to our community? How do we show that?
2. Are we a community of mercy? How is this expressed?
3. How do we invite disconnected Catholics who are going through sacramental preparation for themselves or their children to renew their relationship to the Church on a typical Sunday?

PARISH ASSESSMENT - PRINCIPLE TWO

Principle Two—Our parish community responds to people’s real needs.

1. In what ways is our parish involved in people’s lives?
2. Are these the typical moments when the Church has always been present (marriage, baptism, funerals) or other moments, such as miscarriage, serious illness, or debilitating accident?
3. Or when a young person gets their driver’s license or graduates from high school, college, or career training?
4. How are we involved in the lives of the people we serve?
5. How do we embrace the suffering of our parishioners?
6. How do we support our parishioners who are new to our country, seeking employment, or struggling with addictions such as pornography, gambling or substance abuse?
7. Are we patient with people who are lonely, angry, or difficult?
8. How does our parish leadership (pastor with parish committees and pastoral staff) support and guide parishioners as they reach out to those in need?

PARISH ASSESSMENT - PRINCIPLE THREE

Principle Three—Our parish community bears fruit..

1. What is our parish vision for responding to the pastoral needs in our community?
2. What is our plan to bring the parish vision to action?
3. How are the fruits of our labor seen in our worship, evangelization, discipleship, community, and ministry?
4. Is our parish community growing?
5. Are there weeds growing in our parish life?
6. If yes and they can be named, how do we address them?
7. What are the sprouts of new life in our parish?

PARISH ASSESSMENT - PRINCIPLE FOUR

Principle Four—Our parish community is known by its joy.

1. Would an outsider consider our community joyful?
2. How do we celebrate the small victories of our parish leadership and of our parish in general?
3. Are the weekend liturgies the heart of our parish life?
4. Is weekend liturgy schedule accessible and appropriate for those whom we hope to invite to be a part of our parish?
5. Is our liturgy beautiful and prayerful?
6. What can we strengthen in liturgies? Homilies? Hospitality? Music? Participation? Increased involvement in ministries such as servers, lectors, extraordinary ministers of the Eucharist?

PARISH ASSESSMENT - PRINCIPLE FIVE

Principle Five—Our parish community is in intentional contact with its individual members.

1. Would those not currently attending church but registered at one time consider our parish to be inflexible, out of touch, or self-absorbed?
2. If yes, how can we find out?
3. What is our current staffing model, both paid staff and volunteers?
4. Does this model reflect the needs of the parish?
5. What new positions would help us address the parish's needs?
6. How will we fill these positions?
7. How do we strive to make our parish welcoming to all our parishioners and visitors all the time?
8. Do the same people make up all our committees and councils?
9. If yes, what problems does this create?
10. How can these be solved?
11. Do our committees, councils, and staff display a healthy model of leadership?
12. If yes, how is this expressed? If no, how will this be addressed?

PARISH ASSESSMENT - PRINCIPLE SIX

Principle Six—Our parish community forms members to be evangelizers.

1. What is our plan for evangelization in our parish?
2. Who do we seek to evangelize and how will we do it?
3. What steps are involved in moving people from being complacent consumers of religion to being active disciples?
4. What ministries have the potential to be developed to form missionary disciples?
5. Is our parish in maintenance mode or in mission mode?
6. Are we happy to keep things as they are or are we eager to reach for new ways and new people?
7. What parish activities take time away from forming parishioners as missionary disciples?
8. What would it take to stop these activities?

PARISH ASSESSMENT - PRINCIPLE SEVEN

Principle Seven—Our parish community assesses how we align how our activities and values.

1. Do we have an “always done it this way” mentality at our parish?
2. If yes, what can we do about that?
3. When we measure our parish’s alignment to the pastoral plan regarding staff (paid and volunteer), activities, committees, groups and events, do we use information based on parishioner responses?
4. Are we willing to rethink our goals, structures, styles, and methods of evangelization with boldness and creativity?
5. Or do we approach timidly and fearfully?
6. How can we help our pastor identify ways of removing non-essential tasks in his ministry?

PARISH STAFF & MINISTRY LEADERSHIP TRAINING

Contact the Evangelization and Mission Team at toolkits@dmdiocese.org to schedule a discussion around the formation opportunities in Section 4 “Best Practices”.

BEST PRACTICES

PRINCIPLE ONE: GOD INITIATES ALL ACTS OF EVANGELIZATION IN OUR PARISH COMMUNITY.

- *Vision* - The power of the Holy Spirit is the catalyst for parish renewal.
- *Scriptural Focus* - “I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high” (Luke 24:49).
- *Strategy* - Sacraments and the preparation for them are our greatest pastoral opportunity to lead people to discipleship.
- *Focus Question* - How do we measure success when participants go through our sacramental preparation processes?

IMMEDIATE PASTORAL EXERCISES FOR PRINCIPLE ONE

All pastoral exercises can be found at the end of the toolkit.

- Living Our Baptismal Promises
- Developing a Mission Statement
- The Holy Spirit in Parish Renewal Efforts

PASTORAL EXERCISES WITH DIOCESAN HELP

With the help of diocesan staff, it may be helpful to outline the processes our parish needs to develop for fruitful sacramental formation:

- Infant Baptism
- Becoming Catholic (Order of Christian Initiation for Adults)
- Children and Teen Formation
- First Reconciliation
- First Communion
- Confirmation
- Marriage

PRINCIPLE TWO: OUR PARISH COMMUNITY RESPONDS TO PEOPLE'S REAL NEEDS.

- *Vision* - Leadership knows where it needs to go by knowing the community's real needs.
- *Scriptural Focus* - "As a body is one though it has many parts, and all the parts of the body, though many, are one body, so also Christ. For in one Spirit, we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, slaves or free persons, and we were all given to drink of one Spirit" (1 Corinthians 12:12-13).
- *Strategy* - The pastor and his shared leadership team listen to the needs of the community so that they may be guided by the pastoral priorities that are surfaced by God's people.
- *Focus Question* - What leadership team structure would best respond to our community's pastoral needs?

IMMEDIATE PASTORAL EXERCISES FOR PRINCIPLE TWO

All pastoral exercises can be found at the end of the toolkit.

- Begin Alpha or ChristLife (two programs that create the space for small group sharing and learning the Catholic faith. Consider this an on-ramp opportunity for your parish)
- Operation Kindness

PASTORAL EXERCISES WITH DIOCESAN HELP

- Assist the pastor with parish leadership in designing a leadership structure that best fits the community (rural, urban, suburban)
- Goal planning for the new fiscal year. Create a plan for how the parish community will achieve the goals by the end of the fiscal year.



PRINCIPLE THREE: OUR PARISH COMMUNITY BEARS FRUIT.

- *Vision* - Leadership articulates a vision for our future and has a plan on how to get there.
- *Scriptural Focus* - “Everyone who listens to these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and buffeted the house. But it did not collapse; it had been set solidly on rock. And everyone who listens to these words of mine but does not act on them will be like a fool who built his house on sand. The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and buffeted the house. And it collapsed and was completely ruined” (Matthew 7:24–27).
- *Focus Question* - What is your vision, your hope, based on your community’s needs? How could this come to fruition in five years?

IMMEDIATE PASTORAL EXERCISES FOR PRINCIPLE THREE

All pastoral exercises can be found at the end of the toolkit.

- Creating a Small Groups Culture
- Parish Experience Survey
- Plan for Evangelizing Outcomes

PASTORAL EXERCISES WITH DIOCESAN HELP

Develop a five-year vision in the following categories: worship, evangelization, discipleship, community, and ministry.

- Analyze strengths, weaknesses, threats, and opportunities for each category.
- Develop a short-range and long-range plan for each category.



PRINCIPLE FOUR: OUR PARISH COMMUNITY IS KNOWN BY ITS JOY.

- *Vision* - Leadership invests time, effort, training, and preparation in the Sunday liturgy so that worshipers leave having a sense of awe.
- *Scriptural Focus* - “Jesus said to them, ‘I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me will never hunger, and whoever believes in me will never thirst’” John 6:35.
- *Strategy* - The pastor and parish leadership prioritize the Sunday experience by investing in homilies, hospitality, and music.
- *Focus Question* - What cultural forces have shaped the parish you have today and what will shape the parish you will have in 20 years?

IMMEDIATE PASTORAL EXERCISES FOR PRINCIPLE FOUR

All pastoral exercises can be found at the end of the toolkit.

- Gift Bags
- Inviting Key People to be Mass Greeters
- Welcome Before Mass Begins

PASTORAL EXERCISES WITH DIOCESAN HELP

- Analyze and maximize your Mass schedule
- Develop a six-month planning guide for homilies and hospitality



PRINCIPLE FIVE: OUR PARISH COMMUNITY IS IN INTENTIONAL CONTACT WITH ITS INDIVIDUAL MEMBERS.

- *Vision* - Leadership invests in building parish staff skills to multiply ministry outreach to satisfy the community's needs and go out into the community.
- *Theological Focus* - "The renewal of structures demanded by pastoral conversion can only be understood in this light: as part of an effort to make them more mission oriented, to make ordinary pastoral activity on every level more inclusive and open, to inspire in pastoral workers a constant desire to go forth and in this way to elicit a positive response from all those whom Jesus summons to friendship with himself" (Joy of the Gospel, no. 27).
- *Strategy* - The pastor and parish leadership develops and implements staffing models for paid staff and volunteers that will multiply outreach to the community.
- *Focus Question* - What is needed in your community to cultivate a leadership culture that is faithful, available, contagious, and teachable?

IMMEDIATE PASTORAL EXERCISES FOR PRINCIPLE FIVE

All pastoral exercises can be found at the end of the toolkit.

- Be Still and Know Prayer Service (with framework for the activity)
- Moments of Encounter Accompaniment
- Mystagogy Formation
- Nametag Sunday
- Touchpoints of Engagement

PASTORAL EXERCISES WITH DIOCESAN HELP

- Plan a process to build a staffing model to fill the dream paid and volunteer positions as the mission expands.
- Identify and develop future leaders that are already in your parish community.



PRINCIPLE SIX: OUR PARISH FORMS MEMBERS TO BE EVANGELIZERS.

- *Vision* - Leadership focuses on two processes: transforming parish culture and forming missionary disciples.
- *Scriptural Focus* - “No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old cloak. If he does, its fullness pulls away, the new from the old, and the tear gets worse. Likewise, no one pours new wine into old wineskins. Otherwise, the wine will burst the skins, and both the wine and the skins are ruined. Rather, new wine is poured into fresh wineskins” (Mark 2:21–22).
- *Strategy* - The pastor and parish leadership invest the parish’s time, talent, and treasure into processes that form missionary disciples.
- *Focus Question* - In order to have the capacity to form missionary disciples, what does the pastor, the staff, and parish leadership need to stop doing?

IMMEDIATE PASTORAL EXERCISES FOR PRINCIPLE SIX

All pastoral exercises can be found at the end of the toolkit.

- Sharing Your Faith Story
- Divine Renovation

PASTORAL EXERCISES WITH DIOCESAN HELP

- Outline the main goals for transforming the parish and list what is needed to achieve these goals.
- Create a plan to reduce unnecessary activities so there is capacity to form missionary disciples.
- Identify the qualities of a missionary disciple and develop a plan for developing missionary discipleship.



PRINCIPLE SEVEN: OUR PARISH COMMUNITY ASSESSES HOW WE ALIGN OUR ACTIVITIES AND VALUES.

- *Vision* - Leadership regularly analyzes our parish's lived values to measure how closely we are aligning to our pastoral plan.
- *Theological Focus* - "I dream of a 'missionary option,' that is, a missionary impulse capable of transforming everything, so that the Church's customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures can be suitably channeled for the evangelization of today's world rather than for her self-preservation" (Joy of the Gospel, no. 27).
- *Strategy*- The pastor and parish leadership conduct an annual self-survey on aligning our values to mission. A parish survey is also conducted. The results are compared
- *Focus Question* - What do we as a parish community really value versus what we hope we value?

IMMEDIATE PASTORAL EXERCISES FOR PRINCIPLE SEVEN

All pastoral exercises can be found at the end of the toolkit. For this principle you are also invited to visit other parishes to see what is working well for them.

- Divine Renovation
- Visiting Other Parishes

PASTORAL EXERCISES WITH DIOCESAN HELP

- Map out changes that need to occur to align the parish values to the activities which support your pastoral plan.

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

Websites

Committee on Evangelization, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) <https://www.usccb.org/committees/evangelization-catechesis/evangelization>

Crucial Conversations, <https://cruciallearning.com/crucial-conversations-book>

Alpha USA, Alpha is an evangelistic organization that equips churches, ministries, and individuals to help others discover and develop a relationship with Jesus. <https://alphausa.org/>

ChristLife, ChristLife equips Catholics for the essential work of evangelization so that all people might personally encounter Jesus Christ and be transformed into His missionary disciples. <https://christlife.org/>

Acts XXIX, <https://www.acts29.com/>

Amazing Parish, <https://amazingparish.org/>

Divine Renovation USA, <https://divinerenovation.org/>

Books and Articles

Joy of the Gospel (Evangelii gaudium), Apostolic Exhortation by Pope Francis

Evangelization in the Modern World, Apostolic Exhortation by Saint Pope Paul VI

Go and Make Disciples, by the USCCB - https://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/how-we-teach/evangelization/go-and-make-disciples/what_is_evangelization_go_and_make_disciples

LIVING OUR BAPTISMAL PROMISES

EVANGELIZATION OPPORTUNITY

Baptism is the sacrament that imprints the initial likeness of Christ on the human person; it is the first step of initiation. Christ is the source of our life. How does our preparation for, our participation in, and living of this sacrament; help us to recognize our Lord calling us to this life of priest, prophet, and king? How can Baptism be a part of this plan? How do we live our baptismal promises?.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES:

- Fuller participation in the Liturgy.
- To lay groundwork for a life of intentionally living our baptismal promises.
- To recognize the elements and articles of baptism.
- To connect parishioners with those entering the Church at Easter.

PROCESS:

- To lift up Baptism as a gift from God, thanking God in your daily prayers for being a part of His Sheepfold
To lay groundwork for a life of intentionally living our baptismal promises.
 - *To acknowledge baptismal anniversaries in some manner, i.e., send a card or postcard to each child on the anniversary of his or her baptism*
 - *At a yearly parish celebration, i.e. feast day, to acknowledge the “newest” members of your parish community (newest member baptized), as well as a “vintage” member of your community (older member of the community). Perhaps give an icon of the parish patron saint or other item that could be blessed and placed in the home or on the family prayer table.*
 - *To provide a prayer card (with parish or diocesan logo) with prayer to the Holy Spirit acknowledging the gift of Baptism.*
- To be intentional in reflecting upon the elements of baptism
 - *To provide information in the bulletin on the following elements of baptism from Romano Guardini’s book “Sacred Signs” (which appears to be in public domain and is free to use)*

LIGHT: CANDLES

WE stand in a double and contrary relationship to objects outside ourselves. We stand to the world and all its contents as when God brought the animals to the first man for him to name. Among them all Adam could find no companion. Between man and the rest of creation there is a barrier of difference, which neither scientific knowledge nor moral depravity can remove or efface. Man is of another make from every other earthly creature. To him they are foreign. His kinship is with God.

On the other hand he is related to everything that exists in the world. Everywhere we feel somehow at home. The shapes, attitudes, movements of objects all speak to us, all are a means of communication. It is the incessant occupation of the human soul to express through them its own interior life, and to make them serve as its signs and symbols. Every notable form we come across strikes us as expressing something in our own nature, and reminds us of ourselves.

LIVING OUR BAPTISMAL PROMISES

This feeling of our connection with things is the source of metaphor and simile. We are profoundly estranged from, yet mysteriously connected with, outside objects. They are not us, and yet all that is or happens is an image to us of ourselves.

One of these image-objects strikes me, and I think most people, as having more than ordinary force and beauty. It is that of a lighted candle. There it rises, firmly fixed in the metal cup on the broad-based, long-shafted candlestick, spare and white, yet not wan, distinct against whatever background, consuming in the little flame that flickers above it the pure substance of the wax in softly-shining light. It seems a symbol of selfless generosity. It stands so unwavering in its place, so erect, so clear and disinterested, in perfect readiness to be of service. It stands, where it is well to stand, before God.

It stands in its appointed place, self-consumed in light and warmth.

Yes, of course the candle is unconscious of what it does. It has no soul. But we can give it a soul by making it an expression of our own attitude.

Stir up in yourself the same generous readiness to be used. "Lord, here am I." Let the clean, spare, serviceable candle bespeak your own attitude. Let your readiness grow into steadfast loyalty. Even as this candle, O Lord, would I stand in your presence.

Do not weaken in or try to evade your vocation. Persevere. Do not keep asking why and to what purpose. To be consumed in truth and love, in light and warmth, for God, is the profoundest purpose of human life.

LIGHT: FIRE

SOME cold, dull day in late autumn, when darkness is coming on, and the wide plain below as far as eye can reach is empty of life, and the mountain-path chill underfoot, and we are feeling very much alone, a strong natural desire comes over us for human contact. Then, suddenly, at a turn of the road, a light beams out. It comes like the answer to a summons, like a thing expectation called for, like a missing link in a series suddenly supplied.

Or, you are sitting at dusk in a dreary room between blank walls among uncongenial furniture. A familiar step approaches, a practiced hand sets the hearth to rights, the kindling crackles, a flame shoots up and the room glows with comfortable warmth. The change is as pleasant as when a cold inexpressive face suddenly lights up with friendliness.

Fire is closely allied to life. It is the aptest symbol we have for the soul within that makes us live. Like fire, life is warm and radiant, never still, eager for what is out of reach. When we watch the leaping tongues of flame, as they follow every current of the draught, soaring up not to be diverted, radiating waves of light and heat, we feel how exact the parallel is, how deep the kinship. This fire that forces its way through the intractable material that impedes it and reaches out to touch with light the things around and make for them a center of illumination,--what an image it is of that mysterious flame in us that has been set alight to penetrate the whole of nature and provide it with a hearth!

And if this aspiring, irresistible, life of ours were allowed to express itself outwardly, if it were given the least outlet, it also would break through and burst into flame.

And with what strength it should burn before the altar where at all times it rightfully

LIVING OUR BAPTISMAL PROMISES

belongs! We should stand there close to the Sacramental Presence where God addresses himself to us and we address ourselves to God, concentrating our force and our intelligence in prayer and attention. We recognize in the lamp before the altar the image and representation of what our life should be. Its flame is never allowed to go out.

As material light it has of course nothing to say to God. It is for you to make it an expression of your soul, like it burning out the force of your life in flame and light close to the Holy Presence.

We cannot learn this all at once. It must be striven for. But each moment of quiet illumination will bring you nearer to God, and will carry you back among men at peace. You leave the sanctuary lamp before the tabernacle in your stead, saying to God, "Lord, it stands for my soul, which is at all times in thy presence."

HOLY WATER

WATER is a mysterious thing. It is so clear and frictionless, so "modest," as St. Francis called it. It hardly pretends to any character of its own. It seems to have no other end or object than to be of service, to cleanse what is soiled and to refresh what is dry.

But at some time you must have gazed down into the still depths of a great body of water, and felt it tugging to draw you in, and have got a glimpse of the strange and secret thing water is, and of the marvels, terrors and enticements that lurk in its depths. Or, at another time when it was whipped to a boiling torrent by a storm, you have heard it rushing and roaring, rushing and roaring, and watched the sucking vortex of a whirlpool and felt a force so grim and dreary that you had to tear your thoughts away.

It is indeed a strange element. On the one hand smooth and transparent, as if it hardly existed in its own right, ready at hand to wash away dirt and satisfy thirst; and on the other a restless, foundationless, enigmatic force that entices us on to destruction. It is a proper image for the secret ground-source from which life issues and back into which death recalls it. It is an apt image for this life of ours that looks so clear and is so inexplicable.

It is plain why the church uses water as the sign and the bearer of the divine life of grace. We emerge from the waters of baptism into a new life, born again of water and the Holy Ghost. In those same waters the old man was destroyed and put to death. With this elemental element, that yields no answer to our questioning, with this transparent, frictionless, fecund fluid, this symbol and means of the supernatural life of grace, we make on ourselves, from forehead to breast, from shoulder to shoulder, the sign of the cross.

By her consecration of it, the Church has freed water from the dark powers that sleep in it. This is not a form of language. Anyone whose perceptions have not been blunted must be aware of the powers of natural magic inherent in water. And are they only natural powers? Is there not present also a dark and preternatural power? In nature, for all her richness and beauty, there is something demonic. City life has so deadened our senses that we have lost our perception of it. But the Church knows it is there. She "exorcises" out of water those divinities that are at enmity with God.

She blesses it and asks God to make of it a vehicle of his grace. Therefore the Christian

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when he enters church moistens forehead, breast and shoulders, all his person, with the clean and cleansing water in order to make clean his soul. It is a pleasing custom that brings grace and nature freed from sin, and man, who so longs for cleanness, into the unity of the sign of the cross.

At evening also we sign ourselves in holy water. Night, as the proverb says, is no friend to man. Our human nature is formed and fashioned for light. Just before we give ourselves over into the power of sleep and darkness, and the light of day and consciousness is extinguished, there is a satisfaction in making the sign of the cross on ourselves with holy water. Holy water is the symbol of nature set free from sin. May God protect us from every form of darkness! And at morning, when we emerge again out of sleep, darkness and unconsciousness, and life begins afresh, we do the same thing. But in the morning it is to remind ourselves of that holy water from which we have issued into the light of Christ. The soul redeemed and nature redeemed encounter one another in the sign of the cross.

THE SIGN OF THE CROSS

WHEN we cross ourselves, let it be with a real sign of the cross. Instead of a small cramped gesture that gives no notion of its meaning, let us make a large unhurried sign, from forehead to breast, from shoulder to shoulder, consciously feeling how it includes the whole of us, our thoughts, our attitudes, our body and soul, every part of us at once, how it consecrates and sanctifies us.

It does so because it is the Sign of the universe and the sign of our redemption. On the cross Christ redeemed mankind. By the cross he sanctifies man to the last shred and fiber of his being. We make the sign of the cross before we pray to collect and compose ourselves and to fix our minds and hearts and wills upon God. We make it when we finish praying in order that we may hold fast the gift we have received from God. In temptations we sign ourselves to be strengthened; in dangers, to be protected. The cross is signed upon us in blessings in order that the fullness of God's life may flow into the soul and fructify and sanctify us wholly.

Think of these things when you make the sign of the cross. It is the holiest of all signs. Make a large cross, taking time, thinking what you do. Let it take in your whole being,-- body, soul, mind, will, thoughts, feelings, your doing and not-doing,-- and by signing it with the cross strengthen and consecrate the whole in the strength of Christ, in the name of the triune God.

- *Reflect upon the words of the baptismal promises, especially during the season of Lent. Each week of Lent, list one of the baptismal promises that will be spoken at the Easter Vigil, and invite a sponsor, a neophyte, a member of the RCIA team, etc. to write a short paragraph on what that means for them, and how they live that promise, or what the Church, the world, our local parish would be like if that were realized today.*
- *Place in the parish bulletin, a "Blessing of my Baptism" or "The Font" weekly reflection question on how to live my baptismal promise.*
- *Offer a "Priest, Prophet, and King" half-day retreat on rediscovering our baptismal call*
- *Provide talking points for conversations with family and friends who are not practicing their faith.*

LIVING OUR BAPTISMAL PROMISES

TRAINING AND FOLLOW-UP:

- Develop a “Sacramental Team” from within your parish to assist in your baptismal initiatives.
- During the time of mystagogy, invite the newly baptized to reflect and write on their baptismal promises, so those reflections may be used in the parish bulletin the following Lenten season.

DEVELOPING A MISSION STATEMENT

EVANGELIZATION OPPORTUNITY

The parish mission statement expresses why the parish exists in a concise and meaningful way that reflects the real identity of the parish community. The documents of the Second Vatican Council (Ad Gentes) establishes evangelization as the fundamental mission of the Catholic Church and reaffirms the tie between evangelization and charity for the poor. We are a broken people who have found salvation in Jesus and we invite others into this broken community. The parish mission statement finds its roots in the mission of the universal Church. Once the mission statement is accepted by leadership and the entire community, it is the ongoing work of the pastoral council to set goals and priorities that align with the mission statement and bring it to life.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES:

- The parish has a clear and concise statement as to why they exist.
- Parish leadership aligns all pastoral activity towards making the mission statement a living witness to the parish community.
- Parish leadership creates goals and priorities to fulfill the parish mission.

PROCESS:

Begin in prayer and reflect on the following questions:

- *Who are we as a parish community?*
- *What do we value?*
- *What are hopes for our community (think outward to the larger community, not just for those who enter our doors)?*
- *What is Jesus' mission and the mission of the universal Church?*
- *How is our parish connected to the mission of the Diocese of Des Moines?*

Write drafts of your parish mission statement. Include the following:

- *Identity – (We the parish of...)*
- *Purpose – state your values, central focus, reason for existence (Our mission is to...)*
- *Function – (We are committed to...)*
- *Future – (We seek to become...)*
- *Make sure the name of Jesus is in your draft mission statement*

Consult with the parish community. As the Pastoral Council is working on a draft mission statement, nurturing the parish involvement soil includes:

- *Homilies on evangelization in the local community*
- *Discussion opportunities with parish committees and organizations*
- *Bulletin inserts and parish forums regarding mission*

DEVELOPING A MISSION STATEMENT

Once the draft is complete, post the draft mission statement on a large poster board in very large print.

- *Have sticky notes and pens available and invite the community and visitors to post comments on the mission statement*

Complete mission statement based on comments.

Promote and celebrate the mission statement:

- *Announce the parish mission statement at weekend Masses*
- *Mail the parish mission statement to parishioners with a letter from the pastor.*
- *Ask parish committees/organizations to reflect on their purpose in light of the parish mission statement.*
- *Invite the community to internalize the mission statement at home, at work, at school.*
- *Frame the parish mission statement and display it in a prominent place.*

Create parish goals and priorities to align to the mission statement.

TRAINING AND FOLLOW-UP:

- Initial training offered at the beginning of the initiative. This training is to help with the discernment process for a new mission statement as well as how to align parish goals and priorities once the statement is set.
- Follow-up training is available on request to help revise a mission statement.
- Review and revise the mission statement periodically.

THE HOLY SPIRIT IN PARISH RENEWAL EFFORTS

EVANGELIZATION OPPORTUNITY

Recalling the Sower and the Seed Parable, forming the community to embrace the posture to docile humility and invoking the power of God's Spirit to be primary force for change establishes "right relationship" between us and God. With God in charge, there is no ceiling or limit to the potential for grace to be present and transformation to result!

EXPECTED OUTCOMES:

- A growing and deepening consciousness among all members of the parish community that God is in charge (or should be in charge) and a conversation of many to a new relationship with God in the Holy Spirit. This alone will impact many people both within the parish and beyond, as well as the culture of the parish itself.
- Strategic planning will become more reflective of God's will and parish renewal and outreach efforts will gain greater efficacy.

PROCESS:

Parish leadership explores a number of apt scriptural passages and spiritual messages/ exercises that extoll both the preeminent place of the Holy Spirit in renewal efforts and the centrality of a spiritual disposition of docility to God's movement and will. Such prayers, quotes and content are regularly drawn upon to ground all activities and all parishioners are invited to pray with such content and are formed to develop this interior spiritual disposition.

Examples of prayers and scripture:

- *Prayer to the Holy Spirit*
- *John 15 (Vine and the Branches)*
- *Surrender Novena*

TRAINING AND FOLLOW-UP:

- The diocese would provide both formation in this regard and content from which parish leadership can discern what to utilize. The expectation would be conveyed that parishes should center their renewal planning and execution around the discerned scriptural and/or spiritual content.

ALPHA OR CHRISTLIFE

EVANGELIZATION OPPORTUNITY

Knowing the people in your parish and building relationships with those people will help you respond to their needs.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES:

- Alpha and ChristLife is a journey of faith that you take with other parishioners. This journey allows you to share in a non-judgmental and caring environment
- Because Alpha is an 11-week journey, there is a real opportunity to build meaningful relationships with other parishioners.
- ChristLife involves three, seven-week sessions (Discovering Christ, Following Christ, Sharing Christ)

PROCESS:

There is no need to create a new program or idea. There are many programs that can be used at the parish to help foster relationships with fellow parishioners.

1. Alpha (www.alpha.org)
2. ChristLife (www.christlife.org)

TRAINING AND FOLLOW-UP:

- There is online training to begin Alpha or ChristLife at your parish.
- There is a follow up survey available with both programs. This will provide you with data that will help with your next Alpha or ChristLife.

OPERATION KINDNESS

EVANGELIZATION OPPORTUNITY

The Eucharist transforms us and sends us on mission. The Eucharist, celebrated as a community, teaches us about human dignity, calls us to right relationship with God, ourselves and others, invites us to community and solidarity, and sends us on mission to help transform our communities, neighborhoods and world. Church teaching, rooted in both Scripture and Tradition, emphasizes both the personal and social natures of the Eucharist.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES:

- The parish is seen as responding to the real needs of the community because of their faith.
- Parishioners get to know each other and may be open to more religious opportunities as they experience those in need.
- Those not as engaged in the parish begin to form friendship when working with others on a common problem. This improves Mass attendance.

PROCESS:

Begin with understanding your parish boundary. You may be surprised by how large it is. Your pastor is responsible for all the souls, Catholic or not, within the parish boundary

- *You may want to contact your local county representative to discover some demographic information about your area*

Have the parish community research and brainstorm every possible need or service opportunity within your parish boundary. Examples include:

- *Service Opportunity – these opportunities take very little planning and money. Those who may not be very engaged in the parish may find themselves attracted to helping others in the community.*
- *Seminars/Workshops – questions to ask include, “Who will we reach?” “How big is the need?” “Who will lead the workshop?”*

IDEAS FOR SERVICE OPPORTUNITIES AND SEMINARS/WORKSHOPS

Service Opportunities:

- *Adopt a highway for cleanup*
- *Spring and fall yard clean-up and simple construction projects for older neighbors*
- *Visiting people in nursing homes*
- *Taking meals to the first responders or families of service women and men*
- *Sponsoring a food drive, a coat drive, a back-to-school drive*
- *Make holiday dinners for those who are unable or who can't afford a nice holiday dinner*
- *Have an Angel Tree at the Church with presents for those who are in prison or whose parents are serving abroad in the military*
- *Mowing lawns or shoveling snow for the handicapped or elderly*

Seminars/Workshops:

- *Parenting seminar*
- *Newcomers guide to the community*
- *Marriage workshop*
- *Estate planning workshop*
- *Personal finances/budgeting workshop*
- *Time management workshop*
- *Tollege preparation for parents seminar*
- *Basic computer skills*
- *Job interviewing and resume building skills*

OPERATION KINDNESS

Once the deadline for ideas from the community passes. Have a small group of parishioners of various ages prioritize the ideas..

- *Prioritize based upon needs, cost, effort required on behalf of the parish, number of people reached, and what is already being done in your community.*
- *The committee will come up with a list of three opportunities for the parish to vote on.*

Once the vote is finalized, reveal the winner for the year.

Mobilize the parish community to sign-up to help.

- *Identify a budget if any is needed*
- *Seek assistance in locating the people to assist*
- *Publicize workshops and arrange facilitators for the workshops*
- *Schedule the events on the parish calendar and take pictures if it isn't against the policy of where you are working*
- *Throughout the year publish success stories in the bulletin, on the parish website, and on your social media platforms*

At the end of each opportunity, have volunteers reflect on their experience.

- *Where was God present in what I did today?*
- *Where was God distant or how did I push God away in what I did today?*
- *If I do this again, what will I do differently?*

During the Lenten season, begin the process again to start on Pentecost Sunday.

During the Easter season, celebrate inviting those who you helped to the large celebration.

TRAINING AND FOLLOW-UP:

- Requires a core group of three to five volunteers who are well connected in the community.
- Follow-up can be a quick synopsis from the individual volunteer or group of what was done.
- Follow-up questions during Lent can include:
 - *What was inspiring about the work done by your parish community last year?*
 - *What do you find challenging?*
 - *What issues facing your community weigh deeply on your heart?*
 - *What gifts has God given you? How might he be asking you to use these gifts in the service of others?*
 - *How does the Eucharistic meal compel you to care for others in your community?*
 - *How is the Holy Spirit moving you to join with others to respond to problems in your neighborhood and community?*

CREATING A SMALL GROUPS CULTURE

EVANGELIZATION OPPORTUNITY

Small communities are powerful vehicles for adult faith formation, providing opportunities for learning, prayer, mutual support, and the shared experience of Christian living and service to Church and society. (Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us, USCCB, 106)

EXPECTED OUTCOMES:

- Make friends - We are created for connection and relationship. Whether it is a bible study, book club, a running group, a Theology on Tap group at a local brewery, small groups meet regularly and foster friendship.
- Make disciples - Regardless of the type of group, the purpose of a small group is to encourage us on our journey of holiness. Small groups create a place where we can grow in our faith and become more like Jesus.
- Make a difference - Jesus came with a mission to reconcile the world to God, to restore creation to its intended state, and He charged his followers with continuing that mission. Small groups are not insular communities. They help us discover how God is calling us to live out that mission in our daily lives.

PROCESS:

Provide a six-step process for developing small groups in your community. A great resources comes from the Archdiocese of Washington D.C. <https://adw.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2021/01/Small-Groups-101-Workbook.pdf>

1. What are small groups?
2. Small group roles
3. Planning your small group
4. Hosting your small group
5. Leading your small group
6. Qualities of a small group leader

TRAINING AND FOLLOW-UP:

- Members of the Commission will help train your initial cohort of small group leaders using the Small Group workbook from the Archdiocese of Washington D.C. We will also help the small group team locate resources they would like to use for their small group.

PARISH EXPERIENCE SURVEY

EVANGELIZATION OPPORTUNITY

To gather data on what the parishioners think about parish life. Things such as their current faith life, music during Mass, how do they keep up to date with things happening at the parish and then allow for open ended questions where people can provide suggestions. The survey will provide feedback and allow you to address any urgent issues, but more importantly it will provide a baseline so you can do this same survey next year and compare the results.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES:

- A better understanding of what parishioners truly think about the parish.

PROCESS:

1. Determine what areas within your parish you would like to evaluate (music, liturgy, parishioner's spiritual life)
2. Determine how the survey will be distributed (paper copy, QR code in bulletin, social media). Digital resources for completing surveys include: SurveyMonkey, Google Forms, Jotform, SurveyPlanet.
3. If paper copy, have ushers hand out the survey as people come into Mass. Father should address the reason for the survey and allow the parishioners to complete the survey during Mass (after Communion would be best or after homily) then have the ushers collect the surveys.
4. Survey should be tabulated, and results shared with leaders in the parish. These leaders will determine what action will be taken with the results of the survey.

TRAINING AND FOLLOW-UP:

- If the survey results show areas of concern, an action plan should be created to address the concerns. Evaluate suggestions and determine if they should be implemented in the parish. Distribute the same survey next year to compare results.

PLAN FOR EVANGELIZING OUTCOMES

EVANGELIZATION OPPORTUNITY

To ensure that renewal efforts are grounded in the mission of the Church and built with intentionality and accountability.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES:

- A parish will be more unified in its vision (grounded by the organizing principle of evangelization for its pastoral activity) and more focused and intentional in its goals-development work. It will have teams and individuals with whom responsibility rests for overseeing goals-achievement, better positioning it to stay on track and moving forward. It will create means by which to measure progress toward goal-achievement and thus be able to assess and recalibrate more confidently and effectively.

PROCESS:

Parish leadership structures (pastoral council, other particular councils and commissions within the leadership organization of the parish, as well as parish staff) craft a strategic plan and build a systematic process for its implementation. The parish is free to draw upon a diocesan-developed planning framework, utilize third party-designed frameworks, or create their own.

The mission of evangelization is foundational and a non-negotiable starting point for all parish plans. Beyond this, other required elements include means to assess (including gauging fruitfulness using both quantifiable and qualifiable measures), as well as accountability structures (to help to facilitate ongoing forward progress and sustainability).

TRAINING AND FOLLOW-UP:

- This is dependent on the approach utilized. Necessary components will include leadership formation, goal setting, accountability structures, assessment measures and scheduled points for revisiting goals and modifying tactical plans serving particular goals.

GIFT BAGS

EVANGELIZATION OPPORTUNITY

A way to promote the parish and all the ministries available at the parish. By promoting the parish, you are sharing an opportunity with others to come and worship and encounter Jesus at the Mass.

PROCESS:

1. Purchase gift bags. Would be best if the bags had your church logo on it.
2. Determine what items should go into the bags. For example: new church member registration form, church brochure (contains history of your parish, pictures of your church, the contact information for your pastor and church secretary, information about the various ways to get involved in your parish and current Mass and Reconciliation times).
3. Keep the bags in the back of church and let the greeters know they should be handed out to all visitors.

IDEAS FOR GIFT BAGS

- *Parish directory with contact information for staff and descriptions of current parish ministries*
- *Magnet or card with Mass & reconciliation times*
- *A copy of the monthly Magnificat*
- *A prayer card or image of the parish's patron saint*
- *A crucifix for the home*
- *Kitchen towels or potholders*
- *Women's or men's groups might contribute something to the basket*

WELCOME BEFORE MASS BEGINS

EVANGELIZATION OPPORTUNITY

The words of welcome before worship are so important. They not only welcome those in the congregation, longtime and new, but they set the tone for the Liturgy of the Word. What is said will resonate with everyone in the parish. The welcome message not only creates a connection with the community, but also honors your guests by thanking them for the honor of their presence.

With more people attending Mass less often, taking steps to make everyone feel welcome is essential. Words of welcome from the ambo, combined with a vibrant greeting from a hospitality minister, sets the stage for all gathered to encounter God in our worship.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES:

- This simple process will help the community be more attentive to the very beginning parts of Mass and help transition from gathering into worship.

PROCESS:

Create a resource each week that works as an onramp for the community to enter into the Mass. Key ingredients for this type of resource include:

- *Good morning, evening, afternoon...and welcome to (parish name). Whomever is delivering the welcome message should introduce oneself.*
- *Add a message of welcome for visitors and those new to the parish. It is good to direct those who are new or visiting to the one of the hospitality ministers if they have questions. This is also a good time to remind everyone to switch off cell phones or anything that can cause a distraction.*
- *(Optional) You can include the entrance chant or something written by Father or someone involved in planning the liturgy that previews the Liturgy of the Word.*
- *(Optional) If there is new Mass service music to learn, this is a good time to briefly work through the music and direct the community where to find it in the worship resources.*
- *(Optional) This is a good time to have parishioners provide a word of greeting to those around them.*
- *Finish with announcing the intention for the day's Mass, who is celebrating the Mass and if there are any deacons assisting.*

TRAINING AND FOLLOW-UP:

- Be sure to train your cantor or music director who will be reading the welcome message each week.
- The welcome message should be adjusted for Easter, Christmas, Ash Wednesday, and parts of Holy Week.

“BE STILL AND KNOW” PRAYER SERVICES

EVANGELIZATION OPPORTUNITY

To help people find the space and time to recognize God’s presence in their life. To offer practical and simple ways that allow parishioners to “be still”.

“The hymns and litanies of the Liturgy of the Hours integrate the prayer of the psalms into the age of the Church, expressing the symbolism of the time of day, the liturgical season, or the feast being celebrated. Moreover, the reading from the Word of God at each Hour (with the subsequent responses or troparia) and readings from the Fathers and spiritual masters at certain Hours, reveal more deeply the meaning of the mystery being celebrated, assist in understanding the psalms, and prepare for silent prayer.” (CCC 1177)

EXPECTED OUTCOMES:

- To become familiar with Psalm 46:10, and to prepare for further work with the Psalms.
- To understand the context of Psalm 46.
- To identify how praying with the psalms can help someone to find the space and time to recognize God’s presence in their life.
- To introduce the role of the Psalms in the Liturgy of the Hours.

PROCESS:

Identify team to lead morning of reflection:

- *Are there at least six individuals who would assist in preparing this morning?*
- *Are there individuals in the parish who would benefit from being a part of this team?*

Determine gifts/interest of team to provide:

- *Lead / prepare prayer experience*
- *Lead / prepare the presentation*
- *Prepare the environment*
- *Hospitality needed*
- *Marketing/advertisement, i.e., Make “Be Still and Know that I am God” Bible bookmarks to hand out with the parish bulletin in the month/weeks prior to the event,*

Download framework for morning of reflection:

- *Determine what needs to be added/edited/rewritten in the framework for your particular community*

TRAINING AND FOLLOW-UP:

- Follow up with those in attendance regarding learning to pray the Liturgy of the Hours.

“BE STILL AND KNOW” FRAMEWORK

SAMPLE MORNING OF REFLECTION

This sample morning of reflection takes approximately 2 hours. Your parish can adapt this script to fit your parish needs.

SAMPLE SCHEDULE & MATERIAL LIST:

Opening Prayer (5-7 minutes)

- Prayer table
- Prayer cloth
- Prayer card for Psalm 46:10
- Bible
- Candle try

Community Building (10 minutes)

- Copies of Community Building questions for each participant
- Pen/pencil

Context of Psalm 46 (5 minutes)

- Presenter notes

Unpacking Verse 10 (5 minutes)

- Presenter notes

Be Still / Making Silence (30 minutes)

- Presenter notes
- Blank paper
- Pen/pencil

Faith Sharing (30-45 minutes)

- Copies of Faith Sharing questions for each participant
- Pen/pencil

Closing (5 minutes)

- Scripture verses to take home

“BE STILL AND KNOW” FRAMEWORK

CALL TO PRAYER

The Psalms are an expression of the people of Israel’s experience with God. They are a prayer for the people of Israel, they are our prayer, too. Let us open our hearts and our minds to the Lord, who is our strength and our refuge.

WORD OF GOD

Light candle before proclaiming scripture from the Bible: Psalm 46

Reader:

God is our refuge and our strength,
an ever-present help in distress.
Thus we do not fear, though earth be shaken
and mountains quake to the depths of the sea,
Though its waters rage and foam
and mountains totter at its surging.

Streams of the river gladden the city of God,
the holy dwelling of the Most High.
God is in its midst; it shall not be shaken;
God will help it at break of day.
Though nations rage and kingdoms totter,
he utters his voice and the earth melts.
The LORD of hosts is with us;
our stronghold is the God of Jacob.

Come and see the works of the LORD,
who has done fearsome deeds on earth;
Who stops wars to the ends of the earth,
breaks the bow, splinters the spear,
and burns the shields with fire;
Be still and know that I am God!
I am exalted among the nations,
exalted on the earth.”
The LORD of hosts is with us;
our stronghold is the God of Jacob.

Take a few minutes to be still in silent reflection.

REFLECTION

The psalmist voices: God is with us. We find comfort in knowing that the Lord is near, especially when faced with struggles and challenges of daily living. The psalmist advises us: We do not need to be afraid. We find confidence in the great power of our God, especially when catastrophe covers the earth, undoing creation. The psalmist writes: Be still and know that I am God! We find peace in resting in the LORD, who provides for all that we need, May we find contentment and happiness in the great love that our God has for us.

“BE STILL AND KNOW” FRAMEWORK

RESPONSE

This prayer is a call and response, similar to the Liturgy of the Hours. Split the group into two sides for this exercise.

Side 1: As I wake to the quiet of the morning . . .

All: “Be still and know that I am God!”

Side 2: In the routine of preparing for my day . . .

All: “Be still and know that I am God!”

Side 1: In the comings and goings, and busyness of my day . . .

All: “Be still and know that I am God!”

Side 2: In all of the ordinary and mundane tasks of my day . . .

All: “Be still and know that I am God!”

Side 1: In the frenzied pace of the day . . .

All: “Be still and know that I am God!”

Side 2: In the work that is before me . . .

All: “Be still and know that I am God!”

Side 1: In the quiet of night and stillness of sleep . . .

All: “Be still and know that I am God!”

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord and Master of All,
You provide for us refuge and strength
When our hearts are heavy.
Provide for us the calm and peace for which we long,
We ask this in your most holy name. Amen.

SONG (OPTIONAL)

Be Still and Know

“BE STILL AND KNOW” FRAMEWORK

COMMUNITY BUILDER ACTIVITY

Looking at the list below, put a check mark next to the items under “Be Still” that would be easy for you, circle those that would be a challenge for you:

Be Still:

- Stop talking
- Switch off your phone
- Stop commenting on social media
- Listen
- Stop arguing
- Stop questioning
- Stop complaining

Looking at the list below, consider what this type of “knowing” means for your relationship with God.

Know:

- Stop doubting
- Be sure
- Have faith
- No second opinion

What image or aspect of God resonates with you from the list below? Is there a particular title or image you use in prayer? Is there one (or more) titles or characteristics that you would add to this list?

That I Am God:

- God is Almighty
- God is in Control
- God is love
- God is King
- God is my hope, rock, fortress
- God is ever-present, a help in times of trouble
- God is my Father
- God is my Shepherd-He will lead me, nourish me, protect me, and restore me.

Take a moment to share your responses with those at your table.

CONTEXT OF PSALM 46

Psalm 46 is a song of confidence in God’s protection of Zion with close parallels to Psalm 48.

The dominant note in Psalm 46 is sounded by the refrain, the LORD of hosts is with us (v. 8 and 12)

The first strophe (v. 2-4) sings of the security of God’s presence in utter chaos;

The second strophe (v. 5-8) of divine protection of the city from its enemies;

The third strophe (v. 9-11) of God’s imposition of imperial peace.

*God is our refuge and our strength,
an ever-present help in distress.
Thus we do not fear, though earth be shaken
and mountains quake to the depths of the sea,
Though its waters rage and foam
and mountains totter at its surging.*

*Streams of the river gladden the city of God,
the holy dwelling of the Most High.
God is in its midst; it shall not be shaken;
God will help it at break of day.
Though nations rage and kingdoms totter,
he utters his voice and the earth melts.
The LORD of hosts is with us;
our stronghold is the God of Jacob.*

*Come and see the works of the LORD,
who has done fearsome deeds on earth;
Who stops wars to the ends of the earth,
breaks the bow, splinters the spear,
and burns the shields with fire;
Be still and know that I am God!
I am exalted among the nations,
exalted on the earth.”
The LORD of hosts is with us;
our stronghold is the God of Jacob.*

“BE STILL AND KNOW” FRAMEWORK

UNPACKING VERSE 10

“Be still and know that I am God.” - Psalm 46:10

BE STILL

The Hebrew word for “be still” is *rapha*. It does not mean for us to simply stop talking, texting, emailing, gaming, working, chatting, or watching our screens. Rather, it means be weak, release, die to yourself, to drop down, and let go. This word has also been translated to mean “*surrender*.” Think about when we genuflect or bow down before God, how the Magi approached the baby and made themselves small before the One who is so great. They prostrated themselves because they knew they were in the presence of the King.

Is this easy for us to do in our culture? To stop what we are doing? Our lives are usually attached to a schedule, a plan. And now we are to forget that, forget our plan or maybe what we would like to do and simply be still and focus on what is beyond ourselves.

To “be still” is more than simply being quiet, but it is a stillness *with* God. To be aware that the God of all power and strength is *with* us, we are not alone.

KNOW THAT I AM GOD

We recognize the glory and the greatness of God. We are confident in God’s protection and power in our life. In this Psalm, the holy city is place of refuge for worshippers. This is the place where God dwells. The temple and the city are the places where God’s power and strength are celebrated.

“BE STILL AND KNOW” FRAMEWORK

BEING STILL / MAKING SILENCE

This activity involves 20 minutes of making silence followed by 10 minutes of journaling about the experience.

Silence is an important and necessary means of listening to and responding to God. We are going to have an opportunity to make silence and sit in the stillness of God's presence.

Presenter reads:

find a comfortable position

close your eyes

put your feet flat on the floor

place your hands in your lap, palms up

be conscious of your breathing, in through your nose, out through your mouth

feel your back pressed against the back of the chair

relax your neck, rolling your head from side to side

relax your shoulders,

relax your arms, your wrists, all the way to your fingertips,

all the while breathing in through your nose, out through your mouth

relax your hips, your thighs

relax your legs, your calves

all the way down to your feet, your toes

all the while breathing in through your nose, out through your mouth

in and out

in and out

“BE STILL AND KNOW” FRAMEWORK

FAITH SHARING

Spend time consider what you have heard from the presenters and within the stillness of your heart. Choose one or even two of the following questions and journal your response. Be prepared to share with others at your table. Know that you have the option to “pass”.

1. Reading the Psalms helps me understand the prayer of the people of Israel. What does this verse tell me about God’s people? What does it tell me about my relationship with God?
2. What does “being still” mean for me? When was the last time I was truly “still”?
3. Consider: Do I allow myself the gift of time to simply sit and be still? If so, how does this impact my day? If not, could it affect my day, if I allowed for this practice?
4. Can I be aware of God’s presence, if my mind and heart are not still? Can I be aware of God’s will for my life, if my mind and heart are not still?

“BE STILL AND KNOW” FRAMEWORK

SCRIPTURES TO TAKE HOME

Silence needs to become a habit of being, for prayer, understood as dialogue, requires silence. Without it, there is no prayer. The Gift of Silence will help us remain quiet for a period of time and help to develop a sense of peace and spiritual awareness of God.

Possible Scripture verses to consider this week:

- *The Lord is in His holy temple, let all the earth be silent before Him. (Hab 2:20)*
- *Be still before the Lord. (Ps 37:7)*
- *Be still and know that I am God. (Ps 46:10)*
- *Be still before the Lord, all mankind. (Zec 2:13)*
- *The voice of the Lord was not in the wind, or the earthquake, or the fire; but in a gentle whisper. (1 Ki 19:11 - 12)*
- *The Good Shepherd calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. (Jn. 14:3)*

MOMENTS OF ENCOUNTER ACCOMPANIMENT

EVANGELIZATION OPPORTUNITY

Affirming moments of encounter and also helping people be aware of the following as times of encounter, i.e., at prayer, before the Word, at times of conflict, at times of suffering, at rest, at play, when burdened. Describe and offer examples for each of the areas listed. How do we accompany those who are in nursing homes, homebound, suffering silently?

What are those bridges which unite people in our parishes and communities? How are we responsible for building bridges to bring unity and peace. Do we recognize Jesus as that bridge that unite us with God the Father?

EXPECTED OUTCOMES:

- To determine what accompaniment is and what it is not
- To create a spirit of empathy among staff, parish leadership, and one another, regarding the ways in which we encounter each other on occasions of joy and in times of sadness.
- To continually ask ourselves: Are we still a church capable of warming hearts?

PROCESS:

"We need a Church capable of walking at people's side, of doing more than simply listening to them; a Church which accompanies them on their journey; a Church able to make sense of the "night" contained in the flight of so many of our brothers and sisters from Jerusalem; a Church which realizes that the reasons why people leave also contain reasons why they can eventually return. But we need to know how to interpret, with courage, the larger picture. Jesus warmed the hearts of the disciples of Emmaus.

I would like all of us to ask ourselves today: are we still a Church capable of warming hearts? A Church capable of leading people back to Jerusalem? Of bringing them home? Jerusalem is where our roots are: Scripture, catechesis, sacraments, community, friendship with the Lord, Mary and the apostles... Are we still able to speak of these roots in a way that will revive a sense of wonder at their beauty?" -Pope Francis

To determine what accompaniment is and what it is not, look to resource "How to Become An Accompanying Parish" by Bill Huebsch (which includes a presentation and planning process).

TRAINING AND FOLLOW-UP:

- Provide Diocesan Accompaniment Day formation, focused on the Emmaus story (Luke 24) as the context for the conversation and relationship between Jesus and the two disciples
- Provide Diocesan Day on: The Early Church and the Church Today, (Acts 2) as to how our parishes can become more like the early church in how we live with one another.
- To Provide copies of resources, for parish ministers, caregivers, and family members of the sick, such as "Visiting the Sick and Homebound" (LTP)
- To provide for instances of conflict, resources such as "Difficult Conversations" by Sheila Heen, Douglas Stone, and Bruce Patton
- To provide Bible Study Resources for faith sharing and accompaniment/Bible Study, such as "Walking with Jesus: A Bible Study for Learning the Art of Accompaniment" by Art Zannoni, Ann Naffziger, and Paul Canavese.

MYSTAGOGY FORMATION

EVANGELIZATION OPPORTUNITY

This is an important part of welcoming new members into the faith community.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES:

- More vibrant and active community

PROCESS:

1. Develop a Manner of Mystagogy in your parish community. While mystagogy refers to a period of time in the Christian Initiation of Adults, we can offer moments of mystagogy after every liturgical experience.
2. Be intentional about using the beautiful, rich language of the Church, including terms like mystagogy. We can define it in simple terms, and also use it and promote it regularly.
 - Create a large wall sign to be displayed at Church with phonetic spelling of Mystagogy and simple definition.
 - Create “Manner of Mystagogy” questions for parish use.
 - Offer snippets of mystagogical writings of the Church Fathers in the parish bulletin with a discussion question on our own parish experience of liturgy. (write samples for toolkit)
 - During Mass, the focus of the priest’s homily should be “what was proclaimed, and now what will be lived in our celebration of the Eucharist.” for example, at Christmas: At Bethlehem, what did the shepherds see? Now, what will we see?
 - Sofia Cavalletti describes mystagogy as “the method of initiation to the Mystery used by the Fathers of the Church.” Mystagogy links the liturgical sign with “the biblical narrative of the event(s) on which the liturgical element is based.”
3. Ask the RCIA director to share the current roster of potential members with a parish committee whose purpose is to promote various clubs, groups and parish organizations.
4. Coordinate with RCIA director regular meetings during the Mystagogy stage with the heads of various committees, clubs and groups. These Parish leaders will promote their organizations to the Neophytes, giving them the opportunity to serve and participate in the life of the parish and grow in their relationship with God.
5. Prepare discussion questions for follow up to the rite of baptism, anointing of the sick, matrimony, confirmation, and the Eucharistic celebration of the Mass. See sample questions for Confirmation Mystagogy:
 - *What did you say and do at the Confirmation Liturgy?*
 - *What was a significant moment for you? Why?*
 - *What feeling was evoked?*
 - *What seemed especially important?*
 - *What was your experience of God?*
 - *What did you bring to the rite (ceremony)?*
 - *Did you prepare in any way? How?*
 - *What commitment did you make by these words and gestures?*

TRAINING AND FOLLOW-UP:

- 6 months after the Easter Vigil chat with the Neophytes to discover what they are now involved in at the parish levels and at the Diocesan level as is appropriate.

NAMETAG SUNDAY

EVANGELIZATION OPPORTUNITY

"I have called you by name: you are mine" (Isaiah 43:1b). Names matter. Calling someone by one's name is our first opportunity to form a connection. It takes a disciple to make a disciple. For those who want to help other encounter Jesus, we need to call this person by name just as God has called each person by name. In a world where evangelization and discipleship are increasingly personal and relational, truly loving someone in a Christian community means knowing and using the person's name.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES:

- Increased connections with parishioners.
- Parishioners feel known.
- The more people who are known, the better the opportunity to invite parishioners to Bible studies, small group faith sharing, parish missions, and retreats.

PROCESS:

- Discern who is a good fit to be a nametag ambassador. Include leadership: pastoral council members, finance committee members, trustees, leadership of Catholic organizations such as the Knights of Columbus or Altar & Rosary/Catholic Daughters, lectors, extraordinary ministers of Eucharist, ushers, leadership of committees such as liturgy, parent organizations, and staff. Longtime parishioners who are outgoing are a great fit for this initiative.
- Order a substantial nametag on a lanyard for each member of the team. The parish will have an order form for the nametags.
- When will the leaders wear the nametags?
 - at Mass, Faith Formation events, and parish wide gatherings.
- Nametag Sunday
 - Held on the first Sunday of the month. Reminder notices need to be
 - Those on the nametag team are available before each Mass to help others write nametags for each member of the family.
 - Offer an opportunity for fellowship after each Mass (coffee and donuts, pancake breakfast, homemade cookies, etc. Anything that will help the nametag ambassadors to connect with those who have handwritten paper nametags.
 - Nametag ambassadors thank parishioners by name for being part of the faith community and will have materials on upcoming events at the parish or be able to answer simple questions about parish life (volunteering, getting involved, who to contact with a question.

TRAINING AND FOLLOW-UP:

- Initial training offered at the beginning of the initiative and for new staff or leaders who come on board later. A simple resource manual will be provided for the nametag ambassador to answer simple questions.
- A simple follow-up after each Nametag Sunday will be available for information that will be helpful for the parish staff to know and also follow-up with the parishioner.
- Twice a year, all nametag ambassadors will meet with the pastor to refine the initiative.
- Annually examine the data as to how much engagement has happened in parish events due to the nametag initiative.

TOUCHPOINTS OF ENGAGEMENT

EVANGELIZATION OPPORTUNITY

Parishioners would gain a greater sense of caring from the parish and a sense that they matter to the Body of Christ and the parish would gain a greater understanding of their people, both broadly and particularly. This would result in more effective goal-setting for meeting the real and felt needs of parishioners.

Parish ministers involved in this outreach ministry (along with staff) develop heightened skills for listening and pastoral accompaniment. The deeper parish-parishioner relationship could result in more engagement and investment of marginal parishioners (time, talent and treasure).

Finally, this effort can be conducted with intentionality to form all parishioners (engaged and not) to take on the role of pastoral listener/accompanier in their relationship spheres in the world and perhaps as evangelizers.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES:

- To strengthen or develop relationships between parishioners and the parish.

PROCESS:

Parish leadership discerns what is needed in terms of pastoral outreach to help facilitate healthy relational dynamics with its parishioners. A multi-faceted approach would be encouraged. One facet could, for example, involve annual intentional outreach and engagement of each household by the parish.

TRAINING AND FOLLOW-UP:

- Effective pastoral listening/accompaniment formation would be made available (live and/or recorded) by the diocese. Such training would be for staff and ministers in the parish and potentially for those added to the ministry ranks to supplement those currently on staff and in ministry.
- Given the size and bandwidth of parish staffs, this would be a primarily parishioner-led effort. However, staff members (including pastor) would be a first point of contact for some (as intentionally discerned) and more involved in subsequent engagement as determined appropriate.

SHARING YOUR FAITH STORY

EVANGELIZATION OPPORTUNITY

Your story — regardless of how “spectacular” or “ordinary” you think it is — is a story about God’s character. It is your eyewitness account of how God rescued you from sin and death through Christ, and changed your life as a result. When we share our story of coming to faith with others then we help them get to know what God is like and what God can do in them and through them.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES:

- Sharing stories will connect parishioners in a deeper way.
- Because of sharing vulnerable moments, one would be ready to participate in a small group or a retreat more easily.
- Authentic witness is a natural way to evangelize to others and will bring people into the Church.

PROCESS:

Be ready for the spirituality of encounter as Pope Francis calls it. Use the process below to develop how to shape your story. Ask God to help you form your story in a way that will help someone you encounter.

1. *The Opening.* Identify a theme or scripture passage you can use to frame your story. What did your life revolve around (e.g. relationships, your reputation, your agenda, money) that God used to help bring you to Him? Briefly illustrate how that influenced your life.
2. *Your Life Before Christ.* Briefly paint a picture of what your life was like before you came to know Christ intimately. This is more than academic or book knowledge; this is heart knowledge. Don’t dwell too much on, or brag about, past sins or struggles. Share only the details that relate to your theme -- just enough to show your need for Christ and his Church.
3. *How You Came to Christ.* Give the details about why and how you became a follower. Communicate in such a way that the person you are talking with, and anyone who overhears you, can understand how they can become a follower of Christ, too. Even if your listeners are not ready for that, God could use your story and explanation of the gospel to draw them to God in the future.
4. *Your Life After Coming to Know the Lord.* Share some of the changes that Christ has made in your life as they relate to your theme. Emphasize the changes in your character, attitude or perspective, your connection to the Church and to other people, not just mere changes in behavior. Be realistic. We still struggle as disciples. Life is far from perfect, share what’s different about your life now?
5. *The Closing.* End with a statement that summarizes your story and connects everything back to your theme. If you want, close with a scripture verse that relates to your experience.
6. *Pray.* Whether the encounter was positive or a challenge, afterwards thank God in prayer for the opportunity to witness to your faith and pray for the one(s) who heard your story-- that the Holy Spirit will fall a-fresh on that person’s life to have them come to know Jesus intimately

TRAINING AND FOLLOW-UP:

- A member of the Commission will work with those who want to take this on in your parish community. This training will help each person frame one’s message and practice on how to deliver it.

DIVINE RENOVATION

EVANGELIZATION OPPORTUNITY

Parishes must focus on becoming more missionary. Parishes must equip their parishioners with the tools they need to evangelize to other parishioners as well as to evangelize to people outside of your parish. Pope Francis said “The parish is the presence of the Church in any given territory, an environment for hearing God’s word, for growth in Christian life, for dialogue, proclamation, charitable outreach, worship and celebration”.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES:

- Divine Renovation inspires priests and lay leaders to move their parishes from maintenance to mission.
- The power of connection – worldwide to in our own Diocese. Divine Renovation understand that bringing renewal to your parish can be a difficult and lonely journey – but it doesn’t have to be that way.
- By providing tools and coaching, Divine Renovation helps parishes escape maintenance mode and live out their missionary identity.

PROCESS #1:

Have parish leadership read the book “Divine Renovation: Bringing Your Parish from Maintenance to Mission.” by Fr. James Mallon. This book provides practical ways to help your parish become more alive for Christ. The book’s focus is to help the members of your parish deepen their relationship with Jesus and to equip them with the tools to evangelize to the people outside of your church walls.

Focus on a few key areas and create small teams to lead these areas. For example:

- *Community Outreach* – How can you as a parish evangelize to others outside of your church walls? How can you go into the community and show others that your parish is indeed alive and you want to invite others to your parish to also become alive in their love of Jesus. This might mean working with an organization in the community, visiting a nursing home or delivering cookies to people around the parish who might not attend Mass.
- *Mass Experience* – How can you create an impactful experience for people at Mass? This might be different music, if there is a special prayer said after Communion, print that prayer out and put it in the pew so visitors can recite the prayer or plan an outside Mass.
- *Hospitality* – How are you welcoming people as they come into church? How are you making certain visitors feel welcome? This might mean greeters actually stand outside to welcome people or a welcome message from the lector before Mass.

PROCESS #2:

Have the Pastoral Council (or key leaders) with the Pastor use Divine Renovation’s “Three Keys to Unlocking Your Parish” Study Guide. This will help this leadership team better understand the pathway for parish renewal and how best they can help the pastor

1. *The Primacy of Evangelization* - The Church exists to evangelize. Your parish exists to evangelize. It’s right there in the Great Commission. But is your parish doing things in the right order? That is, the order the Great Commission places them in! Read it again. Jesus commands us to: first, go and make disciples; second, baptize; and third, teach.

DIVINE RENOVATION

- *To do this you must put evangelization first at your parish. Through evangelization you will reach the unchurched and the de-churched. But to evangelize well, you have to prioritize it. That may mean putting other things on hold or stopping them altogether. Possibly many things. The Great Commission comes with a cost, but it's a cost worth paying since we become instruments through which Jesus will literally save souls.*
2. *The Best of Leadership - We can't do parish renewal alone. No one person has all the gifts and strengths needed to single-handedly lead, let alone transform, a parish. There is no such thing as a balanced person, but you can have a balanced team.*
 - *The secular world has discovered that leadership is a science. It is a multi-billion-dollar industry, with books and tests and coaches and training programs all designed to help leaders like you do your best work. If it's important for a company that sells widgets or sneakers to have the best of leadership, how much more important is it for priests and parish leaders who shepherd people to God and deal with questions of the eternal?*
 3. *The Power of the Holy Spirit - This is God's work. You are not enough... but He is. It is not by your own power that your parish will transform. There are two truths happening at once: Your parish will not transform with you. Your parish cannot transform without Him..*
 - *Call on the Holy Spirit and expect Him to show up, because the Father has promised Him to us. Surrender your work, surrender your leadership, surrender your parish, and surrender your whole self to Him*

PROCESS #3:

Priest Cohort Coaching - Someone always needs something, so you're exhausted.

Seminary only prepared you for part of your job, so you're struggling to make sense of the rest of it. Old methods don't resonate with today's culture, so your parish is declining.

This is not what you signed up for. You want your parish to be alive and your priesthood to matter! It can be and it will. We'd like to show you how.

Cohort coaching is free and can help in these areas:

- *Mission inspired prayer*
- *Forming and casting vision*
- *(Re)Planting an evangelization initiative*
- *Building a leadership team*
- *Enhancing the Sunday experience (see above)*
- *Becoming the leader that you are*
- *Rest*

TRAINING AND FOLLOW-UP:

- The training involved would come from the committees who head up the 3 areas of focus. Training is available from Divine Renovation as well as staff from the Diocese who can help get you started.

VISITING OTHER PARISHES

EVANGELIZATION OPPORTUNITY

We are all busy, but yet we all want our parish to be more inviting, more holy, more welcoming, and more alive. By visiting another parish, you might be able to get some ideas on how other parishes are doing those things well.

PROCESS:

Have 2 or 3 members of the parish attend a different parish for Mass. Don't make it obvious that you are there to get ideas. Attend as simply a guest but keep a lot of mental notes.

TRAINING AND FOLLOW-UP:

Once each person has attended another parish, plan a meeting to review the things you experienced at that parish. Determine what ideas could be implemented in your parish.