

MISSION READINESS STATEMENT

Holy Family Catholic Community
Middletown, Maryland

September 26, 2016
Feast of Blessed Paul VI

Here at Holy Family Catholic Community, we strive every day to find ways and opportunities to become and to make ever greater ‘Missionary Disciples’ of our Lord Jesus Christ. Our charge is the Great Commission: “...go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:19). Challenged especially by the words and actions of Pope Francis, we are striving to understand and grow the concrete reality that discipleship is always active. We look to recognize and live the fact that “follow” (following, etc.) appears in the Gospels some eighty times but never as a noun. It is always in verb form. There is no such thing in the Gospels as abstract discipleship. It is neither an idea nor a purely inward disposition; it exists only as a concrete, visible, tangible event reaching beyond the disciple and outward to the other. It is this outward focused activity of knowing and serving Jesus Christ that must be the vision of the driver for our community. We have begun this journey but we have very far to go.

This year Holy Family celebrates 30 years as a parish. This faith community came together to establish a lasting presence in the Middletown Valley, and one of the community’s first priorities was to provide a proper space of worship for gathering, service, and evangelization. With the building of the worship space and offices (in 1997) and the Father John C. Moore Parish Center (in 2007), the community is positioned to take up our mission. Our worship space can seat over 500 (more than 700 at Christmas and Easter with overflow in our large Narthex), and now has the potential of expanding into our Parish Center with live streaming of our Masses. The Holy Family campus is on 20 acres, and the original Master Plan reflects the forethought to expand the worship space with another 1500 seat sanctuary and an enlarged office, meeting and classroom facility providing for the long term growth of the parish. Plans have been developed and some monies have already been raised to complete the lower level, furnishing space for meetings, formation, and outreach that should facilitate both our coming together and our looking outside of ourselves. The project, which was part of the case statement for the Embracing Our Mission Campaign, is on hold until further funds can be raised. Also, the parish looks to sell the current offsite rectory, which needs renovation, and construct a rectory on the campus with enough room to realize the hope of having an associate pastor and/or a retired priest to assist with sacramental needs of our and other area parishes.

Holy Family’s greatest opportunity to “mission-readiness” and personal and pastoral “missionary conversion” comes in her recent efforts to respond to the call of the Lord. The community was faced with the prospective of a new stage of her evolution which anticipated the Archdiocesan call for evangelism and consolidation into pastorates. The completion of the obligations of *Embracing Our Mission Campaign* (2018) and the payment of the parish center mortgage (2017) would complete the parish’s base obligations, allowing the parish to chart a new direction and move beyond the inward focus on buildings and finances. The community at large, and the pastoral council in particular, began to reflect on where the parish should go. A process called Mapping Our Journey allowed us to take stock of the current situation and discuss how we would move forward. The process uncovered a community that had become too inwardly focused and comfortable. We were meeting the monthly mortgage payment but not our obligations for offertory. Many had become tired and the practice of faith rote. Problems with declining Mass attendance, tight finances and problems in securing sufficient volunteers were the symptoms of a community in decline.

It is the gift and strength of this community, though, that she rises to meet a challenge. When faced with these trials, especially with the financial difficulty which became dire, the community stepped up to the plate financially. The pastoral council began investigating and visiting other communities that had turned similar situations around. The addition of a Director of Parish Operations to focus on the administrative aspects allowed for tight control of expenses and for proper support of the staff. While several programs and communities were examined and provided valuable input, the pastoral council and leadership were most inspired by Father James Mallon at Saint Benedict Parish, Nova Scotia, Canada and **Divine Renovation: Moving Your Parish from Maintenance to Mission**. The book and conferences gave us the focus of shifting the parish from maintenance to mission. Unexpected changes in staff called each remaining staff member to be more strategic in reaching out to others. We restructured the pastoral council to focus on the mission and direction of the parish. We formed a senior leadership team to help, guide, nurture and lead with the pastor and joined the Divine Renovation Network to learn from Father James Mallon and his team. They help to provide tactical direction and, just as importantly, keep us focused on the mission.

But the change was not only in parish staff or leadership. One of the primary opportunities for revitalizing the parish was Alpha, chosen as the vehicle to move us from maintenance to mission. Alpha helped to begin forming the community into "...a sanctuary where the thirsty come to drink in the midst of their journey, and a center of constant missionary outreach." (EG, no. 28). Our use of Alpha was extremely successful in the first year with over 170 parishioners coming to a deeper relationship with Jesus. Many experienced the Holy Spirit personally while developing communal relationships during the Alpha sessions. Many were renewed and revitalized in their service to the Lord and to the parish community. Those who had initially been opposed to both Mapping Our Journey and Alpha began to change. And our goal is to continue. We have expanded Alpha to the youth of our parish and all high schoolers will go through the process this year as part of their regular faith formation program. With Alpha as our evangelization engine we hope to revitalize the whole community even as we build smaller communities (25 – 30 individuals) to reinforce the Lord's grace. In these communities we look to see the people pastoring one another, looking out for and taking care of one another, providing a support to allow pastoral care far greater than what can be provided by the pastor or deacons. But this is not the end point for these smaller communities or for the whole parish. Our goal is to continue to focus the community outwards beyond itself, even to stretching our comfort level in the true sense of discipleship called for by Jesus Christ and as challenged in our own day by Pope Francis.

Another opportunity comes with our faith formation programs. Over the last few years, we have been attentive to the needs of our families and have examined both the structure and the curriculum of our programs. In light of our shift from maintenance to mission, planning is underway to review these approaches again along with our sacramental preparation processes. The goal is to develop the most effective approach to sacramental, spiritual, and faith formation of our youth, side by side with the engagement of their parents or guardians, and, indeed, of all adults.

A further opportunity comes in our parish liturgies. It has long been a tradition here at Holy Family that much attention has been paid to good liturgy that makes a connection to the community and ties worship to the life of the believer. Mass has always been the centerpiece of community at Holy Family. Music, homilies, abundant ministers along with the beautiful and spiritual artwork present a prayerful, joyful, engaging worship experience. This was also a primary focus for Mapping Our Journey which called for a study and possible reexamination of our approach to liturgy. This has been enhanced lately with the addition of a Praise and Worship Mass, which is now a fixture on the 3rd Sunday of every month at 5:00 p.m. Other areas of liturgy are also being reexamined, including especially the formation and support of liturgical ministers.

We have already begun to bear the fruit of these efforts of revitalization. Many comment that there is a dynamism at Holy Family that has not been present for a long time. Our young people are more connected to the community and a growing number are choosing to remain connected and serve even after the formal

obligation of participation is over. Numbers of young families are increasing. Holy Family has begun to plan for a parish census to be taken in 2017. We are looking not only for an accurate record of our current members, but also the identification of those that have become estranged from the community. An outreach will be undertaken to reconnect and engage this section of our community.

Other opportunities for evangelism also are present at Holy Family. Holy Family has had some level of mission involvement since her creation. Financial generosity and strong volunteer involvement have included working with the Middletown Valley People Helping People, Middletown Food Bank, Weekend Food Backpack program, Middletown Meals on Wheels, St. Vincent DePaul, helping to staff the Frederick homeless shelter, a variety of local and Archdiocesan charities and our relationship with the people of our sister parish, St. Martha in Marmalade, Haiti. Here we focus on prayer and feeding the school children, but we hope to grow this relationship to develop a strong relationship between the two communities.

Further, the finances have become stable. At the end of FY 2015, Holy Family ran an operating deficit of \$90,000, continuing a 6 year pattern of deficits. In FY 2016 Holy Family ran a small surplus. Several factors played a role (families catching up on missed envelopes, the giving by some of additional one-time contributions, movement to an EFT offertory, some tithing) but the overall success is a new awareness of the responsibility we have for our community, in terms of time, talent and treasure. The FY2016 budget was restated in such a way that the income and expenses were separated for Operations, Mission, Charitable, and Restricted Use (mortgage). The FY2016 ratio between Operations and Mission was 80/20. The FY2017 budget reflects a 75/25 ratio, with any additional unbudgeted revenue going toward the Mission of the parish. We believe that the finances of the parish will continue to strengthen over the coming years.

Even with all of these opportunities and blessings for “mission-readiness” and personal and pastoral “missionary conversion,” Holy Family still faces many challenges. The primary challenge is the lack of engagement by the majority of our parishioners. There is a continued inertia in many and, in some, a sense of entitlement that can block the best efforts of the Holy Spirit. Our circles and pathways of leadership need strengthening and inclusion in discussion to generate increased participation and continued and strengthening ownership of parish. An invitation to Alpha will be our first step at reaching out to those that may have left or are searching. Currently, Alpha is being presented only here on our campus but the hope is to run Alpha sessions in the larger community - in a local restaurant, at neighboring Christian churches, in neighborhoods - to meet people where they are. Holy Family is planning for expanded Discipleship groups that will focus on additional opportunities to learn about Jesus, to deepen our relationship with Him, and fortify our resolve to “go and make (more) disciples.” The struggle is to engage people where they are and to help them discover how faith matters in their lives.

This is especially true for our young people and our young families. While we strive to find the most effective way to provide religious and spiritual growth for our youth, we need to find a way to engage their parents as well. Jesus taught the adults and blessed the children. We struggle to break the old habit of teaching only the young. This is particularly important for young families. Holy Family has always provided these vehicles with varying success and attendance. The Faith Formation programs, while successful for the engaged families of the parish, remain for many only a necessary exercise required to receive the sacraments. In fact, as in other parishes, we have seen the growth of families registering only the child preparing for a sacrament, leaving their other children unregistered. Helping the parents also become missionary disciples is paramount. Without engaging the parents as disciples, the lasting benefit of our young people is diminished, and we will have failed in our mission.

The Pastoral Council’s Action Plan stressed the need to encourage, develop, and support mission work. Holy Family’s plan is to utilize Alpha as the evangelization engine, with multiple outlets for the disciples to work for the Lord. One option is for the disciple to move into an established mission, or possibly take on a mission of their own. Our challenge is to be patient as the plan begins to come together and bear fruit. While

we are somewhat engaged in mission outside of ourselves as outlined above, often this is at the behest or by the efforts of individual parishioners. As a community, we lack an overall emphasis on “going out to the periphery” and reaching those in need.

A further challenge has come in the naming of our pastor also as the pastor of Saint Francis/Saint Mary. The challenge of his splitting time and attention has been felt by both communities. Combining our resources and programs has been challenging. When two parishes commit to work together and are at different places on the journey from maintenance to mission challenges occur. This is especially true as Saint Francis/Saint Mary has not had as much recent focus on and preparation for change. Father Rob recently combined high school and middle school youth and formation program for Holy Family and Saint Francis/Saint Mary. The head of faith formation from Saint Francis/Saint Mary will soon become engaged in the faith formation efforts of both parishes. Also, the parish will be sharing a maintenance man with both parishes contributing to the cost.

We also face the challenge of maintaining of our facilities. The professional assessment, completed this year with the help of the Archdiocese, reflects a \$1.8 million price tag over the next 20 years, just on the facilities we have now. This amounts to approximately \$10,000 per month. God has blessed Holy Family with a core of generous parishioners who currently give \$20,000 per month for the current mortgage. On occasion the parish has been generous with both finances and talent to support a specific need or challenge. But for the most part these efforts are championed, supported, and sustained by a minority of the parishioners. The challenge is to expand the number of those giving, along with those giving at sacrificial levels so that the entire parishioner base contributes. We hope to establish a maintenance fund to set aside the money that is needed before a financial crisis could occur. This is especially critical as the original systems of the church and office building are nearing (or have already exceeded) their anticipated useful life. Significant repairs in the infrastructure will be required in the near future.

In light of both the opportunities and challenges outlined here, Holy Family Catholic Community appears poised to take on the challenge of “mission-readiness” and personal and pastoral “missionary conversion.” There is already a spark of mission desire igniting within the congregation. Such intensity is evident in some of our parishioners and is also becoming apparent in the growing number of new families and individuals that have sought us out because of the activity they see taking place. It is most obvious in those individuals who experienced through Alpha an encounter with the Holy Spirit and developed a stronger, more personal relationship with Jesus. We recognize that a community can only be transformed by the Holy Spirit working with her members to change hearts and build missionary disciples in the true, active sense of the word. We trust that the Lord will continue to provide for our people and our community as we move forward on our journey to realize the Great Commission right here in our midst.

This document was prepared by senior staff and then reviewed and amended by the pastor. The draft was then sent to parish leadership (parish staff, corporators, pastoral council, finance committee, liturgy committee, and faith formation team along with other parish groups) who offered suggested amendments, additions and deletions. The recommended changes were reviewed by the senior leadership and incorporated into the final document.