

MISSION READINESS STATEMENT

St. Francis of Assisi – St. Mary Parish

Brunswick, Maryland

September 28, 2016

Feast of Lawrence Ruiz and Companions, Martyrs

The community of St. Francis of Assisi/St. Mary has an extraordinarily long history of bringing the Presence of Christ to southwestern Frederick County. A church building was constructed in Petersville in 1826 and then rebuilt in 1873 by the slaves and freed African-American residents in the area. St. Francis of Assisi was constructed in 1894 as a mission to St. Mary's and then expanded as the railroad expanded in Brunswick. A new church was dedicated in 1907, along with a school and rectory. Many of the parishioners today can trace their ancestry back to those who began the early churches. The adjacent cemetery at St. Mary's contains graves from 1832 and many of the founding family members are buried here.

Perhaps the parish's greatest opportunity for "mission - readiness" and personal and pastoral "missionary conversion" comes in the strong community that has existed for so long. Although small in number, we are willing and striving to continue the proud history of service and evangelization, even as times change and call for new methods of proclaiming the Gospel. There is a strong emphasis on family and many are proud of the strong, if small, community. Many of the parishioners have been actively involved in the pastoral life and the physical upkeep of the parish. The community responds well, even financially, to a crisis and looks to take care of our own. Part of that response is often the parish's Knights of Columbus and Catholic Daughters, both of which are very active and quick to help.

This strong bond is also seen in our liturgies. Our liturgical ministers and parishioners take an active role in the liturgy and work to promote active participation for all. Father George Limmer, a retired priest of the Archdiocese who helps out every weekend, has provided a tremendous support for the community and his continued presence has helped to keep the community focused and together.

Another opportunity for "mission readiness" comes in our location. This is especially true as the area around the parish continues to grow and develop. There is proximity to both Washington, D.C. and Baltimore. Commuter and Amtrak trains run from Washington through Brunswick. This makes the area an ideal location for those who commute to Washington, D.C. Significant housing developments are growing the area population and more are slated to begin soon. Additionally, development continues even outside of these developments. As a result of the housing developments, we have seen a net increase in registered parishioners in each of the past nine (9) years.

A further opportunity comes because the community has operated as a "pastorate" for many, many years, calling together the parishes of Saint Francis/ Saint Mary. Both were served by the same pastor and, although most parishioners associate with one parish or the other, we have functioned with one pastoral council and finance committee. We were one of the first parishes to have a Pastoral Life Director (a deacon) as the administrator and a sacramental minister. This was a huge learning

curve for most parishioners, (as everyone wants a priest) but we adapted and the “Building Up the Body of Christ” team provided information to the Archdiocese as to how this model worked for us and one that should be considered going forward.

The parish community was faced with another recent change in leadership at the retirement of Deacon Larry Teixeira who served faithfully and fruitfully as Pastoral Life Director for more than 12 years. The parish is using this opportunity to look at the current way of operating and see how well we are doing. Through a process of evaluation and reflection, leadership, ministries and parish groups are looking at where we are strong and avenues for improvement. The parish staff, pastoral council, and finance committee have already begun the process and it will spread into other groups as well as the parish at large. Also, several parishioners have attended Alpha and more are signed up to attend this year. Our goal is to host an Alpha Session next year. Already those who have attended are seeing the benefits of making disciples and spreading God’s message of love. In addition, our youth will be exposed to Alpha in their faith formation programs this year.

While Saint Francis/Saint Mary recognizes these opportunities, she also faces a number of challenges for “mission - readiness” and personal and pastoral “missionary conversion.” Faced with a history of adaption and change, especially in leadership, the community feels a certain hesitancy. Leadership continues to be a challenge. Although the community welcomed Father Rob as her pastor and appreciates the gifts he brings, the amount of time he can offer to the parish is limited. More than that, many believe they have little voice about the future of the parish or the direction the parish is taking. The possibility of a new model of one priest for several parishes is another huge adjustment. Trust needs to be established between the community and any form of leadership that will allow them to work together to help discern God’s plan and the actions needed to realize that plan. Further, many parishioners believe a greater sacramental, pastoral presence is needed.

The community’s greatest strength can also be a challenge. The community can seem closed to “outsiders” and resistant to change. Location and history have led to a sense of isolation which, while it has made us strong, also can separate us from neighboring parishes and from the Archdiocese. The community recognizes the need to reach out, especially to young people and to young families. The community is also recognizing the need to embrace an evangelical spirit of outreach both to those Catholics who have fallen away or are not connected and to others in the community who are not Catholic. We must get further out into the community around us and let others know we are here. We must make the time to be in the community more and participate in more ecumenical activities other than the Thanksgiving ecumenical service. We need to do more to get those who have fallen away back into the church and we look to use Alpha as the vehicle for this.

Our buildings also represent a challenge for us even as we operate now, let alone as we plan for the future. Currently the community has two churches and two former rectories, all of which are over 100 years old. The parish has no open space for a large meeting or community gatherings. Already the pastoral council and the building committee are looking to see how they can make some simple changes to provide that but a large gathering space is necessary. Maintenance has been deferred and some of the situations are becoming critical. A recent assessment indicated that almost \$1 million will be needed over the next 20 years simply to maintain the current structures. With the help of the founding families’ direct descendants, many parishioners and friends, we were able to renovate the front portico and doors at St. Mary Church. We are still in the maintenance mode and trying to avoid catastrophes. We have not always been successful.

Finances also present a challenge. The parish has been diligent in sticking to break even budgets and has ended recent years in the black. However, for the last few years, this has been deceiving as the parish was not paying a salary or benefits for her pastoral leader. In addition, greater resources are needed for faith formation, especially for adults, and for outreach. We will need to reach out to parishioners to address how we finance both what we have now and what we will need for the future. Our parish has risen to financial crises in the past and the hope that they will do so now is strong. The rising up to meet needs is also present in the way the parish reaches out to the community and the need around us. Currently our parishioners volunteer in the greater Brunswick community by assisting with the Food Bank, Brunswick Elementary Caring Cupboard, Emergency Relief Fund, on the board of the Brunswick Ecumenical Assistance Committee on Needs, Habitat for Humanity, the Religious Coalition for Emergency Needs, Brunswick House, and St. Vincent DePaul.

A further challenge comes in reaching out to our young people. We need to provide services, both inside and outside of liturgy, for young children. Our faith formation program is going through restructuring with the 7th and 8th grades along with the high school youth program being held at Holy Family. This is a major change for parishioners with children in those. Some question whether the exposure to a larger program and the sacrifices necessary for this will benefit their child. This change has led to a further restructuring of the 6th grade class as well, moving it back towards a more classroom-centered approach.

With these opportunities and challenges, we at Saint Francis-Saint Mary believe ourselves to be at the beginning stages of mission readiness and mission conversion. The pastoral council, finance committee, corporators and parish staff are developing several action plans to set and reach goals which center around communication, space and volunteers. The parish of St. Francis/St. Mary is full of parishioners proud of their faith and their history and willing to live their Catholic faith. Our goal is to build on this Spirit and reach out to the community around us to help them know, love, and serve Jesus Christ.

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.