



OTTAWA, CANADA

OUR PASTORAL STRATEGY
April 27, 2014 - Divine Mercy Sunday

An invitation to love God, love our neighbour, and make Disciples

“The parish is not an outdated institution; precisely because it possesses great flexibility, it can assume quite different contours depending on the openness and missionary creativity of the pastor and the community.”

Evangelii Gaudium, Pope Francis, December, 2013



by Annunciation of the Lord Parish, some rights reserved

This document is published under the Creative Commons license (CC BY 3.0)

original publication date: April 27, 2014 (v1)

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Our Pastoral Strategy.....	1
Pastor’s Message	4
Introduction.....	5
A Changing World	5
How Are We Doing?.....	5
Why We Need a New Pastoral Strategy	6
How this Draft Pastoral Strategy came about	6
1. Strategy for the Liturgy	7
2. Strategy for Ministries of Social Action	8
3. Strategy for Christian Education	10
4. Strategy for Strengthening All Ministries.....	11

OUR PASTORAL STRATEGY — AN OVERVIEW

PASTOR'S MESSAGE

So often when I meet former parishioners and they ask which parish I'm at, and I say Annunciation, they usually say something about it being an active parish. I always say that it is a wonderful parish with many good things happening.

We are truly blessed!

However, we can also state the obvious that growing an engaged parish in these times is a challenge. The Tsunami of Secularism is upon us, and in order to grow as a parish every parishioner must take on the exhortation of Pope Francis to become a 'Missionary Disciple'.

This is our baptismal identity!

As missionary disciples we do well to practise Stewardship as a way of life giving thanks to God for his gifts, and sharing them generously. In our desire to share generously of our Time, Talent and Treasure our giving back to God and to others needs to be planned, intentional and proportionate.

The Parish Pastoral and Stewardship Councils have attempted to do this by engaging in a Pastoral Strategic Planning Process. This document — Our Pastoral Strategy — is the first fruit of that process, one which we hope will guide and focus efforts on our continuing goal of becoming an engaged parish.

This Pastoral Strategy is but the beginning. We invite you as Disciples into this Process.

In Christ,

Father Yves Marchildon,

Pastor, Annunciation of the Lord Parish

INTRODUCTION

A CHANGING WORLD

In a 2013 report on Canada's Changing Religious Landscape¹, Pew Research points out that

“The percentage of Canadians who identify as Catholic has dropped from 47% to 39% over the last four decades, while the share that identifies as Protestant has fallen even more steeply, from 41% to 27%. In contrast in the United States, the Catholic share of the population has held fairly steady in recent decades at around 25% while the Protestant share has been declining from more than two-thirds in the 1960s to about 50% today.

“Concurrently, the number of Canadians who belong to other religions – including Islam, Hinduism, Sikhism, Buddhism, Judaism and Eastern Orthodox Christianity – is growing and now account for 11% of Canadians as of 2011, up from 4% in 1981.

“In addition, the number of Canadians who do not identify with any religion has been rising rapidly in recent decades, going from 4% in 1971 to 24% in 2011. The religiously unaffiliated Canadians — also referred to as ‘independent Christianity’² — increased by 8% in the 10 year period of 2001 to 2011.”

Getting closer to home, the member erosion noted above is taking a severe toll: nearly 50% of Ottawa parishes are not able to support themselves; reports are that some 150 churches are available for sale in the Archdiocese of Montreal.

HOW ARE WE DOING?

While the picture in our bigger world is not particularly good, at Annunciation we can take pride as a vibrant, joyful, and economically stable parish — one of the best in the Diocese by all accounts. Achievements mentioned frequently touch on the fact that we have a Cursillista alumnae of around 300, sixty plus active Ministries, a robust fellowship program, and a healthy financial position -- pretty good indeed.

¹ Pew Research Religious & Public Life Project

² Catherine of Siena Institute

The Annunciation catchment area of Beacon Hill plus our reputation as a ‘destination parish’ provides a certain sense of comfort. Beacon Hill, while essentially a built-up community, continues to enjoy an influx of younger families attracted by the quality schools for growing children. No doubt this is a stimulus to our Parish vibrancy and can be a future source of member stability.

Digging a little deeper however, one quickly uncovers threatening signs: we have a decidedly ageing population; families are smaller and there are fewer young people in the pews; marriages are down significantly as are sacramental preparation candidates; volunteers are getting older are asking for help and relief and it’s getting more difficult to recruit replacements. That’s the stark reality.

WHY WE NEED A NEW PASTORAL STRATEGY

Against the above backdrop, the Parish Pastoral and the Stewardship Councils felt that a careful assessment of Annunciation of the Lord Parish was necessary. Why? While, the current situation may be quite good, there are serious signs that cause worry. Currently, we do not have the means to receive visitors and the general public in the words of Archbishop Prendergast, “in the manner Jesus would receive them”; to provide the necessary training, support and planned renewal of our volunteers; to effectively communicate the spiritual and civic value of a dynamic Catholic faith in an increasing competitive world; and, to reach out as missionary disciples to the dechurched and unchurched in our community. Reviewing this draft Pastoral Strategy quickly provides a complete picture of the task ahead of us.

HOW THIS DRAFT PASTORAL STRATEGY CAME ABOUT

Preparing this draft strategy began as a preliminary discussion in the fall of 2013. It soon became apparent that a broad consideration of the parish’s situation required more research and an intentional consideration of our future direction by the Parish Pastoral and Stewardship Councils. A wide range of other stakeholders have also provided input to the deliberations.

Once background research was prepared and shared, a Strategy Retreat of over 20 parishioners was held on March 22nd. The Retreat proposed about 15 strategic initiatives to address the critical needs of the Parish. Subsequent analysis and consolidation in the Strategic Initiatives outlined in this report.

1. STRATEGY FOR THE LITURGY

ASSUMPTIONS & VALUES

Despite the challenges of living in our secular world such as moral relativism, perceived mistrust of the church, and even the non-relevance of the basic message of Christianity for some people, research also shows that people will come if invited and further, that good liturgies create an opportunity for a life changing personal encounter with God.

“In Christianity, liturgy is always in the first place communion or fellowship with Jesus Christ. Every liturgy, not just the celebration of the Eucharist, is an Easter in miniature. Jesus reveals his passage from death to life and celebrates it with us. The most important liturgy in the world was the Paschal liturgy that Jesus celebrated with his disciples in the Upper Room on the night before his death. For Jesus’ death and Resurrection is the proof that someone can die and nevertheless gain life. This is the genuine substance of every Christian liturgy.”³

Our overarching challenge is getting more people to experience liturgies as ‘the way’ to a personal encounter with Jesus and God’s mercy, causing a conversion. In essence, the Great Commission: “Go forth and make disciples of all nations...” is essentially an outreach challenge.

While those involved in liturgical ministries ‘get’ the bigger picture of the liturgy — how it is the way “par excellence” to reach the dechurched and unchurched in our broader community — doing so requires that we significantly elevate the ‘customer experience’ of all our liturgies. These are the two primary aims of our Strategy for the Liturgy — more people experiencing great liturgies.

STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT

Three Strategic Initiatives are proposed as critical for achieving our Liturgy Strategy:

1. Reach out to parishioners and the wider community;
2. Elevate the Liturgical experience; and,
3. Deliver the Liturgy flawlessly.

³ Adapted from Catechism in a Year - Day 122

The overall effect of these three initiatives is to leverage Annunciation’s reputation as a vibrant welcoming parish. AoLP is gaining recognition as a destination parish, and we wish to grow that both for the benefit of the dechurched and the unchurched⁴ in our catchment area — leveraging AoLP’s reputational strength to showcase the single most visible trait of Catholicism—its Liturgy.

Using the Sunday Liturgy to show case AoLP is a growing trend among Parishes often held out examples of ‘best practice’. Indeed, in the book Rebuilt, authors Michael White and Tom Corcoran devote an entire chapter to this corner stone of Parish renewal titled “It’s the Weekend, Stupid!”

2. STRATEGY FOR MINISTRIES OF SOCIAL ACTION

ASSUMPTIONS & VALUES

As Catholics, our call to social action requires the application of practical precepts of the church, which flow directly from Matthew 25; namely, the corporal and spiritual works of mercy: feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, visit the imprisoned, shelter the homeless, bury the dead, counsel the doubtful, instruct the ignorant, pray for the living and the dead. When these are practiced, one’s concern for “peace and justice” is no longer an abstraction. It becomes real and actionable.

There is also a second great calling for Christians that comes to us directly from Jesus when he commissioned his disciples to “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations...” The recent Apostolic Exhortation of Pope Francis summarily states:

“... The parish is the presence of the Church in a given territory, an environment for hearing God’s word, for growth in the Christian life, for dialogue, proclamation, charitable outreach, worship and celebration. In all its activities the parish encourages and trains its members to be evangelizers.

⁴ The expression ‘dechurched and the unchurched’ refers to those who no longer go to church (the dechurched) or have never gone to church (the unchurched).

We must admit, though, that the call to review and renew our parishes has not yet sufficed to bring them nearer to people, to make them environments of living communion and participation, and to make them completely mission-oriented.”⁵

We also acknowledge that, even in a Parish like AoLP, our achievements on both counts have fallen short and a more intentional effort is required.

STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT

The strategic initiatives proposed recognizes that building the Kingdom of God is achieved one encounter at a time: everyone needs a Paul (a mentor), forming them into a Timothy (student), as well as a Barnabas (fellow companion on the journey). The roles of a Paul, a Timothy, and a Barnabas provide us with the socialization process by which Christian life becomes a living reality in our community. Christianity, when lived authentically, humanizes people. As “missionary disciples”, we are all three of these at different times.

In examining AoLP’s achievements, we note there is no pastoral policy that overtly expresses the above socialization process; there is no overall vision and purpose for Social Action and, there is no overall vision and purpose to guide our outreach effort. To address this need, two ‘Strategic Initiatives’ are proposed for Ministries of Social Action:

1. Define a vision and purpose for the Social Action Ministry; and,
2. Define a vision and purpose to guide our efforts for a new Social Outreach Ministry.

The overall effect of these two initiatives is to leverage Annunciation’s reputation as a vibrant welcoming parish through a Social Action Ministry (Matthew 25), and a Social Outreach Ministry (“go forth and make disciples of all nations... «). AoLP is gaining recognition as a ‘destination parish’, and it’s logical to embrace growth for the benefit of the ‘dechurched and the unchurched’⁶ in our catchment area.

⁵ Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, December, 2013, paragraph 28

⁶ The expression ‘dechurched and the unchurched’ refers to those who no longer go to church (the dechurched) or have never gone to church (the unchurched).

3. STRATEGY FOR CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

ASSUMPTIONS & VALUES

The teachings of the Catholic Church evolved over some 2000 years; they are clear, firm and relevant. They are often not the same as today's societal values. Catholic values are still very relevant to society, precisely because they are foundational to much of our public institutions such as our legal system, education, health care, elder care, and charitable activities such as soup kitchens.

Our Christian Education challenge must be understood in terms of the trends in society namely:

- Declining community support for any faith culture characteristic of secular society;
- The limitations of our parochial schools system in teaching the Catholic faith;
- Competing societal values that can confuse and confound the relevance of Catholicism; and,
- The post-modern proclivity to asking why and how is it important to MY everyday life.

In response to this societal reality, we need to increase AoLP members' ability to appreciate the depth of the Catholic faith, its benefits to their well-being (mental and physical), as they fully participate and engage. Left unresolved, the trends evident in society will result in fewer and fewer people growing up knowing the authentic Catholic faith and inevitably, as the relevance of the Catholic faith to their everyday lives continues to erode, they will drift away and may even eventually oppose Catholic values.

*“Pastoral ministry in a missionary key seeks to abandon the complacent attitude that says: “We have always done it this way”. I invite everyone to be bold and creative in this task of rethinking the goals, structures, style and methods... in their respective communities.”*⁷

⁷ Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, December, 2013, paragraph 33

STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT

We acknowledge that, even in a Parish like AoLP, our performance has fallen short and a more intentional effort is required. To that end, it is important to pursue three Strategic Initiatives premised on the following convictions:

- a) That concise, clear, relevant messaging to the Parish and beyond about why the Catholic faith matters and has value is needed;
- b) That effective sacramental preparation of candidates will enable them and their families to become engaged parishioners; and,
- c) That our missionary discipleship formation deepens the Gospel in the lives of believers; brings about the re-conversion of those who live it only nominally; and, reaches out to the unchurched.

To address these needs, the following three broad Strategic Initiatives are proposed:

1. Effectively Communicating the value of the Catholic Faith;
2. Turning Sacramental Candidates into Lifelong Parishioners; and,
3. An Enlarged Adult Faith Studies Program

Details for of this strategic initiatives are outlined in Appendix X.

4. STRATEGY FOR STRENGTHENING ALL MINISTRIES

ASSUMPTIONS & VALUES

As Catholics, our call to social justice requires the application of practical precepts of Christianity, which flow directly from our understanding of the teachings of Jesus Christ. In our own times, the spirit of a redeeming Christian life and the role of the Church in its propagation is perhaps best summed up in the Apostolic Exhortation:

“The parish is not an outdated institution; precisely because it possesses great flexibility, it can assume quite different contours depending on the openness and missionary creativity of the pastor and the community.”⁸

⁸ Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, December, 2013, paragraph 28, and 23

A careful reading of the strategic issues outlined in this document quickly establish the need to strengthen our ministries — even doubling or tripling the number of parishioners involved in all ministries - in order to effectively meet our calling to “missionary discipleship” for Liturgy, Social Action, Parish and Community, and Christian Education ministries.

STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT

A common theme encountered throughout this strategy development process was the challenges faced by our volunteers and the realization that we need to form our people better, we need better planning, and we need better co-ordination.

In examining AoLP’s achievements, we note more specifically several major deficiencies:

- There is a need for a broad appeal for an increase in volunteers to expand the scope of ministries. This can be described as the need for accurate descriptions of the task a volunteer is asked to do coupled with a transparent recruitment process — essentially, a ‘job posting’ process.
- There is a need to align the goals and activities of the various ministries to the mission of the church as expressed in the Apostolic Exhortation, “The Joy of the Gospel”. In the spirit of this call, all parish ministries should be intentional in examining what, why, how they are currently using the Apostolic Exhortation to determine what changes to achieve alignment of ministry activities with the priorities expressed in the “Joy of the Gospel”.
- The need for greater cohesiveness amongst parish ministries. Cohesiveness speaks to the process whereby all ministry leaders would work together as a leadership team.

To address these needs, two broad Strategic Initiatives are proposed:

1. Discipleship Formation Program; and,
2. Organization and Delivery through: Volunteer ‘Job’ postings (for commitment and recruiting); Succession planning in all ministries; An Annual Ministry Planning Workshop; and, Full Time Coordinator of Volunteers and Ministries.