

Strategic Overview

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..."

We acknowledge that, even in a Parish like AoLP, our achievements on both counts have fallen short and a more intentional effort is required. The recent Apostolic Exhortation of Pope Francis summarizes the situation succinctly:

"... 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. 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."¹

And also:

"...An evangelizing community gets involved by word and deed in people's daily lives; it bridges distances, it is willing to abase itself if necessary, and it embraces human life, touching the suffering flesh of Christ in others."²

¹ Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, December, 2013, paragraph 28

STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT

Our strategy 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 is the socialization process by which Christian life becomes a living reality in our community. Christianity, when lived authentically, humanizes people. When we take on the role of “missionary disciple”, 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. Social Action Ministry; and,
2. Establish a Social Outreach Ministry

The overall intent 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’³ in our catchment area.

STRATEGIC INITIATIVE 1: SOCIAL ACTION MINISTRY — LIVING MATTHEW 25

Much is already being done in terms of pastoral care to AoLP members. There is a vibrant core of pastoral care ministers who work tirelessly to:

- Assist home bound and hospitalized Parish members;
- Assist Shepard's of Good Hope 2 months per year;
- Sponsor a refugee family;

² Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, December, 2013, paragraph 25

³ 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).

- Provide emergency assistance to families brought to our attention;
- Assist with Christmas baskets; and,
- AoLP is a generous and regular contributor to the Gloucester Food Bank.

We do not want to understate the value and generosity of what is currently done — it is wonderful. At the same time it is important to recognize that we fall short, particularly with respect to reaching beyond our own membership. In brief, we want to meet or exceed the call outlined in Matthew 25 of looking after the poor and sick in the broader community as well as the needs of AoLP members. However, a broader inventory of current Social Action Ministry is needed to identify the efforts of individual parish members who are involved with ministering to the marginalized described in Matthew 25. This is just a consequence of not having an ‘active ministry’ addressing the Matthew 25 needs of our broader community. To do so we believe it is necessary to undertake the following strategic initiative:

1. Missionary Disciple Development Project

- Conduct an inventory of current initiatives / practices;
- Determine success/failures including experience of participants;
- Identify performance requirements given the needs of our surrounding community;
- Examine best practices in other jurisdictions;
- Select appropriate solutions and integrate into a practical / doable program;
- Implement missionary disciple training as necessary; and
- Implement Missionary Disciple projects according to our capacity and resources.

Time Line: Year 1: a) complete design phase; and, b) recruit and equip the first cohort participants.

Year 2: Implement a Ministry for Social Outreach⁴

In proposing this project, those already active as private individuals in meeting the needs of the broader community will be vital to help train, inspire, and possibly lead an AoLP cohort of missionary disciples.

Details for of this initiative are outlined in Strategic Initiative 2-1.

⁴ *Living the Gospel Without Compromise*, Catherine Dorerhty, Madonna House, coined the phrase ‘Chit Chat Apostolate’ to describe going out into the market place to meet the poor and the lost.

STRATEGIC INITIATIVE 2: OUTREACH MINISTRY OF AoLP⁵

This initiative purposely targets the new person in our Parish precinct and recognizes that as a parish we do not have a ministry of 'missionary disciples' with a charge to bring the joy of the gospel to our larger community.

At a Parish level, many members are "pew bound"⁶, while we struggle to evangelize AoLP members through the school system, sacramental preparation, at the hockey rink, through community events, etc. From a Parish perspective, we need an overt response to "the great commission". To use a memorable quote, "We aren't here simply to serve the congregation; we're here to reach out to those who live within the parish."⁷

Again the behavioural traits mentioned earlier bring us to following conclusions:

- People will feel connected if they know someone – make a connection;
- People also try to avoid getting to know people, so they don't have to be engaged – or have expectations made of them (they hide, avoid);
- People tend to hope they are doing enough spiritually and are reluctant to commit further; and,
- Deep down, most know they were created to be in relationship with God, to encounter his love and mercy, and to live it by reaching out to other beloved child of God.

AoLP strengths that can be leveraged to take on this ambitious Ministry include: an extensive array of active ministries (over 60); friendly, receiving Parish members; the strong desire of AoLP members to help others; and, the overall strength of socio-economic demographics of the parish.

The aim is to empower a large number of our members to courageously respond to the missionary disciple call to reach the dechurched and unchurched in our broader community. To do so requires that we undertake three action projects:

⁵ The term 'Outreach' is used here to denote the great commission as distinct from the call to do good works of corporate mercy outlined in Matthew 25.

⁶ See Rebuilt, Michael White and Tom Corcoron, Get the Parish Out of the Pews, p. 189

⁷ See Rebuilt, Michael White and Tom Corcoron p. 72

1. Missionary Disciple Development Project

- Carefully assess current outreach experience;
- Conduct an inventory of current initiatives / practices;
- Identify performance requirements given the needs of our surrounding community;
- Examine best practices in other jurisdictions;
- Select appropriate solutions and integrate into a practical / doable program;
- Implement missionary disciple training as necessary;
- Sponsor a range of Outreach events; and,
- Implement Missionary Disciple projects according to our capacity and resources

If done successfully, we should see members taking on the role of missionary disciples by getting out of the pews and reaching into the community: at schools, at rinks, at community events, etc. As well, we can anticipate changes such as more children at mass — as we gain success in attracting the critical 25 to 45 age population, more people coming earlier to get a seat, more smiles, increased offerings, increased attendance at liturgies, and increased numbers of volunteers.

This presents us with a stark reality -- we do not have enough active people to achieve these great initiatives. Our parish needs a champion to meet with AoLP members who have taken care of the poor for many years, in a variety of ways. We need to understand the best practices and build them into our parish DNA.

The 4th Strategy for Strengthening All Ministries speaks to the need for forming missionary disciples and sets an aggressive set of actions to address this need. The time lines and budget implications are set out there.

Details for of this initiative are outlined in Strategic Initiative 2-2.