

# *In the Wake of the Spirit*

*An Overview of My Current Outlook as Pastor of St. Francis*

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I have been blessed in so many ways. Among the many blessings that I have received, I count being pastor of St. Francis of Assisi as one of the most important. I also count, among the top of my list of blessings, my time at Sacred Heart Major Seminary in Detroit completing my Licentiate in Sacred Theology, with an emphasis in the New Evangelization. As the Holy Spirit would have it, I was able to start being a pastor at the same time that I started this course of studies. As a result, the first three years of my pastorate (the most critical for initiating a relationship with parishioners) were supplemented with rigorous study on the theology and methodology of the New Evangelization. This meant that I was able to apply theological research while “in the trenches” of parish life to three intersecting topics: discipleship, stewardship and the new evangelization. My pastoral perspective, vision and planning are centered on the direct application of these three concepts to the life and mission of St. Francis of Assisi Catholic Church. It has been, and still is, my desire to follow in the wake of the Holy Spirit as he continues to shape and propel my priestly ministry. What follows is an overview of my current pastoral outlook.

## The Boat and the Net



The analogy I use to understand the connection between discipleship, stewardship and evangelization is that of casting a net from a boat. Jesus told Peter, “Put out into the deep and lower your nets for a catch” (Luke 5:4). Consider, for a moment, that every parish is a boat with a net. Just as different boats come in various shapes and sizes, so too do parishes. Likewise, there are different kinds of nets. Some nets, like trapeze nets, catch things that are falling. Other nets are cast outside a boat to catch fish.

Jesus wants both kinds of nets in our boat. Our parish needs to have a net that catches people who are falling. These are people in crisis, people who seek confession, people who are suffering a difficult marriage, or simply people seeking the sacraments. This is a receptive way of being a net.

But Jesus also wants our parish to be the kind of net that is thrown: seeking people who don't come to Mass, inviting people to hear the message of the Gospel, and offering people to become a part of a Catholic community as disciples and stewards. This kind of net is active and dynamic; it is thrown wide to reach souls in their daily lives.

The main question forming my pastoral outlook is: How can our parish practically apply the analogy of boat and net to parish operations, evangelization, stewardship and discipleship? We must keep in mind:

- ✦ The boat can't have holes.
- ✦ The crew must have intelligent leadership.
- ✦ The boat must have compartments to keep the fish in the boat.
- ✦ The crew must have a strong, well-mended net that is able to be thrown.

### Inside the Boat

Thinking logically, whenever it comes to pastoral activity inside a parish, a parish must be a place where people can find relationships and opportunities for service that meet their personality and skills. These opportunities are the “compartments” inside the boat. People must have a “place” to go that meets their needs. Consequently a “hole” in a parish is an absence of a ministry or the lack of an opportunity for service.

I call the ability to direct people to ministries that meet their needs a “shuttle pass.” This is something that I learned while I was pastor at St. John's in Clonmel (a parish of 600 souls). When a person came to me with a need or a suggestion for ministry, I created a system where I could shuttle pass them to the right spot. Take, for example, a young family desiring to get their child baptized. Perhaps the parents themselves aren't fully catechized, and they have a few children. Where could I send such a family? The parents could go to adult education. If one of the parents was non-

Catholic, he or she could go to RCIA. Older children could go to PSR or youth ministry. All of this took place on Sunday morning between the 8 a.m. and 10:30 a.m. Masses. Such a context of formation became a “one-stop shop” for families. Pastorally, I was able to shuttle pass them to the opportunities that fit their needs, on a day and at a time that was conducive to their family schedule.

At St. Francis of Assisi (a parish of 8,000 souls), I still use this shuttle pass principle to help direct people to the best place for their formation and stewardship. For example, in the past when people came to us in March or April seeking to join the Church, we used to tell them, “Come back in August!” That's like saying, “Great! We are so excited you want to become Catholic that we won't do anything about it for six months!” This was not a successful practice. Our RCIA coordinator kept track of persons who came in March and were delayed until August; *zero percent* of them came back. We recognized that this was a hole in our boat. We now have two rounds of RCIA every year; one from September to April, and one from April to October. This way we are able catch those souls when they come to us.

For mystagogia (ongoing formation for the new Catholics), we encourage them to go through the following round of RCIA. Going through once can be like drinking from a fire hose. Going through twice does three things: builds community, allows them to think anew of what they've learned once and, most importantly, lets them hear the Gospel message having been freshly anointed by the Holy Spirit.

What about those persons who know nothing about Jesus Christ and the Catholic Church? Or what about those Catholics who were never properly catechized? Here is another common place where holes can be in a boat. Every parish needs “zero-point entry” catechesis. What is this? A zero-point entry is like a wave pool, or a beach, where a person can just walk into the water and go from zero inches to all the way into its depths. Zero-point entry for catechesis, therefore, reaches persons who know nothing about Catholicism but need a place to ask questions. For example, consider a young man who stands in the back of church most Sundays, who is not Catholic, but is enamored of the Christian message. He has no way of understanding the Eucharist unless he has a time and place he can freely ask questions. Does our parish provide this opportunity?

At St. Francis, Discovering Christ is a community-based program that is intentionally designed as zero-point entry catechesis. We also use FORMED, which is a very powerful online tool for people to do private studies. This is valuable because some people start their own conversion in secret. Publicly asking questions can be very intimidating. So, FORMED is a place to shuttle pass such a person. It can be accessed through the front page of our website.

## Outside the Boat

A parish must be a *functioning* boat to throw an evangelizing net. Stewardship is concerned with the functioning of the boat, and evangelization is concerned with casting the

net. Evangelization and stewardship are vitally interconnected. They rise and fall with each other. It is necessary to have a sense of urgency about the status of both.

So, what net have we used at St. Francis? Recently, we have used the parish visioning process called Faith Forward. The Dellasega Group helped us facilitate a visioning process to arrive at a five-year strategic plan. It was a wonderful process. It yielded more than 250 pages of feedback. Every page was read. Every line was processed—every line. As the information was collated, it was presented to parish leadership, employees and parishioners to arrive at a viable plan. This entire process was an act of pastoral *listening*. By listening, leaders came to understand the needs of the parish, then discerned how best to meet those needs.

Once the strategic plan was published, we threw our net by visiting every registered member of the parish. We presented every household with a bottle of holy water, a home blessing, a registration data sheet (to update), and the results of the parish vision. We focused on registered parishioners because the new evangelization focuses on re-evangelizing Catholics who have fallen away or have become disenfranchised with the church.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The difference of the New Evangelization from general evangelization is its focus on baptized Catholics who have fallen away from the Church. Evangelization itself is the entire operation of the Church for the salvation of souls. As such, it includes both stewardship and the New Evangelization, but we took a more specific view of evangelization, which focuses on how a parish shares the message of the Gospel in an inviting and motivating way.

With holy water in hand, nearly 300 parishioners were trained to go to every household and knock on the doors of both active and inactive parishioners. At St. Francis, 3,600 souls attend Mass each weekend. Statistically, that means 52% of all parishioners are missing Mass on a weekly basis (or attending elsewhere). That further means that 52% of households need information on the beautiful things happening at St. Francis. They need to be personally invited to active participation in the life of the parish.

Why does this invitation needed to be person-to-person? Jesus Christ came *in person* to save souls. He sent his disciples out *in person* to share the Good News. A Christian community is made up of *persons* who share faith, life, and love with one another. All of this because God himself is a community of *persons*: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The God who himself is a *community of persons* desires to be worshipped in a *community of persons*: that is, a parish. It is proper that persons are invited by persons to be a part of such a community.

Such an invitation must also be non-intimidating to both the parish evangelist as well as the persons being visited. It is very difficult to approach someone and simply talk about faith or Jesus. It is often an awkward conversation that makes both parties feel uncomfortable, and no one wants to feel uncomfortable. So, a person doing a home visit benefits from having a product to take to houses that is easy to discuss. This is the mentality our society has formed in us. We are

a consumer society. When we have a product that we can offer to somebody else, we can talk about a thing more easily than talking about a person.

For our home visits, the parish evangelist had a parish vision document in his or her hand. This provided both visitor and person being visited an objective “thing” to talk about. But that thing—that parish vision document—contained within it the very message of the person, the Gospel, about whom we want people to ask questions. The biggest words in the document are “discipleship,” “stewardship,” “evangelization” and “parish operations.”

The document the parishioners carried to the front door of every household contained the Gospel message about a person: Jesus. They delivered this document saying something to the effect of: “*I am a parishioner of St. Francis. You are a registered parishioner of our parish. Here is some information about our new parish vision. This is exciting. I hope you read it. If you have any questions, feel free to give me a call.*” This conversation was intended to be neither intense nor extended. It was able to be less than a three-minute conversation. The goal was simply for one parishioner to share a document with another parishioner, face to face. If a longer conversation between the two parishioners grew out of that, great!

## Our Boat Is Part of a Fleet

Our boat, our parish, is part of a fleet, our diocese. As such, our parish's vision, mission, and pastoral priorities closely align with the diocese's. Consequently, my pastoral outlook is very closely associated with the mission and vision of our diocese. St. Francis' vision—to *invite people to become disciples of Jesus Christ through the proclamation of the Gospel and inclusion within the parish family*—has discipleship as its primary goal. This has influenced our new parish mission statement: *To be united in the Eucharist and formed as instruments of peace through the practice of stewardship in imitation of God's Triune love.* This mission is in turn accomplished through three priorities: evangelization, stewardship and parish operations. The ultimate goal of these priorities is discipleship.



St. Francis' vision and priorities are closely aligned with the diocesan vision: *That all God's children will respond to Christ's call so as to become fully alive as missionary disciples.* This vision then shapes the diocesan mission: *To go forth faithfully to preach the Gospel to all God's children and to evangelize today's culture.* This mission is subsequently carried out through three pastoral priorities: evangelization, stewardship, and reclaiming Sunday.

## Pastor before Administrator

As I have been facilitating this process of vision, mission and priorities—and correlating St. Francis' to the diocese's—I realized (and parishioners told me) that I am too much of an administrator and not enough of a spiritual father, a pastor. Therefore, I have been working very hard to delegate appropriate administrative tasks to lay persons without relinquishing my duty (and right) as a pastor to guide the vision, direction and temporal goods of the parish.

In response to parishioners' requests, I have been sincerely trying to prioritize my role as spiritual father above that as administrator. This is difficult. The Holy Spirit has been revealing much to me, lately, about how I can prioritize my fatherhood over administrative responsibilities (which I do enjoy). I am achieving this by reclaiming the meaning of my personal mission statement: *To worship, preach and teach the Eucharistic person of Jesus Christ, so as to inspire and enliven in the fire of the Holy Spirit, to the Glory of God the Father, in the teachings of Holy Mother Church, unto the salvation of souls.*

Worshipping, preaching and teaching are the reasons I was called into the priesthood, and the point of my pastorate.

I never once set out to be the CEO of a multi-million-dollar non-profit organization. In fact, when I was in third grade, at Christ the King, I once asked a teacher if I could go to the church to pray rather than go to recess. She said yes. While I was in the church, I felt spiritually called to move closer and closer to

the tabernacle. I successively moved from the back pew, to the front pew, to the altar, then to the tabernacle. When I knelt at the foot of the tabernacle, I felt the Lord say to me, “Here is where I want you to be.” That’s when I knew I was called to be a *man of the sanctuary*, a pastor of souls, a father (unworthy as I am); not simply a pastoral administrator. This fatherhood, as my personal mission states, is rooted in worshipping, preaching, and teaching.

I *worship* by celebrating the Mass, making a daily personal Holy Hour of adoration, and being faithful to the Divine Office (the Liturgy of the Hours). My first priority is for myself to be a disciple of Jesus Christ, to receive from Him what I hope to hand on to others, and thereby to save my soul. As St. Paul says, “I drive my body and I train it, for fear of having preached to others I myself might be lost” (1 Cor 9:27). By caring for my own soul, I have a storehouse of grace to share with other souls. My next priority is my self-gift to the parishioners God has called me to serve.

I *preach*. I love to preach, especially at Mass, but the Holy Spirit has recently impressed upon me (with great clarity) that I not only preach through my homilies at Mass, but also *in the confessional*. The confessional is a “one-on-one” homily tailor-made to the penitent’s personal needs. Confession is, in fact, the objective act of God enlightening a conscience through the ministry of a priest. It is, in effect, a mini-homily for the hope of each soul.

In the confessional, I both evangelize *and* form my parishioners as disciples—one at a

time. Confession is not just an act of the new evangelization, it is the *goal* of new evangelization. For this reason, I have significantly increased my availability in the confessional, including hearing confessions during Mass. Too often pastors are trying to “programatize” too many discussions in group format. But people usually won’t come to group discussions on personally sensitive issues. However, they will—and do—come to the confessional. So . . .

- ✦ How can a pastor make disciples? One-on-one in the confessional.
- ✦ How can a pastor combat pornography? One-on-one in the confessional.
- ✦ How can a pastor support struggling spouses? One-on-one in the confessional.
- ✦ How can a pastor stem bullying in school? One-on-one in the confessional.
- ✦ How can a pastor provide spiritual direction to so many parishioners? One-on-one in the confessional.

Finally, I *teach*. By delegating more administrative responsibilities to laypersons, I aim to increase my teaching in adult education as well as in my youth ministry programs. I plan on teaching more regularly on Wednesday nights (concurrent with PSR and RCIA). I also plan on making spiritual conversations about spiritual reading more available by being, again, in the confessional. Persons can do spiritual reading privately and then come to me at their convenience for some spiritual counseling or advice.

These three things—worshipping, preaching, and teaching—are my focus. That focus can

only be maintained by a greater delegation of administrative responsibilities proper to the competencies of the employees and stewards of our parish. Lately many conversations concerning the dialogue about the bishop and priest abuse scandal include hearing the laity express a great desire to be more involved in parish functioning according to their proper competencies. This is a balance that, if achieved, can only bring about a great good. Utilizing the gifts and competent skills of the laity to carry out more administrative responsibilities frees the priest to be more present as the spiritual father and pastor of souls.

This must be done, however, without relinquishing the rights and duties proper to a pastor. This means that priests must still be concerned about the buildings, budgets, insurance, legalities, and employee relations that are all connected to non-profit organizations. After all, Jesus chose St. Joseph as his foster-father partly because he was a laborer. Priests must never lose the laborer component of the priesthood. Just as a father of a household must deal with leaky faucets, so too, priests deal with leaky roofs. And yet, priests need to delegate those things that are not essentially demanded by virtue of their Holy Orders.

Once I had a person come up to me and say, "Father, the door hinge over there is broken." Well, while the pastor is the easy "go-

to" person for people to share that kind of information, the director of maintenance is the one who is going to fix that door. Because of the God-given skills and talents present in our parishioners, others are better suited to fixing the door; this delegation enables me more time to be behind another door—hearing confessions. People will need to be formed to contact the person on campus with the proper competency for a certain issue. As a pastor, the question is this: Is my pastorate situated in such a way that I can delegate the tasks of administration to the proper laypersons to protect my spiritual fatherhood?

### Rhythm of Life in the Boat

With this goal of being a pastor and spiritual father prior to being an administrator, the Holy Spirit has impressed upon me the importance of a regular life, the need for public Divine Office, and (as already discussed) the logic and spirit of the confessional. Just like a cruise liner has an itinerary of daily activities, a parish needs to have an analogous "itinerary."

What follows is my new pattern for daily pastoral ministry. This may strike some as "a lot," but I assure you this is merely the greatest availability in the most personal way. I am adopting the freedom of a regular life that opens me generously to pastoral ministry with a large amount of accessibility. Here is the new schedule that I am adopting:

## Pastor's Daily Schedule (beginning April 2019)

Liturgy	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday [Day Off]	Saturday
Personal Holy Hour [Moveable throughout day]	6:20 - 6:50 a.m.	6:20 - 6:50 a.m.	6:20 - 6:50 a.m.	6:20 - 6:50 a.m.	6:20 - 6:50 a.m.	6:20 - 6:50 a.m.	6:20 - 6:50 a.m.
Open Confessional	7 a.m. (during Mass)	7-7:35 a.m.	7-7:35 a.m.	7-7:35 a.m.	7-7:35 a.m.	7-7:35 a.m.	7-7:35 a.m.
Public Morning Prayer	7:40 a.m.	7:40 a.m.	7:40 a.m.	7:40 a.m.	7:40 a.m.	7:40 a.m.	7:40 a.m.
Mass	7 a.m. 8:30 a.m. 10 a.m. 11:30 a.m. 1 p.m.	8 a.m.	8 a.m.	8 a.m.	8 a.m.	8 a.m.	8 a.m. 5 p.m. 7 p.m.
Open Confessional	8:30 am (during Mass)	8-8:40 a.m.		8-8:40 a.m.	8-8:40 a.m.	8-8:40 a.m.	
Open Confessional	10 a.m. 11:30 a.m. 1 p.m. (during Masses)	11:30 a.m.-noon	11:30 a.m.-noon	11:30 a.m.-noon	11:30 a.m.-noon		
Personal Time		12:00-3:10 p.m.	12:00-3:10 p.m.	12:00-3:10 p.m.	12:00-3:10 p.m.		
Public Daytime Prayer w/ Divine Mercy Chaplet	2 p.m.	3:10 p.m.	3:10 p.m.	3:10 p.m.	3:10 p.m.	3:10 p.m.	8:30 a.m. (after Mass)
Baptisms	2:15 p.m.						
Open Confessional				3:30- 5 :25 p.m.	3:30- 4:45 p.m.	3:30- 4:45 p.m.	3 p.m.
Open Confessional		4:45-5:25 p.m. - Assoc. Priest	3:30- 5 :25 p.m.		4:45-5:25 p.m. - Assoc. Priest	4:45-5:25 p.m. - Assoc. Priest	
Mass		5:30 p.m.	5:30 p.m.	5:30 p.m.	5:30 p.m.	5:30 p.m.	5 p.m. 7 p.m. (during Masses)
Public Evening Prayer	8 p.m. - Solemn Vespers	6 p.m.	6 p.m.	6 p.m.	6 p.m.	6 p.m.	6 p.m.
Baptisms							6:15 p.m.
Praise and Worship Holy Hour w/ Prayer Ministry							8-9 p.m.
Open Confessional	8:15 - 9 p.m.		8-9 p.m.	8-9 p.m.	8-9 p.m.	8-9 p.m.	8-9 p.m.
Public Night Prayer w/ anticipated Office of Readings	9:10-9:35 p.m.	9:10-9:35 p.m.	9:10-9:35 p.m.	9:10-9:35 p.m.	9:10-9:35 p.m.	9:10-9:35 p.m.	9:10-9:35 p.m.

Here are a few reasons why such a schedule is freeing, not to mention proper to a priestly identity:

1. *Regularity:* A regular pattern of ministry is freeing and consistent. It also fosters a prayerful attitude throughout the day so that the peace acquired in personal mental prayer is distributed throughout the day. Also, praying the Divine Office (Liturgy of the Hours) publicly is not more work because a priest prays it every day anyway! In the final analysis, prayer is rest and rejuvenation, not work or exhaustion.

2. *Availability:* This will minimize the need to track me down. The proper competency of a priest is spiritual advice. The proper place for such advice is in the confessional. If more time is needed than what is afforded in the confessional, an office appointment could be determined during the visit in the confessional, but it must be stated clearly: a priest is not a psychological counselor or a family therapist by trade; meeting in a counseling capacity should be the exception, not the norm.

Personally, I have grown weary of meetings without prayer, and of conversations that use the language of counseling more than the language of the Spirit and Scripture. Being in the confessional is the default place for the language of the Spirit and Word to be expected and protected. The confessional is the privileged place of a priest, especially of a pastor. The idea of using the confessional in this way would necessarily mean taking

longer in the confessional with extended wait time.<sup>2</sup>

3. *Accessibility:* This also eliminates the need to go through “hoops” to meet with a priest. This limits frustration in calling, proposing times, arranging schedules and delaying conversations for days, if not weeks, at a time. In short, it eliminates the buffer zone between the priest and the people.

4. *A Liturgical Life:* Most of all, such a pattern of pastoral living ensures that the structure of parish life is the structure of the Liturgy of the Church. Just as the Holy Spirit called me to be a man of the sanctuary, so too, the Holy Spirit is calling me to be a man of the liturgy. Consequently, my life as a pastor is modeled on the liturgy, not on a corporation.

Let me explain. In every age the church models itself on certain templates of operation. For example, the church took on monarchical characteristics in the age of monarchies. Today, the church tends to imitate the corporate model. To illustrate this, consider that parish offices are open 9–5, priests are frequently “by appointment only,” and employees are given job descriptions with tasks, responsibilities and annual reviews. Parishes have budgets, benefits and defined goals and outcomes. While there are amazing benefits to such a model, in the end, a parish is *not* a corporation and a pastor is *not* a CEO.

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<sup>2</sup> Nor should it be ignored that we are in a day and age where priests are being accused of poor conduct. The screen and confessionals help prevent false accusation and compromising situations, however unlikely they are.

Rather, the parish *is* a living body and a pastor *is* a father. The parish is the body of Christ, and the root model of a parish should not be a corporation but the *lived liturgy of the Church*. If a priest is present for public liturgy four times a day, and hears confessions three to four times a day, people don't have to set up appointments. Why? They will know where he is *and* that he is prepared to receive them.

This model gives a priest the greatest reach to the greatest number of people. A priest is to be a confessor, spiritual director, preacher, teacher—in short, a spiritual father—before he is an administrator. This model offers a new possibility in being such while relying on the rhythm of *prayer and liturgy* to be the formal cause of our parish operations—not the rhythm of the secular work week.

### Why I Was Ordained

I believe the Spirit is asking me to adopt this new pattern of being a pastor. Like an ice skater begins to circle with arms spread wide and then pulls them into the center, thereby forming a tight, fast spin, the Spirit is asking me to pull in to the sanctuary and confessional to be generously present to St. Francis.

Two analogies have clarified this for me.

The first is the analogy of the confessional as the conscience. I have come to see that the confessional in the church building is what the conscience is to the soul. Just as a person subjectively whispers the secrets of her soul to God the Father in the depths of

her conscience, so, too, a penitent objectively whispers the secrets of her soul to a father (priest) in the protected space of the confessional. The confessional is the *deep place* in the Church where one verbally communicates to God (through the ministry of a priest) for the enlightenment of one's conscience. Thus, the Spirit wants me to be generously present in the confessional not only for a "listing of sins" and absolution, but also for spiritual advice and direction. The goals of these conversations are *freedom* and *holiness*.

The second is the analogy of a storm to life in the world. Living in the world is like trying to operate during a storm. The world is so violent! So loud! So chaotic! And yet, in a storm system there is what is known as the eye of the storm. I believe that the Spirit is calling me to be in the eye of the storm: the sanctuary and the confessional. Consider the church. Isn't it quieter, more ordered, and more peaceful than any other building? And isn't the confessional a contemplative atmosphere where one encounters mercy and the whisper, "All will be well—I absolve you." I believe the Spirit is calling me to be a *man of the sanctuary (liturgy)* and a *man of the confessional* because they are the eye of the storm. They are the quiet place where we can rest in the love of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Being a man of the sanctuary and liturgy includes home and hospital visits. Taking communion to the homebound and visiting the sick in hospitals and nursing facilities is an act of taking the sanctuary to those who

cannot come to the sanctuary. After all, the tabernacle in the church exists precisely for such persons. One could say that the tabernacle is a lived reminder of absent brothers and sisters who join the community in spirit and prayer.

In my opinion, the rooms of the home and hospital where the infirmed and elderly are confined are little churches where prayer and sacrifices are made on behalf of the parish. I consider such persons to be adorers and intercessors no less than a parishioner who has a regular holy hour in the chapel. Until now, these visits have been delegated to the associate priests; but it is my sincerest of hopes that delegating administrative tasks to laypersons will free me to resume visits myself, as pastor and spiritual father.

Being a man of the sanctuary and liturgy also includes dinners with parishioners in their homes. The Church has always taught that a home is a “domestic church.” I want to visit those sanctuaries as well to bless homes, pray with families, and maintain my waistline. Liturgy, confession, teaching, visits to elderly or infirmed, home visits . . . these are *why* I was ordained.

### Next Cast

How is St. Francis going to continue to make progress in the new evangelization, in making disciples, and forming stewards? We need to do a new round of home visits. This round would again use a product that could be hand-delivered to every registered parishioner’s house. The product—or package—would include a pamphlet or

brochure outlining the major things we have to offer at St. Francis, including such information as Discovering Christ, Kapaun’s Men, God Squad, PSR, SFA School, our Mass schedule, and our new confession and liturgy schedule.

We are also discerning new avenues of evangelization by forming intentional communities in our neighborhood. This would work through extraordinary hospitality of Catholic homes in welcoming their Catholic and non-Catholic neighbors over for genuine fellowship in a Christian atmosphere. There must be an interdependent relationship between the life of the parish and the life of the neighborhood. Just as a living body breathes in life and exhales breath, so too, parishioners breathe in the life of God through Mass, confession, formation, and adoration, and breathes out the Spirit through hospitality, witness, and intentional community.

### International Waters

We must also be aware that our parish is a *Catholic* parish. The word *catholic* means universal. As such, it is not only concerned with the needs of our own local community, within our own parish boundaries. We are also concerned with the needs of other parishes, the diocese and the universal Church. For this reason, we foster service opportunities in the diocese, and we support the Diocese of Khammam, India.

As part of my pastoral outlook, I am also growing increasingly attentive to the various

cultures and races that are found in our parish, namely, Vietnamese, Filipino, Hispanic, African/African American, and Indian (from India). I will be making intentional forays into ministering to these cultures and including their religious practices and devotions into the life of our parish. Particularly, I plan to capitalize on the major saints and feast days for each culture. St. Francis is a *Catholic* parish; thus, a parish of various cultures and races. It is a boat floating in international waters.

### Our Catholic School

I would like our Catholic school to be at maximum capacity. Many parishioners may not realize that Catholic schools are provided to stewards as a mission of the parish. They may not realize that it is stewardship-based and not paid for by tuition. Our school is second to none in every way possible. Our Catholic school is an amazing institution where children meet Jesus through liturgy, prayer and classroom discipline, and in the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd program. Any parishioner actively involved in the parish as a steward is invited to benefit from our school if you feel it is the best fit for you child.

### Everyone Has an Oar to Row

Just as a boat must be operated by a crew, so too, our parish cannot function without the direct stewardship of every member of the family. As such, our parish is in a privileged position where we can invite

one another into participation and hold one another accountable.

Christian disciples are accountable to one another and to the parish family. We must foster accountability at every level. There must be a transparent relationship between the pastor and households. Families must actively participate in Mass and in the life of the parish. Through accountability (specifically, face-to-face conversations), we encourage one another in the stewardship way of life. These should be grounded, practical, pastoral conversations that seek to understand and meet people in their real need. In this way, parishioners who have gone through challenges are supported through the mission and ministry of the parish. We must encourage one another.

Furthermore, these conversations should occur between parishioners themselves, not only between the pastor and parishioners. Such accountability is nothing more than a community sharing one another's burdens. It encourages everyone to play their part in the life of stewardship.

Accountability is how we accompany one another on the path to heaven. The destination for our boat is this: *The Gospel be preached unto the salvation of souls.* Everyone has an oar to row on this boat.

## Wind in Our Sails



To be sure, this boat that is our parish is moved more by wind than by oars. The wind in our sails is the Holy Spirit who moves us by God's unfailing Providence. And we open our sails to this Spirit by prayer. Since 1977, the doors of St. Francis have had this passage displayed on them in prominence: "My house will be a house of prayer." The prayer that spreads our sail is first and foremost the Eucharist and the Divine Office.<sup>3</sup> We have seven Sunday Masses, two daily Masses, as well as offering the entire Divine Office. It is in the liturgy where all people will (I dare say, *must*) find welcome, inspiration, community, and grace to take back to their daily lives. These liturgies are our participation in the heavenly liturgy that grants of the supernatural virtues: faith, hope, and charity.

The Divine Office (Public Prayer of the Church) is a place of welcome not only for highly active Catholics; but another zero-point entry for persons who know nothing about the Church. You don't have to be

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<sup>3</sup> The Divine Office is also called "Liturgy of the Hours"; we will celebrate it daily in the following format:

- ✦ Morning Prayer – 7:40 a.m.
- ✦ Daytime Prayer – 3:10 p.m. (exception: Saturday @ 8:30 a.m. and Sunday @ 2 p.m.)
- ✦ Evening Prayer – 6 p.m.
- ✦ Night Prayer – 9:10 p.m.

Catholic to fully participate in Liturgy of the Hours.

Liturgy is filled out by a well-rounded devotional life in the parish, most especially the Rosary of our Blessed Virgin Mother. Mary is the co-captain of Jesus Christ, the tabernacle of the Holy Spirit, and the daughter of the Father who shows us what our adopted childhood looks like. She, who "pondered" (Luke 2:19, 51) the life of Christ in her heart, also teaches us to ponder the life of Christ in our own heart through adoration. She teaches us how to adore.

How beautiful it is that St. Francis has had perpetual adoration for more than 35 years! It is the one of the most direct causes of our success as a parish. It is a place of adoration as well as intercession. As the pastor of St. Francis, I do not think of persons who have agreed to take an hour each week only as "adorers," I also think of them as "intercessors." Those who maintain a holy hour of adoration should consider themselves an adorer and an intercessor. (As mentioned early, this applies to the homebound in a privileged way.) I plan to capitalize on this intercession by publishing parish intentions for the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Here too, is another zero-point entry for persons who are un-catechized or un-churched. Un-churched persons will find a welcome at our Saturday night worship with its holy hour and healing service, which includes persons who are trained in healing and prayer ministry. Such a prayer service allows persons who are not catechized to

have a place to go on a Catholic campus without feeling overwhelmed by the rituals of the Eucharist or Divine Office. Such para-liturgical prayer services allow people who are not sacramentalized to find a place to be evangelized and to be offered the possibility of becoming Catholic.

### Into the Deep

Let us, then, “Put out into the deep and lower our nets for a catch (Luke 5:4).” Let us follow in *THE WAKE OF THE SPIRIT* and ask essential pastoral questions:

- ✦ Can our priest be a Father first and an administrator second?
- ✦ Is the liturgy the formal principle of parish life?
- ✦ Does our parish entrust lay persons with properly delegated administration?
- ✦ Does our parish have places where we can shuttle pass people, so their needs can be met?
- ✦ Does our parish have a net we can cast widely?

In short, can we say of our parish what Pope Francis has said of parishes?

*“The parish remains valid! The parish must remain. It is a structure that we must not discard; it is the home of God’s People. The problem is how the parish is organized! There are parishes that scare people off, parishes with closed doors . . . But there also parishes with open doors, parishes where when someone comes to ask a question, they are told: ‘Come in, make yourself at home, what can we do for you?’ And someone listens to them patiently, because*

*caring for the people of God requires patience; it takes effort!*

*“Managing a parish takes effort nowadays . . . The Lord has asked us to get a little tired, to work and not to rest . . . The renewal of the parish has to be a constant concern. It has to remain a place of creativity, a reference point, a mother, where inventiveness finds expression. When a parish does all this, it becomes a missionary disciple, a parish that goes forth.”*

Let us entrust our parish to St. Francis of Assisi, our patron and our inspiration.

*St. Francis of Assisi, pray for us.*



## Hail, Star of the Sea

Let us also entrust ourselves to Mary our Mother, under the title of Star of this Sea (*Ave Maris Stella*).

Hail, thou Star of ocean,  
Portal of the sky!  
Ever Virgin Mother  
Of the Lord most high!

Oh! by Gabriel's Ave,  
Uttered long ago,  
Eva's name reversing,  
'stablish peace below

Break the captive's fetters;  
Light on blindness pour;  
All our ills expelling,  
Every bliss implore.

Show thyself a Mother;  
Offer Him our sighs,  
Who for us Incarnate  
Did not thee despise.

Virgin of all virgins!  
To thy shelter take us:  
Gentlest of the gentle!  
Chaste and gentle make us.

Still, as on we journey,  
Help our weak endeavor;  
Till with thee and Jesus  
We rejoice forever.

Through the highest heaven,  
To the Almighty Three,  
Father, Son and Spirit,  
One same glory be. Amen.





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