



A Community of Communities

Planning Toward Mission

A parish is “a community of communities, a sanctuary where the thirsty come to drink in the midst of their journey, and a center of constant missionary outreach.”

– Pope Francis in Evangelii Gaudium

Especially important in living up to this mission is understanding the makeup of the parish, *including those who are often forgotten/unheard*. Parish families are in a unique position to better learn who is – and isn't – served by current parish offerings.

A first step toward this is intentionally reviewing the makeup of a parish family, which may include:

1. **Database pull:** Use the ParishStaq database to pull a list of parishioners. From this, glean important information like age, zip code, and even languages spoken.
2. **Surveying:** Hand out a formal survey, or host one online that quickly collects demographic and needs-based information about parishioners. For any community survey, please wait until 2025 to ensure proper time for the communities to come together first.
3. **Ministry review:** Part of what constitutes the parish as a “community of communities” is the presence of different ministries/movements with a range of spiritualities/charisms. Take some time to review the parish ministries. Do they serve specific groups? How integrated are they in parish life? Do they have the resources they need to fulfill their mission? This examination of ministries and their participants will slowly reveal the people or groups who may be underserved or not represented.
4. **Leadership review:** Look at the parish leadership structures and consider their makeup. What are the cultural backgrounds of those in leadership positions? Doing this can help to understand who is highly engaged in the parish, and who is “not at the table.”
5. **Informal assessment:** Ask someone to attend multiple Masses to take an informal assessment of who is attending. Take note of things such as general age ranges, family sizes, languages spoken, etc. By having one person assessing multiple Masses, a more representative snapshot of those in a parish family will emerge.

The most effective and efficient of these strategies are database pulls and surveying. A database pull makes use of information already provided by parishioners and can simultaneously determine how database/registration processes can be improved – as well as what data may be missing in the database.

Surveying works well because it directly asks those attending individual parishes about themselves, even if they are not formally registered or involved in parish ministry. Once information is collected from these surveys, it is also important to make sure the information is fed back into the database to ensure that future database pulls include the most up-to-date information. To assist in survey efforts, we will be generating ready-made surveys (that can be edited to fit your needs) for each parish family, which can be completed online as a ParishStaq form alongside a printable version. Additional information about these surveys is forthcoming.

After taking an assessment of a parish community, it is important to share the information with the rest of the parish family. This will help people better understand the unique character of each parish and of the parish family – as well as unmet needs in the family.



Social Outreach and Pastoral Care

Coming together as a parish family is an opportunity to do things differently. What would you do that you're not doing now because of lack of time, resources, or space? Who is hurting, suffering, or marginalized within the expanded canonical boundaries of your new parish family? How might you encounter, accompany, and be converted by those on the peripheries?

Opportunities in Phase 1

Know your strengths and weaknesses as a parish community

What are your strong suits when it comes to outreach and pastoral care? What ministries does your parishes currently offer? Do parishioners have opportunities for direct service and advocacy? Where are the gaps in your own parish's outreach and pastoral care ministries? Where might you be able to grow if you had more space? Where are you limited due to lack of volunteers?

Together you will have access to additional resources – people, ministries, and space. Look for ways to do more in your region through shared ministry.

- Is there room for new volunteers in your existing ministries? If not, why not?
- Is there overlap in your existing ministries? Are there multiple St. Vincent de Paul conferences or an existing shared ministry at a local hospital?
- Look beyond your parish family for unmet needs in the wider community and in the world. How might the parish family be able to address needs that a single parish community could not?
- Are there unused spaces with the potential to house a new ministry – a food bank, a shelter, transitional housing, clothing closet, etc.?

Foster community through outreach

In Phase 1, look for ways to encourage relationship-building while also supporting outreach and pastoral care ministry work. Examples include:

- Consider a get-to-know-you mixer related to social outreach and advocacy. Potentially include a gifts assessment where parishioners share what talents and interests they have related to outreach (e.g., caring for the homeless, visiting the homebound, collecting diapers, tending a community garden, etc.). Explore what service activities are already unfolding in the new parish family (e.g., shelter ministry, PREPARES, St. Vincent de Paul conference, etc.).
- Host a day of service in which parishioners come together to volunteer at one (or more) outreach sites (e.g., soup kitchen, food bank, community garden, or retirement community). The day can include prayer, service activity, and shared reflection.

- Consider offering a mission trip and inviting all parishioners in the parish family to participate. Contact the archdiocese's [Missions team](#) for more details.

Move out of your comfort zone

Missionary discipleship is the intentional movement away from our comfort zone and toward various margins. Jesus is our blueprint for this. Following Jesus means following his example of encountering those who suffer, those who are ignored, those who are demonized, etc. This allows us to deliver Christ's healing to those who desperately need it while simultaneously transforming ourselves into more loving, more sacrificial people.

Nourished by the Eucharist, we conform ourselves to Christ so that we are propelled beyond the church walls into the streets and other places of distress – jails, hospitals, assisted living, ports, shelters, meal programs, migrant communities, etc.

Pope Francis tells us, "The poor have much to teach us." However, this crucial mutual transformation cannot occur unless we show up on the peripheries. From there, we "make disciples" by inviting others to join us on the margins and experience a similar conversion.

Ways to get started with pastoral care

Sometime during the first year and half:

- Consider hosting a Chancery-led missionary discipleship retreat with your parish family's leadership and parishioners. Rooted in a curriculum developed by Maryknoll, this four-hour retreat invites staff and parishioners to understand and embrace a field hospital model of Church engagement on the margins. Reach out to the [Pastoral Care and Outreach team](#) to schedule or for more information.
- Explore existing outreach programs that could be incorporated into parish life using the Parish Outreach Guide, which will be coming soon! This guide, while not exhaustive, will offer outreach possibilities or partner organizations. It is intended to inspire pastoral imagination about outreach ministries that could emerge from the formation of your new parish family. What Good News might now emerge for the poor and suffering because of this larger, better equipped community of faith?