

# **Characteristics Found in Vital Parishes**

## **ARCHDIOCESE OF PHILADELPHIA**

**Spring 2003**

### **CHARACTERISTICS FOUND IN VITAL PARISHES**

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## **I. Preface**

In 1988, Cardinal Bevilacqua began his pastoral work as Archbishop with an appeal for all of us to respond fully to the Holy Father's invitation to prepare for the Great Jubilee and the dawn of the Third Millennium through spiritual and pastoral renewal. What began in 1991 was a nine year period of Renewal, *Catholic Faith and Life 2000*, through which the clergy, religious and laity of the Archdiocese carefully explored every aspect of the mission of our local Church. Thus, the spiritual renewal of the clergy, religious and laity of the Archdiocese was intimately connected with a corresponding effort to renew the pastoral and institutional components of the Archdiocese.

The Archdiocesan Mission Statement was approved by Cardinal Bevilacqua in 1992. It proclaims what the Archdiocese is and what, with God's help, it intends to be. Simultaneously, His Eminence mandated the establishment in every parish of a Parish Pastoral Council to plan, under the guidance of the pastor, the parish's Renewal and other projects of pastoral importance.

Each parish proceeded to develop a parish mission statement, conducted a self-study and formulated a parish pastoral plan providing a vision for the future of the parish. After this, a new process, called Cluster Pastoral Planning, was engaged. Parishes met together in geographical areas or clusters to study and develop ways of strengthening the mission of the Church in each area of the Archdiocese. For the first time in the history of the Archdiocese clergy, religious and laity carefully listened, planned and worked together to ensure the vibrancy of the parishes in their given area and to guarantee that the Catholic Church is having the maximum impact on life in every neighborhood and locale as we moved into a new millennium.

With the dawn of the Great Jubilee Year 2000, the Archdiocese found itself prepared to celebrate the graces and gifts of Redemption in unique and moving ways. *Opening Wide the Doors to Christ* who is the same yesterday, today and forever, the Archdiocese advanced into the new millennium enkindled by the Holy Spirit for the ongoing work of the New Evangelization. All recognized the accomplishments achieved and even more the myriad tasks that lay ahead.

On December 8, 2000, Cardinal Bevilacqua after much prayerful consideration, and having consulted with the Council of Priests, decreed the convocation of the Tenth Synod of the Archdiocese of

Philadelphia to be held in 2002. This Synod, recently completed, was a true experience of *communio*, communion, as well as a looking forward to the fulfillment of the work of the New Evangelization within the Archdiocese in the years ahead.

## **II. Purpose**

*Duc in altum! (.Put out into the deep. (for a catch)! Lk. 5:4) These words ring out for us today, and they invite us to remember the past with gratitude, to live the present with enthusiasm and to look forward to the future with confidence: .Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. (Heb. 13:8). (cf: #1, Novo Millennio Ineunte, Pope John Paul II)*

There is no doubt that the work of renewal, of pastoral planning and of implementation is an ongoing activity. To respond to the Holy Father's words above involves everyone in a work of bold initiatives as we travel this new millennium already fraught with so much sorrow and pain.

Part of the ongoing work of pastoral planning is assessment. It is necessary to review pastoral plans and the actions taken to implement them on a regular (yearly) basis. To that end, the parishes have available to them a tool which provides a format for assessing the Parish Pastoral Plan by the Parish Pastoral Council. Currently, the clusters of parishes, under the leadership of the Regional Vicars, are engaged in an informal assessment of their implementation of the Cluster Pastoral Plans.

The present document is a more unique instrument for the parish in so far as it is a tool to look both at the present as well as to the future. The purpose for identifying characteristics found in vital parishes is to enhance the spiritual and pastoral life of every parish in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia according to the mission of Christ and His Church. Parish uniformity, that is, each parish providing exactly the same services, is not a desired state. Attention must be accorded to the uniqueness of each parish: to its cultural, linguistic, economic, social, geographic and demographic diversities.

Nevertheless, there are certain areas constitutive to the life of the Church which are fundamental and foundational to parish life. These are based upon sound ecclesiology, a proper vision of the parish, the teachings of the Second Vatican Council and recent Post Synodal Apostolic Exhortations. These constitutive areas have been the focus of parish renewal, self-study, planning and implementation efforts.

This document will provide insight, reflection and challenge in each of these fundamental areas. It will also assist in the development of the capabilities of the staff and all parishioners to carry out the mission of the Church in their local parish. Such development should be an ongoing priority for the Pastor, parish staff, Parish Pastoral Council as well as other parish leaders as they continue to plan and carry out the work of the Church in these times.

*As a particular church, the diocese is charged with initiating and deepening the encounter of all the members of God's people with Jesus Christ, respecting and fostering that plurality and diversification which are not obstacles to unity but which give it the character of communion. (Ecclesia in America, #36)*

### **III. The Church and its Mission**

*The teaching of the Second Vatican Council on the unity of the church as the people of God gathered into the unity of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit stresses that baptism confers upon all who receive it a dignity which includes the imitation and following of Christ, communion with one another and the missionary mandate.. (Ecclesia in America, #44)*

***...what we have seen and heard we proclaim now to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; for our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. We are writing this so that our joy may be complete. [1John 1:3-4]***

The above words from the first letter of Saint John provide the starting point for our understanding of communion (*communio*) and therefore our understanding of the Church. We have access to communion with God through the realization of the communion of God with man which is Christ in person; the encounter with Christ creates communion with Him and thus with the Father in the Holy Spirit; and from this point unites human beings with one another. The purpose of all this is full joy: the Church carries an eschatological dynamic within her. (Cardinal Ratzinger, November 2000)

It is the Holy Spirit who gathers the communion of believers (the Church) into the Body of Christ and sanctifies the Church as Christ's mystical Bride. The Second Vatican Council did not speak about the Church as a reality closed in on herself, but saw her in a

Christological perspective. To understand who and what the Church is you must understand Christ. To speak correctly about Christ, you must at the same time speak about the Father, and you cannot speak about the Father and Son without listening to the Holy Spirit. Our communion with one another flows from our communion with the Triune God. This union with the life of the Trinity that creates the communion of the Church comes about through the Eucharist where Christ gives us Himself to form us into His Body, the Church. It is the vertical communion with the Trinity, brought about in the Eucharist that in turn creates the horizontal communion among the members of the Church. The Church is in essence a *communio* created by participation in the life of the Trinity through the Eucharist. Our purpose as Church, from the days of the Apostles to this new millennium, and until the return of Christ in glory, is to live in this fellowship (communion) and to share it with all the world.

The apostolic exhortation *Christifideles Laici*, summarizing the Council's teaching, presents the Church as mystery, communion and mission: .She is mystery because the very life and love of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are the gift gratuitously offered to all those who are born of water and the Spirit (cf. Jn. 3:5) and called to relive the very communion of God and to manifest it and communicate it in history [mission]... (*Pastores Dabo Vobis*, #12)

The mission of the Church is the mission of Jesus Christ. Jesus came that we *might have life and have it to the full*. He is The Priest, Prophet and King who sanctifies, teaches and governs the People of God, His Espoused Bride. Faithful to her Spouse, the Church is the living sacrament of Christ in the world.

The communion which we share with God (and which comes from God) is the source for our communion with one another. Entrusted with the care of the diocese, the Bishop, as successor of the Apostles, is the visible source of unity and fulfills Christ's mandate to sanctify, teach and govern the community of believers. Through the Bishop, united with all the Bishops of the world and with the Holy Father, the members of the diocese are joined in communion with the universal Church which is made present in each local Church. However, this cannot be understood to be a federation of local churches coming together into a global church. No, the universal Church of Christ precedes any particular, local Church.

Parishes exist to carry out the mission of the Bishop to teach, sanctify and govern. Priests and deacons exercise their ministries only in union with the Bishop. Parishes are not little churches in themselves but geographic places where the communion of the universal Church

of Christ is made visible and available to the community of believers through Word and Sacraments, above all in the celebration of the Eucharist. By working together within the parish, by collaboration with local parishes (Clusters) and with all the other parishes and institutions within the diocese, the communion of the Triune God is made visible and real in each particular place. This communion of purpose, of relationships, of persons leads everyone to holiness which has been described as *the dwelling of God with men and of men with God. The parish is a privileged place where the faithful concretely experience the church.* (*Ecclesia in America*, #41).

*The parish is the place where all the faithful can be gathered together for the Sunday celebration of the Eucharist. The parish initiates the Christian people into the ordinary expression of the liturgical life: it gathers them together in this celebration; it teaches Christ's saving doctrine; it practices the charity of the Lord in good works and brotherly love.*  
(*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2179).

*A parish is a certain definite community of the Christian Faithful stably constituted in a particular church whose pastoral care is entrusted to a pastor as its proper pastor under the authority of the diocesan bishop.* (*Canon 515 §1, Code of Canon Law*).

#### **IV. Fundamental Areas of Parish Life**

In light of the mission of Christ and the Church, seven fundamental areas of parish life are distinguished in this document. These areas are constitutive aspects of parish ministry. In its own way, each parish is expected to embrace and implement them, striving to be faithful to the mandate of Christ and the Church and to build the communion of life and holiness.

In each of the seven areas, there is a somewhat detailed listing of structures, programs, services and ministries which each parish, regardless of size, cultural make-up, resources or geographic considerations, needs to work toward in order to fulfill its ecclesial mandate, while acknowledging and maintaining its unique parochial identity. The listing in each of the seven areas helps to identify in practical ways expectations and norms. The listings also act as indicators of the parish's current life situation. Parishes that are vital meet specific expectations for each of these seven fundamental areas:  
**A) worship, B) Christian community, C) evangelization, D) teaching, E) service, F) leadership, and G) stewardship.**

It is understood that some parish activities or programs address several of these areas simultaneously. (cf: *Guided by Faith*)

Certainly, the perfect parish does not exist in this world. However, each parish remaining faithful to Christ and open to His grace must strive to fulfill its mission as completely as possible. Each parish is challenged to be a community of love, participating in and sharing with each other and all others in the Archdiocese the communion and love of the Triune God. There exists of course something of a creative tension in the practical reality, since the unique gifts, concerns and problems of each individual parish must be met with the personal holiness of clergy, religious and laity, living their vocations and gifts of service in Christ.

Vital and effective parishes are not determined principally on the basis of programs, no matter how successful. Programs allow for some degree of measurability, but do not in themselves constitute parish vitality and effectiveness. Parish programs and ministries are the natural outgrowth of a clear understanding and commitment to the mission of the Church, supporting it and allowing true communion to flourish.

This document, *Characteristics Found In Vital Parishes*, holds the hope that all involved in parish ministry, priests, deacons, religious, and laity alike, arrive at a common view of the parish's mission and how that mission is specifically and best lived out. It is this agreed upon mission, and the pastoral plan to accomplish it, that will determine the specific ministries, activities, and programs of each parish.

Parish vitality and effectiveness require and deserve our greatest energies and support. By carefully considering each fundamental area which delineate the normative aspects of parish ministry, and specific possibilities within each area, all the parishes of the Archdiocese can grow in their ecclesial mission in and through Christ Jesus.

*I am with you always, to the close of the age. (Mt. 28:20). This assurance, dear brothers and sisters, has accompanied the church for 2000 years... From it we must gain new impetus in Christian living, making it the force which inspires our journey of faith.  
....What must we do?. (Acts 2:37).*

*We put the question with trusting optimism, but without underestimating the problems we face. ...No, we shall*

*not be saved by a formula but by a person and the assurance which He gives us: I am with you! It is not therefore a matter of inventing a new program.. The program already exists: It is the plan found in the Gospel and in the living tradition; it is the same as ever. Ultimately, it has its center in Christ Himself, who is to be known, loved and imitated so that in Him we may live the life of the Trinity and with Him transform history until its fulfillment in the heavenly Jerusalem. This is a program which does not change with shifts of times and cultures, even though it takes account of time and culture for the sake of true dialogue and effective communication. This program for all times is our program for the third millennium. But it must be translated into pastoral initiatives adapted to the circumstances of each community.*

(#29, *Novo Millennio Ineunte*)

## A. A Worshiping Parish

*(Worship)*

Each parish is fundamentally a worshiping community of faith. *The parish needs to be constantly renewed on the basis of the principle that the parish must continue to be above all a eucharistic community.. (Ecclesia in America, #41) Parishioners encounter God and the mystery of redemption in Christ Jesus in a privileged way in the celebration of the Sacraments and Rites of the Church, most especially the Eucharistic Sacrifice. The quality of the Sacramental life is indicative of parish vitality and effectiveness. For two thousand years, Christian time has been measured by the memory of that first day of the week. (Mk. 16:2,9; Lk. 24:1; Jn. 20:1), when the Risen Christ gave the Apostles the gift of peace and of the Spirit (cf: Jn. 20:19-23). (cf: #35, *Novo millennia Ineunte*)*

A basic expectation is that parishioners recognize worship as their center and the focal point from which everything else follows. *The liturgy is the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed; at the same time it is the font from which all the church's power flows (#10, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy). For the whole liturgical life of the Church revolves around the Eucharistic sacrifice and the sacraments (#113, Catechism of the Catholic Church). Clergy and laity plan together and participate together in the celebration of the Eucharist and the other sacraments of the Church, devoting appropriate resources to these activities. (cf: *Guided by Faith*, 21) Specific to these basic expectations is that each parish:*

1. Develop a properly formed worship committee to assist in the coordination and implementation of the parish's liturgical life and the appropriate catechesis of all.
2. Schedule an adequate, but not superfluous, number of Sunday Masses in proportion to the number of parishioners and the size of the worship space.
3. Provide, individually if feasible or in collaboration with other parishes when necessary, Sunday Mass in the language(s) spoken by parishioners.
4. Celebrate Sunday Mass with utmost reverence and in a manner faithful to the liturgical laws of the Church and particular Archdiocesan guidelines.
5. Provide homilies at all Sunday and holy day Masses (and even at weekday Masses) and fulfill all the norms for preaching.
6. Provide for the catechesis and celebration of the Sacrament of Baptism according to Archdiocesan guidelines.
7. Celebrate fully the liturgical rites of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (R.C.I.A.), to initiate adults and children of catechetical age, and to receive baptized Christians into full Communion.
8. Provide for the catechesis and celebration of First Penance, First Holy Communion and Confirmation in accord with Archdiocesan guidelines.
9. Provide regular and adequate opportunities for the celebration of the Sacrament of Penance/Reconciliation in accord with liturgical law, archdiocesan guidelines as well as the needs and convenience of the parishioners.
10. Provide, both directly and through Archdiocesan programs, effective preparation for and celebration of the Sacrament of Marriage according to Church Law and Archdiocesan guidelines.
11. Provide effective pastoral care for, and celebrations of, the Catholic Funeral Rites according to the Order of Christian Funerals.

12. Provide sufficient devotional and culturally sensitive religious services and devotions to meet the authentic needs of all parishioners.
13. Celebrate the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick, individually and communally, as pastoral need demands.
14. Provide for the regular celebration of the Sacraments for persons with disabilities, the sick, the elderly and homebound.
15. Maintain accurate parish sacramental registers and record of Mass Intentions in accord with Church law and Archdiocesan guidelines.
16. Provide quality liturgical ministries and services, including lectors, extraordinary Eucharistic ministers, music ministers (directors, choirs, cantors, musicians), altar servers, hospitality ministers/ushers, environmental committees/altar society members, and others, in accord with the liturgical law and documents of the Church. Those in ministry/service are to be fully representative of the parish community.
17. Provide, directly and/or by clusters and through Archdiocesan programs, effective training and development for all liturgical ministers.
18. Provide other ways for the enrichment of the liturgical life of the parish such as:
  - a. scheduling liturgies at convenient times within the parish and as appropriate at staggered times within the cluster, for the good of the people and for more effective participation/attendance;
  - b. celebration of the annual Forty Hours Devotion;
  - c. fostering frequent and regular Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament in each parish and/or in cooperation with cluster parishes;
  - d. providing the regular celebration of the Liturgy of the Hours as an integral part of the prayer life of the parish.

**Archdiocesan Offices which may be of assistance: Office for**

**Worship, Office for Adult Faith Formation, Family Life Office,  
Respect Life Office**

**B. A Welcoming and Caring Parish**

*(Christian Community)*

*To make the Church the home and the school of communion: that is the great challenge facing us in the millennium which is now beginning, if we wish to be faithful to God's plan and respond to the world's deepest yearnings.*

*But what does this mean in practice? Here too, our thoughts could run immediately to the action to be undertaken, but that would not be the right impulse to follow. Before making practical plans, we need to promote a spirituality of communion, making it the guiding principle of education wherever individuals and Christians are formed, wherever ministers of the altar, consecrated persons, and pastoral workers are trained, wherever families and communities are being built up. A spirituality of communion indicates above all the heart's contemplation of the mystery of the Trinity dwelling in us, and whose light we must also be able to see shining on the face of the brothers and sisters around us. A spirituality of communion also means an ability to think of our brothers and sisters in faith within the profound unity of the Mystical Body, and therefore as "those who are a part of me". This makes us able to share their joys and sufferings, to sense their desires and attend to their needs, to offer them deep and genuine friendship. A spirituality of communion implies also the ability to see what is positive in others, to welcome it and prize it as a gift from God: not only as a gift for the brother or sister who has received it directly, but also as a "gift for me". A spirituality of communion means, finally, to know how to "make room" for our brothers and sisters, bearing "each other's burdens" (Gal 6:2) and resisting the selfish temptations which constantly beset us and provoke competition, careerism, distrust and jealousy. Let us have no illusions: unless we follow this spiritual path, external structures of communion will serve very little purpose. They would become mechanisms without a soul, "masks" of*

*communion rather than its means of expression and growth. (#43, Novo Millennio Ineunte)*

As a community of faith formed and incorporated into the Body of Christ, the parish attempts to fulfill Jesus' call to meet the spiritual, personal, and social needs of all persons, thus responding to and affirming each person's dignity, demonstrating Christ's love and care, and creating a sense of belonging. The parish is aware and concerned about the needs of the community, and is involved in efforts and activities to meet those needs.

A basic expectation is that parishioners create and nourish a strong sense of community within the larger Church. Members identify themselves with the Catholic Church. They also identify themselves with their parish community and seek to improve it. The clergy and laity have a deep sense of the importance of unity among the faithful in all parishes and with the Archbishop.

Further, each parish needs to enable and form lay leadership. Providing for collaborative ministry evokes the gifts of all God's people and better expresses the Church's true nature. Lay involvement and leadership, moreover, should be reflective of the makeup of the parish.

Consistent with these basic expectations is that each parish:

1) provide, individually if feasible, or by clusters when necessary, pastoral care for families through initiatives of welcome and outreach, programs for parenting, ministry to the divorced and separated, ministry to persons in troubled marriages and families, to bereaved persons, etc. Provide formation opportunities for families which will assist them in fulfilling their mission to be the domestic Church through programs and resources which promote family prayer, catechesis in the home, participation in the sacramental life of the Church as well as the understanding and witness of Catholic faith and morals.

2) provide regular and effective means to bring about a sense of belonging and an atmosphere of hospitality within the parish, e.g., greeting/welcoming visitors/new parishioners before Mass, priest(s) greeting congregation after Mass, a structured program to welcome new parishioners, home visitations, frequent hospitality gatherings after Mass, parish social events, rectory staff (full-time and part-time) who are warm and welcoming, etc.

- 3) provide regular and effective communication services with parishioners, such as a Sunday bulletin, parish information packets, parish newsletters and parish/cluster web site.
- 4) actively work towards the convalidation of marriages and provide pastorally tactful and sensitive contacts with cohabiting couples to assist them in their situation and faith.
- 5) provide, individually if feasible or by clusters when necessary, regular and effective ministry to persons with disabilities as well as include them in roles of service to the extent of their abilities.
- 6) provide effective and ongoing ministry to bereaved persons, through a structured program or more informal care, including meeting with the bereaved family to plan funeral liturgies and burial.
- 7) provide regular and effective ministry to persons who are elderly, sick or homebound, as well as a special effort to welcome minorities and persons seeking to live within the Church but may feel ostracized (e.g., immigrants, divorced persons, persons who are HIV+ and others).
- 8) provide vibrant spiritual and liturgical, as well as social and cultural, opportunities for the various ethnic groups within the parish, in particular those new to this country.
- 9) provide, if possible, some form of child care, as well as a Children's Liturgy of the Word, during at least some Sunday Masses, and perhaps also at other significant functions.  
For each of the areas listed, it is recommended that each parish or cluster of parishes, directly or through Archdiocesan Offices, educate personnel to assist in the implementation of the specific area.

**Archdiocesan Offices which may be of assistance: Catholic Social Services, Family Life Office, Respect Life Office, The Chancery, Metropolitan Tribunal, Office for Pastoral Care for Migrants and Refugees, Office for Hispanic Catholics, Office for Black Catholics**

### **C. A Witnessing and Proclaiming Parish**

*(Evangelization)*

*To nourish ourselves with the word in order to be*

*.servants of the word. in the work of evangelization: This is surely a priority for the church at the dawn of the new millennium. Even in countries evangelized many centuries ago, the reality of a .Christian society. which, amid all the frailties which have always marked human life, measured itself explicitly on Gospel values is now gone. Today we must courageously face a situation which is becoming increasingly diversified and demanding in the context of .globalization. and of the consequent new and uncertain mingling of peoples and cultures. Over the years I have often repeated the summons to the new evangelization. I do so again now, especially in order to insist that we must rekindle in ourselves the impetus of the beginnings and allow ourselves to be filled with the ardor of the apostolic preaching which followed Pentecost. We must revive in ourselves the burning conviction of Paul...*

*This passion will not fail to stir in the church a new sense of mission, which cannot be left to a group of .specialists. but must involve the responsibility of all the members of the people of God. Those who have come into genuine contact with Christ cannot keep Him for themselves; they must proclaim Him. A new apostolic outreach is needed which will be lived as the everyday commitment of Christian communities and groups. This should be done however with the respect due to the different paths of different people and with sensitivity to the diversity of cultures in which the Christian message must be planted in such a way that the particular values of each people will not be rejected but purified and brought to their fullness.*

*...Christ must be presented to all people with confidence. We shall address adults, families, young people, children, without ever hiding the most radical demands of the Gospel message, but taking into account each person's needs in regard to their sensitivity and language... (cf: #40, Novo Millennio Ineunte)*

Parishes exist to enhance each person's individual and the community's collective relationship with God in Jesus Christ. The parish strives in a variety of ways to offer all members opportunities

to grow in the Christian life. This personal and communal spiritual growth is a sign of parish spiritual vitality.

Basic expectations include the following: parishes have active programs of evangelization to share the Catholic faith and mission; people are active in ministries of sharing the faith such as participation in the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults; and, appropriate resources are made available to support their efforts. (cf. *Guided by Faith*, 22)

In addition, the parish .as an ecclesial unity gathered around the Eucharist, should be, and proclaim[s] itself to be, the place of authentic ecumenical witness. and educates its members in the ecumenical spirit. (*Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism*, Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, #67)

Consistent with these basic expectations is that each parish:

- 1) Provide (and advertise) directly, or in concert with others, retreat and faith formation opportunities for all persons, ages and constituency groups, as well as provide regular Days of Prayer and spiritual exercises for parish staff and all parishioners, particularly during the Seasons of Advent and Lent.
- 2) Provide, as far as possible and as needed, effective programs for parish spiritual renewal.
- 3) Provide (and advertise) opportunities for a variety of prayer experiences, such as charismatic prayer or other Faith-sharing opportunities, such as Disciples in Mission.
- 4) Provide opportunities for those not part of the Catholic community to learn about the Catholic Faith and participate in the R.C.I.A.
- 5) Provide, as far as possible, opportunities for vocational discernment, as well as regular and structured approaches to prayer for vocations, including priesthood, permanent diaconate, consecrated life, married and single-life.
- 6) Provide outreach in all faith-related areas to young adults.
- 7) Provide outreach to persons who have become estranged from the Church, through various programs which are offered

through the Archdiocese.

8) Provide education/formation opportunities for the Laity responsive to the primary and distinctive character of their vocation, which is its secularity. This secular character is expressed in the Church's call of the laity to bring the Gospel to the structures of society: family life, political life, workplace, science and the arts, mass media, etc. Through participation in the sacramental life of the Church, personal prayer, intellectual and moral formation within the Church's teachings and witness of life the laity consecrate the world to God.

9) Assure opportunities for parishioners to develop a missionary spirit and support of missionary efforts.

10) Designate a parish evangelization contact person.

11) Provide a pastoral program which involves someone charged with promoting and planning ecumenical activity, working in close harmony with the parish priest. (N.B. Most parishes have a Parish Ecumenical Representative.)

For each of the areas listed, it is recommended that each parish, or cluster of parishes, directly and through Archdiocesan Offices, educate personnel to assist in the implementation of the specific area.

**Archdiocesan Offices which may be of assistance: Office for Adult Faith Formation, Office for Evangelization, Vocation Office for Diocesan Priesthood, Office of the Vicar for Religious, Office for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs, Office for Communications**

#### **D. An Educational and Formational Parish**

*(Teaching)*

The proclamation of the Word of God is foundational to the Church's mission. All persons need to have the Good News of Jesus Christ preached and presented in an effective and persuasive manner, so that they may grow in the gift of faith. In addition, the clear teaching of the Catholic Church based upon the Word of God needs to be presented in various ways within the parish community.

*The new evangelization in which the whole continent is engaged means that faith cannot be taken for*

*granted, but must be explicitly proposed in all its breadth and richness. This is the principal objective of catechesis, which, by its very nature, is an essential aspect of the new evangelization. Catechesis is a process of formation in faith, hope and charity; it shapes the mind and touches the heart, leading the person to embrace Christ fully and completely. It introduces the believer more fully into the experience of the Christian life, which involves the liturgical celebration of the mystery of the Redemption and the Christian service of others. (cf: #69, Ecclesia in America)*

*Something similar must also be said about Catholic schools, particularly with regard to secondary education: a special effort should be made to strengthen the Catholic identity of schools, whose specific character is based on an educational vision having its origin in the person of Christ and its roots in the teachings of the Gospel. Catholic schools must seek not only to impart a quality education from the technical and professional standpoint, but also and above all provide for the integral formation of the human person. Given the importance of the work done by Catholic educators, I join the Synod Fathers in gratefully encouraging all those devoted to teaching in Catholic schools. priests, consecrated men and women and committed lay people . to persevere in their most important mission. The influence of these educational centers should extend to all sectors of society, without distinction or exclusion. It is essential that every possible effort be made to ensure that Catholic schools, despite financial difficulties, continue to provide a Catholic education to the poor and the marginalized in society. It will never be possible to free the needy from their poverty unless they are first freed from the impoverishment arising from the lack of adequate education. (cf: #71, Ecclesia in America)*

A basic expectation is that parishioners commit to the religious education and spiritual formation of adults and children to bring them to a deeper understanding of Church doctrine, to a deepening conversion to Christ and to expressions of personal witness to the Faith. Appropriate resources are to be made available by the parish to support their efforts.

The parish is to provide ongoing formation in the Faith for all members of the parish. In support of parents, who have the God-given responsibility as the first teachers in the Faith, the parish is to provide wherever possible a parish elementary school and a Parish Religious Education Program.

A vital concern is the insistence of the Vatican's *The Ecumenical Dimension in the Formation of Pastoral Workers*, by the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, #1, that . an ecumenical dimension is to be fully present in all the different settings and means through which formation takes place..

In the area of education and formation, the following are to be considered:

1. If a parish has a parish elementary school, the parish is to:

a. assure that the parish school has a strong Catholic identity. This is demonstrated by a Catholic faculty committed to Catholic life and education, the celebration of Sacraments and devotions, a Catholic atmosphere in the school, service to the needy, a fully developed religion program with qualified teachers, and an organized evangelization program when serving a significantly non-Catholic community.

b. incorporate fully the parish school into parish life. Parish subsidy to the school should not be an excessive percentage of the school's entire budget, and the parish income should not have an excessive percentage of its entire budget directed towards the school operating budget. (Refer to *Standards for Quality Catholic Elementary Schools within the Archdiocese of Philadelphia*)

c. have teachers who are properly degreed, qualified and competent, and remunerated where feasible in a manner consistent with guidelines **recommended** by the Pastors Committee.

2. provide an effective program of religious education and formation for all children and youth, including immigrants, those whose primary language is not

English as well as members of ethnic communities, in grades K through 12 [with an awareness that the necessary ecumenical dimensions of catechesis .sets out to prepare children and young people as well as adults to live in contact with other Christians, maturing as Catholics while growing in respect for the faith of others,. (i.e., respect for the religious liberties of those not of our faith) cf: *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism*, #61d].

3. provide programs of sacramental preparation for candidates, sponsors of the candidates, and for parents of candidates, including those whose primary language is not English, according to Archdiocesan guidelines.
4. have a professionally degreed, qualified director/coordinator for the program of religious education.
5. provide directly if feasible, or in cooperation with the cluster of parishes when necessary, and through Archdiocesan programs, the proper education for all parochial school teachers and catechists, according to Archdiocesan guidelines.
6. provide an adequate number of catechists and support personnel, properly educated, for the program of religious education.
7. provide directly if feasible, or in cooperation with the cluster of parishes when necessary, and through Archdiocesan Offices:
  - a. regular and effective ministry to youth and young adults which will foster their full participation within the larger parish community;
  - b. the appointment of a Coordinator for Youth 30 and Young Adult Ministry;
  - c. regular and effective ministry to single people;

- d. Faith Formation of Adults as well as catechetical instruction and ongoing Faith formation for all members of the parish, sensitive to the cultural and linguistic needs of parishioners. (e.g., Scripture Study, Faith Sharing, Moral and Doctrinal Formation, Social Justice Teachings, Seasonal Programs, etc.);
- e. the appointment of a Parish Coordinator of Adult Faith Formation;
- f. the initial and ongoing formation of catechists for adults;
- g. an effective parish process for the implementation of the R.C.I.A. through the establishment of a parish R.C.I.A. team.

N.B.: If a parish, along with one or more other parishes, sponsors a regional parish school, the parish(es) must assure that the regional parish school has a strong Catholic identity, as described above in paragraph 1.a., and incorporate as fully as possible the regional parish school into the life of the parish(es), as described above in paragraph 1.b. The parish, along with the other sponsoring parishes, is to comply with the other provisions listed above as they relate to a regional parish school.

**Archdiocesan Offices which may be of assistance: Office of Catholic Education, Office for Catechetical Formation, Office for Adult Faith Formation, Office for Pastoral Care for Migrants and Refugees, Office for Hispanic Catholics**

## **E. A Parish Responsive to Others**

*(Christian Service)*

The Church, like her saving Lord, proclaims the Good News of God's reign to all persons. All are offered God's providential love and mercy; all possess essential dignity and are entitled to proper care. The Church is not only responsive to the needs of its own members, but reaches out to all persons, responding with love, healing and reconciliation to their various concerns and needs.

*... conversion is incomplete if we are not aware of the*

*demands of the Christian life and if we do not strive to meet them. In this regard, the Synod Fathers noted that unfortunately at both the personal and communal level there are great shortcomings in relation to a more profound conversion and with regard to relationships between sectors, institutions and groups within the Church.. .He who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen. (1 Jn 4:20).*

*Fraternal charity means attending to all the needs of our neighbor. .If any one has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him?. (1 Jn 3:17).*

*Hence, for the Christian people of America conversion to the Gospel means to revise all the different areas and aspects of life, especially those related to the social order and the pursuit of the common good.. It will be especially necessary to nurture the growing awareness in society of the dignity of every person and, therefore, to promote in the community a sense of the duty to participate in political life in harmony with the Gospel.. Involvement in the political field is clearly part of the vocation and activity of the lay faithful. (cf: #27, Ecclesia in America)*

A basic expectation is that parishioners provide the service of charity to others at several levels. First, parishioners should direct some services to the poor in keeping with the Church's expressed priority for the poor. Second, parishioners should work for peace and justice with other people of good will. Third, parishioners should contribute in service to the civic community in which the parish exists. Consistent with this basic expectation is that each parish:

- 1) exhibit demonstrable and effective concern for the poor, (the homeless, newcomers from other lands and those at the margins of society), the least among us, within and/or outside parish boundaries.
- 2) engage, as far as possible, in dialogue, prayer and service with other religious denominations and their leadership.
- 3) make efforts in raising the consciousness of parishioners regarding Catholic teaching on life issues, racial, ethnic and

cultural issues, local and universal issues of peace and justice, as well as leading the people to appropriate action, beginning within the parameters of the parish/neighborhood.

- 4) participate in all archdiocesan special collections (e.g., Catholic Charities Appeal, Saint Charles Borromeo Seminary, Care for Aging and Ill Priests of the Diocese and Retirement Fund for the Religious, etc.).
- 5) provide opportunities for parishioners to participate in non-perishable food collections and clothing drives as well as special sacrificial donation opportunities for the poor (e.g., Operation Rice Bowl and parish poor boxes).
- 6) sacrificially give a designated portion of its resources for the service of the poor.
- 7) form or increase partnerships between parishes, that is, the inter-parish and suburb-to-city (*sister parishes*) programs, especially in areas of Catholic education of youth.
- 8) minister, directly or in collaboration with other parishes or agencies, to persons with special needs. This includes providing referral services, outreach to and accommodation for persons with disabilities, hosting and/or assisting in 12-step programs, etc. (e.g., individuals/families affected by drug addiction, alcoholism, HIV/AIDS).
- 9) encourage participation in all aspects of civic affairs, giving witness to Gospel values and cooperate in various endeavors for civic/neighborhood improvement (e.g., encouraging participation in election process, Martin Luther King Service Day, etc.). [cf: Answering The Call To .Faithful Citizenship,. Archdiocese of Philadelphia, Guidelines Governing The Use of Archdiocesan and Parish Facilities]

For each of the areas listed, it is recommended that each parish, or cluster of parishes, directly and through Archdiocesan Offices, educate personnel to assist in the implementation of the specific area.

**Archdiocesan Offices which may be of assistance: Catholic Social Services, Office for Pastoral Care for Migrants and Refugees, Office for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs, Respect Life Office, Office for Development, Office for Accounting Services, Office for Public Affairs, Office for Black Catholics, Office for Hispanic Catholics**

## **F. An Effectively Administered Parish**

*(Leadership)*

The Church's mission in the world is the responsibility of all the baptized, thereby making the parish's mission and ministry a collaborative endeavor, requiring the gifts and talents of all the faithful. Furthermore, the parish needs sufficient physical and human resources to fulfill its mission.

*As pastors of the People of God in America, priests must also be alert to the challenges of the world today and sensitive to the problems and hopes of their people, sharing their experiences and growing, above all, in solidarity towards the poor. They should be careful to discern the charisms and strengths of the faithful who might be leaders in the community, listening to them and through dialogue encouraging their participation and co-responsibility. This will lead to a better distribution of tasks, enabling priests to dedicate themselves to what is most closely tied to the encounter with and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, and thus to represent better within the community the presence of Jesus who draws his people together.. (cf: #39, Ecclesia in America)*

*Moreover, .this kind of renewed parish needs as its leader a pastor who has a deep experience of the living Christ, a missionary spirit, a father's heart, who is capable of fostering spiritual life, preaching the Gospel and promoting cooperation. A renewed parish needs the collaboration of lay people and therefore a director of pastoral activity and a pastor who is able to work with others. Parishes in America should be distinguished by their missionary spirit, which leads them to reach out to those who are faraway.. (cf: #41, Ecclesia in America)*

A basic expectation is that parishioners recognize and accept their rights and responsibilities as baptized Catholics to full participation in the life of the Church. The pastoral leadership should encourage full collaboration among the People of God by assisting them to take an active, responsible role in the life of the parish. Parishes should have a sufficient number of members in their active years who participate productively in the parish ministry. The number of parish staff and parishioner volunteers, as well as their training and sense of

mission, should be adequate to carry out all of the work of the parish as identified in the Parish and Archdiocesan Mission Statements as well as described in this document, *Characteristics Found In Vital Parishes*. (cf. *Guided by Faith*, 22)

Specific to these basic expectations is that each parish provide:  
Physical Resources:

- 1) worship space of adequate size and sacred design and environment to celebrate the rites and ceremonies of the Church and to accommodate the usual number of worshipers according to the Church's liturgical norms.
- 2) secure space and files for all official documents.
- 3) facilities adequate to house the priests and religious of the parish.
- 4) space adequate to engage in the education and formation of parish members.
- 5) space (such as a center, hall or auditorium) adequate for parishioner's social needs.
- 6) space adequate for staff work areas, meetings, and larger gatherings of persons.
- 7) office equipment/supplies (i.e., computers, copiers and fax machines) adequate to function effectively.
- 8) facilities in good condition and properly maintained, and, where possible, accessible to all parishioners.

#### Personnel Resources/Parish Staff

- 1) office and other support services adequate to operate effectively.
- 2) custodial service adequate to care and maintain all the property and buildings.
- 3) adequate parish house/rectory staff, such as housekeeper and/or cook, to allow the priests to be attentive to pastoral responsibilities.
- 4) a Parish Business Manager, paid or volunteer, in larger

parishes or clusters of smaller ones, to handle administrative and plant concerns, to allow priests to give more time to pastoral responsibilities.

- 5) effective communication among staff on a regularly scheduled basis (such as staff meetings) to ensure the sharing of timely and accurate information, cooperation and collaboration on the part of every member of the staff.
- 6) compliance with all governmental laws and regulations as well as Archdiocesan policies and procedures related to personnel, both salaried and volunteer, including appropriate background checks.

#### Consultative Bodies

- 1) active and effective Parish Pastoral Council, constituted according to archdiocesan guidelines, which assists the pastor in developing, implementing and regularly reviewing the Parish Pastoral Plan. Periodic reports are to be given to parishioners concerning meetings and parish issues under discussion.
- 2) active and effective Parish Finance Council, constituted according to Canon Law and archdiocesan guidelines, which assists the pastor in addressing the temporal realities of the parish.

#### Parishioner Access to Clergy and Staff

- 1) Parishioners should be able to contact clergy (and other staff) throughout the normal day and evening hours, and at other times without excessive difficulty. Telephone service should be adequate to accept all calls. Every effort must be made to ensure that people who call speak with a member of the parish staff. Sensitivity to linguistic needs is an emerging necessity. Whenever possible, there should be an avoidance of the use of .voice mail. during ordinary business hours.

#### Sufficient Financial Resources

- 1) a developed plan to achieve financial stability, as far as possible and in accord with Archdiocesan guidelines. If applicable, a Debt Service Plan is to be formulated with assistance from the Regional Vicar and Parish Financial Services, and submitted to the Vicar for Administration for

approval.

- 2) an effective program of sacrificial giving (tithing, increased offertory, etc.).
- 3) a development or endowment committee to assist in parish fund raising needs, establishing of endowments for Catholic Education, Capital Needs, etc.
- 4) meets financial obligations including those to Archdiocese (assessments, pension funds, health care plans, special collections, etc.).
- 5) an annual balanced operational budget.
- 6) an annual parish financial report to the Archdiocese and parishioners.
- 7) compliance with all governmental laws and regulations as well as Archdiocesan policies and procedures related to proper financial reporting and adherence to proper accounting standards.

#### Complete and Up-to-Date Information on Registered Parishioners

- 1) a current census listing of parish membership, as far as possible. (A computer-based Church Office Management software system or card files maintained from the Annual Parish Visitation, updated regularly, are effective means of maintaining accurate census information.)

#### Active Participation/Cooperation with Neighboring Parishes

- 1) sufficient representation on the Cluster Pastoral Planning and Implementation Committees.
- 2) active responsibility, as appropriate, in implementing the various goals of the Cluster Pastoral Plan.

**Archdiocesan Offices which may be of assistance: Various Offices of the Secretariat for Temporal Services, Office for Audit Services, Office for Adult Faith Formation, Office for Worship, Office for Clergy**

## **G. A Gifted Parish, Living Responsibly**

*(Stewardship)*

A Christian Steward is *.one who receives God's gifts gratefully, cherishes and tends them in a responsible and accountable manner, shares them in justice and love with others, and returns them with increase to the Lord..* (cf: United States Bishops. Pastoral Letter on Stewardship (November, 1992) . **Stewardship, A Disciple's Response**) The practice of Stewardship as a way of life is a basic ingredient for a flourishing parish faith community. The sense of shared responsibility for all aspects of parish life brings with it the commitment of time, talent and treasure.

*Such a vision of communion is closely linked to the Christian community's ability to make room for all the gifts of the Spirit. The unity of the Church is not uniformity, but an organic blending of legitimate diversities. It is the reality of many members joined in a single body, the one Body of Christ (cf. 1 Cor 12:12).*

*Therefore the Church of the Third Millennium will need to encourage all the baptized and confirmed to be aware of their active responsibility in the Church's life. Together with the ordained ministry, other ministries, whether formally instituted or simply recognized, can flourish for the good of the whole community, sustaining it in all its many needs: from catechesis to liturgy, from the education of the young to the widest array of charitable works. (cf: # 46, Novo Millennio Ineunte)*

Stewardship is a common thread linking Worship, Teaching, Christian Community, Christian Service, Evangelization and Leadership. Woven throughout everyday life, Stewardship makes known the mutual responsibility of one parishioner to the other as well as to the entire faith community.

A basic expectation is that members of a vital parish will recognize the parish itself as a gift from God and that parishes have sufficient resources and facilities to support the current work of the parish as well as reasonable plans to expand or modify resources as needed without placing unrealistic expectations on the pastoral leadership and staff, nor undue burden on the parishioners. The pastor, staff and parishioners should not be overly preoccupied with temporal affairs at the expense of the pastoral ministry (cf. *Guided by Faith*, 22). The

parishioners should be sufficiently able and disposed to support the parish with their time, talent and treasure. All should seek to be open in collaborating in ministry with other parishes so that people are served more effectively.

Specific to these basic expectations is that each parish:

1. stress prayer and full participation in the sacramental life of the Church as absolutely fundamental to nurturing the parish's pastoral plan and vision.
2. have strong pastoral leadership of, and support for, the concept of Stewardship as described in the United States Bishop's Pastoral. Pastors who practice Stewardship in their own lives, create interest, by example, among the parishioners.
3. treat its own employees justly regarding salaries and benefits.
4. have a functioning Stewardship Committee with the ability to access both local and national Stewardship Resources.
5. welcome parishioners to growth and conversion in Christ through greater participation in a vibrant parish community.
6. enhance continuous Stewardship formation for parishioners of all ages through educational opportunities and faith-sharing.
7. challenge parishioners to increase personal sacrifices of time, talent and treasure within the parish and the greater community.
8. conduct annual commitment renewals of time, talent and treasure to the parish.
9. sacrificially give a designated portion of its resources for the service of the poor.
10. seek and welcome new lay leaders for service within the parish (and elsewhere) as well as provide, individually or by clusters and archdiocesan programs, appropriate training and formation for

them.

11. inform parishioners of the good works being done through the generosity of their commitments.

**Archdiocesan Offices which may be of assistance: Office for Development, Office for Adult Faith Formation, Catholic Social Services . Volunteer and Community Relations**

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*A word of gratitude to the Archdiocese of Los Angeles  
for sharing their Parish Profile document and  
allowing us to utilize its many insights.*

Approved: May 13, 2003