

Creating a Parish Pastoral Plan

Originally Developed for the Parish Consultations Process
November 1997

(This document was originally developed as part of the parish manual for the Parish Consultations Process. It is presented here in its entirety to show how parish plans and priorities were developed. This is especially important for priests and lay parish leaders who were not a part of the 1997-2000 PCP process in the Rockford Diocese. The section “Writing Priorities and Objective” on page 3 is useful outside of the Parish Consultations Process.)

The key document of the Parish Consultations Process is the parish pastoral plan. Everything in the process — the parish surveys, the team meetings, the town hall meetings, etc. — exist for one purpose: to help the parish create a pastoral plan. The plan shows the parish’s priorities and lists the ways the parish will address the challenges, thus helping the parish increase its vitality.

How to Select Parish Priorities

The number of parish priorities generally should be limited to 2-4 items. If there are more, it will be difficult for the parish to make progress towards them. By analogy, a person who makes eight New Year resolutions is probably less likely to keep them than the person that makes two carefully-selected resolutions.

There are two sources which can help in the selection of parish priorities: the parish survey data and the parish leaders’ worksheet (in the manual, chapter 3, page 7). Here are some general tips.

1. On the first page of the survey data, look at the first table, in the last column. This QID column shows the difference between peoples’ expectations (the importance) and the reality (the quality). This is a good place to start looking for priorities, with the items near the top of the table as likely parish priorities. This is especially true if their QID numbers are large. A QID of -.90 or -1.00 means that there is a very high discrepancy between expectations and reality. QIDs between -.70 and -.90 generally mean there is a high discrepancy, while QIDs between -.50 and -.70 show there is a moderate discrepancy. QIDs between about -.40 and -.50 show a minor discrepancy and can usually be disregarded.

2. If there are items with similar QIDs, look at their importance scores. An item of higher importance should generally have a higher priority than an item of lower importance, given similar QIDs.

3. Compare the top 3-5 items in the table (items with the highest QIDs) to the parish leaders’ evaluation. An item which seems to be a priority in both the parishioners’ survey and the leaders’ evaluation would definitely be a priority. What if there is a discrepancy between the way the parishioners see the parish and the way the leaders see the parish? The leaders should discuss this among themselves. Perhaps the leaders are not aware of the opinions of the people in the pew. Or perhaps the difference can be attributed to the fact that the leaders are more knowledgeable about

the parish. In any case, the parish priorities should reflect both the broad opinions of the typical parishioner and the greater knowledge of the parish leadership.

4. It is also important to note any new insights or suggestions that come from the parishioners after they see their data. Whether the parish presents the data at a town hall meeting or publishes it in the bulletin, parishioners should have some way to respond to the data. They may offer ideas which improve the selection of parish priorities.

How to Present the Pastoral Plan

The pastoral plan is composed of the several parts. Please compare the sample parish pastoral plan of St. Albert the Great to the following instructions. Note that some elements of the pastoral plan are required and others are optional.

Mission Statement (optional). If the parish has a mission statement, this should be the first item. The mission statement is important because it shows the context in which the pastoral plan is to be understood. That is, the mission statement provides the “big picture” while the parish priorities are steps taken towards the mission.

Please note: if the parish does not have a mission statement, it should not attempt to write one during the Parish Consultations Process. The development of a good mission statement requires significant time and consultations, which would conflict with the time demands of the PCP.

Introduction (required). General comments on the procedures used to develop the pastoral plan should be next. The purpose is to give the reader enough basic information so that he or she has confidence in the priorities, i.e. that the priorities came out of the felt needs of the parishioners which were expressed in the Sunday Mass survey.

The introduction could include basic information about:

- # the number of people surveyed at Mass in September ;
- # the leadership evaluation of the parish with the leaders’ worksheet;
- # the leadership review of the parish data;
- # presentation of the survey data to parishioners; and
- # review of comments from the parishioners about the survey data.

Items of Highest Importance (optional). A parish may want to list here the five or ten items of highest importance to parishioners along with a short paragraph of explanation. If a parish wishes to present a list of all 34 survey items sorted by importance, it should append it to pastoral plan instead of taking up so much space at this point in the report.

Items of Highest Quality (optional). A parish may also wish to list the items of highest quality. This list could be very affirming to parish leadership as it would call attention to those attributes which the parish does well. As with the items of highest importance, if a parish wishes to include the entire list it should append it to the report.

Parish Priorities (required). As stated above, the number of priorities should generally be limited to 2-4 items. Each priority should have the following sections:

1. a well-conceived statement, expressing the priority in the form of a goal;
2. an explanation of why this item should be a priority; and
3. a series of objectives which will help the parish make progress in the priority.

Please review the enclosed document on writing priorities and objectives. This will help in the creation of the pastoral plan. It will also ensure that when parishes meet in clusters to review each others' pastoral plans, the plans will have a common form.

Writing Priorities and Objectives

Priorities. Parish priorities are analogous to goals. They are brief, clear statement of desired direction or activities, expressed in broad, general terms. The priorities should:

- # be guides to action — stated as a desired outcome, desired condition or result;
- # be general in their direction;
- # be both challenging and inspiring;
- # call for investment and involvement;
- # provide a long-range time line (3-5 years);
- # be tied to the mission of the universal or diocesan Church as well as the mission of the parish; and
- # be able to be attained through objectives and strategies.

An example of a proper priority or goal is: to develop responsible lay leaders in all areas of parish life, who by their example and invitation encourage all parishioners to share their talents.

Objectives. The objectives are specific, time-oriented and realistic statements of what a parish is going to do, for whom, and when it will be done. The objectives are the concrete steps that a parish takes to move towards fulfilling the priorities. The objectives should:

- # begin with “to” and be followed by an action verb;
- # produce just one result;
- # specify for whom or with whom an action is done;
- # have a specific target date, preferably in the near future;
- # be quantifiable and measurable;
- # be clear and understandable;
- # be realistic and attainable in light of the parish's human and fiscal resources; and
- # link with at least one priority.

An example of a proper objective is: by May 31 to involve at least 15 people from the pastoral council and its commissions in two two-hour workshops on the theology of the parish and conflict resolution.

Strategies or Tasks. It is not necessary to write strategies for the pastoral plan. Nevertheless, they are presented here for completeness. Strategies are the specific actions which need to be taken in the attainment of an objective. A group of strategies is an “action plan”

specifying how an objective will be reached. After a pastoral plan is accepted, a parish may wish to formally write strategies for itself to make sure everything gets done. The strategies should:

- # name the individual(s) who are responsible for a specific action;
- # name the specific action for which they are responsible;
- # specify the date by which the action should be completed;
- # be linked to a specific objective; and
- # be tied in with other strategies.

An example of a proper strategy is: by April 10 Robert Bernstein will meet with the finance council chair to determine a budget for the two workshops for pastoral council members and communicate the response to Mary Jones.

Sample Pastoral Plan

St. Albert the Great, Victoria

February 8, 1998

St. Albert Mission Statement

St. Albert the Great Parish chooses to follow Jesus Christ and bring the gospel message of salvation to all people in our community. We do this by first finding our focus within the Eucharistic assembly and then moving out into the secular world. We believe that God's Word is continually being revealed to the world in many fashions and that our role is to discern this revelation and cooperate with God's grace wherever it is found.

All parish plans in this document should be reviewed within the context of our parish mission statement. This mission statement was approved in March 1995 by the parish pastoral council after considerable consultation with parishioners.

Introduction

This draft pastoral plan was developed by the parish consultations committee in collaboration with the pastoral council. It is the result of the following steps.

1. On September 13-14 the *With a Heart Renewed* survey was administered at all parish Masses to people age 16 and over. A total of 450 surveys were completed and processed by the Rockford Diocese. The parish consultations committee studied the results. Particular attention was paid to those areas where the parish was not strong but parishioners had high expectations.

2. During October the parish staff, the consultations committee and the pastoral council completed a parish evaluation, using materials provided in the *With a Heart Renewed* manual. The parish was compared to the ideal parish, as defined by the Diocese in their report "Indicators of Parish Vitality."

3. In December a synopsis of the parish survey data was published in the bulletin and parishioners were invited to give their comments on the data. In addition, an open meeting was held in January where parishioners could look at the survey results in more detail and provide additional feedback to the parish consultations committee.

4. The consultations committee met in January to write the first draft of the pastoral plan. The committee compared the survey results with its own evaluation of the parish, and also took into account the comments provided by parishioners after reviewing the parish survey data.

Parish Priorities

Priority 1: *to provide a high-quality youth ministry program for our parish high school students, so that their faith might be strengthened and an experience of Christian community be developed among them.*

High school youth ministry is listed as the top priority here because the parish Mass surveys indicated that parishioners had a high desire for a strong youth ministry. This was confirmed by the parish leadership in their separate evaluation of the parish's strengths and weaknesses. Furthermore, pastoral council members indicated that both parents and youth have been asking for a good youth ministry program for at least the last five years.

The following objectives will help the parish address priority 1.

Objective 1-1: by May 31, 1998 to have parish leaders meet with a representative of the Diocesan Youth Ministry Office to discuss our parish's need to address youth ministry.

Objective 1-2: during the summer of 1998, to identify 5-9 high school students, who seem to take an interest in parish life, and invite them to a meeting to discuss the needs of high school students.

Objective 1-3: during the autumn of 1998 to host a youth evening, to which all parish high schools students will be invited.

Objective 1-4: by 1999 to establish a "youth seat" on the pastoral council, with the youth representative being elected by high school parishioners.

Priority 2: *to increase the participation of young adults (ages 18-25) in active parish life, so that they may live out their baptismal commitment and the parish may receive their gifts and talents.*

Participation of young adults in the parish is the second priority because of its high ranking in both the parishioner Mass survey and the leadership evaluation. Many parishioners have expressed concern that once young people get married, they are not seen at church until the birth of their children.

The following objectives will help the parish address priority 2.

Objective 2-1: by the end of 1998 to have parish leaders research how other parishes in our size category engage young adults in their parish communities.

Objective 2-2: by the end of 1999 to make a presentation to all parish groups, encouraging them to recruit young adults and presenting them with some ideas on how to do this.

Objective 2-3: beginning in 2000 to provide young adults who are receiving preparation for either their marriage or the baptism of their children with a brochure which lists the opportunities for involvement in our parish.

Priority 3: *to increase the experience of community within the parish, especially within the Sunday Eucharistic assembly, so that we might better live out our faith in support of, and supported by, one another.*

While there is general satisfaction with the Sunday Liturgies at our parish, sufficient concern was raised in the parishioner survey to make this item the third priority. Many people who have visited other parishes on vacation report a vibrant sense of community. They ask, “why can’t we have this at St. Albert.” The parish leadership evaluation concurs with them.

The following objectives will help the parish address priority 3

Objective 3-1: by June 30, 1998 to solicit assistance from the Diocesan Office of Divine Worship to help the parish improve Sunday Liturgies.

Objective 3-2: during the autumn of 1998 to begin using greeters at all Sunday Masses to welcome people coming into church.

Objective 3-3: during the autumn of 1998 to begin having coffee and donuts available weekly in the church hall after the principal Sunday Mass and encourage people to meet other parishioners there.

Objective 3-4: during the autumn of 1998 to begin the regular practice of publishing photographs of new parishioners in the parish bulletin.

Objective 3-5: by the autumn of 1999 to invite new parishioners to a semi-annual potluck supper so they might meet other parishioners and find out more about opportunities for involvement in the parish.