

ARCHDIOCESE OF HALIFAX-YARMOUTH

**COMMUNITIES OF MISSIONARY
DISCIPLES**

QUALITIES OF A NEW HEALTHY PARISH

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COMMUNITIES OF MISSIONARY DISCIPLES

FRAMEWORK FOR A NEW PARISH

INTRODUCTION THE CHURCH: A MISSIONARY COMMUNION

The Church "is the visible plan of God's love for humanity," because God desires "that the whole human race may become one People of God, form one Body of Christ, and be built up into one temple of the Holy Spirit." Catechism of the Catholic Church #776

This phrase from the Catechism, which draws from the documents of the Second Vatican Council, contains many images of the Church: The visible plan of God's love for humanity, the People of God, the Body of Christ, and the temple of the Holy Spirit. God's love for humanity is made known in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. As a visible sign of this love the first task of the Church is missionary: to proclaim and make known the Good News of Jesus Christ¹. As a people and a body, the Church is also a communion that is "the sign and the instrument of the communion of God and humanity."² Through our communal and sacramental life – particularly in the celebration of the Eucharist – we manifest the love of God for the world through love and service³. In our communion we are built up into one temple of the Holy Spirit and equipped with the graces and formation to carry our missionary mandate⁴. Thus, the Church is a missionary communion tasked with and equipped to make Christ known to the entire world. Pope Francis has called the entire Church to a rediscovery of our missionary identity and to be fueled by a "missionary impulse capable of transforming everything, so that the Church's customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures can be suitably channeled for the evangelization of today's world rather than for her self-preservation."⁵

In practical terms the People of God, especially the laity and religious, manifest God's love by their word and action in society. The laity and religious of a particular territory are cared for and shepherded by a bishop who, assisted by priests and deacons, is entrusted with teaching, governing and sanctifying the People of God in communion with the other bishops and the Bishop of Rome. As a result, the universal Church is itself a

¹ *Redemptoris Missio, Evangelii Nuntiandi, Evangelii Gaudium, et al*

² CCC 780

³ Benedict XVI: "The Church's deepest nature is expressed in her three-fold responsibility: of proclaiming the word of God (kerygma-martyria), celebrating the sacraments (leitourgia) and exercising the ministry of charity (diakonia). These duties presuppose each other and are inseparable" *Deus Caritas Est*, #25

⁴ *Lumen Gentium*, #11

⁵ *Evangelii Gaudium* #27

communion of communities: particular churches overseen by bishops in communion with one another and the Pope.

The people under the care of a bishop are a particular Church, usually known as a diocese. In his governance of the local Church a bishop creates parishes, which are the presence of the Church in a territory, overseen by a priest in communion with the local bishop. Inside these parish territories are many communities of people: families (the domestic Church and first place of faith), small Christian communities, movements, and ministries. Importantly the parish territory also includes those who do not yet know God. Thus, the parish models the universal Church by being a communion of communities entrusted with the mission of making disciples in a particular place. Therefore, within any given parish the People of God – by their life, work, and worship –are the primary protagonists of the Gospel.

In the Archdiocese of Halifax-Yarmouth, our people and parishes have been innovative and creative in trying to more fully live this missionary mandate. In some places, despite the faithfulness of the people, there remains a struggle to act due to the massive shifts in our society, demographics, and culture. In addition to these social changes there are also “ecclesial structures which can hamper efforts at evangelization”.⁶ Despite these challenges, Pope Francis affirms that the “parish is not an outdated institution; precisely because it possesses great flexibility, it can assume quite different contours depending on the openness and missionary creativity of the pastor and the community.” We must determine the type of ecclesial structures and missionary creativity that are needed for parishes in the Archdiocese of Halifax-Yarmouth to be the effective missionary communities that the Holy Father envisions. However, “even good structures are only helpful when there is a life constantly driving, sustaining and assessing them. Without new life and an authentic evangelical spirit, without the Church’s ‘fidelity to her own calling’, any new structure will soon prove ineffective.”⁷

This framework outlines the signs of missionary and pastoral life that indicate the life of a parish in the Archdiocese of Halifax-Yarmouth according to our values of Mission, Community, and Formation. These reflections on parish life can help us apply the principles of Catholic Action: *see* our present circumstances, *judge* if they are meeting our missionary needs, and *act* where required. With this discernment in mind we can take the steps necessary to re-order our parish structures to meet the missionary challenges of our time.

**MISSION:
THE PARISH EXPRESSES THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH**

*The pilgrim Church is missionary by her very nature, since it is from the mission of the Son and the mission of the Holy Spirit that she draws her origin, in accordance with the decree of God the Father.*⁸

⁶ *Evangelii Gaudium* #26

⁷ *Evangelii Gaudium* #26

⁸ *Ad Gentes*, #2

As “the presence of the church in a particular territory,”⁹ the parish is the practical expression of the Church’s missionary nature. The parish exists for the same reason the Church exists: to make disciples of all nations. Thus the People of God within the territory of a parish must be “completely mission-oriented.”¹⁰ In fact, Saint John Paul II stated that not only is evangelization an essential task of a parish community, but this activity “is the clearest sign of a mature faith.”¹¹ Any attempt to consider the missionary nature of our parish communities must hold evangelizing activity as a critical sign of life. Likewise, Pope Francis says that “missionary outreach is *paradigmatic* for all the Church’s activity.” Therefore, “the effectiveness of the Church’s organizations, movements, parishes and apostolic works must be measured in the light of this missionary imperative.”¹²

Mission effectiveness is not traditionally part of our vocabulary. However, Archbishop Mancini’s 2014 Pastoral Letter, *Quo Vadis Domine?*, created after consultation with the entire diocese, provides us with some important considerations for missionary outreach.

Sharing Christ with Others

*Lastly, we cannot forget that evangelization is first and foremost about preaching the Gospel to those who do not know Jesus Christ or who have always rejected him.*¹³

In our current culture, where many have fallen away from the practice of faith, missionary activity has three important activities:

- Pastoral ministry to “the faithful who regularly take part in community worship and gather on the Lord’s day to be nourished by his word and by the bread of eternal life” to help them “grow spiritually so that they can respond to God’s love ever more fully in their lives”¹⁴
- Outreach to “the baptized whose lives do not reflect the demands of Baptism” so they may “experience a conversion which will restore the joy of faith to their hearts and inspire a commitment to the Gospel”¹⁵
- Preaching the Gospel to “those who do not know Jesus Christ or who have always rejected him” so they may come to know the love and mercy of God and experience conversion and commitment to the Gospel.¹⁶

⁹ Code of Canon Law, *Evangelii Gaudium* #28, etc.

¹⁰ *Evangelii Gaudium* #28

¹¹ *Redemptoris Missio* #49

¹² *Redemptoris Missio* #49

¹³ *Evangelii Gaudium* #15

¹⁴ *Evangelii Gaudium*, #15

¹⁵ *Evangelii Gaudium*, #15

¹⁶ *Evangelii Gaudium*, #15

While the movements of the heart are not quantifiable, there are many fruits and outward signs of lives lived for Christ. These fruits can be observed in order to provide an indicator of the missionary efforts of a parish. Growth has always been an indicator of a missionary Church – from the very first moment the Church was born, people who respond to the invitation to accept Christ are counted as a sign of missionary effectiveness. In the Acts of the Apostles we hear that the number of people being saved was growing daily.¹⁷ However, growth alone does not give an accurate picture. For many years our churches grew primarily due to reproduction and immigration – growth does not always indicate discipleship. We must also delve deeply into other signs of conversion.

Reflections on Missionary Activity

- Do we honestly believe that we need to propose Jesus to others?
- What would a missionary Church look like in our region? What would set us apart from a parish in another region, based on our unique population and resources?
- Would our parish be growing? At what rate?
- How many adults and children would be baptized?
- How would we serve the three areas of missionary activity outlined above?
 - Pastoral ministry
 - Outreach to the baptized
 - Proclamation to those who do not know God?
- In what specific ways do we currently live out our mission that we should take care to continue or grow?

Discernment Survey Questions

- I am comfortable speaking about my relationship with Christ
- Our parish is open to new people and ideas
- Our parish has specific ministries to share the Gospel with new people

¹⁷ Acts 2

Ministry to Those in Need

For this reason, “the service of charity is also a constituent element of the Church’s mission and an indispensable expression of her very being”¹⁸

Care, charity, and compassion are an essential expression of our missionary identity. Saint John Paul II said that our works of charity “reveal the soul of all missionary activity: love, which has been and remains the driving force of mission.” He went on to quote Isaac of Stella in that love is “the sole criterion for judging what is to be done or not done, changed or not changed.”¹⁹ Our personal and communal response to the Gospel must be love that extends outward to serve the entire world. Certainly Christian charity is beyond measure but, as with missionary zeal, we can observe signs of charity within our parish communities.

As Christians, we know that material circumstances are not the only indicator of need. There are many in our midst who are in need of the transformative power of the Gospel to bring about change in their lives and, indeed, in our Church. Therefore, our ministry to those in need should also include outreach to the next generation of disciples, a contingent that is often missing from our pews.

Reflections on Ministry to Those in Need

- What are the areas of greatest material need in our region? Greatest pastoral need?
- What can our community do to make a profound difference for others?
- How could we support the caring organizations that are present within our region?
- Is the Church currently successful in reaching young people in our region? What about other local organizations or activities? (e.g. sports associations, social clubs, etc.)
- What would it mean to have young people in our region fully engaged in our local Church? How would they serve the Church and community and how would we serve them?

Discernment Survey Questions

- Our parish is committed to serving the needs of our community

¹⁸ *Evangelii Gaudium*

¹⁹ *Remptoris Missio* #60

Reliance on the Holy Spirit

The Church urgently needs the deep breath of prayer, and to my great joy groups devoted to prayer and intercession, the prayerful reading of God's word and the perpetual adoration of the Eucharist are growing at every level of ecclesial life.²⁰

The Holy Spirit propels the Church to mission – without the Spirit, the first Christians stayed locked within the walls of the Upper Room. It is not until Pentecost that the Church is able to embrace her missionary mandate. Therefore, prayer in every facet of our parish life is a necessary component of missionary activity. While this certainly includes the celebration of the Sacraments, the presence of intercessory prayer groups, popular devotions, and other forms of prayer are also helpful in surrounding our efforts in prayer. So, too, is the presence of prayer in the “business” of parish affairs, decision making, and planning.

Reflections on Reliance on the Holy Spirit

- What would it look like if prayer was a regular part of all our meetings and events?
- Would it be realistic to spend an extra 10-15 minutes at every committee meeting to include more intentional prayer time, or would this be unnecessary?
- How can we pray for the parish and for the world?
- How can we pray for one another?
- What special devotions are used in our parish?

Discernment Survey Questions

- Our parish decision making processes are grounded in prayer and the Word of God

COMMUNITY: THE PARISH IS A COMMUNION OF COMMUNITIES

The Spirit leads the company of believers to "form a community," to be the Church. After Peter's first proclamation on the day of Pentecost and the conversions that followed, the first community takes shape²¹

In these times of growing isolation, political polarization, and intense loneliness, the witness of the Christian community offers “a way of life that shines out to others.”²² The love we share for one another and our communal worship of God is essential to our Christian commitment but also to our evangelistic witness. Jesus himself said that people will know we are his disciples by the way we love one another²³. Our community life is also necessary as communion with the pilgrim Church is an element of a fulfilled conversion.

²⁰ *Evangelii Gaudium* #262

²¹ *Redemptoris Missio* #26

²² *Redemptoris Missio* #26

²³ John 13:35

Quo Vadis Domine? offers three areas we can focus on to help grow a more vibrant Christian community.

Sacramental Life

The Church's deepest nature is expressed in her three-fold responsibility: of proclaiming the word of God (kerygma-martyria), celebrating the sacraments (leitourgia) and exercising the ministry of charity (diakonia). These duties presuppose each other and are inseparable²⁴

Pope Benedict XVI beautifully illustrates the inseparable nature of the sacraments from our work of evangelization and charity. The sacraments provide us with the effective grace that nourishes and sustains us in our commitment to discipleship. While we can simply hope to increase the number of times a sacrament is celebrated within our parish, we also know that the sacraments “bear fruit in those who receive them with the required dispositions.”²⁵ Discernments regarding the sacramental life of a parish must focus the character and quality of our celebrations as well as numerical considerations.

Reflections on Sacramental Life

- What would an ideal celebration of the liturgy look like to you? What about to others in your community (young, elderly, families, etc.)?
- How many masses are needed to serve your current parish? How many in your region?
- How would you prepare people to celebrate the sacraments?
- How can our community accompany those preparing for the sacraments?
- What requirements (if any) would a missionary community have in place to receive sacraments? (e.g. requirements of a couple wanting to get married in the parish or a young person coming for confirmation)
- How far is reasonable to travel for Sunday Mass? For other sacraments?
- How far is reasonable to expect a priest to travel for weekly Masses? (i.e. what is a reasonable expectation of total driving time within a weekend? Within a week?)

Discernment Survey Questions

- Our parish provides an active, dynamic experience of the liturgy
- I experience the sacraments as profound moments of encounter with Christ and not simply as rituals
- Our parish has clear expectations for how to prepare to receive the sacraments

²⁴ *Dens Caritas Est* #25

²⁵ *Catechism* #1311

Community Life

*It is a community of communities, a sanctuary where the thirsty come to drink in the midst of their journey, and a centre of constant missionary outreach.*²⁶

Community is an essential element of a parish. The *Code of Canon Law* establishes that in order to be a parish the community must be stable and under the care of a pastor²⁷. Therefore, measures of community life will necessarily involve an examination into the size and demographics of a community. Participation in parish life may appear stable, but if all our people are of the same age and stage of life, who will make up the community when they are called to their heavenly home?

The question of pastors must also be considered. Can our community financially support a pastor full-time, even if one were available? If not, we remain a community but perhaps are called to be part of larger parish, creating a communion of communities, cared for by a pastor but in collaboration with other clergy and community leaders. The presence of these communities promotes co-responsibility for our life and mission as they “decentralize and organize the parish community, to which they always remain united.”²⁸ Yet, when these communities come together for the celebration of the Eucharistic they are united more closely to Christ and to one another.

Thus the presence and quality of small communities is an important feature of community life. These “are groups of Christians who, at the level of the family or in a similarly restricted setting, come together for prayer, Scripture reading, catechesis, and discussion on human and ecclesial problems with a view to a common commitment.”²⁹ The quantity and quality of these groups is important as they “are a sign of vitality within the Church, an instrument of formation and evangelization, and a solid starting point for a new society based on a ‘civilization of love.’”³⁰

Reflections on Community Life

- What are the greatest strengths of our region?
- What will our region look like in five years?
- How can we serve this emerging reality?
- What would it look like if everyone in our parish was part of a small community within the larger parish?
- What would these small communities do? How would they care for one another and the community?
- In a thriving missionary community in our area, what populations would we serve, and how? How would pastoral ministry and outreach be different for different groups?

²⁶ *Evangelii Gaudium* #28

²⁷ Canon 515.1

²⁸ *Redemptoris Missio* #51

²⁹ *Redemptoris Missio* #51

³⁰ *Redemptoris Missio* #51

Discernment Survey Questions

- Our parish has excellent hospitality
- I know other parishioners by name and have friends who attend the parish
- Our parish welcomes and supports married couples and families
- Our parish welcomes and supports non-traditional family structures, including those suffering from difficult relationships or who have experienced divorce
- Our parish provides spiritual direction and accompaniment for those in different life stages

Systems & Structures

Pastoral ministry in a missionary key seeks to abandon the complacent attitude that says: "We have always done it this way". I invite everyone to be bold and creative in this task of rethinking the goals, structures, style and methods of evangelization in their respective communities.³¹

Since the Acts of the Apostles, the Church has organized her time and possessions around care for one another and building up the Church. When the Apostles were overwhelmed with the burden of administration, the community called forth leaders to assist in the distribution of food and care for the poor. How a parish makes use of their temporal goods and human resources is an indicator of missionary effort. If our efforts are largely focused inwardly, we are not meeting the call to ensure all of the Church's efforts are "channeled for the evangelization of today's world rather than for her self-preservation."³² Measurements of financial stability and physical assets are important indicators of the missionary capacity of a parish community.

Reflections on Systems & Structures

- How could we use our time, talent, and treasure differently in order to accomplish our mission?
- What could be changed in our parish staffing/volunteer structure to accomplish our mission? Our communications structures? Our financial structures
- What type of leadership gifts do we need in our community?
- What would engage people to give generously?
- What buildings and structures do we need to accomplish our mission?
- How can we use new technologies to help pass on the Gospel?

Discernment Survey Questions

- Our parish makes use of technology and social communications to connect our members and aid our mission
- Our parish has a plan to help move people from being non-givers to generous givers

³¹ *Evangelii Gaudium* #33

³² *Evangelii Gaudium* #27

**FORMATION:
THE PARISH FORMS MISSIONARY DISCIPLES**

*The parish is the presence of the Church in a given territory, an environment for bearing God's word, for growth in the Christian life, for dialogue, proclamation, charitable outreach, worship and celebration.*³³

Formation is the process of maturation in the faith, the “ever-clearer discovery of one's vocation and the ever-greater willingness to live it so as to fulfil one's mission.”³⁴ As the leader of a parish, the pastor is entrusted “to take care that the lay members of the Christian faithful are instructed in the truths of the faith, especially by giving a homily on Sundays and holy days of obligation and by offering catechetical instruction.”³⁵ Formation of adults and children for the mission is an important component of parish life. Pope Francis raises the missionary dimension of formation as an evaluative lens by saying that “in all its activities the parish encourages and trains its members to be evangelizers.”³⁶

While the quality of formation is best measured by the fruits of the people within the parish, there are also indicators that this essential task is being conducted. Looking to *Quo Vadis Domine?* we can see some important characteristics of missionary formation.

Discipleship

*The disciple is ready to put his or her whole life on the line, even to accepting martyrdom, in bearing witness to Jesus Christ, yet the goal is not to make enemies but to see God's word accepted and its capacity for liberation and renewal revealed*³⁷

Discipleship begins with a personal encounter with Christ and a decision to follow him. Our formation for discipleship offers opportunities and experiences that help foster this encounter and provide the skills and tools necessary to grow in the Christian life. Having a clear pathway for discipleship is an important component of a healthy parish. The participation of people and their movement along this pathway is an indicator of ongoing discipleship formation.

Reflections on Discipleship Formation

- Do we currently have a shared vision in our parish? In our region? What do we currently do to promote one, and what else could be done? Is it necessary to have one shared vision within a parish (or diocese) or should smaller communities devote themselves to achieving different goals and visions?
- What skills and training do we need to accomplish our mission?
- What could we do in our community to help people intentionally start and progress on a journey of discipleship? What steps would that journey include (i.e. what programs or resources could our community provide that are targeted and cumulative)? How could we help people move from one stage to the next in their discipleship journey?

Discernment Survey Questions

- I am involved in a discipleship small group
- I am committed to daily, personal prayer

³³ *Evangelii Gaudium* #28

³⁴ *Christifideles Laici* #57 & 58

³⁵ Code of Canon Law #528.1

³⁶ *Evangelii Gaudium* #28

³⁷ *Evangelii Gaudium* #24

- Our parish has a clear process for helping new people to grow in discipleship

Leadership

As the early Church grew in complexity, new leaders were needed to aid the disciples in ministry and administration. Leadership formation also extends beyond the internal matters of the parish by preparing disciples to have an impact on the world for the sake of the kingdom. Having a method to identify, call forth, and develop the gifts and charisms of the community is a critical factor in forming servants and leaders.

Reflections on Leadership Formation?

- What qualities should we look for in leaders for our parish (whether lay or ordained)?
- How could we call forth new leaders? How could we help them grow and develop?
- What would a great functioning parish leadership team look like? Who would be around the table (either specifically or in terms of types of people)?
- What would be the role of a pastor in a thriving, missionary community? The role of parish staff? The role of volunteers?
- What responsibilities/roles in a parish can *only* be fulfilled by a priest? By a deacon? What roles *should* be fulfilled by a priest or deacon (if the answer differs)?
- What formation is needed for lay leaders in our parish? For clergy?
- Is there a difference between “Christian leadership” and other kinds of leadership? If so, how is this practically lived out? Would a Christian leader stand out as unique in the secular world?

Discernment Survey Questions

- Our parish has discipleship small groups that are developing and training leaders to start new small groups
- Our key parish leaders, both lay and clergy, are held to high standards of transparency and accountability
- Our members actively mentor and accompany those called to leadership and service
- I understand the roles and limitations of our leadership structures (e.g. pastor, pastoral council, parish staff)

Service

Service, or ministry, is a fruit of discipleship. As with formation for leadership, a process to call forth and develop gifts is important to forming our people for service to the community. So too is a regular call to consider a deeper service to the Church in the form of priesthood, diaconate, or religious life. The number of people involved in our ministries as well as our ability to produce vocations are both signs of healthy service formation.

Reflections on Service Formation

- What would it look like if everyone in our community was serving the Church or the world?
- What skills and training do we need to be of service?
- How can we encourage others to consider their vocation more deeply?
- How many vocations to the priesthood and religious life would a missionary community generate?

Discernment Survey Questions

- Our members actively mentor and accompany those called to leadership and service
- I understand the roles and limitations of our leadership structures (e.g. pastor, pastoral council, parish staff)

AN ECCLESIAL REORGANIZATION

We must admit, though, that the call to review and renew our parishes has not yet sufficed to bring them nearer to people, to make them environments of living communion and participation, and to make them completely mission-oriented.³⁸

Having reflected on the hallmarks of a missionary community we must observe our reality in light of this missionary vision. Seriously reorienting ourselves to achieve this vision requires making the necessary structural changes to support it. In some cases a parish will be called to re-double their efforts at renewal. In other cases Christian communities may need to be joined together as one parish with multiple locations, but with one pastor and a team of clergy and lay people, in order to have the necessary resources to live our missionary identity. In all cases, *every* current parish structure will be affected in some way by this reorganization of our local Church.

This reorganization cannot be seen as an exercise in “managed decline,” but must be rooted in hope. Hope that a renewed commitment to our missionary nature will lead to growth, health, and vitality for Catholic communities of all shapes and sizes within the diocese. The conditions are right for a new missionary movement in our culture. This exercise will put us in the right place with the right resources to respond to these conditions for the sake of the Gospel.

³⁸ *Evangelii Gaudium* #28