

Radiate Christ

Parish Vitality: Communities of Faith that Live and Spread the Gospel

Introduction



A REALITY AND A MISSION

“Radiate Christ. These two words summarize God the Father’s hope for humanity on this earth. The words contain both a reality and a mission: the reality of the person of Jesus Christ as the Savior of all people and the mission of each Christian to participate in the Son’s redemption of the world.”

- Archbishop Dennis M. Schnurr

THE DISCERNMENT PROCESS

This discernment process has been designed for parish leaders to use to envision and plan for a vital future for their parish which will lead the parish and its people to radiate Christ, to grow in and share God’s love in the world.

The process includes:

- Outlines for three discernment gatherings
- A worksheet to guide and record discussions
- A facilitator’s guide.

This guide is the first of a series, each of which will focus on some element of parish life. Each element might be considered a building block - each is essential to create and sustain strong, healthy life within the parish that will lead each person to live and grow as a missionary disciple. This first guide focuses on elements of parish vitality that are not reflected in future discernment processes, including Worship and Sacraments, Stewardship, the New Evangelization, Love in Action, and Communication.

PARISH VITALITY: GUIDING VALUES

When we think about pastoral vitality, we hold these values as central:

- In and through the parish community, people are led to an encounter with Jesus and compelled to live faith boldly
- The parish community is warm and welcoming
- The Eucharist is at the center of parish life; the liturgy is celebrated with care
- Parishioners value the parish as their family of faith and accompany one another on the journey of faith
- The parish intentionally engages young adults, teens, and their families
- The parish and school form people to respond to the call to holiness; in answering this call, the people have a passion for helping one another discern their vocation
- The parish evangelizes, forming people as disciples, in all ages and stages of life and faith
- Stewardship is fostered as a way of life; the parish actively engages people as contributing members of the community
- Parishioners are formed and sent to put love in action
- The parish demonstrates fiscal responsibility
- Parishes have plans to ensure the development and sustenance of vital parish life

Mary, Mother of the Church and our Mother, present our prayer of thanksgiving to your Son. Beg from Him the graces we need to be faithful disciples who follow Him with enthusiasm and joy. May our witness to the love of God bear fruit in our archdiocese, parishes, homes, and hearts. Teach us to be God’s joyful witnesses, to radiate Christ in all we do, so that all people might know, love, and follow your Son through this life and into the next. Amen.

Radiate Christ

Parish Vitality: Communities of Faith that Live and Spread the Gospel
Discussion Guide for Meeting One



A REALITY AND A MISSION

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ENVISIONING OUR FUTURE

The parish is the community of faith in which people are formed by word and sacrament and from which they are sent to radiate Christ’s love in the world.

St. John Paul II presented a vision of the Church as the “home and school of communion” in which people are drawn deeply to the heart of the Lord and from that heart are led to see and respond to the needs of their brothers and sisters. (Novo Millennio Ineunte, 43)

This vision will only come to fruition when the parish is “vitaly alive in faith;” in which the Sunday Eucharist is at the center of parish life; where people are called to be good stewards of their gifts and resources; where the parish is a center for the New Evangelization; and where people are formed, urged, and sent to put love in action in the parish and beyond it.*

Such parish vitality is intentionally developed and sustained through the leadership of pastors in collaboration with their people.

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What words or phrases strike you and why?

READING AND REFLECTION

Facilitator: We take time to listen to Sacred Scripture and to hear a brief excerpt from The Joy of the Gospel. After each reading, we will pause briefly for quiet reflection. If it will help you to participate in the discussion that will follow, feel free to jot down any thoughts or ideas that occur during this time of reflection in the space provided.

Reader 1: A reading from the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 2:42-47)

They devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles and to the communal life, to the breaking of the bread and to the prayers. Awe came upon everyone, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their property and possessions and divide them among all according to each one's need. Every day they devoted themselves to meeting together in the temple area and to breaking bread in their homes. They ate their meals with exultation and sincerity of heart, praising God and enjoying favor with all the people. And every day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

The Word of the Lord.

Reader 2: Let us listen together to an excerpt from The Joy of the Gospel.

"The parish is the presence of the Church in a given territory, an environment for hearing God's word, for growth in the Christian life, for dialogue, proclamation, charitable outreach, worship and celebration. In all its activities the parish encourages and trains its members to be evangelizers. It is a community of communities, a sanctuary where the thirsty come to drink in the midst of their journey, and a center of constant missionary outreach." (EG, 28)

Record your notes or reflections here.

What words or phrases strike you and why?

What vision does this present for our discernment and planning?

What does this lead us to consider for the future of our parish or region?

Gracious God,

You open wide your hand
and satisfy with your good gifts
the needs of all who live.

Pour forth your Holy Spirit on your Church,
as we strive to radiate Christ,
showing and sharing your love, compassion, and
peace in our homes and places of work,
in our parish and school, and in our world.
We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the
Holy Spirit, God for ever and ever. Amen.

Radiate Christ

Parish Vitality: Communities of Faith that Live and Spread the Gospel
Discussion Guide for Meeting Two



A REALITY AND A MISSION

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READING AND REFLECTION

Facilitator: We take time to listen to Sacred Scripture and to hear a brief excerpt from *Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us*. After each reading, we will pause briefly for quiet reflection. If it will help you to participate in the discussion that will follow, feel free to jot down any thoughts or ideas that occur during this time of reflection in the space provided.

Reader 1: A reading from the Gospel of St. Matthew (Mt 13:1-9)

“A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seed fell on the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Some fell on rocky ground, where it had little soil. It sprang up at once because the soil was not deep, and when the sun rose it was scorched, and it withered for lack of roots. Some seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it. But some seed fell on rich soil, and produced fruit, a hundred or sixty or thirtyfold. Whoever has ears ought to hear.”

The Gospel of the Lord.

Reader 2: Let us listen together to an excerpt from *Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us*.

We seek to form parishes that are vitally alive in faith. These communities will provide a parish climate and an array of activities and resources designed to help adults more fully understand and live their faith. We seek to form adults who actively cultivate a lively baptismal and eucharistic spirituality with a powerful sense of mission and apostolate. Nourished by word, sacrament, and communal life, they will witness and share the Gospel in their homes, neighborhoods, places of work, and centers of culture. (OHWB, 17)

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Discussion Guide for Meeting Three



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Reader 1: A reading from the Gospel according to St. John (John 15:11-17)

"I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and your joy may be complete. This is my commandment: love one another as I love you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. I no longer call you slaves, because a slave does not know what his master is doing. I have called you friends, because I have told you everything I have heard from my Father. It was not you who chose me, but I who chose you and appointed you to go out and bear fruit that will remain, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name he may give you. This I command you: love one another."

The Gospel of the Lord.

Reader 2: Let us listen together to an excerpt from *Novo Millennio Ineunte*.

"To make the Church *the home and 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...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." (NMI, 43)

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An Appreciative Process: Parish Vitality

Use the categories below or identify key values for your parish as a springboard for your discussions.

Process Element	Discover Be attentive <i>What is working?</i>	Dream Be intelligent <i>What might be?</i>	Do Be responsible <i>What will be?</i>
<p>Attention is given to engaging people of all ages, especially teens, young adults and their families.</p>			
<p>The parish and school form people to respond to the call to holiness; in answering this call, people have a passion for and help one another discern their vocation.</p>			
<p>The pastor, staff, and parishioner leaders work together to establish and share a clear vision for the parish and lead people to fulfill Christ's mission.</p>			
<p>The parish demonstrates fiscal responsibility and keeps parishioners informed about their financial wellbeing.</p>			
<p>The parish has a plan to ensure the development and sustenance of vital parish life.</p>			

Radiate Christ

Parish Vitality: Communities of Faith that Live and Spread the Gospel
Facilitator's Guide



Thank you for your willingness to facilitate this discernment process for your parish. This Facilitator's Guide is offered as support for you as you prepare to lead discussions that will result in recommendations for strategies or practices to enhance pastoral life in your parish or region.

Why is this important? This discernment process is designed to help you examine the life of your parish or region, articulate the vision you hold for your parish/region in relationship to these guiding values, honor what contributes to bringing that vision to life, and plan to build upon what already exists in order to more fully develop vital parish life for the future.

Who participates? The participants for this discernment process will usually be members of the parish pastoral council, a sub-committee or task group comprised of council members, or an ad hoc group gathered specifically for this process. The recommendations that your group will make will typically be offered to your pastor, often in the context of a wider pastoral planning process. Delegate one member to take notes and commit to distributing the minutes following the meetings. Invite people in advance to be readers for the opening prayer and reflection.

How do I prepare? Review all of the materials ahead of time. Use the discussion worksheet to guide your conversation. Provide copies of the discussion guide and appreciative process worksheet to all participants. The guide and worksheet include fillable fields for those who prefer to record and share their thoughts electronically.

How will the meetings be held? This process takes place in the context of prayer and reflection. It could take place in three evening meetings, or the process may be conducted in a one-day gathering. If other task groups are considering different pastoral priorities at the same time, all groups might come together on a Saturday, begin with prayer, conduct their discussions in their groups, and return for facilitated synthesis and identification of next steps.

What will be the result? You and your group will provide a synthesis of your discussion with recommendations to your pastor and/or pastoral council. You may be asked to identify potential costs involved in the recommendations, and you or others may be tasked with considering the ways your recommendations might relate to other elements of pastoral life in your parish or region. Keep these things in mind as you facilitate the discussions, remembering that what you are working toward is a more vital, thriving parish or region in the future.

Meeting Outlines

Meeting One:

- 10 minutes Gather the group together. If members do not know one another, take time for introductions.
- 20 -30 minutes Opening prayer and reflection, using the Discussion Guide for Meeting One. Invite participants to quiet themselves as you begin in prayer. Use the prayer at the bottom of page one of the discussion guide as your opening prayer. Be prepared to facilitate the prayer by directing the readers to proclaim the readings at the appropriate times, pace the discussion using the three questions on page 2, and invite participation of all who are present.
- 45 - 60 minutes Invite someone to read the quote from Archbishop Schnurr titled A Reality and a Mission and another participant to read the section titled Envisioning Our Future. Ask participants to quietly review the Parish Vitality Guiding Values. Invite participants to share what strikes them in light of the opening reflection and what they hear and see in this section.
- What are their hopes and dreams for your parish or region?
What already exists at your parish/region that is a strength?
What opportunities come to mind?
Record the highlights or keywords from this discussion for the future.
- 10 minutes Close the meeting with prayer. Use the prayer on page 2 of the discussion guide if you find it helpful. Invite participants to share their prayers for your parish, their family, friends, city, world. Pray the Lord's Prayer together and close with a sign of peace.

Between Meetings One and Two:

It will be beneficial to your work to acquire input from others who are not as involved, or who have constructive critique to offer. People like yourself who are intimately involved will benefit from the insights of those who bring fresh perspective and those who are not as engaged in parish life. Consider asking each member of your group to solicit input from other parish leaders, those who are involved in parish ministry groups, and those who are not yet involved but come to Sunday Mass. What do people see as a strength for the parish? What opportunities do they perceive? You might put questions in the parish bulletin, invite people to contact a member of your committee, or create a simple survey that parishioners can complete online in order to gain perspective from a representative group of people from your parish.

Meeting Two:

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| 20-30 minutes | Begin with prayer. Use the Discussion Guide for Meeting Two to guide your prayer and reflection. |
| 20-30 minutes | Invite participants to share anything they have reflected on since Meeting One. What did they hear from other parishioners? What stands out for them as strengths or opportunities? |
| 45 – 60 minutes | Use the Appreciative Process worksheet to guide your discussion. Work from left to right: Identify what you have to build upon or learn from (strengths) and record them in column one. Consider your vision and capture that in column two. The more clearly you can articulate your vision, the more productive Meeting Three and your future recommendations will be. If possible strategies, practices, or opportunities come to mind, record these in column three but do not dwell on those. That will be the focus of Meeting Three. |
| 10 minutes | Close in prayer as in Meeting One. |

Meeting Three:

- | | |
|---------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 20-30 minutes | Begin with prayer. Use the Discussion Guide for Meeting Three to guide your prayer and reflection |
| 20-30 minutes | Recap the key points from your discussions during Meetings One and Two, using the Appreciate Process worksheet to guide the conversation. Has anything else come to mind for participants since your last meeting? |
| 45-60 minutes | Discern potential strategies, practices, and opportunities for growth, and record in column three of the Appreciative Process worksheet. Identify your immediate next steps, recording those in column four. Take responsibility for creating a clean copy of the Appreciative Process worksheet or ask a group member to do so. Assign people to follow up as appropriate. Some of your recommendations might need input or discussion with other parish leaders or staff members. Your pastor or pastoral council will have a plan for how your recommendations will be used to inform and influence your parish's future plans. |
| 10 minutes | Close in prayer as in Meeting One. |

One-day Option: If the process is taking place in a one-day meeting, use the meeting outlines above and adapt the outline above to suit the timeframe for the day, leaving time at the end for groups to report back to one another.