



January 25, 2019

Most Reverend Nicholas DiMarzio
Bishop of the Diocese of Brooklyn

Dear Bishop DiMarzio,

On behalf of the parish community of St. Charles Borromeo Church, the Pastoral Council has prepared the following summary of our three-year strategic plan.

We are a diverse parish composed of members that have attended St. Charles for more than 50 years, as well new Catholics that have only recently been initiated into the church. In addition, because of our proximity to Downtown Brooklyn, we are the weekday parish for many students and office workers.

The parish has been blessed by the appointment of Fr. William Smith (Fr. Bill) as pastor in June 2018. Fr. Bill has enthusiastically joined our community and gone out of his way to actively engage with as many members of the parish as possible so that he understands who we are and why we are all here. In addition, from his first day at St. Charles he has worked to understand how best to engage all parishioners in our joint spiritual journey. And importantly, Fr. Bill is working to re-engage St. Charles within the wider Brooklyn religious community.

In October 2018, in light of the ongoing renovation of the church buildings and the priest shortage in the Diocese in which we should expect parishes without a resident Pastor to be necessary in the future, we were tasked by Fr. Bill to study the status of our parish community and make recommendations for next steps to enable the St. Charles community to become self-sustaining, as per the Goals outlined below.

Goals

- Ministry to Parishioners: Ensure new and current parishioners feel welcome to participate and worship fully, meet their needs where they are on their spiritual journey, ensure that we create a parish community where all have a true feeling of belonging to our belief community.
- Community Involvement: Interact and draw strength from neighboring churches in the deanery, interfaith and community organizations with common goals.
- Lay Leadership Education: Within 5 years, train parishioners to perform the functions of the parish that do not require a priest.

In order to achieve our goals, the Pastoral Council and other parishioners held one-on-one meetings with our parishioners to identify parishioners that would be willing to take on leadership roles and to understand what our parishioners are looking for in their parish and what constrains people from more actively engaging at St. Charles.

Findings

- Many parishioners are part of families where both spouses work, often with jobs that involve heavy time commitments and travel.
- The parish has many interfaith couples, and many of the families in the Family Faith Program are interfaith as well.
- Children of parishioners generally participate in the Family Faith Program, which may take up most of the time available that parents have for church leadership/activities.
- Because of the cost of living in Brooklyn Heights, people can be transient.
- Even so, a number of these families continue to travel to St. Charles for Mass because they like the church, the priests, the music, and because the Mass times meet their needs, especially the 7 pm Mass.
- More frequent social events, such as coffee hours and wine and cheese after Mass are opportunities to draw folks in and engage them further.

Strengths

- Family Faith Program (Youth Religious Education) – St. Charles has a very successful program each Sunday after the 9 am Mass, in which 85 students have enrolled for 2018-19.
- Weddings – in 2018 there were 7 weddings at St. Charles and an additional 12 couples were prepared for the sacrament of marriage for weddings that would be held in their hometowns or elsewhere.

- Baptisms –38 children and 4 adults were baptized in 2018.
- Confirmations – there were 12 children and adults confirmed during 2018.
- Music Ministry – we have a skilled group of musicians and singers of the highest caliber and for many it is the quality of the music that initially brings them to St. Charles.

Weaknesses

- Parishioner interaction – we need to identify and create more opportunities for parishioners to get to know each other.
- Community involvement (with Deanery churches, interfaith groups, non-religious neighborhood groups) – in the past there seemed to be little interest in community involvement and as a result, we have limited interaction with other parishes in the Deanery and commonly are unaware of what these groups are doing that may be complementary to what we would like to do at St. Charles.
- Teen/Young adult ministry – like many churches we have no official programming for teens and young adults and often lose families after their child (children) is confirmed to sports and other pursuits. Very few children remain active in the parish after their Confirmation.
- Weddings and Baptisms – in the past we often lost those married or baptized at St. Charles and the parish needs to improve what we offer these families.

Based on our findings, the Pastoral Council has identified the following next steps for St. Charles.

A – Ministry to Parishioners

Hospitality is seen as a key driver to creating a committed and vibrant St. Charles parish community. As Fr. Bill has said, “Belonging comes before Believing”. Critical to belonging is:

- knowing our fellow parishioners so we can have conversations with each other;
- knowing if there are needs (individual and community) that should be addressed;
- enabling us to greet each other within the wider community of Brooklyn Heights; and
- establishing St. Charles as a member of the Brooklyn Heights and greater Brooklyn communities, so that we can participate and contribute to those communities, particularly when thinking about evangelization.

Many of our parish families are interfaith and so it is critical that we provide opportunities for all members of our families to experience St. Charles, and that we create a sense of belonging for everyone, both here and in the wider community.

The PPC recommended the following actions to begin building our sense of community.

1. Social Hours - Hold once a month after each Mass with coffee and continental breakfast after the 9 am and 11:15 am Masses, and wine and cheese after the 7 pm Mass. Parish registration materials should be available so that attendees can register. Create opportunities to introduce people to each other often and ask Mass attendees to introduce themselves to their neighbors before Mass. Monthly Coffee Hours after each Mass were started in August 2018 and continue to be a way to bring the community together.
2. Volunteer Thank You Gathering – The Pastoral Council is planning a Volunteer Thank You BBQ after the 11:15 am Mass on a Sunday in the Spring. Our goal is to recognize those that give of their time and talent to St. Charles. In addition, we plan to identify more opportunities to recognize those that volunteer at St. Charles as a way to encourage greater participation in the lay ministries.
3. Concerts – Re-establish our concert and performing arts series to attract interest from the parishioners and the wider community. As this objective requires the completion of the repair work in the church and the installation of additional restroom facilities there will be some delay in implementing this program.
4. Meeting places – Establish policies and procedures for parish and community groups' use of the parish center, sacristy and narthex for meetings. The policy guiding this use is in development.
5. Create Ministries for outreach to diverse and often underserved segments of our parish family.
 - a. 20s and 30s group
 - Working with Fr. Gribowich and de Sales Media, we have created a Media Team with the goal of understanding how to best reach and engage this audience.

- We recognize that we have a unique challenge and opportunity with this age group. What will be an issue for many parishes in the future is our prime issue now.
- b. Teens –a critical audience in which we need to invest to support their families in keeping their teenagers interested in and growing in their faith.
- This particular group is difficult to engage as they are pulled in many directions by an array of academic, sports and cultural pursuits. This problem is not unique to St. Charles. Therefore the Pastoral Council would like to work with the sister parishes in our Deanery to identify and launch joint programs. We have been keeping Paul Morisi of the Diocese Youth office aware of our situation.
- c. Seniors – this group is among the most faithful of St. Charles parishioners and we need to be sure they are not lost amid our focus on building for the future. We have done outreach programming at St. Charles Jubilee center during Advent and the Christmas season, and we will continue during Ash Wednesday and Lent.

B - Lay Leadership

Our parish lay leaders are the foundation on which the parish will continue to grow. Key to this ministry are our younger parish members, who have expressed an interest in forming and growing the lay ministry at St. Charles; however, family and work obligations often limit the time they can contribute. It will be critical that St. Charles find ways to engage all segments of our parish community in lay leadership formation by identifying ways and opportunities to address all constraints that may restrict their participation.

1. All parish functions should be named, defined, and given job descriptions. This includes existing roles (e.g., Lector, EM) as well as other roles not yet specifically identified that do not need to be performed by a priest. The lay ministry descriptions should outline the duties, responsibilities and time required that will be asked of the volunteer. Pathways for advancement should be outlined. This will allow those seeking to become involved to understand the specific function and what training requirements, if any, are necessary.
2. The ARISE program was launched in 2018 for both Lent and Advent. We are working to identify other ways in which parishioners can participate in spiritual growth programs, such as possibly a weekday

- afternoon Bible Study that might be a senior opportunity for both study and socializing.
3. Lay Ministry growth and training – To ensure both new and longtime parishioners are aware of all lay minister opportunities, hold an annual Lay Ministry Fair to ensure that we provide a yearly opportunity for parishioners to become involved as lectors, EM's, Ushers, etc. This was done in Fall 2018 and we will potentially hold another Lay Ministry Fair in Spring 2019.
 4. The PPC would like to see more frequent training sessions offered for new lectors and EM's by the diocese, as in the past parishioners sometimes lost interest in participating when it took months for a diocesan training session to be scheduled. It is also critical that we determine the best way to provide an annual refresher event for these ministries, both to ensure all participants are up-to-date on process and to provide an opportunity for socializing. We will explore the interest in a Deanery Convocation for EMs and lectors as well.
 5. We met with Fr. Joseph Gibino and Dr. Theodore Musco in May 2018 regarding options for adult religious education. The Holy Spirit Institute may be an option for those able to undertake a longer, in-depth distance-learning course of study, especially if one desires an Associate's, Bachelor's or Master's degree. As it is nationally accredited, the credential is portable if the participant moves out of the Brooklyn Diocese. Based on our findings, it is unclear which parishioners, if any, want or can commit the time to participate in the program. We continue to consult with Fr. Gibino and Dr. Musco to craft solutions appropriate to our parish.

C – Community Engagement

St. Charles has not truly engaged in the wider Brooklyn Heights or local community beyond in years. And several years ago, St. Charles stopped participating in the Brooklyn Heights Interfaith Clergy group. Therefore, the Pastoral Council felt that it was premature to plan for engagement outside the parish community at this point since it would be hard to convince the Brooklyn community that we were committed.

The Pastoral Council recommends that we work on building the St. Charles parish community as a foundational step. We will explore partnering with Assumption, St. Boniface, St. James, and St. Paul/St. Agnes particularly as these parishes have invested in working with groups outside their parish communities for years. We would like to meet with representatives from these parishes, so we can determine what opportunities there are for collaboration.

The regularly scheduled Deanery Meetings are one opportunity to more fully engage with our sister parishes in the Deanery.

In addition, St. Charles should re-engage with the Brooklyn Heights Interfaith Clergy Association to ensure we participate in interfaith programs and as a means to understanding issues in the community. As a start, we have planned a common Lenten program with neighboring Grace Church.

D – General Parish Recommendations

The PPC recommends the following actions that will support general and greater engagement on Sundays for our parish community.

- New Hymnals / Missals - the current missal/hymnal is out of date. A better-designed missal will allow those not as familiar with the Catholic Mass (interfaith couples, those thinking about converting) to follow along. Purchase of new hymnals/missals is in progress as is creating opportunities for parishioners to dedicate a new missal.
- Parish Registration – the Parish database has been migrated to the ParishSoft cloud service and, we will be able to have parishioners register online.
- Accessibility and accommodations – As we continue our ongoing external church renovations, we are mindful of improvements that need to be made internally. Our church building has accessibility issues and is in need of interior repair and the majority of programs that we would like to plan will require us to provide at least one accessible restroom, that we have an appropriate number of restrooms for the building, and that the church is in good repair.
 - Improve physical accessibility for motorized wheelchairs and large strollers. This has been partially accomplished with the new narthex but some doorways are still barriers.
 - Create at least one accessible bathroom.
 - Provide hearing accessibility loop system for hearing-impaired parishioners.
 - Make low-gluten hosts available.
 - Once barriers are removed and a solution to parking issues are found, consider hosting the annual West Brooklyn Mass of Inclusion for People with Disabilities and the Deaf/Hard of Hearing.
 - Construct a Basement in the Church to allow us to expand our ministries

- In order to create greater awareness of lay leadership in the Parish, the parish leaders sent Christmas cards to the families of the newly baptized and those couples that were married here or whose marriages were prepared here.
- We also acknowledge that our planning is only as good as the data we have been able to gather and that there is much we do not know and so will look to those with greater expertise to share their knowledge and planning suggestions with us.
- Our daily operations must be funded by our weekly collections and other donations, and that our rental property revenues are dedicated to completing the long-term capital projects of the parish. We anticipate increased spending on programming as described above; we have been offering matching sponsorship opportunities to make these programs self-funding. We will work with our Finance Council to increase fundraising support for our daily operations.
- The Pastoral Council meets monthly to ensure we stay on track with the strategic plan for the parish and that we serve as an outlet for parishioners to ask questions and raise issues.
- The Pastoral Council has launched a parish leadership forum that will meet quarterly to ensure that the Pastoral Council, Finance Committee, Parish Renovation Committee, Family Faith Program, Media and all Lay Ministries share information and are collaborative and coordinated.

As we enter our 170th year, we are putting our faith into action, through rebuilding our church, inside and out. We intend to be here far into the future.

Sincerely,

St. Charles Pastoral Council
Francis Chin
Kerin Coughlin
Robin Curtis
Josephine Dongbang
Phil Murray
Jane Olson
Donna Whiteford