



Parish Pastoral Plan 2016

Immaculate Conception Parish

Willoughby, Ohio 44094

Pastor: Father Timothy David Kalista

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Section #1 Background and Introduction

Dear Parishioners,

As you read this introduction I ask that you pause for just a brief moment and say a special prayer to the Lord...ask Him to open our hearts to His will and for us to work together as a family striving to grow in holiness and to bring others along our journey! Thank you.

This pastoral plan would not have been possible if it was not for the guidance and the assistance of so many people. In particular I would like to thank the pastoral planning committee who helped me to conduct our follow up meetings and aided me in drafting this document. I also need to say a special word of thanks to the staff of the parish. Finally, I need to thank you, the parishioners of this parish. It was your willingness to share your ideas with me at our parish town hall Meeting that was held on 27 January 2016 that allowed this pastoral plan to be written. At our January meeting I explored with all of you two realities that our parish is facing. The first was at the Diocesan level, and the second was at the parish level. For the benefit of this document allow me to outline what I spoke about:

Declining Priests:

In a recent study of Catholic priests in the Diocese of Cleveland, over the next ten years seventy priests will be reaching the age of 75. This is the canonical age that a priest can ask the bishop if he could retire from active ministry. Even though many priests may continue to remain active in parish ministry after the Bishop has granted them retirement, it is a reality that a majority of these priests will most likely resign their pastorates. What does this mean for the Diocese? The answer is that we will have fewer priests to serve Cleveland's large number of parishes. We also need to face the reality that other priests may ask to take a leave of absence from active ministry due to health or for other reasons. The long term effect this will have on our diocese and, on priests in particular, will be felt by all of us. Some examples will be: Limited mass times, dual pastorates, delayed responses in addressing the needs of the flock, and other noticeable changes in the local parishes. As I enter into my 13th year as a priest I realize that my 25th will be significantly different than it was when I was first ordained.

However, one should not read this and be discouraged, fearful, or overly concerned. The reason? I am convinced that the New Evangelization, a term first promulgated by Pope Paul VI and reiterated by all of his successors will rekindle a fire in our young people and convince them more and more like Isaiah the Prophet: "Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom shall I send? Who will go for us?' 'Here I am,' I said; 'send me!'" (Is 6:8) My brothers and sisters it is imperative that we pray for an increase of vocations to the priesthood, and we ask the Lord to continue to send "workers for the harvest." (cf. Lk 10:2) The harvest is abundant and the laborers are there but we need to ask the Lord to send them to fill our seminaries again. We should not only pray for an increase in vocations to the priesthood, but we also need to pray for those men who are discerning a call to serve in the Diaconate, we also need to pray for an increase of vocations to the women and men discerning a call to the consecrated life, and prayers for the men and women called to serve as lay ecclesial ministers. As we pray for an increase in

vocations remember that, the Church has called us all to serve in various ways. Our baptism gave us this “duty” to serve and, may we do so with joy, reverence, and love.

Changes I have noted in the Parish

The second area I spoke about was the change of our parish. As a seminarian, I would often be invited to help and assist at Immaculate Conception in various ways. I would serve Mass; teach PSR; and I would distribute communion at the weekend Masses as my schedule allowed. However, when I began my assignment here on 15 July 2015 I noticed some changes.

The first and the most obvious was the merging of our day school with Our Lady of Mount Carmel. To many in the parish this merger was a sad occurrence, but in God’s bigger plan it served to ensure that our two day schools could unite in strength and numbers, and work together on projects and continue to be a powerful witness in our communities.

The second change since being assigned here is that I would not have any parochial vicars with me during my pastorate. Because of this, many people have stated: “Father, you have so much on your plate...” That statement is true, but I also have a wonderful staff and even more wonderful volunteers who make my job that much easier to do every day. The third change that I noticed was that that the parish size has declined.

As you read this, one could say: “This is sinking ship—get out while you can.” However, I stand with you as your pastor and say what our Lord said, “Do not be troubled or afraid” (Cf. Jn 14:27) The reason I am writing this pastoral plan is so that you and I have the opportunity, in the not-too-distant future, to look back and see how wonderfully our parish has grown; yet, in order for this to happen it is going to require us to work together; to forgive one another; and to be like Christ for one another. Hence, the reason for this pastoral plan and my enthusiasm for writing this document for the parish.

As you read through this pastoral plan be assured of three things: The first is that I am writing this not because I have all of the answers. I am writing this because I want to lead our parish to know, serve, and follow Christ more passionately. The second is that I am writing this plan because I believe that even though the future looks gloomy I have faith that we have the ability to become a strong, unified body in Christ and have a tremendously positive impact in this community and our world. Finally, I am writing this document so that you and I can grow in our knowledge, love, and belief in Jesus Christ. My brothers and sisters it is with a servant’s heart that I offer this pastoral plan to you all and, through the Blessed Virgin Mary I entrust my words and my desires to her Immaculate Heart. May God Bless you and Keep you.

Section #2: The Pastoral Plan

My desire to write a pastoral plan is not because I believe I have the “blue print” to change what has been happening in our world or in our parish, but I believe that I have the opportunity to lead us into a new era that may look a little different from what we have experienced today. My role as pastor is a blessing to me beyond words. There are many expectations that the diocese has of the pastor and each of you. As parishioners, you may have your own list of expectations of me. But the foundation of it all is that I am a servant and, as such, I am willing to do what I can to help you and aid you in your journey of faith. Yet, if the truth is to be told I cannot do this on my own: In other words—I NEED YOUR HELP! The days of being able to say, “*Father will take care of it*” or “*The Church can deal with it—I am simply too busy!*” These expressions are not only unhealthy but they will not sustain us in our ability to follow through on the pastoral plan that God wants for us and for the parish of Immaculate Conception.

My brothers and sisters your involvement in our pastoral plan is what will make our parish vibrant, healthy, and engaging to all people. If we do not get involved or presume that “someone else will deal with this issue” then we are deceiving ourselves and the “truth is not in us.” (Cf. 1 John 1:8) The pastoral plan is not restricted to the few; rather, it is open to the many and my desire as we prepare to implement the pastoral plan is that you will see the vital role that each of you has in ensuring that this plan will be brought to fulfillment. So, as we enter into this section I am going to explore with you all how I envision implementing this pastoral plan. Let’s together explore this in greater detail:

After our parish town hall meeting, we reviewed input on areas that are important for us to grow and strengthen as a parish. In separate meetings I asked our pastoral planning team to please identify the “top four” – areas of greatest concern for the parish. These areas were then explored with parishioners who offered suggestions on how to implement new ideas. I was overjoyed when I saw the parishioners sharing with one another what they were passionate about and what they saw as vital areas of concern for the parish. As it is with any new project, many ideas were presented so it was impossible to pursue them all at this time. Our focus was to find ways to engage the unengaged, reengaged the people attending, and reach out to the people who are not attending at all. The strategies offered in this section are solely based on the suggestions that were made and discussed by the pastoral planning committee. I will now outline for you the four areas we will be focusing on for our Pastoral Plan; they are: **Worship, Teaching, Social Justice, and Hospitality**. I realize that this may not encompass all that the Church has to offer, or could offer, but for the sake of this pastoral plan these areas are key foundation blocks that will serve both Immaculate Conception parish and our surrounding communities well, now and into the future.

Section #3: Worship

“But in order that the liturgy may be able to produce its full effects, it is necessary that the faithful come to it with proper dispositions, that their minds should be attuned to their voices, and that they should cooperate with divine grace lest they receive it in vain. Pastors of souls must therefore realize that, when the liturgy is celebrated, something more is required than the mere observation of the laws governing valid and licit celebration; it is their duty also to ensure that the faithful take part fully aware of what they are doing, actively engaged in the rite, and enriched by its effects.” (SACROSANCTUM CONCILIUM Paragraph 11)

I would like to draw your attention to a key phrase that I believe is vital for our understanding: The phrase: *the faithful come to ‘it’ (the Mass) with proper dispositions...*” Now in life today one of the most difficult things that we all face as people is time management. Many of us have so many activities that finding time to attend Mass, or even to properly prepare ourselves for the Mass seems to be a luxury. However, I believe it would be easier to properly prioritize our lives if we better understood and could more fully appreciate what we do at Mass. I want to find ways that each and every one can grow in our commitment and knowledge of God through the Mass. In order to accomplish this task I am going to begin implementing the following practices in the parish to enhance our understanding and our worship experience. As the Church year officially starts its new liturgical year with the beginning of Advent, it is appropriate for us to also begin our new Liturgical focus during Advent as well. As such, beginning this year for Advent we are going to begin some of the following:

Enhancing our Worship through Sacramentals

The Nativity scene: With each week of Advent we will add different figures to the nativity scene. The first week will be the shepherds, the second week will be Mary, the third week Joseph, and the fourth week the Wise Men. Why do this? So, with each week, we all anticipate with greater fervor the welcoming of Jesus on Christmas Day—who is the “reason for the season.”

Other Feasts: Our teaching will not be reserved for Advent only, my intention is to incorporate other sacramental teachings as well; for example, Candlemas (2/2), the blessing of throats on the memorial of St. Blasé 2/3, burning palms for Ash Wednesday, the Living Rosary (October); Mary Crowning (May), The celebration of Divine Mercy Sunday (2nd Sunday of Easter). These are just some of the ways that I hope to help instruct the parish on the many rich traditions and teachings that the Church has to offer all of Her children.

Enhancing our Worship through Formal Instruction

Beginning with the Advent Season we will offer the Ten Minute Catechism (TMC). The intention is not to impose long dissertations on the faith; rather, the intention is for us to offer a simple lesson on “what” and “why” we believe what we believe. Although at the beginning these lessons will be primarily taught by the clergy, my hope is that in time, we would be able to expand our TMC to parish ministries, to the laity, and to other organizations that can help us all to follow the call of the Lord more fervently.

Enhancing our Worship through Prayer

On Sunday afternoons/evenings, during the Liturgical Seasons of Advent and Lent, we will invite all parishioners to explore the “other” public prayer of the Church, namely, the Liturgy of the Hours, also known as the Divine Office. The Divine Office, prayed primarily by the clergy and the vowed religious, is a prayer that all the faithful can engage in and one where we can learn more about our faith and grow in the knowledge and the love of God. In addition to the Divine Office, we will continue to offer our annual Advent/Lent Penance services, 40 Hours, and the processions of the Blessed Sacrament on Corpus Christi.

Enhancing our Worship through Latin

One of the rich blessings we have as a Church is that we have a Universal Language and that language is Latin. The usage of Latin in the liturgy should never be discouraged; rather, it should be encouraged for the faithful to know the various chants of the Mass. As we begin the Season of Advent we will begin to implement, sporadically, Mass responses in Latin. This should be an opportunity for us all to not only appreciate the tradition we have, but it should also be an opportunity for us to embrace the chance to speak in the Universal Language of the Church. In addition to Mass parts we will offer the parish an annual celebration of the Mass in the Extraordinary Form (the rite which was celebrated prior to the 2nd Vatican Council). The purpose of this would be to celebrate a Mass which many people are unaware of, and at the same time, offer us instruction. My hope is that we will not only offer the Mass in the extraordinary form, but a time for instruction would be given after the Mass to help us appreciate what symbols and gestures mean during this celebration of the Mass.

Enhancing our Worship through Witness

One of the joys we have in our Diocese is that we have many wonderful speakers who can offer us various means of prayer, encouragement, and guidance in our journey of faith. However, we also have many wonderful speakers throughout the United States who can instruct us and give us new guidance and insight. The activities in this section will focus our attention on the ways that we can learn through the witness of others. I will do what I can to invite speakers to offer either parish missions, days of recollection, or weekend retreats to our parishioners to help lead us ever closer to the Lord Jesus Christ. My brothers and sisters the Lord has told us that we need to know our faith, so what better way to learn about our faith than to listen to members of His Body who can share how to live out our faith more fully.

Enhancing our Worship through Homilies

One of the popular tools that was begun by our Protestant brothers and sisters was the “weekly sermon series.” Although this may not be what this is called today I think that the idea is a good one, and, one of the things that we will begin, when applicable, is to “build” on sermons week after week. In order to ensure that the homilies are building on “themes” each week, a special letter will be sent out in advance to the clergy who will be preaching during that month so all are focused on the same message.

Summary

In working on this section of the pastoral plan the decision is to help the parish continue to grow in our knowledge and devotion of Christ. Our worship within the context of the liturgy, is indeed the source and the summit of our faith and, as such, all efforts must be implemented to ensure that we, the parish of Immaculate Conception, can continue to grow in our knowledge and love of Christ.

Section #4: Teaching

“The ‘door of faith’ (Acts 14:27) is always open for us, ushering us into the life of communion with God and offering entry into his Church. It is possible to cross that threshold when the word of God is proclaimed and the heart allows itself to be shaped by transforming grace. To enter through that door is to set out on a journey that lasts a lifetime. It begins with baptism (cf. Rom6:4), through which we can address God as Father, and it ends with the passage through death to eternal life, fruit of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, whose will it was, by the gift of the Holy Spirit, to draw those who believe in him into his own glory (cf. Jn 17:22). To profess faith in the Trinity – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – is to believe in one God who is Love (cf. 1 Jn 4:8): the Father, who in the fullness of time sent his Son for our salvation; Jesus Christ, who in the mystery of his death and resurrection redeemed the world; the Holy Spirit, who leads the Church across the centuries as we await the Lord’s glorious return.” (PORTA FIDEI Par. 1)

In his Apostolic Letter addressed to all of the faithful on the inauguration of the Year of Faith, Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI states for us the reality that, through our baptism into Jesus Christ we are able to enter the “door of faith” and through this entrance we can become a new creation in Christ. Yet, as always, one of the great challenges we face is how can we accomplish this great task? The answer is not as complicated as one would think, and in fact, the answer is really an exciting opportunity for us all. Let me explain:

As pastor one of my primary roles is to teach, and although I do not have a formal education in teaching what I do have I try and offer to the people every day; namely, my faith in Jesus Christ. My friends, the faith is being taught, but one of the problems that we are facing today is that we are not receiving the faith with the same fervor we once had. To help us return to the excitement and fervor of learning about our faith, I propose the following ways that we can instruct the faithful. Please note that many of these proposals have been covered in our section on Worship, but they support this section also and help address some of the concerns and ideas that have been expressed at our individual meetings.

Retreat Days: Diocese of Cleveland

One of the easiest ways to instruct the faithful is through the retreat format. I have found that this affords participants an opportunity to witness, learn, and engage one another in the faith. In the last forty years numerous retreat programs have been created and, many of them have been very successful. A few examples from our Diocese include: TEC (a retreat geared towards teens, young adults, and adults); Christ Renews His Parish (a retreat for men and women); and there are others, but I just wanted to point out some of the opportunities that I will make sure that the

parish community is aware of. However, as I advertise these types of retreats, we will also be implementing retreats at our parish as well.

Retreat: Parish

The two main groups that I am going to be relying on for this will be our Knights of Columbus and our Elizabeth Ministry. I believe that each of these groups can champion and help promote the teaching needs of the men and women of our parish. My intention is to offer retreats during the seasons of Advent and Lent. An ideal teaching opportunity is if parishioners would be willing to witness their personal story and share about their spiritual journey. This approach makes things very “real” since we know the speakers, and thus the retreat becomes a much more “personal” encounter as we are invited to see how God is working in their lives. But I am also willing to contact outside resources to help lead our parishioners in days of recollection and reflection. In mentioning a retreat day for men and women this does not mean that we will cease offering the parish mission or other wonderful teaching opportunities for the parishioners of the parish; rather, what I mean is that we will expand the types of programs we offer.

Retreat: Youth/Young Adults

To neglect our young people would not be appropriate and, as such, I will do what I can to help facilitate retreat weekends for the youth of the parish. And, although these days can be seasonal—always the intention is to help bring our teens into a greater devotion of following Jesus Christ. Some retreats that we are currently working on or we have found to be successful already are within our sacramental programs of Confirmation and First Communion and for our Pre-Cana (engaged couples) program. However, as time goes on, I hope to find other ways of attracting and engaging our young people in following Jesus Christ.

Formal Instruction

One of the ways that the faith can be explained is through formal instruction. Thanks to Deacon Paul our parish offers parishioners Adult Education Video Series; however, one concern is that we seem to only attract a limited group of people. Although this should not be seen as a bad thing, what I hope is to introduce some other ways of bringing out the faithful in the parish to learn more about our faith. As such, I am proposing three methods to be used this year:

- **Movies:** You heard me correctly, through the cinema great spiritual principles can be discovered. (Please refer to my Concept Article when I was appointed as pastor) Be assured, we will screen all movies and, to ensure we are compliant with copyright laws, we will make sure that we have written permission to show any movie in a public setting.
- **Teaching Mass:** Have you ever gone to Mass and asked yourself the question, “*Why do we do that?*” The intention of a teaching Mass is to offer instruction as we are actually participating in Mass. This is definitely a little different, and leads to a longer Mass, but I have found this instruction to be very beneficial as it reinforces the beauty and purpose of the Mass. The teaching Mass is to help us understand what God has given us to worship Him!

- **Guest Speakers:** As I mentioned already we are extremely blessed in our Diocese to have some very informed people. My intention is to “tap” into this great resource and begin inviting some of these people to instruct us in the faith. Topics would include, but of course not be limited to: Divorce, Sacraments, Voting, Ethics, and Encyclicals. As the faithful are instructed in the faith we can be “armed” with the knowledge that, with God, we can defend our beliefs.

Pilgrimages

One of the easiest and most important ways of passing on the faith is through the pilgrimage encounter. The parish will be offering one day pilgrimages to various churches, shrines, and religious sites—the purpose of these pilgrimages is to expand our knowledge and understanding of the wonders of our universal Church. We will be growing in our faith and, at the same time, receiving blessings as we “bring” the petitions of our parish with us. As we learn more about our faith, we become stronger in our ability to know, love and serve our God!

Section #5: Social Justice

“Hence, though the Church's first care must be for souls, how she can sanctify them and make them share in the gifts of heaven, she concerns herself too with the exigencies of man's daily life, with his livelihood and education, and his general, temporal welfare and prosperity.” (*MATER ET MAGISTRA Par. #3*)

As I begin this section I would like to make an observation of what I have seen in regards to the response of the late St. John XXIII. Under the leadership of Fr. Francis Curran, the parish of Immaculate Conception has been committed to witness our defense of life, and, as such, the parish has participated in the annual Lake County Chain for Life, the March for Life in Washington D.C. and has been extremely generous in collections for the unborn. Under the leadership of Fr. Michael Troha, Immaculate Conception began the Mother Teresa Meal Program. This program serves a variety of people in our local area who, due to circumstances out of their control, would normally have found themselves without a meal. The Mother Teresa Meal Program continues to thrive because our parishioners recognize the needs of our brothers and sisters in the community and reach out in love to help. With the assistance of our St. Vincent de Paul Society we held our annual giving tree at Christmas and, this past Lent we hosted the first “stuff the truck” event for the McKinley Center. These initiatives are mentioned here not to draw attention to the people who have made them successful; rather, they are written about to share with the parish examples of the many activities already in existence here at Immaculate Conception. Following in the footsteps of my predecessors I am committed to ensuring that Social Justice is being practiced and proclaimed to all the members of the parish community. However, one of the challenges that we all face daily is: “What can I do?” The answer is quite simple, and it requires three “B’s”:

The First “B”

Be informed. One of the sad realities that happened in our town hall meeting is when parishioners were asking us to begin programs that have already been established in our parish. It is imperative that we are “informed” of the various ministries of the parish. Some of the ministries may not seem to relate to our group, to our needs, or to our interests. Yet, when we are informed we become much more effective in our ability to help others. In this section it is not my intention to simply inform you about what our parish is doing, but to empower you to see what you can do to become more involved. Another way that we, as a parish can be informed is for the parish to have a quick guide for parishioners who may be in need. Here is an example: You are standing at the end of Mass having a doughnut and someone asks: “Is there a place I could get a meal?” Having a “quick guide” of parish and community programs available, allows you to share information about programs and hotline numbers and ways of getting this person the help they need. This booklet will be available in our parish office, sacristy, and throughout the Church so that if someone ever comes in need and asks the question: “Where can I get some help?” – we will have the answer at our fingertips. Sometimes being approached by someone in need occurs at an inconvenient time, but please recall what our Lord said in the Bible: “When I was hungry you gave me to eat...” (Cf. Matthew 25:31-46)

The Second “B”

Be generous. This seems almost obvious and one thing that I have noticed about our parishioners is that you are all so generous. Your generosity is noticeable and it is so appreciated. With a thankful heart, I ask that your generosity continues. Let me say it again and again—our parish has and continues to shine in this area and when I say it I mean it! We give back and we should be proud of this. Thank you for your financial generosity. However, I place before you a challenge, and that is to fully share of your time and talents too! Be assured that the old adage is so true: Many hands make light work! However, what happens if we want to get involved but we do not know how to—what do we do then? The answer is simple—we will make it easier for you. I am going to make it my priority that if and when someone desires to assist in some aspect of Social Justice that we will have the resources and information available to you. There is nothing more discouraging to hear than when someone says: “I tried to get involved but I never felt welcomed.” or worse, “I was never called back!” My friends this section is being offered to us all so that each and every one of us realizes the importance and the need to give back to God and His people what He so generously has given to us!

The Third “B”

Be JOYFUL. I have chosen to capitalize the word JOYFUL because I believe it is so imperative that joy be the overarching theme in Social Justice. Why? Let me paraphrase a quote from St. Teresa of Calcutta: “The religious is to take four vows: Poverty, Chasity, Obedience, and Joy. The reason Joy is included is because the sick and suffering do not need a crabby nun taking care of them!” My brothers and sisters the same is true for our social justice outreach. As a parish we need to share the love and devotion of Jesus Christ with the whole world, and recall what our Lord told the Apostles as they began their public ministry:

After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others whom he sent ahead of him in pairs to every town and place he intended to visit. He said to them, “The harvest is abundant but the laborers are few; so ask the master of the harvest to send out laborers for his harvest. Go on your way; behold, I am sending you like lambs among wolves. Carry no money bag, no sack, no sandals; and greet no one along the way. Into whatever house you enter, first say, ‘Peace to this household.’ If a peaceful person lives there, your peace will rest on him; but if not, it will return to you. Stay in the same house and eat and drink what is offered to you, for the laborer deserves his payment. Do not move about from one house to another. Whatever town you enter and they welcome you, eat what is set before you, cure the sick in it and say to them, ‘The kingdom of God is at hand for you.’ (Lk 10:1-9).

As the Lord has instructed the Apostles so the Lord also instructs us as well—go and proclaim! May the invitation of the Lord Jesus Christ aid us in our willingness and desire to follow Him.

Section #6 Hospitality

“The joy of the gospel fills the hearts and lives of all who encounter Jesus. Those who accept his offer of salvation are set free from sin, sorrow, inner emptiness and loneliness. With Christ joy is constantly born anew. In this Exhortation I wish to encourage the Christian faithful to embark upon a new chapter of evangelization marked by this joy, while pointing out new paths for the Church’s journey in years to come.” (*EVANGELII GAUDIUM Par. #1*)

As our Holy Father has said in his Apostolic Exhortation the theme of Joy should pervade all of what we do, say, and become in the spreading of the Good News of Jesus Christ. Yet, sadly, many people in our world today do not experience the joy that comes from the knowledge of Jesus Christ. Often, Mass is not a time of celebration but it is viewed as drudgery. The sacrament of reconciliation is not an encounter with Jesus but something to be feared and avoided. And parishioners who come to Mass often view the experience so “narrowly” that they totally miss the beauty of gathering with the Body of Christ to raise our collective voices in worship and praise. One example of this is when one defends their pew as if it were private property rather than a seat for brothers and sisters to gather as family! Now, this is a general observation and one that cannot be applied to all parishioners, but one of the things that I have heard about our parish is: “We are the most welcoming of all parishes!” And, in the same day I have also heard: “We are the most unwelcoming of all parishes!” Who is right? Both! Our parish can be welcoming and unfriendly at the same time. Yet, realistically I cannot change people’s attitudes, but what I can do is to encourage people to respond to God’s invitation more readily.

We have all been blessed with the Gifts of the Holy Spirit. These were given to us at baptism and strengthened at our time of confirmation. If we allow the Holy Spirit, and His Gifts, to work within us, the Bible tells us that we will experience the Fruits of the Holy Spirit. “*But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control ...*” (Galatians 5:22-23a) With that being said, we are all challenged to examine our lives and see if we “live” the Fruits. If not, we are called to amend our lives. With the Gifts and the Fruits of the Holy Spirit alive within us, hospitality is a natural outgrowth. We begin to feel God working in our lives and we begin to see God present in those around us. If you struggle in reaching out to others in warmth and love, and we all do at times, I encourage you to start by coming to

confession and then spending time in Adoration asking our good and loving God for His help along this journey. I also propose the following ways we, as a parish can become a more welcoming environment.

The Parish is a family

Just as was our upbringing in the home, so is our parish today—we are a big family with many members and just as many ideas that accompany that. Yet, one thing remains, all of us desire to know we are welcomed in the parish. I invite us all to remember what Jesus said to the sheep in Matthew’s Gospel: “When I was a stranger you welcomed me!” (Cf. Matthew 25:35) My friends all of us need to be part of the “welcoming committee” of the parish because regardless of the time we have been in this parish we need to welcome the stranger among us.

The Parish is a community

One of the sad realities is when we have people who say things like: “I am spiritual but not religious!” What they are saying is that I pray to God in my own way, as I feel like it, and when it suits my schedule! Yet, we are not to be separate from one another – we are called to be in communion with one another: “The LORD God said: It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suited to him.” (Gen 2:18) In the very beginning of creation God made us to be in communion with one another and, as such, we need to follow through on our community involvement. As a community we can invite people to various activities, the parish will try and offer opportunities to gather as a community, but the best invitation that can be given is the personal one: Namely, we need to personally invite and let people know that they are welcomed at our church!

The Parish is an oasis

One of the greatest compliments a parish could receive is when we are told how welcoming we are. Recall these words from the Acts of the Apostles:

“The community of believers was of one heart and mind, and no one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they had everything in common. With great power the apostles bore witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great favor was accorded them all. There was no needy person among them, for those who owned property or houses would sell them, bring the proceeds of the sale, and put them at the feet of the apostles, and they were distributed to each according to need.” (ACTs 4:32-35)

As we can read from the earliest days of the Church, the Christian community is meant to be an oasis for all people. My friends, I want and desire that our parish also becomes that oasis for the people who come to us. And, as such, I propose that we begin to implement the following ways of our parish:

The first is to pray for all members of the community at least once a week. There is not a day that goes by without someone asking me for prayers, If they are asking me for prayers then why do we not pray for each other and our church once a week? Now this does not need to be a formal

prayer at the church but, once a week, we need to unite ourselves in prayer for the parishioners of Immaculate Conception.

The second is to invite people back to Church. My friends you are the surest way of getting people to return to the faith. Asking someone to come back to Church may require us to “step out” of our comfort zone, but if it means bringing someone back to the faith then it is all worth it.

The third is to welcome the stranger among us. Yes, people have been coming here for years but maybe we could say, “I am not sure I know your name, my name is...and you are?” I am not implying that we will become the best of friends, but the more people feel welcomed the more likely they will be coming back to the Church.

My brothers and sisters this section is brief, but the Church cannot provide programs for the ways that we can change ourselves. If you say, “I am introverted” then I say to you, “so am I!” Each of us is required to “step out” of our comfort zones and embrace the call of Christ.

Conclusion

The Pastoral Plan of Immaculate Conception Parish is meant to help us on our journey of faith. This pastoral plan is not the end of the discussion; rather, it is meant to begin the discussion. To assist me in implementing this plan I have asked that our former parish council reps would serve on a new committee with me. Our intention is to meet quarterly and to evaluate and provide feedback on which parts of the pastoral plan are working and which need some help.

Please know that this parish pastoral plan you are reading has been reviewed thoroughly by the members of the Staff of Immaculate Conception Parish, the Pastoral Planning Committee, and the members of the ad hoc committees which were: Liturgical/Worship, Teaching, Social Justice and Hospitality. I submit this plan to you, the parishioners of Immaculate Conception Parish as the foundation of our future.

Be assured of my gratitude for you and for all that you do for our parish.

Sincerely Yours in Christ,
Fr. Timothy Kalista
September 11, 2016