

CORE MISSION PRIORITIES WORKBOOK



INSTITUTE FOR
Evangelization

Questions? Concerns?

For questions or concerns about Parish Renewal, please contact:

Director of Office of Parish Renewal

320 Cathedral Street | Baltimore, MD

21201 Phone: 410-547-5488

Executive Director of Institute for Evangelization

320 Cathedral Street | Baltimore, MD 21201

Phone: 410-547-5420 | Fax: 410-625-8481

CORE MISSION PRIORITIES WORKBOOK

Introduction

The Goal: Missionary Conversion

The goal of the Parish Renewal process is missionary conversion. What is “missionary conversion”?

Missionary conversion is the fruit of an encounter and enduring friendship with Jesus Christ that changes your heart and your life and makes you a “missionary disciple”:

“Every Christian is a missionary to the extent that he or she has encountered the love of God in Christ Jesus: we no longer say that we are ‘disciples’ and ‘missionaries’, but rather that we are always ‘missionary disciples’. ... Here we find the source and inspiration of all our efforts at evangelization. For if we have received the love which restores meaning to our lives, how can we fail to share that love with others?” (Pope Francis, *The Joy of the Gospel*, 8)

When missionary disciples come together in a parish community, they desire to embrace what Pope Francis calls the “missionary option”:

“I dream of a ‘missionary option’, that is, 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.” (Pope Francis, *The Joy of the Gospel*, 27)

When missionary disciples embrace the “missionary option” in their parish it becomes what Archbishop Lori calls a “center of evangelization.”

Pope Francis’s words deserve serious, prayerful reflection. However, words alone cannot answer questions such as:

How do you have a personal encounter – or renewed encounter – with Jesus Christ? How do you live out “missionary discipleship” in the messiness and challenges of your own daily life? In your own parish and community? What steps can you take in your parish to become a “center of evangelization” and evangelize “today’s world?”

Answering these questions and discovering for yourself the “source and inspiration” for missionary conversion comes through prayer, action, reflection, and the grace of the Holy Spirit. This deeper knowledge and divine inspiration is what we hope you discover as you move through this process as a community of faith.

FOUR GUIDING PRINCIPLES

We offer these guiding principles of spiritual discernment to serve as constant touchstones throughout the renewal process:

1. **Make Planning Prayerful:** Whenever you discuss God’s plan for your parish, take time to stop, pray, and listen to the Holy Spirit. The Lord does have a plan and He wants to share it with you. “Unless the LORD build the house, they labor in vain who build.” Ps. 127
2. **Go and Bear Fruit that will Last:** Jesus said to the Apostles, “I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit that will last.” (John 15:16) Therefore, “An evangelizing community is always concerned with fruit, because the Lord wants her to be fruitful.” (The Joy of the Gospel, 24) Bearing fruit means making new disciples of Jesus Christ. Making a habit of asking this question will help you be intentional about everything you do as a parish: is this bearing fruit? Why or why not? How could it bear more fruit?
3. **Be of One Mind and One Heart:** Sharing one vision will make your parish a vibrant center of evangelization. Fostering such unity of mind and heart allows you to discern and implement a Spirit-led process of missionary conversion and turn all you do into clear pathways to discipleship. This exercise is an opportunity to do just that.
4. **Take on the Smell of the Sheep:** Pope Francis’s vivid image gets to the heart of a mission-focused renewal process. Evangelizing others is impossible unless you can prove to them that you really know them and care about them. That is why offering friendship and building a truly welcoming community for all is so important. If you seek out and begin to see the world through the eyes of those you want to reach, your discernment will always have a missionary focus. God calls you and your parish, just as He called Jesus, “to seek and save the lost.” (Luke 19:10)

PLANNING FOR MISSIONARY CONVERSION WITH THE CORE MISSION PRIORITIES

A Vision of the Whole:

Jesus said, “I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever remains in me and I in him will bear much fruit, because without me you can do nothing. ... By this is my Father glorified, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples.” John 15: 5, 8

This metaphor can help us understand the six Core Mission Priorities, which serve as guiding principles for your discernment. They describe six different but inseparable aspects of a vibrant, growing, and evangelizing parish.



Liturgy



Welcome



Encounter



Accompaniment



Sending



Mission Support



LITURGY

“Liturgy” is like the sun in the sky. Without it, a Vine cannot take root, grow, or bear fruit because the Eucharist is the source and summit of Christian life. The liturgy should welcome, form, make, and send forth missionary disciples to evangelize and serve others.

WELCOME

God’s Word needs good soil to take root, grow, and bear fruit. We need to prepare the soil of peoples’ hearts to receive God’s Word through radical hospitality, community, and reaching out to those on the peripheries. This creates a sense of belonging, trust, and openness to God’s grace.



ENCOUNTER

“Encounter” is the planting of the seed in good soil, allowing it to take root and begin to grow. It refers to the personal experience of Christ’s love that transforms your heart and inspires a decision to live as a missionary disciple of Jesus Christ.



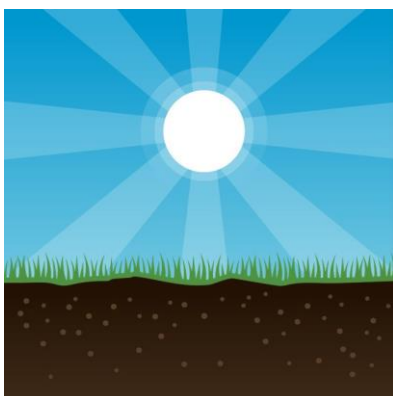
ACCOMPANIMENT

Planted in good soil and nourished by the sun, the vine grows and flourishes. “Accompaniment” means missionary disciples helping each other to grow spiritually and to live the gospel more fully through prayer, sacrament, faith formation, and friendship.



SENDING

A truly healthy vine always produces good fruit. The goal of “Sending” is the spiritual fruit that missionary disciples produce in their lives and communities through personal witness, service, friendship, and invitation.



MISSION SUPPORT

A vine cannot thrive and produce fruit without a “trellis” to support it. “Mission Support” refers to everything necessary to make the mission possible in the real world: finances, facilities, HR, development, communications, and more.

Together these Core Mission Priorities will guide your discernment as your parish seeks to become a “center of evangelization” that bears lasting fruit. Your parish will discover its own unique way of realizing this goal. But there is no doubt that God will lead your parish step by step to make missionary disciples in how it worships, prays, welcomes, evangelizes, forms, sends them forth, and supports its mission.

EXERCISES FOR DISCERNMENT

The following six Core Mission Priority exercises are suggestions and optional tools to help you in your discernment. For each exercise, the following is included:

1. **Opening Prayer**
2. **Lectio Divina**
3. **Reflection Questions for Group Discussion**
 - a. **Personal**
 - b. **Parish**
4. **Prayer Break**
5. **Assessment of Mission Priority (worksheet)**
6. **Visioning: Opportunities and Challenges (white board)**
7. **Next Steps**



CORE MISSION
PRIORITY #1:
LITURGY



CORE MISSION PRIORITY #1: LITURGY

Lectio Divina

“And it happened that, while he was with them at table, he took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them. With that their eyes were opened and they recognized him, but he vanished from their sight. Then they said to each other, ‘Were not our hearts burning [within us] while he spoke to us on the way and opened the scriptures to us?’ So they set out at once and returned to Jerusalem where they found gathered together the eleven and those with them who were saying, ‘The Lord has truly been raised and has appeared to Simon!’ Then the two recounted what had taken place on the way and how he was made known to them in the breaking of the bread.” (Luke 24:30-35)

Goal: Vibrant Liturgies

Summary:

The Church calls us to strive for “a conscious, active, and full participation of the faithful” at Mass. Your hospitality, music, preaching, and every aspect and detail of liturgical ministry should aim at this goal. With your participation, Christ wants to welcome, encounter, feed, transform, heal, teach, and send forth his people on mission at every Mass.

With this in mind, the following questions can help you reflect on liturgy from a personal perspective:

QUESTIONS FOR DISCERNMENT

- How did you arrive at your own understanding and love of the Mass?
- If someone asked you to define why you are Catholic, would the Eucharist be a part of your definition? Why or why not?
- What role does daily or weekly Mass have in your life?
- In what way is the Eucharist the “source and summit” of your Christian life?
Can you give examples?
- Are you able to enter into prayer and worship at Mass without distractions?
Why or why not?
- How do you prepare yourself for Mass? Do you take time to reflect on the readings?
Do you seek to grow in your understanding of the Eucharist?



CORE MISSION PRIORITY #1: LITURGY

Now take some time to reflect on your parish's experience of liturgy as a community:

1. Is our entire liturgical celebration “arranged in such a way that it leads to a conscious, active and full participation of the faithful?”
2. Have we offered adequate resources on the liturgy, such as worship aids, adult formation sessions, online resources, etc., to ensure that the assembly knows “why they are doing, what they are doing, when they are doing it”?
3. How do we make the connection between liturgy and daily life apparent? Do our liturgies teach the faith, offer spiritual renewal, and send us out to share the Good News of the Gospel and serve our neighbors?
4. Do the homilies engage and lead the assembly into a deeper understanding of the readings and the liturgical year?
5. Are parishioners encouraged to share their talents in liturgical ministry and do our liturgical ministers reflect the demographic of our parish?
6. Does music enhance worship and serve the liturgy? Why or why not?
7. Do we have a number of liturgies at which the sanctuary is less than half-full?
8. Do our liturgies and devotional prayer opportunities fill the spiritual needs of our entire parish community?
9. How do we minister to those who are unable to be physically present at the liturgy?





CORE MISSION
PRIORITY #2:
WELCOME



CORE MISSION PRIORITY #2: WELCOME

Lectio Divina

“Do not neglect hospitality, for through it some have unknowingly entertained angels.” Hebrews 13:2

Alternative Scripture Readings:

Goal: Belonging

Summary: to practice radical hospitality and welcome others as Jesus did, seeking out the disenfranchised and vulnerable and creating a sense of fellowship, belonging, and community grounded in love for each other and humble gratitude to God.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCERNMENT:

Most church-going Catholics believe their parish is very welcoming. In fact, it's often what they love most about their parish. However, a mission-focused hospitality challenges us to be intentional, creative, and spare no effort to make those who are not coming to our parish to feel welcome, valued, and at home. With this in mind, the following questions can help us reflect on welcome from a personal perspective:

- What was the most joyful experience of welcome and hospitality that you have experienced? What made it so joyful?
- What was your most joyful experience of offering someone else welcome and hospitality?
- Describe an experience in which you felt unwelcome and excluded. Why do you think that happened? What might have made it a better experience for you?



CORE MISSION PRIORITY #2: WELCOME

Now take some time to reflect on your parish's experience of welcome as a community:

1. In what ways does your parish already do an exceptional job at welcoming and fostering a sense of belonging in your parish?
2. Would someone feel welcome at your parish if their first encounter was:
 - a. your website?
 - b. your social media?
 - c. calling during office hours?
 - d. calling after office hours?
 - e. showing up for Mass on Sunday?
 - f. stopping by unannounced on a weekday?
3. Do you know who the "forgotten ones" are in your parish's territory? What efforts do you make to invite and welcome them to your parish? What more could be done to invite them and make them feel welcome and at home?
4. How do we welcome and provide community for other specific groups within our parish, such as youth, young adults, college students, the elderly, the homebound?
5. Has anyone ever felt unwelcome in your parish? Who and why? What specifically could have prevented each instance?
6. Who lives in your community but might not have access to your parish and therefore feel unwelcome, such as those with physical disabilities, the deaf and hard of hearing, the visually impaired, and so on?
7. Who are those in your community who come to your parish for Christmas and Easter but are not present throughout the year? What would we have to do to welcome this person and perhaps this person's family to come back again?
8. Describe the most representative person in your community who does not come to your parish, from the house the person lives in, to the neighborhood, to the kind of work the person does, to the size family the person has. What specifically would make your parish more welcoming for that person?





CORE MISSION
PRIORITY #3:
ENCOUNTER



Lectio Divina

“Jesus came, although the doors were locked, and stood in their midst and said, ‘Peace be with you.’ Then he said to Thomas, ‘Put your finger here and see my hands, and bring your hand and put it into my side, and do not be unbelieving, but believe.’ Thomas answered and said to him, ‘My Lord and my God!’.” John 20:26-29

Goal: Conversion

Summary: “Encounter” is the life-changing personal encounter with Jesus Christ, unique to every person, that leads to conversion of heart and a life of discipleship, ongoing conversion, and evangelization of others.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCERNMENT:

Reflect on the following questions in light of these passages from Pope Francis:

“I invite all Christians, everywhere, at this very moment, to a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ, or at least an openness to letting him encounter them; I ask all of you to do this unfailingly each day. No one should think that this invitation is not meant for him or her, since ‘no one is excluded from the joy brought by the Lord’. The Lord does not disappoint those who take this risk; whenever we take a step towards Jesus, we come to realize that he is already there, waiting for us with open arms.” (The Joy of the Gospel, 3)

“Every Christian is a missionary to the extent that he or she has encountered the love of God in Christ Jesus: we no longer say that we are ‘disciples’ and ‘missionaries’, but rather that we are always ‘missionary disciples’. If we are not convinced, let us look at those first disciples, who, immediately after encountering the gaze of Jesus, went forth to proclaim him joyfully: ‘We have found the Messiah!’ (Jn 1:41). The Samaritan woman became a missionary immediately after speaking with Jesus and many Samaritans come to believe in him ‘because of the woman’s testimony’ (Jn 4:39). So too, Saint Paul, after his encounter with Jesus Christ, ‘immediately proclaimed Jesus’ (Acts 9:20). So what are we waiting for?” (The Joy of the Gospel, 120)

With this in mind, the following questions can help us reflect on encounter from a personal perspective:

- How and when did you first encounter Christ? What effect did this encounter have on you and your life? Have you been able to share your story of personal encounter and conversion with others?
- Have you ever gone out of your way to encounter others and share Christ with them? Why or why not?
- Take some time to share your own personal faith story with others in your group.



CORE MISSION PRIORITY #3: ENCOUNTER

Now take some time to reflect on your parish's experience of "Encounter" as a community:

1. Are you intentional in your parish about fostering and providing opportunities for personal encounters with Christ? If so, please give examples.
2. Please share any instances in which people experienced real personal conversion because of the efforts of your parish or someone who belongs to your parish.
3. Is most of what you are doing in the parish waiting for others to come to you, or do you go out to encounter others? How and why?
4. Jesus reached out to people in the middle of their daily activity. How do you form members of your parish to share their faith story with others in their daily lives?
5. If someone expressed a desire for a personal encounter with Christ, how would your parish respond?
6. Do you take the first step to encounter those who may feel estranged or unwelcome in your parish community?





**CORE MISSION
PRIORITY #4:
ACCOMPANIMENT**



Lectio Divina

Then the angel of the Lord spoke to Philip, “Get up and head south on the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza, the desert route.” So he got up and set out. Now there was an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of the Candace, that is, the queen of the Ethiopians, in charge of her entire treasury, who had come to Jerusalem to worship, and was returning home. Seated in his chariot, he was reading the prophet Isaiah. The Spirit said to Philip, “Go and join up with that chariot.” Philip ran up and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet and said, “Do you understand what you are reading?” He replied, “How can I, unless someone instructs me?” So he invited Philip to get in and sit with him.

Then Philip opened his mouth and, beginning with this scripture passage, he proclaimed Jesus to him. As they traveled along the road they came to some water, and the eunuch said, ‘Look, there is water. What is to prevent my being baptized?’ Then he ordered the chariot to stop, and Philip and the eunuch both went down into the water, and he baptized him. When they came out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away, and the eunuch saw him no more, but continued on his way rejoicing.” Acts 8:26-39

Goal: Spiritual Growth

Summary: Accompaniment means entering into friendship with others and growing as disciples in order to nurture growth in others as we study, share, and live out the teachings of Christ and his Church through prayer, sacraments, faith formation, and education.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCERNMENT

In our parishes, we most often accompany people through faith formation programs and ministries. Yet, if we are going to respond wholeheartedly to the call to missionary discipleship, we need to ask ourselves whether the ways we accompany people today are responding to the needs of today. As Pope Francis says, to be faithful is to change because our mission takes place in a constantly changing world.

With this in mind, the following questions can help us reflect on accompaniment from a personal perspective:

- When did you first “own” your faith and consider yourself a disciple of Christ and an active member of the Catholic Church?
- Who has accompanied you most in your life of faith? What are the fruits of their accompaniment in your life?
- What has helped you most to grow spiritually as a disciple in the past year?
- What are the biggest obstacles that you encounter today to growing spiritually as Christ’s disciple?



CORE MISSION PRIORITY #4: ACCOMPANIMENT

Now take some time to reflect on your parish's experience of "Accompaniment" as a community:

1. How does your parish effectively accompany others in their spiritual lives?
2. What new areas do you believe God is calling your parish to explore in terms of accompanying others in their faith journey?
3. How are those who are hurting or marginalized in your parish accompanied and shown the love and mercy of Christ?
4. How do you support people who are questioning their faith, are experiencing spiritual dryness, or are angry with God?
5. What opportunities are available to people in your parish for friendship and fellowship as they go through the different seasons of life and the unique struggles that arise in each?





CORE MISSION
PRIORITY #5:
SENDING



Lectio Divina

“On the evening of that first day of the week, when the doors were locked, where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst and said to them, ‘Peace be with you.’ When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. The disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. [Jesus] said to them again, ‘Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.’ And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, ‘Receive the holy Spirit.’” (John 20:19-22)

Goal: Making Disciples

Summary: “Sending” means bringing Christ to the world, living out missionary discipleship, and serving the poor and those in need.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCERNMENT:

The word “Mass” comes from missa, Latin for “send”. When we receive Jesus in the Eucharist, He sends us forth to make Him present to others, no matter where they might be. We received this mission from the Lord first through baptism and we take it up in many ways. We serve others through material and pastoral care and by sharing with them through our witness and words the Good News of Jesus Christ’s life, death, and resurrection. Pope Francis said, “Jesus teaches us another way: Go out! Go out and share your testimony, go out and share, go out and ask. Become the Word in body as well as spirit.”

With this in mind, the following questions can help us reflect on sending from a personal perspective:

- Do you have a role model who exemplifies a life of service and evangelization? What have you learned from this person? In what ways do you differ?
- What are some of the obstacles that keep you from carrying out Christ’s mission to make more disciples?
- How are you living out the “missionary” dimension of your own missionary discipleship? How might the Lord be asking you to go deeper and bear more fruit for Him through your daily interactions?
- What was your first experience of sharing Jesus with those who did not yet know Him? What came of it? What kind of experience was it? Exciting? Scary? Disappointing? Why?



CORE MISSION PRIORITY #5: SENDING

Now take some time to reflect on your parish's experience of sending as a community:

1. How and in what ways is the mission to go and make disciples preached and taught to your parishioners?
2. Is there a "culture of silence" in your parish, or are there opportunities for people to share their faith with others within the parish? How are your parishioners encouraged to share their faith with others outside the parish in their daily lives?
3. Do your parishioners feel equipped to answer questions about their Catholic faith?
4. Are the prevailing images of evangelization in your parish negative (imposing your beliefs on others) or positive (sharing the joy of God's love with friends)?
5. Do your outreach activities correspond to the real and often hidden needs in your surrounding communities?
6. How can your opportunities for service also become occasions to share the gospel of Jesus with others?
7. Does your parish have a process for discerning parishioners' gifts and callings?
8. How does your parish call new and existing members to mission and service?
9. **Prayer Break:** Have your group take a few minutes in silent prayer to ask the Lord to reveal what the Holy Spirit is saying to you and to your parish through your reflections and conversations.





CORE MISSION
PRIORITY #6:
M I S S I O N
S U P P O R T



CORE MISSION PRIORITY #6: MISSION SUPPORT

Lectio Divina

“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.” Acts 2:42-47

Goal: Mission-Focused Parish

Summary: “Mission Support” means practicing wise stewardship of God’s gifts so that all of our resources work together to support and further the mission of making missionary disciples and serving our neighbors.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCERNMENT:

Mission Support encompasses everything that makes it possible to live the Gospel as a community of faith in today’s world. More than that, it points to the challenge of allowing that “missionary impulse” to transform “everything” in your parish – finances, facilities, human resources, technology, communications, and more – so that you can be faithful and effective in your mission to make missionary disciples. In every detail, the question: “how will this help us make missionary disciples?” should lead your discernment and decision making process.

With this in mind, reflect on the following questions with your group to help you discern how your many areas of mission support are (or are not) supporting your mission to make missionary disciples:

- I. Stewardship:
 - a. In what ways does your parish connect giving “time, talent, and treasure” to missionary discipleship?
 - b. What are the top fundraising priorities in your parish and how do they serve the mission?
 - c. Do parishioners see and experience the fruits of their gifts of time, talent, and treasure? Do they feel they “own” and identify with everything the parish does with their support?
 - d. How do you respond to someone who wants to serve in some way at your parish when there is, and when there is not, an opportunity?



CORE MISSION PRIORITY #6: MISSION SUPPORT

2. Finances:

- a. Do financial considerations centered on parish self-preservation lead the decision making process when discussing budget-related issues?
- b. Based on experience, what are the most important criteria used for planning your budget by order of priority? Where does making missionary disciples fall in your list?
- c. What does your budget reveal about the real-life priorities of your parish's culture?
- d. In what way does the need for long-term planning for mission and investment in future renewal and growth enter your budget planning process?

3. Human Resources:

- a. Would you describe your parish leadership team, pastor, staff, and parish council, as unified, collaborative, and focused on the same mission with the same vision? What steps might you take to counter the tendencies to work in separate silos with separate agendas and interests?
- b. Do members of your parish staff hold each other, including the pastor, appropriately accountable? Why or why not?
- c. Are there any gifts or skill sets important for your mission that your current pastor, staff, and council are not able to provide?
- d. Are the members of your parish staff, council, and volunteers representative of your community?
Are there any groups in your community whom your parish leadership does not adequately represent?

4. Facilities:

- a. What are the main criteria used in the discernment and decision-making process for determining the use or future use of your facilities?
- b. Are there any groups, internal or external to your parish, who use the facilities but do not contribute meaningfully to your parish's mission to make missionary disciples?
- c. Does your current use of facilities anticipate future decline, stagnation, or growth? On what are these decisions based?
- d. Are your facilities safe, accessible to all in your community, well maintained, and easily found?

5. Technology:

- a. Does your use of and investment in technology reflect your efforts to make missionary disciples in the digital age?
- b. Does your parish have the tools to meet people, especially youth and young adults, where they're at when it comes to technology?
- c. Do you have someone who is responsible to make sure the parish is using and always updating and improving its use of technology for your mission?



CORE MISSION PRIORITY #6: MISSION SUPPORT

6. Communications:

- a. What are the most effective ways your parish currently communicates? How do you know?
- b. Do your communication tools and services reflect how your people actually communicate with each other in their daily lives outside the parish?
- c. Do you ask your parishioners how they would prefer you to communicate with them? Do you give them any options?
- d. Do you have a strategy for how you use your communication tools or are the bulletin, announcements, website, email, social media, voice mail, bulletin board, and signage separated from one another in day-to-day use?
- e. What impression does your parish give to outsiders: a community that prioritizes, values, and welcomes them, or a community that is more focused on its current active members?
- f. Is your website and social media presence effective? How do you know? Who updates your website and maintains your social media presence and how often?

