



H o p e s a n d N e e d s

a conversation at Saint Mary Catholic Community

Introduction

In the winter of 2017, the recently formed Diocesan Pastoral Council (DPC) solicited parish input concerning its formulation of priorities to be submitted to Bishop Thomas regarding future priorities for the Diocese of Helena. Each parish was asked to conduct a parish input session aided by diocesan guidelines.

At our parish, four parish input sessions were convened (March 16, 26, 29, and 31), with more than seventy parishioners participating at afternoon or evening sessions. The results were reported in the parish bulletin of April 23, 2017. We understood these sessions to be important not only for the purposes of the DPC, but also for our own parish, serving as the beginning of a conversation about our parish.

The success of a parish is, in part, influenced by the vision articulated by the pastor with the collaboration of the pastoral staff and the parish councils. All have had a role in the presentation of these hopes and needs, aware of our mission “to live and proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ through worship, service and community, taking seriously Jesus’ command to ‘Do This in Memory of Me.’ ” (Parish Mission Statement).

Synthesis

The hopes and needs summarized in our parish report to the DPC can be grouped as seven areas of focus for the sake of our conversation. In no particular order, these are: lay leadership, youth, justice, security, Mary, stability, and community. Clearly, these categories do not encompass the breadth of concerns or possibilities in parish life and ministry at Saint Mary, but these categories represent topics which arose as our conversation began.

This conversation is not just about attention to tasks, but also about our full, conscious and active participation in the life of our parish; we are always in the prayerful process of becoming the faith community we are called and blessed to be. Recall a passage from the gospel:

As (Jesus) was setting out on a journey, a man ran up, knelt down before him and asked him, “Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus answered him, “Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. You know the commandments: You shall not kill; you shall not commit adultery; you shall not steal; you shall not bear false witness; you shall not defraud; honor your father and mother.” He replied and said to him, “Teacher, all of these I have observed from my youth.” Jesus looked at him, loved him and said to him, “You are lacking in one thing. Go, sell what you have and give to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.” At that statement his face fell, and he went away sad, for he had many possessions. (Mark 10:17-22)

Unwittingly, the young man placed limits on his discipleship. He thought that fulfilling a narrow understanding of the commandments was sufficient. Jesus invited him to a new way of thinking. He turned down the invitation and went away sad, resigned to grow no further. He was a young man, presumably with years ahead of him. What became of him? More importantly, what could he have become?

Similarly, recall this exchange between Jesus and one of the scribes:

One of the scribes...asked, "Which is the first of all the commandments?" Jesus replied, "The first is this: Hear O Israel! The Lord our God is Lord alone! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength. The second is this: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these." The scribe said to him, "Well said, teacher. You are right in saying, He is One and there is no other than he. And to love him with all your heart, with all your understanding, with all your strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself is worth more than all burnt offerings and sacrifices." And when Jesus saw that he answered with understanding, he said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." And no one dared to ask him any more questions. (Mark 12:28-34)

The scribe answered with understanding, showing an integration of daily life and religious ritual. Nevertheless, Jesus does not tell him to take it easy and do no more. Rather, he says, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." In other words, the scribe is advised to draw even closer to the Lord and his ways.

These scriptures remind us that being a people of the kingdom means (a) taking a risk (Mark 10:17-23) and (b) integrating daily life and religious ritual (Mark 12:28-34). It means always moving forward, closer to the God who calls us. Closer. Always, closer.

Our conversation is precisely about this: drawing closer to the Lord, risking and integrating, all in service of our full, conscious, and active participation in the life and mission of our parish.

Areas of Focus

Lay Leadership

Parishioners appreciate that Saint Mary is blessed with many lay leaders who are well-formed in faith and spirituality. The vitality of our parish during a ten year period in which a succession of many priests served the parish bears witness to this, for the vitality of a parish is the vitality of its ministries.

In order to grow in this area of focus, our conversation may consider the following:

- What local or global needs present opportunities for new ministries? In recent years, our awareness of homelessness has given rise to the Family Promise ministry; our awareness of hunger has given rise to the Jubilee Garden ministry; our awareness of injustice has given rise to the Saint Francis Peace through Justice Ministry.
- What can we do to ensure that lay leadership is strengthened? Each year our parish ministry fair invites parishioners to embrace new ministries, but what can lay leaders do to reinforce this?

A particular focus concerned parishioners other than staff members taking more responsibility in parish life.

- Can we support pot-luck parish dinners which will be fully coordinated by lay leaders involved in various ministries of the parish? Recently, the Saint Francis Peace through Justice Ministry coordinated such an event which was enjoyed by many.
- Can we support frequent lay presiders at liturgies such as Novena to the Holy Spirit, Marian Prayer Services, and Evening Prayer? Lay presiders have served in circumstances of need, but can this be done more frequently?

Our hopes and needs remind us that gifts for ministry are poured out generously on all members of our community.

Youth

Saint Mary Catholic Community has a long history of youth ministry. We are particularly advantaged at this time with a full-time youth minister who works with our Director of Faith Formation. We recognize our responsibilities to youth, who are future leaders in the church.

In order to grow in this area of focus, our conversation may consider the following:

- How can we support and increase the participation of parish youth in formative experiences, including local opportunities such as summer programs at Legendary Lodge, as well as the broadening experience of the National Catholic Youth Conference?
- How can we strengthen our invitation for youth to engage in parish-wide ministry, such as liturgical and outreach ministries?
- How can we affirm the God-given gifts we see in our youth, especially gifts for ministry?
- How can we better mentor our youth?

Our hopes and needs remind us that our youth are more likely to become future leaders in our parish if they are engaged in parish life now.

Justice

Parishioners here at Saint Mary appreciate that justice is a hallmark of our life as a faith community. We have heard the prophetic call to do what is right, to love goodness, and to walk humbly with God. (Micah 6:8b) Through the light of the gospel, have seen how Jesus embraced this in his public ministry. We already serve a broad array of human needs, and we recognize that many of these needs arise from societal or institutional injustice.

In order to grow in this area of focus, our conversation may consider the following:

- How can we be more respectful of the God-given human dignity shared by all people, especially those who are in some way different?
- Have we condoned injustices? Which ones? How can we change?
- What can we do to advocate for justice in the workplace, in the government, and in the church?

Our hopes and needs remind us that our world and all of its social structures are far from perfect, and that we have a chance to make things better.

Security

Our parish family is aware of a recent history of break-ins and attempted break-ins at the pastoral center and the church complex. During this time, a number of incremental measures have been taken to ensure the security of our property and our sacred space. Most recently, video cameras and alarm systems have been installed to ensure the safety of all who work and worship here, as well as all who visit. Nevertheless, as a church we need to be both responsible and welcoming.

In order to grow in this area of focus, our conversation may consider the following:

- How can we be attentive to our surroundings without becoming suspicious of people?
- How often do we take the initiative to greet and welcome newcomers?
- How can we be alert to unsafe or unusual activity on the church grounds, especially after hours?

Our hopes and needs remind us that we share responsibility for our church home.

Mary

Members of our faith community express heartfelt love for Mary, patron saint of our parish, and desire a communal celebration of this love. With a mind to develop a distinctive liturgy which is adaptable to a variety of Marian celebrations throughout the year, we experimented with a prayer service on the

Vigil of the Assumption (August 14). At least ninety people joined in prayer, with many expressing appreciation with a desire for celebrations throughout the year. Scheduling may vary due to a number of factors, but a possible schedule may include similar liturgies in coordination with celebrations of the Annunciation (March), Visitation (May), Assumption (August), and Immaculate Conception (December). This is one possibility; others may emerge in conversation.

In order to grow in this area of focus, our conversation may consider the following:

- What is our appreciation of Mary's role in the history of our salvation in Christ? How do we relate to her? As sister? As mother? As disciple?
- What is our appreciation of intercessory prayer? Christ is the intercessor to the Father, and our spiritual tradition also recognizes the communion of saints whose prayers we request, just as we ask for the prayers of family and friends. How have we prayed through the years?
- What is our appreciation of the representation of Mary in our worship space? What does it say to us about her life and her significance in the Catholic Church throughout history and up to the present day?

Our hopes and needs remind us that we have a rich and diverse appreciation of Saint Mary.

Stability

Among our many blessings is our community itself. Parishioners living generous lives are substantial cause for the success of our parish mission. Living a generous life means not only serving; it also means inviting others to serve by sharing our wisdom, knowledge, and experience. In this way, no ministry would ever cease because a particular parishioner is no longer able to serve.

In order to grow in this areas of focus, our conversation may consider the following:

- In the circumstances of our work lives and personal lives, do we generally collaborate with others or do we prefer to work alone? Would collaboration be something new for us?
- Do we see collaboration as an advantage for our parish as it moves into the future?
- Do we see a value in affirming the gifts for ministry we see in others?
- How did we first become involved in various parish ministries? Was it because of someone's invitation?

Our hopes and needs remind us that we can be responsible for our parish without being exclusive.

Community

Our parishioners deeply appreciate Saint Mary as a vibrant faith community. With good reason, we call ourselves Saint Mary Catholic Community. Community is among the most distinguishing features of our parish. Parishioners affirm that community is strengthened when we know one another better, not just names and faces, but also abilities and needs. Our parish community gathers on many occasions for a variety of purposes, but our most regular gathering is at Mass.

In order to grow in this area of focus, our conversation may consider the following:

- Are there ways we can spend more time becoming acquainted with people when we come to church for Mass, such as lingering in the gathering space, especially on hospitality weekends? First time visitors may be people looking for a place to call their church home. How can we make them feel welcome?
- Are there ways we can occasionally place ourselves in an environment such that we are sitting near different people at the Mass we usually attend so as to become better acquainted with them?
- Although a number of personal or family needs may rightly prevail, can we consider the possibility of occasionally attending a Mass apart from our general routine?
- How do we feel about occasionally introducing ourselves to someone whose name we do not know?

Our hopes and needs remind us that our everyday decisions are important to community.

Vision

Let us join the conversation, as we desire to embrace our future as Saint Mary Catholic Community by drawing closer to the Lord, risking and integrating, all in service of our full, conscious, and active participation in the life and mission of our parish. Names of Parish Pastoral Council and Parish Finance Council members are included in the weekly parish bulletin, along with contact information for our pastor and members of our pastoral staff. They all stand ready to listen to the fruits of this ongoing conversation.

Many thanks for your consideration, your share in the conversation, and for all you are and all you do as Saint Mary Catholic Community.