

Equip the Saints – 2018 Lenten Video Series Summary

April 19, 2018

Dear Parishioners,

During Lent this year, we were very fortunate to be able to gather as a community on a number of different occasions to share a meal and to listen to Archbishop Mancini talk to us about becoming communities of missionary disciples and how important it is to focus not only on structure but also on the key changes in pastoral activity that is required to bring about renewal of our parishes. Following the videos, we broke into groups and discussed what we heard and how we felt about what we heard. All of the comments were compiled and sent to the Archbishop as our feedback from Saint Thomas More Parish. The feedback as compiled follows for your review as well.

Over the next months we will be continuing our journey and sharing information. **A town hall meeting will be held on Thursday, May 10th at 6.30pm**, to give an update on the restructuring process and some of the changes that will be made in our parish soon – (like the change of Mass time). We would like parishioners to be involved in this decision making. Please send in any comments, suggestions or questions before hand or bring them along when attending the meeting or future information sessions.

On behalf of the Pastoral Council and Senior Leadership Team, I thank you for your continued support. I request that you keep our parish and the archdiocese in your prayers as we journey through this discernment process together.

In Christ,

Rev. Too-chukwu Okafor, Pastor

Session 1 – A Community of Disciples

1. What is your experience of being Catholic? How has this changed over the years?

- Our children are not following the same path we did
- Lack of faith formation today for youth and for adults
- Significant decrease in mass and parish activity attendance
- Catholic Schools played an important part in faith development and we don't have that anymore
- Cradle Catholic – didn't question anything, did what we were told, we were taught by the nuns
- Over the years have moved away from the church and have come back with a deeper faith and desire to learn more and to evangelize, have come to know Jesus in a deeper way
- Seems since Vatican 11 we are always changing and because of the changes we are leaving people behind
- Now music is the draw – it has to get better
- Nothing has changed still a problem with Power
- The key is engagement – need to draw the children in and their parents and keep them engaged
- Millennials do not believe in the church present structure – rules are too rigid and man made
- The church was credible in the past
- Instruction is watered down
- The church does not reflect current society
- Other activities are more important than church and faith

2. Do you believe that you, personally, need to propose Jesus to others?

- There does need to be a personal touch – an invitation but don't know how to do that – everyone says YES but don't know how
- Jesus is our role model – but I am not capable of this – teach me
- How to evangelize – how to do a testimony effectively
- Show people what God has done in our lives – but how
- If you are loving and caring to others that is enough people will see this

3. What do we need to do differently today as Catholics and the Church?

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- The church needs to allow and accept expression of spiritual matters
- Adult faith formation opportunities
- Invite non believers to come to communion
- Use technology better – Social Media – promote good Christian messages and show what is happening in the parishes as good news
- Get rid of buildings and focus on the people – amalgamate
- Greater focus on youth ministry and adult faith formation
- Meet people non judgementally
- Evangelize ourselves first
- Respect, remember the purpose of church and our faith
- Stop using the “rules” against us
- Send out good news stories to the media, if they don’t use them no problem but they may and lets make the church look good rather than always reacting to the bad news that is happening in the church – be more proactive
- Form hockey teams in the parishes and have a fun league of youth and of adults
- Video or tape the homilies and reflections and show on the websites and social media
- Make the rituals more meaningful for young families
- How do we attract – engage and keep those that only come on the holy days like Christmas and Easter
- Be open to invitation

Session 2 – A Culture of Discipleship – The Leaders

1. In your experience, what elements make up a parish?

- Community of Believers
- Continuous flow of communication and information
- Welcoming people from different backgrounds
- Adult faith formation – sharing of our experience allows us to come to help each other
- Need a feeling of warmth among parishioners, building relationships
- Want to be involved
- Make a cursillo followed by prayer groups
- Often have felt connected to the priest but not to the parish
- Need to train our leaders in all the ministries so everyone feels welcomed
- Would like to see a ministry of caring – so that we have an ability to identify the special needs where they exist
- We should have a funeral ministry that includes following up with the people
- Nice to see an informal gathering with the priest – coffee and tea
- We have a lot of really good, established ministries at the parish that do good work

2. In Session 2's video, AB Mancini said, "to stay alive calls for a reconfiguration of our parish network – so that we can consolidate our gifts and talents; our existing faithful and our over stretched material resources around a newer, more centrally located, better-equipped and stronger parish." How does this differ from the description discussed in question 1?

- We are hung up on the buildings – the parking lot – the roof and sold properties to pay for the buildings. We have to focus on the people not the building. We need to be more interested and focused on celebrating together in greater numbers. Work together with St. Vincent de Paul and the French parish to build the community
- Don't forget to acknowledge the parishioners that got us to this point – we seem to be spending more time on bringing in the new and unchurched and are forgetting about the older folks in the parish that have been sustaining the parishes for years.
- If/when we combine how is it possible to maintain and keep all the facilities?
- The fundamentals are the same but we need a new process for doing everything
- We would be able to draw leadership from the resources of several parishes and it would mean more people lighten the load for everyone.

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- Financial distribution would mean that we could hire some better qualified staff
- 3. What would our parishes look like with the proposed “Communion of Communities?” What would this new parish do?**
- Don’t really see a big change unless we close buildings
 - As a larger community we would have more people in the pews
 - Would be necessary to have something like connect groups
 - Lines would blur because we would all be getting to know each other
 - Confusion
 - The church is not the building and we have to drill that into people – we are adaptable
 - We would have the opportunity to appeal to the youth and younger adults which would be excellent
 - What happens to the \$\$
- 4. How would multiple churches and buildings be used in this type of parish?**
- Support each other for events
 - Staggered masses so that one priest could handle all the masses if necessary
 - Accessibility issues could be addressed
 - Church would have a greater visibility in the community because of everything we are doing in many locations
- 5. What kind of leadership is needed for this type of parish?**
- How can we get more men in the parish involved?
 - Priest that has the gifts of welcoming, evangelization and mission
 - Priest that is collaborative has the same vision as the archdiocese and is willing to let a leadership team do certain things that he does not have the skills in i.e. financial, staff management.
 - Exceptional partnership between the priest and the layity
 - Priest and leadership team need people skills
 - YOUNG people on all the significant teams, i.e. pastoral council, senior leadership, financial

Session 3 – Structured for Discipleship – The Formation

1. What gifts are needed to lead this new parish?

- Personal Gifts – encouraging new people to come forward, ability to get our youth involved
- Adaptability – there will be lots of change so a willingness to look at different ways of doing things, being open, willing to make mistakes
- Patience, sense of humour, sensitivity
- Exceptional communication skills including listening
- We need leadership training for the priests
- The things that have worked should be maintained and developed
- Welcoming
- Realizing that we all need formation
- Ability to resolve conflicts

2. In the video our AB says, “what is being envisaged here is a leadership team which involves clergy and faithful in the direction, animation and administration of this new parish, as a community of missionary disciples.” What role does the pastor play in this leadership structure?

- The pastor has to realize that his role has changed and he is now part of a leadership team and that he can't physically do everything
- Succession planning for the next pastor
- Reversal from top of the pyramid and is now a balanced influence with the laity in the parish
- The pastor is the spiritual leader
- Facilitator

What is unique to the Clergy?

- Sacraments
- Lead but not do

What can lay leaders contribute?

- Assist as pastoral ministers
- Administration, finances, human resources, management, maintenance
- Assist with reaching out to the community
- Remember that the older people in the parishes have already spent years serving

3. What are our long-standing parish practices?

- CWL and their support of the funeral receptions
- Many community based ministries, i.e. SVDP
- KOC
- Unity in programs i.e. catechetical and baptismal

How do we evaluate if they advance the mission of making disciples?

- We need to evaluate based on mission, formation, evangelization reaching to the community
- Surveys – has our culture changed?

4. What type of environment helps our parishes be places where discipleship is the norm?

- Caring and lively environment – something that gives more life to our parish
- Relevant – people need to think that it is relevant in their lives and that it is value added and makes sense
- Includes laity, their contributions, leadership and spirituality
- How do we combat all the negative media attention and show the positive to give people a reason to return to the parish
- Accessible – physically/older population
- Better welcoming each weekend, need more than just an usher saying hello at the door – nice but not enough
- More socials
- Regular youth mass
- Better music
- More events that draw the community into the parish like the Evans and Doherty
- Get rid of the gambling signs and have messages that are welcoming and shows that we are full of the holy spirit
- At STM we need more things at the parish for children

5. What do you recommend for the Church of Halifax-Yarmouth and what would you tell the Archbishop?

- That we proceed with the proposed restructuring quickly and if he needs to close buildings do it
- Promote the catholic church, share the good news, be proactive in the media
- Keep doing the surveys, it is really good information that parishes need and will be especially important in the next few years to see if what we are doing is working

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- Teach us in PLAIN LANGUAGE how to re-engage, how to evangelize and share the mission
- In the parishes we desperately need formation on how to be effective lay leaders
- More opportunities for youth, at the archdiocese don't hire anyone anymore over the age of 50 – youth need to get to know youth
- After the restructuring – stop making changes – give people time to breath
- Top down approach is not longer acceptable
- Start having more women in the archdiocese management – even with John Stevens it looks like an old boys club
- Bring back low cost Catholic Schools
- Church needs to accept gays/lesbian parishioners
- I would tell the Archbishop that he has been conciliatory long enough and now he needs to have a backbone and make the tough decisions and quit pussy footing around – lets get on with this. It is a good plan, lets go.