



**St. Francis and St. Clare of Assisi Parish
Halifax, Nova Scotia**

Pastoral Plan

As Presented by Parish Pastoral Council,
February 2025

ST. FRANCIS AND ST. CLARE OF ASSISI PARISH

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I. Introduction

The Archdiocese of Halifax published a set of guidelines for Parish Pastoral Councils in November 2020. Included in that document was the following statement drawn from a publication of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops (CCCC) Episcopal Commission for Doctrine, *The Missionary Dynamic of the Parish Today*, 2014, no. 2:

The very nature of the parish is to be missionary. The life of the parish does not rest on the shoulders of a few volunteers, but on all the baptized, whose gifts are essential to the parish's mission. When people are able to share their God-given gifts and respond to their baptismal vocation, they offer themselves more fully to the task at hand. In this regard, the faithful of the parish community should as much as possible be involved in creating a missionary plan for their parish....
(Emphasis added)

The guidelines go on to state that the role of the Pastoral Council is to “assist the pastor and other parish leadership for the parish’s growth in mission, formation and as a community of faith”, and more specifically, to carry out the following activities:

- strategic, longer term pastoral planning focused on formation, mission and building the community of faith (3-5 years out),
- propose pastoral programs that support the planning objectives,
- improving pastoral services, and
- evaluating the pastoral effectiveness of various programs and services.

At a high level, as pointed out in the CCCC document, the faithful of a parish are to be involved in creating a missionary plan, and more specifically, it is the unique role of the Pastoral Council of the parish to engage in work of strategic, long term pastoral planning. The work of the Pastoral Council is not, however, done in isolation; rather, the Council is to support and assist the pastor and work collaboratively with other members of parish leadership, in particular the Parish Leadership Team and the Parish Finance Council. We can add also that this work must also be done in an atmosphere of connectedness with all the members of the faithful in the parish, so that there is wide engagement and understanding of the planning, and so that the plan can also be informed by the feedback and input of parishioners.

The Pastoral Council of St. Francis & St. Clare of Assisi Parish is committed to carrying out its proper role, a key part of which is to prepare a plan related to the pastoral and spiritual needs of the Parish over the next 3-5 years. The work of planning is itself a spiritual exercise, for the Archdiocesan guidelines note, it must “occur in the context of prayer and openness to the Holy Spirit”, so that the Council is engaged in “discerning where the Holy Spirit is calling the faith community to achieve the Great Commission.”

The Pastoral Plan presented herein is the first such formal plan created since the creation of St. Francis & St. Clare Parish upon the merger of our four predecessor parishes: St. Theresa, St. Mother Teresa of Calcutta, St. Patrick and St. Catherine of Siena. It represents the outcome of the Parish Council’s prayerful deliberations about where our Parish and parishioners are currently at in our collective journey, and the pastoral priorities that we should focus our attention on over the next few years. The plan is not, however, carved in stone; rather, it is a dynamic plan that is intended to be constantly reviewed, evaluated, prayed over, reflected upon and, if necessary, modified over time. Even where the strategic longer-term goals remain fairly constant, the activities and tactics engaged in by the Parish in order to achieve those goals may be modified, in order to ensure that we are best positioned to make progress on our plan.

II. Vision and Archdiocesan Priorities

It is important to note at the outset that the goals set forth in this Pastoral Plan are oriented toward the pursuit of our Parish vision, which has been established in 2023 and communicated to the faithful of the parish. That vision statement is as follows:

***We are a welcoming community of Jesus’ disciples who journey together
in right Faith and certain Hope and live out His Love in Word and Deed.***

This vision statement articulates who we wish to be as a parish moving forward. It also contains elements that connect with the priorities set in recent years by our Archbishop, being Parish Identity, Catechesis, Homelessness/Social Justice and Evangelization, as follows:

Parish Identity	Catechesis	Evangelization	Homelessness/Social Justice
“We are a community...who journey together in right Faith and certain Hope ...”	“We are ... Jesus’ disciples ...” (“Disciple” is from the Latin <i>discipulus</i> , meaning “learner”)	“We are ... welcoming...”	“We ... live out His Love in Word and Deed.”

Thus, we can see that our vision is connected to the Archdiocesan priorities, which is important as we seek to be a community that is connected and integrated with all the parishes of our Archdiocese as we journey together as members of the Roman Catholic Church. In our vision we can see also two key orientations, one that is more internally focused (i.e., Identity and Catechesis) and the other external (i.e., Social Justice and Evangelization). As we move forward it is important that we maintain a balance between our outreach to the world around us, on the one hand, and our focus on our own community's spiritual growth and identity.

III. The Pastoral Plan

With the foregoing considerations in mind, we move now to the presentation of the Pastoral Plan itself. The plan is currently comprised of four long-term strategic goals that are oriented toward the pursuit of our Parish vision and addressing the Archbishop's priorities as enumerated above. The goals are as follows:

Goal #1: All Parishioners are invited to connect with a small group that is in turn connected to the whole Parish.

For our Parish to grow in its sense not only of identity as a community, but also for our parishioners to grow in their sense of identity as Roman Catholic Christians, it is essential for us to foster an environment of connectedness and engagement. Our Church, and on a more local level our Parish community, is a family, the family of God. We all know, each in our own individual way, some experience of a family, and an important part of being a family is being connected with one another. Some people are connected to others through a prayer group, through a form of ministry within the Parish, or through personal connections with other friends or families who are members of the Parish. We want, in an intentional way, to build upon the existing connections, and to invite parishioners to form new connections and/or to continue to grow existing ones. The smaller groups that our parishioners are and may choose to be connected with are and will be in turn connected to the whole community, so that people have a sense of being integrated within the Parish and achieve a sense of belonging.

It is not only important for our parishioners to experience a sense of connection with the Parish community and with the Catholic Church, but it is also essential for them to be engaged. Connection can be more passive in nature, but engagement generally connotes that someone is actively involved. We want to ensure that our parishioners not only have the opportunity and an invitation to connect, but also that they are encouraged to become engaged, to be active participants in the life of the Parish. As with connection, there is already a baseline of engagement that we can seek to build upon.

When we refer to "small groups", this can take on a variety of different forms. It could be a prayer group, a small group of families gathering for prayer and Bible study, a form of ministry such as St. Vincent de Paul, etc. Our goal will be to ensure that there is a diversity of different groups for parishioners to choose from, and parishioners will be at their liberty to choose whether, and in what way, to become involved. A first step in the pursuit of this goal will be to identify what groups currently exist, and who is involved in them, and then to identify what other groups may be formed and how best to connect people with them.

In approaching the task of encouraging participation in small groups, we recognize the importance of ensuring that these groups do not evolve into “cliques” that are closed and exclusive, creating segmentation and fracture within the community at large. It will therefore be important that the groups are connected in some way back to the Parish as a whole, and that there is an open line of communication with and between the groups. The small groups are meant to be a support system, but not to supersede the importance of the larger Parish community or the Church as a whole.

While recognizing the need for structure and interconnectedness with the small groups, we also note that there is an element of natural, organic development to them that should not be frustrated through forced connections. Just as people connect to others in friendship in their own natural ways, so it is that groups may develop through new and existing relationships, and it will be important not to force the groups to follow a rigid structure. Rather, we see the need to develop an orderly framework for the small groups, within which they can develop and grow organically in a way that is ultimately connected with and supportive of the larger community.

Goal #2: A program of systematic catechesis (esp. for adults) is developed and made available to all parishioners in an intentional, proactive way.

As Catholic Christians, we recognize the importance of the “domestic Church” – that is, the family unit wherein parents have the important role of raising their children in the faith, including praying with them, passing on the teachings of our faith, and bringing them to the celebration of the sacraments, among other things. However, it is fair to say that a good many adult Catholics today do not themselves have a deep knowledge of the teachings of the faith, and in such a situation it is impossible to pass on to children and to others that which one does not know oneself. Thus, it is important for adults to be continuously engaged not only in the practice of the faith, in prayer and acts of charity, but also in faith formation – the exercise of learning of the teachings of our faith.

It was Saint Anselm who coined the phrase “*Fides quaerens intellectum*”, or “Faith seeking understanding” – meaning that we start from the basis of our faith, our belief in one God in three divine persons, which is a mystery, and we move from there toward a greater understanding of that mystery. The movement from faith toward understanding involves “seeking”, meaning that each of us needs to be actively engaged in furthering our knowledge and understanding of God, as communicated to us through the Holy Scriptures, the magisterium of the Church and sacred tradition.

We recognize that, apart from religious education offered to young people, in particular up to the point of receiving the sacrament of confirmation, there has not always been enough of an effort made to encourage and enable adult Catholics to engage in catechesis. Therefore, as we pursue our vision of being disciples of Jesus – of being those who follow Him and seek to learn, as the first apostles did – we will develop and implement a program of catechesis that will be made available to all our parishioners, and which we will encourage and support our parishioners to take advantage of. For young people the program will build upon the foundation of religious education for children and young people that is already in place, and for adults there will be a program of resources developed, in a systematic and intentional way, so that we will experience an increase in catechetical activity and formation in our Parish.

It is worth noting that not all members of the Parish are at the same point in their faith journey, and each person will have their own particular areas of interest in terms of ongoing learning. Thus, the program of catechesis will not be “one size fits all” but will have options that are well suited to the diversity of our parishioners who are seeking to engage with it. For example, there will be resources and programming well suited to those who are new to the faith, including those who enter into the faith community through our efforts at evangelization and proclamation, and there will also be materials suited to those who already have a solid foundation but are looking to further develop and build upon that.

Goal #3: A strategy for evangelization is developed and implemented that builds upon activities currently ongoing and expands our reach throughout our Parish mission field.

An important part of our vision for St. Francis and St. Clare of Assisi Parish is that we are a “welcoming community”. When we think about what that means, we recognize that it is not merely about welcoming people into a social group, where we can get to know one another and build relationships together. Rather, we are seeking to welcome people into the Church, the mystical body of Christ, where through the sacraments of initiation they can be cleansed from original sin and can access the salvation offered to all people through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. In so doing, we are striving to live out the great commission that Jesus gave to his apostles at the time of his ascension into heaven: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you”. (Matthew 28:19-20)

As Catholic Christians we can at times be too inwardly focused and preoccupied, seeking to expend all our efforts in support of the people sitting in the pews. However, we all need to understand that as disciples of Jesus it is our personal responsibility and mission to be engaged in evangelization, in reaching out and sharing our faith with others. Jesus did not give the great commission only to a select few, but to all of us. We hear echoes of this command of Jesus in the words of the dismissal at Mass, where the common wording is that of “going forth”, of mission, and in one formulation in particular we hear, “Go and announce the Gospel of the Lord”. We come to the sacraments to find healing, strength and nourishment, and then we must embark on the outward journey into the world, much like the first disciples who were sent two-by-two to preach the good news that the kingdom of heaven is at hand. (Matthew 10:5-15)

We seek therefore to develop a strategy for evangelization in our parish that will broadly engage our parishioners. This strategy will build upon activities and programs that are already in place and will seek to enhance and develop these activities so that missionary activity can really flourish in our Parish. This is a goal that we will need to work at over the long-term in order to pursue our vision of being a welcoming community that lives out the great commission of Jesus, but we will also establish near-term and medium-term milestones that will help us to measure our progress along the way.

Goal #4: A program of social justice initiatives is developed that seeks to address poverty in its various forms and prioritizes welcoming those who are struggling to belong or find their place.

Throughout the Gospels we see and hear Jesus' concern for the poor and the marginalized, whether it was someone who was blind or lame, a prostitute, a Samaritan or a tax collector. The need to be concerned for the less fortunate is clearly communicated by Jesus to be the responsibility of each one of us. We are well familiar with the words, "I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me", and that "Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me". (Matthew 25:35-36, 40)

It is the vision of our Parish to be disciples of Jesus "who live out His love in Word and Deed". One very important expression of that love is through our care and concern for the poor and less fortunate, and we want this to be a defining characteristic of our Parish community; that we are a people devoted to helping the poor. In this work we are mindful of the many forms which poverty can take, such as food insecurity, homelessness, lack of material or economic resources, ill health, lack of access to educational opportunities, social exclusion and marginalization, among others. We need to encourage each parishioner to be preoccupied with, to be mindful of, and to seek to live out, in his or her way, alleviating poverty in our communities, within each person's own unique circumstances.

Our Parish, though the predecessor communities that have come together, already has a history of outreach activities that have been engaged in. Thus, there is a foundation to be built upon and expanded, in a manner consistent with the vision for our parish community. We will seek first to identify the activities that are being engaged in currently, as well as individuals who are involved and participating in them, and we will look to gather all of these activities together in a unified strategy of social justice work and effort. Again, it will not just be about engaging a few people to participate in some select programs but rather seeking to engage all of our parishioners in an understanding that concern for the poor, doing our individual part, is at the core of what it means to be a follower of Jesus.

IV. Conclusion

As indicated at the outset of this document, this Pastoral Plan represents the efforts of the Parish Pastoral Council to identify several long-term pastoral goals that we, as the Parish of St. Francis and St. Clare of Assisi, can collectively focus on in order to live out our faith and to pursue the vision that we have set for our Catholic faith community in the north end of Halifax. This plan has been developed through a process of prayer and discernment, and this process continues – not only by the Parish Council, but by all of us who are members of this Parish. Throughout 2025 and beyond, we will be seeking to share with all parishioners our vision and this Pastoral Plan, in order to foster engagement as well as ongoing feedback and input from parishioners. We look forward to that process of engagement and ultimately to seeing this framework built out and implemented in the Parish over the coming months and years. We entrust this Plan, and our Parish, to the intercession of St. Francis and St. Clare of Assisi, our patrons, as well as that of St. Therese of Lisieux, St. Catherine of Siena, St. Patrick, St. Stephen and St. Mother Teresa of Calcutta – all patrons of our communities that have come together as one.