

Over the next several weeks, I'll be introducing you to a vision for our parish. A vision is the dream of where we want to be, what we want to be. This vision came from a gathering of 42 members of our parish, a combination of parish leaders from the Parish Council, the Finance Council, various organizations in our parish, and the parish staff. We met on a Saturday last August for a retreat day with the specific goal of listening to one another, considering how we are now, and how we want to be in the future.

We did this in response to a perceived need which was affirmed at that gathering. When we were asked to use one word to describe the parish, people wrote words like *segmented, confused ... in transition ... not always united in purpose ... frustrated ... floundering ... disconnected ... lacking true community ... struggling ... troubled*. They noted that we have lots going on here – lots of activities and organizations, lots of people doing lots of things, but not always with a clear sense of direction. We could keep adding more, but how do we decide what more to do, or when to let go of something?

Having a vision gives the parish as a whole a common direction, to know where we're headed. Having a vision helps to guide our decision-making – to choose what we'll do and not do, because we can't do everything. Having a parish vision helps us to focus our priorities so we can use our resources well, including our finances, our facilities, our staff, and the entire membership of the parish.

The home is still the place of priority when it comes to faith development. The church of the home, the domestic church, is the first place where people learn and practice unconditional love, and forgiveness when they fail; the home is the place where prayer can occur day and night; the place where the gospel is lived and passed from one generation to the next; the starting place for loving one another, and then moving out into the world with hearts formed for service.

After the home, our parish is a major context for our discipleship (along with school/workplaces, the world).

St. Catherine's has some significant strengths:

- we are the largest parish in the Diocese (2100 households, more than 7000 registered parishioners; that's about 15% of the population of Portage!);
- we are one of the youngest parishes in the Diocese (founded in 1966) with amazing facilities that are in pretty good shape;
- our parish has an incredible amount of resources (financial, personnel, and a talent base unrivalled in the diocese);
- we have lots of activities to choose from – currently about 70 parish organizations and hosted activities. As a parish we also have some impediments right now:
 - we have the second lowest weekend Mass participation in the diocese (23.5% in 2017 census)
 - we have very low rate of participation; almost every group or activity is asking for more volunteers or members;
 - we have a mortgage that requires a significant portion of our Sunday collection for paying down the principal and interest each month. (\$16,300/month; \$195K/year).

So as we continue to celebrate the Easter season, I'll be speaking to you each week about a vision for our parish that will guide how we use our resources, and move beyond our impediments.

As your pastor, let me close by telling you my personal goal. In the next ten years, I'd like to see St. Catherine's become the pre-eminent parish in the diocese, that we set the gold standard. I this parish will set an example for all other parishes, so that when they write their own vision statements, they start by saying, "We want to be like St. Catherine's!"