

Mapping Our Strategic Intent – Saint Thomas the Apostle Catholic Parish

Environment

Diocesan Direction

- Pastorally driven leadership style; new Pope and new Bishop
- Consolidated diocesan services and programs
- New/merging and clustering of parishes and schools
- Ongoing diocesan oversight of parishes
- Shortage of and aging priests causing changes
- Some increase in priestly vocations
- Diaconate program currently being reevaluated with a view toward reinstatement

Parish Direction

- Strong and stable pastoral leadership
- Strong school, highly integrated with parish life
- Opportunities for spiritual growth and enrichment
- Growing; financially stable
- Strong alignment with Catholic doctrine, Word of God, sacraments
- New staff changes and stipend positions
- More college students, fewer baby boomers, fewer volunteers

Trends *economic, social, political, religious, etc.*

- Technology can be a blessing and curse, affecting interpersonal relationships and presenting other issues
- Challenging global economy: fewer jobs, demanding more of older workers, younger workers – harder to find employment
- Sexual impurity, relativism
- Personal and college debt
- Societal challenges to religious freedom
- Increasing number of single parent families
- Busy-ness – lack of attention to eternal things
- Cultural diversity
- Political correctness

Responsibilities

What do we do?

- Welcome, embrace and serve our brothers and sisters
- Help each other develop, enrich and renew our spiritual lives
- Devote time, talent and treasure to meet the needs of our parish and all God's people
- Celebrate life, faith and the sacraments
- Provide comfort, forgiveness and healing to those in need
- Form and educate in the Catholic faith
- Promote collaboration and communication with other faith communities

Mission

Why we exist

We provide a spiritual home for all God's family and nurture one another through the sacraments and the principles of Catholic faith.

Values

What is important to us?

We value being a community of Catholic faith in which parishioners...

- Encourage and support a living relationship with Jesus for themselves and others
- Are guided by the principles of Catholic faith to enrich an adult life of faith in the world
- Show respect for where people are in their understanding and embrace of the Catholic faith, and encourage them to grow
- Understand and accept that the next step forward in faith is not necessarily the same for everyone
- Intentionally invite and welcome new faces and new talents to our parish and school
- Consistently include all who would like to participate in ministry and programs
- Proactively encourage the development of lay leaders

Eight Factors Critical to our Community's Success

1. LEADERSHIP Strengthen Christian leadership by calling forth and equipping new people as leaders in our faith community.

2. LITURGY Sustain a vibrant, prayerful environment that nourishes people of all ages.

3. EVANGELIZATION Equip our parishioners with the necessary understanding and skills to invite people to a living relationship with Christ.

4. MORALITY AND JUSTICE FORMATION Offer and encourage efforts to grow in personal and collective moral integrity and social responsibility.

Critical Realities

Affecting our work

- Parish and school landlocked: tight on space
- Ethnic communities whose members live and work in our geographic area
- We are drawing young, large families
- Perceived as a community different from the norm (collaborative)
- Close proximity and growing relationship with Aquinas College and Holland Home
- Parishioners drawn from all parts of the metropolitan area
- Geographically close to growing downtown
- Serving a broad and diverse membership and neighborhood population (young, old, single, married, divorced, unemployed, working)

5. HOSPITALITY AND FELLOWSHIP Develop and highlight occasions/activities for our community to connect, interact and come to know one another.

6. STEWARDSHIP Call all parishioners to a full sharing of their time, talent and treasure for the growth of our faith community.

7. OUTREACH Inspire and increase efforts to reach out and serve the spiritual and physical needs of people.

8. CATHOLIC SCHOOL APOSTOLATE Provide a Christ-centered school environment to foster heroic virtue in children.

Competitive Landscape

Why people choose options other than Saint Thomas

- More liberal congregations
- More traditional atmosphere
- Sports and athletics
- Other parishes that provide more opportunities for singles and empty nesters
- Perceived lack of excitement in our youth program
- Technology offers alternatives to human connectedness
- Over-extended family life
- Once children leave Saint Thomas school or Catholic Central, they leave the parish as well
- Other denominations provide less doctrine and focus more on entertainment
- Obligation to give (competition for funds)
- Culture of instant gratification; location/time of available Mass, televised Mass, website Mass

Congregational Practices

Common issues of Catholic parishes

- Stewardship, tithing and evangelization practices are poorly understood and minimally practiced
- Sacramental focus of the Catholic Church draws non-Catholics to a deeper relationship with Christ
- People are creatures of habit: same Mass time, same pew
- Importance of congregational practices seem second to extracurricular activities
- Young adults tend to register at parishes when they have families of their own
- People do not communicate when or why they leave the parish
- Communication with parishioners has changed due to technology
- People often reluctant to commit to a ministry, though willing to volunteer for one-time events/activities

How we measure living our vision

Quantitative indicators

- Consistent, strong Mass attendance
- Healthy school enrollment
- Sound financial status
- Relevant ministries
- Active lay leadership and participation in ministry
- Flourishing faith formation efforts
- Vibrant RCIA program
- Healthy local and global outreach programs

Vision

What we constantly strive to be

A welcoming, Christ-centered parish, guided by the Holy Spirit, celebrating prayer, worship, education and the sacraments as the way of living God's kingdom on earth.

How we want to be known

Qualitative indicators

By Parishioners:

- Young adults: "I feel like I belong. I'm welcomed and appreciated."
- College students: "At Saint Thomas I have a chance to grow in my faith and I feel valued as part of the parish."
- Adults: "I feel at home here and my faith is always nourished."
- Seniors: "Saint Thomas makes it easy for me to be connected and involved."

Visitors: "I wish my church were this alive."

Neighbors: "Saint Thomas makes our neighborhood a good place to live."

Larger Catholic Community: "Saint Thomas inspires us, encourages us, and is a dependable and willing partner."

Our Community Partners (i.e., Aquinas College, neighborhood associations): "Saint Thomas is an anchor for the local community, keeping the neighborhood stable and inviting... a place people want to be."