

St. Francis Xavier Parish

La, Grange, IL

Transition Report

December 13, 2016

INTRODUCTION

St. Francis Xavier Parish, located in La Grange, IL is a vibrant Catholic community of faith comprised of approximately 3,200 registered families. As we head into 2017, our 127th year as a Parish, we will be going through the transition of our next Pastor, the 10th to serve in this capacity for the people of St. Francis Xavier. To best understand our current culture, the following is an introduction from Fr. John Hoffman, current Pastor at SFX to prospective parishioners and visitors:

St. Francis Xavier Parish is a community of people who believe in being Church in all of its diversity --spanning the spectrum from traditional to contemporary. We try to live vibrant lives formed by the gospel and the awareness that, at all times, we are embraced by Christ. Our Eucharistic celebrations are the center of our shared faith life, and active participation in the wide array of ministries is a highly valued priority. We are committed to life-long faith formation and growth, and provide opportunities for this through the RCIA (Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults), Day School, School of Religious Education, High School QUEST, Young Adult Ministry, Adult Faith Formation, and SPRED (Special Religious Education). To top it all off, in 2015 we celebrated our 125th Anniversary!

There is great, multi-generational affection for this parish on the part of its 3200 households and a true sense of family exists among the members of St. Francis Xavier Parish. New and veteran parishioners describe St. Francis as a place where you are welcomed and feel you belong--no matter who you are. Although not primarily an ethnically diverse community, there is broad economic diversity. Parishioners have a strong investment in and commitment to the needs of fellow parishioners, the wider local community, and the world as evidenced, for example, through the work of the Ministry of Care, the SFX Food Pantry, and our yearly involvement in forming building crews for Habitat for Humanity.

Thank you for your interest in St. Francis Xavier! Hopefully, you will find the information, opportunities, and faith community you are looking for by exploring the various pages of our parish website. We look forward to you visiting St. Francis Xavier and, perhaps, joining us on our journey of faith.

May we remember that we all live in the presence of God--always!

St. Francis Xavier's Parish celebrates the idea that we are: "A place of Welcome, Worship and Work."

This commitment is taken seriously in all aspects and can be seen in the more than 55 missions and ministries at St. Francis Xavier.

Growth has been the hallmark of the last two decades. A surge in our Day School enrollment prompted the expansion of the Day School with new emphasis on pre-school education. Our Religious Education program has seen a parallel growth in numbers, and now serves students two days a week in three separate sessions. Quest, our youth ministry program, is now firmly established as a vital and significant ministry for teens. QUEST provides teens the opportunity to serve others while sharing their faith with other teens and adult sponsors.

Ongoing faith formation happens in a variety of contexts at St. Francis for adults and special populations including, SPRED, RCIA, Baptismal preparation for parents, Scripture study, and the formation of lay ministers. The annual Msgr. George Higgins Social Justice Lecture is a highlight.

Spirituality is addressed through opportunities for spiritual direction/companioning, seasonal reflection and Evenings of Prayer and Reflection during Advent and Lent. A vital relationship exists between the parish and The Well Spirituality Center, sponsored by the sisters of the Congregation of St. Joseph.

The St. Francis family is blessed with a wide variety of ministries, organizations and activities supported by a vibrant and growing parish population. New initiatives are always on the horizon and seek to answer expressed and observed needs of the parish and community beyond.

The most recent transition of pastors came in the midst of our continuing growth, expansion and renewal. After 15 years, Fr. Stenzel left SFX and we welcomed Fr. John Hoffman as the ninth pastor of our parish in the summer of 2005. Under his collaborative style of leadership, St. Francis remains a vital and welcoming place to call "home."

Now, as we prepare for the next spiritual leader for St. Francis Xavier, the transition committee is proud to provide the following report, summarizing the charism of the Parish which represents the voices, feelings, ideals and overall perspectives from hundreds of current parishioners.

THE PROPHETIC PLAN – A strategic initiative for St. Francis Xavier

In 2011, St. Francis Xavier parish began a journey – a journey of self-discovery. The process of self-discovery involved many people with many different ideas and perspectives. Sixty to seventy people attended each of the three weekend retreats; and, about 1150 people responded to the in-the-pew survey. The quest was not so much about finding new abilities or new skills, but about gaining a new understanding and awareness of those skills and abilities that already exist within us. As a result, we have named ourselves in our mission statement, reaffirmed what is important to us with our value statements, looked to the future with our vision statement, and

outlined a course of action with our goals and objectives. (The complete Prophetic Plan can be found as Attachment A to this document.)

Since that time, the *Prophetic Plan* has guided the actions of the parish. It has been visible in discourse about ministries, in reminders in the Bulletins, and in the accomplishments of the parish. Our values and mission remain the same; and, the vision still reflects where we want to be. Each of the goals and objectives have been addressed. Some are still in process, some are completed, and some need to be redefined. There are sixteen pages of accomplishments tied to the goals and objectives. These will be refined and made available to those who wish to explore that level of detail. This hopes to be a more concise summary.

In developing the summary, three central themes were identified – Welcome, Worship, and Work.

Welcome includes more than the ritual greeting at the start of Mass. It is the recognition of others as brothers and sisters in Christ, and the desire to invite them to participate in our journey. It is characterized by the hosting of St. Agatha Bible Study at St. Francis Xavier; by inviting those unable to receive communion to receive a blessing instead; and, by partnering with neighboring parishes, congregations and the community on the Food Pantry, RCIA, Grief Support, and adult faith formation. The sharing of resources between the day school and the religious education program helps to break down the artificial barrier between those two approaches to understanding our faith. The formation of a Teen Youth Council brought teens closer to the parish; and, a similar council for young adults is being developed. Our parish organizations provide opportunities for youth, adults, seniors, the active and the shut-ins, men and women. The construction of the gathering space will provide greater opportunities for welcome activities when it is completed.

Worship recognizes that different people relate to God in different ways. Our Sabbath services have been enhanced by the addition of youth lectors and commentators, as well as altar servers. Music is an important part of worship for many people. Our music at these liturgies has been enriched by the addition of talented youth musicians. And, opportunities to sing in choirs are available to children, teens, and adults. Additional worship experiences are provided – small faith-sharing groups, Taize prayer, shared Mass with St. Agatha, CHRP and KAIROS retreats, Bible studies and Quest groups for teens. Our strong relationship with *The Well* enables our parishioners to participate in their religious education and formation programs. Twice a week, word and communion services, led by lay people, provide worship opportunities when priests are not available. And the number of trained and mandated Ministers of Care has increased to provide worship experiences for the shut-ins and hospitalized.

Work includes activities that address human concerns and issues of social justice. St. Francis continues to send teens and adults for domestic missions to Virginia Beach, and on Habitat for Humanity trips to Clarksdale, Mississippi. We have supported the BEDS program, not only by hosting, but by advocating for permanent housing for the chronically homeless in the La Grange area. Our food pantry is well supported by donations from parishioners and local businesses. Volunteers at the food pantry come from St. Francis Xavier and from near-by parishes that do

not have their own food pantry. St. Francis Xavier Day School recently celebrated its seventh-annual All-School Service Day where students, parents and teachers engaged and served various communities throughout the Chicagoland area. This experience has been so successful that the concept was broadened to include the entire parish. In 2016, over 400 parishioners of all ages reached out to 19 organizations. St. Francis Xavier has provided funds to St. Agatha and Ascension-St. Susanna for the improvement and upkeep of their facilities. The Domestic Violence Outreach group was created in partnership with St. Cletus and St. John of the Cross when parishioners became more aware that this was a growing problem.

These are only a few exemplars of the accomplishments of goals and objectives based on our *Prophetic Plan*. (Attachment B in this document presents an extensive collection of organizations and ministries that seek to fulfill our mission.)

“We, the community of St. Francis Xavier Parish, wholeheartedly live and celebrate the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We commit ourselves to live in communion with God, others and all of creation to create a more just world through sacraments and worship, learning and service.”

The Next Pastor

Starting in the fall of 2016, a Pastor Transition team was put into place and Chaired by Fr. Bill Killeen, Associate Pastor at St. Francis Xavier. The following summary is premised on the survey responses and input from the Transition Committee parish meetings and the approximate 250+ parishioners who shared their thoughts and reactions through either a survey instrument or participation in community meetings.

A summary of the survey as well as notes from the Community meetings are included as Attachment C and D respectively. Overall, the parishioners of St. Francis Xavier, feel deeply blessed to have had Fr. John Hoffman as the pastor for the past 12 years and have shared the following:

We are very grateful for the depth and breadth of ministries and faith programs at St. Francis. We love our parish dearly and we seek a pastor who will love this congregation. We want a pastor who believes himself to be one of us. May he be a priest who is not afraid to rejoice with us, weep with us, comfort us and fall in love with us. We want a pastor who will embrace and value the traditions and history of this parish and lead us into the future. He should be a man of prayer. We want our next pastor to nourish our souls by proclaiming the Word beautifully and through inspiring homilies and preaching. We desire a humble, holy man who demonstrates through his own actions and words that one leads by serving others and that the Gospel of Jesus Christ is a story worth telling and a story that all need to hear. We need a pastor of strong character who provides an inspirational vision to our parish.

Our pastor should reflect his flock. He should be open and welcoming, joyful, loving, tolerant and compassionate. We hope he is blessed with a good sense of humor. We are a vibrant parish with many devoted volunteers. We are a people who serve others in our community and who

care for those who need our help. We are involved. We want a pastor who empowers and supports us, our ministries, our school children and our school of Religious Education. Our pastor should believe in the potential and the value of our youth and champion robust youth ministries. At the same time, it is important that the Pastor make all segments of our parish feel welcome, especially our senior parishioners.

We need a person of unquestionable integrity. We must have confidence in how he runs and administers the parish. We are a well-educated parish and we want to help our pastor. We want our pastor to be a strong administrator who knows how to properly delegate and hold others accountable. We hope he maintains a gifted staff and taps into our congregation for the best we can provide in time, talent and treasure. It is important that our pastor takes time to care for his own physical, mental and spiritual health.

We welcome our next spiritual leader with open hearts and open minds. We pledge our help and our prayers. May you love us as you lead us.

Respectfully submitted:

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