



Notre Dame of Mt. Carmel Church

Multi-year
Strategic Plan
January 2026



75 Ridgedale Ave, Cedar Knolls, NJ 07927
www.ndcarmel.com

A Message from our Pastor

Dear Faithful Parishioners and Friends,

With gratitude to our loving God and deep appreciation to all who contributed, I am pleased to announce the publication and approval of this Parish Strategic Plan.

This document is the fruit of a shared journey of prayer, listening, dialogue, and discernment. I extend my sincere thanks to the Chair and Vice-Chair, and to all the members of the Parish Pastoral Council, our parishioners, and the dedicated members of our various ministries whose time, insights, and commitment made this plan possible. Your collaboration reflects the life and vitality of our parish community. God bless you.

As your pastor, I officially give my blessing for the implementation of this Parish Strategic Plan. May it guide us as we move forward together, strengthening our parish mission, deepening our faith, and responding generously to the needs of our parish and the wider community.

I am asking everyone to continue to pray for one another and for the successful implementation of this plan, that all we do may give glory to God and build up the Body of Christ.

Notre Dame of Mt. Carmel, pray for us.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Fr. Vidal R. Gonzales, Jr.", written in a cursive style.

Fr. Vidal R. Gonzales, Jr.

Introduction

In 2016, guided by the Holy Spirit, Notre Dame of Mount Carmel embarked on a journey of renewal to move our faith community “from maintenance to mission” using the Divine Renovation model, to more fully embrace our call to be missionary disciples. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, the work of our ministries, the generosity of our community, and the support that the Parish Leadership Team provides to our Pastor, we have experienced significant fruitfulness, including the development and strengthening of leadership here at Notre Dame.

Pope Francis showed us the importance of listening when he called for the Synod of Synodality, a gathering of bishops and other representatives who focused on how the Church listens, discerns and walks together. To that end, in 2023, the Parish Leadership Team and previous Parish Council members undertook a discernment initiative to renew the Parish Pastoral Council at Notre Dame. This included recruiting new Pastoral Council members through a nomination process that was open to the parish, and defining a new set of Guidelines and Operating Principles. In January of 2024, the new Parish Pastoral Council was introduced to the parish, with its first meeting taking place in February 2024.

Since then our renewed Parish Pastoral Council has been working on this Strategic Plan. It is the hope that this plan will guide our parish to align ever more closely with our mission in the coming years. We are a parish that believes strongly in the importance of Evangelization, Stewardship, Discipleship, Ministry, Worship, and Community & Fellowship. What follows are high-level goals for these pillars, which incorporate feedback from parish leaders and are the result of months of discernment. It should be noted that while goals are listed below a given pillar, many of the goals address several other pillars as well.

In the coming year, the PPC will help to shepherd year-one goals working with the leadership of parishioners and staff members, and we commit to keeping the entire parish updated on our progress. If you are passionate about one or more of these goals we invite you to reach out to us by contacting Chair Dan Balogh (dabalogh@optonline.net) and Vice Chair Jen Qvotrup (jqvotrup@optonline.net). We would love to have you either lead or participate in these efforts.

Thank you for helping to support and grow the mission of our beloved Notre Dame of Mt. Carmel Parish as we look to the future, inviting others into a relationship with Jesus Christ and making missionary disciples. God bless you!

Our VISION

Notre Dame of Mount Carmel is a Roman Catholic community of faith called to be missionary disciples of Jesus Christ for the purpose of bringing about the Kingdom.

Our MISSION

Formed by the Word, fed at the Table, and inspired by the Holy Spirit, we INVITE, WELCOME and GUIDE each other into a relationship with Christ, to GO OUT and MAKE missionary disciples.





Evangelization



We are a community of believers who boldly embrace our faith, and actively share the Gospel message of salvation with others through genuine witness of our transformed lives. With evangelization at the heart of our mission, and through our actions, we strive to embody the love and truth of Christ, inspiring others to cultivate an active love relationship with God.

We believe it is essential to equip our parishioners to share the importance of God in their lives, so that they invite friends, family, and acquaintances to Mass and other church events. We believe it is essential to create opportunities for parishioners to evangelize both inside and outside the church, reaching seekers, the marginalized, and those without a church affiliation. We also believe in the importance of evangelizing parents who are the first catechists of their children.

Our planned actions for the first year include:

- Assembling an Evangelization Team that will, in conjunction with other ministries, formulate a parish plan for a clear path of discipleship that will (a) bring others into a relationship with Jesus, and (b) bring closer to Jesus those who are already in a relationship with him, from the first Gospel proclamation to beginning disciple to fruitful missionary disciple.*

Future actions to consider include:

- Developing and offering training and empowerment workshops and events that equip parishioners to evangelize through invitation and faith stories, and equip them to lead small groups.
- Actively inviting both lapsed NDMC parishioners back to the flock, and new parishioners into the NDMC family.
- Evangelizing the neighborhood both *on church grounds* and *away from the church* by means of visible and interactive activities that are open to the public.
- Creating the position of Parish Communications and Outreach Assistant that will support the Director of Communication and Evangelization with marketing, advertising, and publicity efforts that warmly invite and welcome seekers to the parish community.
- Forming a comprehensive adult faith formation ministry that will strive to bring every parishioner into a more intimate communion with Jesus Christ, by offering education opportunities to everyone, no matter where they are spiritually.

* NDMC will be following the recommendations set forth by Jim Jansen in the book *A Clear Path: How to Make Missionary Disciples in Your Parish* (Anchor Consulting LLC, 2023).



Stewardship

We are a parish that joyfully returns to the Lord by sharing our time, talents, and treasure. Through intentional stewardship, we recognize God's gifts, build our Church and community, and reap the blessings of a grateful, generous life.

We believe it is important to encourage parishioners to be generous in supporting the parish financially, and to identify the talents of disciples in our church community, inspiring them to serve and share their

time and talents. We believe it is necessary to teach and encourage all ages in the congregation to practice stewardship with intentionality.

Our planned actions for the first year include:

- Continuing the efforts of the Stewardship Ministry, which include the broad oversight of stabilizing ongoing deficits through increased giving, regular fundraising efforts, and continuous expense control.
- Cultivating a culture of gratitude by developing a plan to recognize and thank parishioners who continue to share their time, talent or treasure, while communicating within the parish the importance of generosity in their sharing of treasure.

Future actions to consider include:

- Conducting ministry fairs to showcase NDMC ministries and to identify opportunities for parishioners to share their time and talent.





Discipleship



We are missionary disciples who invite others to deepen their relationship with Jesus and accompany them on their journey.

We see the importance of encouraging continuous and transformational discipleship that moves beyond a single encounter. We are committed to offering regular opportunities for families to remain engaged with the Church, and to accompanying Sacramental Preparation families before, during, and after sacrament reception.

Future actions to consider include:

- Continuing to offer discipleship groups year-round, at varying times of the day, online and in-person.
- Reimagining an engaging and dynamic youth ministry program for grades 9-12 that increases the active involvement of our young people in parish life.
- Providing a series of evenings (Parish Missions) during Advent and Lent, featuring religious or lay guest speakers, to inspire spiritual renewal and deepen the faith of parishioners.
- Introducing the concept of Connect Groups to take discipleship into home spaces.
- Hiring a youth minister who will lead the Youth Ministry program and foster a culture of invitation that welcomes and accompanies the youth of our parish as they journey in faith.



Ministry

We engage and serve our community and perform corporal and spiritual works of mercy. Our parish family supports and equips everyone to serve in response to Jesus' call to love.

We believe it is important to dispense information effectively to ensure we inform our parish and the neighboring community about the ministries available to them. We also believe it is necessary to develop and mentor ministry leaders and volunteers, to create leadership succession plans, and to evaluate the engagement and effectiveness of each ministry. We also believe it is important to identify communities that need our support.

Our planned actions for the first year include:

- Cultivating a vibrant culture of missionary leadership by identifying, equipping, and mentoring new and current ministry leaders and volunteers, while fostering spiritual growth, collaboration, and leadership continuity across all parish ministries.

Future actions to consider include:

- Creating a robust ministry directory in print and digital formats.
- Building and expanding a repository of ministry materials that can be deployed when needed.
- Enhancing our ongoing outreach to those on the margins of life who are living with hardship.
- Establishing a Technology Ministry, responsible for the use of chapel, church, classroom, and Parish Hall A/V equipment.
- Developing a ministry assessment process.
- Creating and publishing a ministry guidebook that establishes processes for ministries and ministry leadership.





Worship



We faithfully and sacredly preserve the Liturgy handed down from God to the Church by worthily celebrating the Mass and engaging the full and active participation of the community.

We believe it is important to teach the faithful what is happening at the different parts of the Mass, and to provide hymns, homilies, and hospitality that engage and enrich Mass participants. It is also important to incorporate the congregation's diverse cultural background in the celebration of the liturgy. We also see the necessity of offering other opportunities for prayer, and to increase the active involvement of our congregation.

Our planned actions for the first year include:

- Continuing to provide opportunities for education and refreshers about the Order of Mass.

Future actions to consider include:

- Providing engaging homilies, hymns and hospitality that emphasize the Gospel message, teach the beauty of the Mass, and inspire attendees to encounter Jesus and participate communally in the sacred liturgy.
- Offering additional opportunities to hold specific intention or devotional novenas.
- Scheduling a parish-wide retreat or day of reflection.
- Scheduling a rotating series of special themed Masses.



Community & Fellowship

United in our love of Jesus, we join our hearts and our hands as we welcome, share, and care for one another with warm hospitality. We build community through a variety of groups, events, and ministries that emphasize belonging, faith-sharing, and mutual support.

We feel it is important to create regular opportunities for hospitality and community-building, and to strategically and mindfully promote fellowship opportunities while ensuring our

offerings are representative of the evolving needs of our faith community. In doing so, we see the necessity of keeping respect for the Mass at the center of community and fellowship. We also believe it is important to measure and assess the level of engagement with current and future fellowship and outreach programs.

Future actions to consider include:

- Conducting regular parish surveys to collect feedback and assess engagement, including overall Mass experience with regard to homilies, hymns and hospitality.
- Increasing community engagement and fellowship through recurring social events and initiatives.
- Ensuring that fellowship, ministries, and outreach include an element of prayer and worship, reinforcing what we receive at the altar, the heart and love of Jesus.
- Inviting parishioners to meet with members of the Parish Pastoral Council for dialogue on how to serve their needs better and improve engagement.
- Establishing an events ministry that plans and coordinates, with the assistance of other ministries, recurring events such as parish picnics, Hanover Township Day, and parades.



APPENDIX

Recognizing the need for synodality as we strengthen our commitment to our six pillars, in January of 2025 the council hosted an all-morning workshop where over sixty ministry leaders and participants provided a wide range of ideas for developing and supporting these pillars. What follows are suggestions from that event which we will be considering to address the goals.

If you see an idea that you would like to implement, either by leading an effort or participating in one, please do so, and let us know by contacting Chair Dan Balogh (dabalogh@optonline.net) and Vice Chair Jen Qvotrup (jqvotrup@optonline.net).

Evangelization

- Offer training workshops at least once a year on how to evangelize through invitation and sharing your faith story (e.g., "Everyday Apostles: Sharing Our Faith" from April, 2023 at NDMC).
- Offer quarterly "Witness Evenings" or afternoons where parishioners share how God's presence in their lives has greatly benefited them. These could be shortened versions of Cornerstone testimonies, which would provide concrete examples of how to share your faith story.
- Offer training workshops at least once a year on how to lead a small group or ministry, including how to facilitate discussions (e.g., "Jesus Had a Small Group: Facilitating Discussions Like the Master" from January, 2022 at NDMC).
- Daily rosary after the noon Mass on the front lawn weather permitting, at least once week during summer months.
- Having faith formation children write Bible verses on the sidewalk on Ridgedale Avenue every week.
- Hosting already-scheduled parish barbecues on the front lawn or side parking lot.
- Lining the path to the voting booths each Election Day with NDMC information.
- Starting a "Chat With a Catholic" program, identical to the one in which Dan Balogh participated at St. Paul Inside the Walls in summer, 2024, inviting the public to come in with a gripe, or question, or prayer or need to be heard.
- Eucharistic processions through the neighborhood at least once a year.
- Christmas caroling at least once during the Christmas season.
- Praying a rosary at a local park on a weekend at least twice a year.
- Renting space for a prayer station at a local Farmer's Market.
- Hosting a walk-to-church day at least twice a year.
- Adding a prayer station to our presence at Hanover Township Day.
- Offering at least one of our many faith enrichment programs to places outside the church, at least twice a year.
- Arrange for Fr. Vidal to pray an opening prayer at the fire station Christmas tree lighting across the street.
- For the 1,200 lapsed families (those registered but in no way connected to the parish), reach out by email, phone, and with home visits, to at least 100 families each quarter, beginning in 2025.
- For home visits, create a "goodie-bag" (which could include a Ministry Directory), then go into the Mission Field in teams of two or three. Training will be provided.
- For non-parishioners, have teams of two or three evangelists go door-to-door visiting at least 50 homes in the neighborhood at least twice a year, asking if residents would like to be prayed for, and then praying for them on the spot, then offer them a goodie bag with NDMC literature.

Stewardship

- Capital Campaign: Consider a Capital Campaign to ensure the parish's overall viability heading into our second century.
- Online Giving: Improve online giving by making it more user-friendly, promoting it through education and tutorials, and potentially offering printable receipts that are auto-emailed.
- Giving Reminders: Send contribution reminders at the end of Q2 and Q3, highlighting year-to-date results compared to budget and prior year. Include clear calls to action and emphasize the impact of contributions.
- Offer Alternative Payment Methods: Implement QR codes and other modern payment options to make giving easy and convenient for parishioners.
- Community Gift: Re-establish a \$10K-\$20K gift to the community to demonstrate the church's commitment to supporting those in need.
- Tithing and Financial Education: Develop educational materials and a finance newsletter to teach parishioners about tithing and the importance of supporting the Parish and Diocese.
- Stewardship Sunday: Establish an annual "Stewardship Sunday" to emphasize the importance of consistent giving and encourage parishioners to make a commitment to supporting the church. Discuss Stewardship from the pulpit (examples of the impact of giving)
- Design and implement creative marketing strategies to bolster volunteer support and parishioner interest in programs, and to help evangelize outside the church.
- Communication of ministries and events that could generate more involvement (brochures, website, social media).
- Refresh our website and create a more balanced approach between website and Flocknote presence.
- Purchase a digital sign to advertise parish events and establish a plan for use.
- Streamline and refresh website and parish communications.
- Promote NDMC programs during heavily attended Masses.
- Spotlight Ministries on a rotating basis; utilize TV screens in the gathering space; Spotlight 1-2 ministries each month in the Parish Update (tied to Ministry Goal: Create a Ministry Directory and standardized ministry materials (where applicable) to promote awareness of Ministries and their work)
- Share new parishioner information with appropriate ministry leads.
- Ensure the parish is listed as a 211 resource.
- Place flyers with parish offerings at Welcome Centers and other appropriate community locations
- Expand job board and local announcements section (or add new section) in ND Happenings Flocknote where parishioners could indicate needs.
- Develop a yearly Ministry Fair calendar. Options can include a large-scale fair with participation from all ministries, or a more frequent model (i.e. quarterly) where a subset of 5-6 ministries offers a Mini Ministry Fair.
- Coordinate ministry fair events with Stewardship and Offertory Initiative Sundays.

Discipleship

- Offer at least one Discipleship Group targeted to youth
- Offer at least one Discipleship Group targeted to young adults.
- Offer at least one Discipleship Group which increase Biblical knowledge.
- Offer at least one Discipleship Group which discusses the Mass.
- Re-evaluate the current Youth Ministry program and consider making changes to increase effectiveness.
- Assess areas of expertise among team members and allocate responsibilities accordingly.
- Develop an engaging youth ministry program for grades 9-12 that increases the active involvement of our young people in parish life
- Re-evaluate day and time of youth ministry meetings and events.
- Consider bringing back annual Antioch for high schoolers within 2-3 years.
- Consider running Youth Alpha.

- Create an Instagram account separate from ND's account to reach young people.
- Consult past youth ministry leaders to determine best approaches to recruiting and maintaining members.
- Market Appalachia service opportunities for youth.
- Increase and reinvigorate the youth altar server program with incentives (for instance, field trips).
- Increase the promotion of the 6PM Mass and the engagement of youth lectors and music ministers.
- Collaborate with other youth groups from local parishes.
- Create a mentoring program so that younger parishioners can meet and observe older parishioners serving the parish.
- Bring in more guest speakers (religious, lay persons) to speak about their faith experiences and vocations and to provide instruction as warranted.

Ministry

- Create a Ministry handbook that includes:
 - A process for ministry self-assessment.
 - Suggestions for rotation of leadership within ministries.
 - Best practices for incorporating prayer within ministry events and for combining spiritual programming with social time.
 - Procedures for: outreach and invitation to events and programs; accompaniment and mentorship of participants during the programs; follow-up with participants to solicit feedback and recommend "next steps" for them as well as invite them to future leadership roles; and plans for reunion events.
 - Recommendations for:
 - co-ministry collaboration
 - engaging new parishioners.
 - service projects that ministry groups can undertake (e.g., Lent Soup Kitchen, Home Solutions BBQ)
 - adherence to the marketing and communications plan for ministry events.
 - The incorporation of Masses before or after as many parish events as possible, including but not limited to retreats, where witness opportunities can be incorporated.
 - Guidance to ministry leaders to gather feedback at the conclusion of activities
 - Coordinate regular use of the Gathering Space by the Ministries.
- Measure and track participation in ministry activities.
- Assess whether some less active ministries should be discontinued or combined with other ministries.
- Assess if there is duplication or redundancy among ministries.
- Determine if there are any gaps in ministries.
- Develop signage and handouts describing the ministries.
 - Create a standard one-page document that each ministry can share (hard copy) at ministry fairs and other public events.
 - Create a standard slide template for Ministries to utilize to develop a single slide advertisement for display on digital sign boards or TV displays in the gathering space.
- Collect and prepare testimonials from ministry program participants.
- Create or purchase giveaways and NDMC merchandise.
- Compile and prepare photographs from past ministry events.
- Organize and execute the live-streaming of designated parish events.
- Involve current live-stream volunteers with knowledge of the church's equipment.
- Assist with one-off requests, such as showing Alpha videos in church or reviewing tech for Cornerstone.
- Retain live streaming volunteers in a manner tangential to their original involvement.
- Recruit more volunteers, especially from the young adults in ministry.

- Complete a digital ministry directory that at a minimum, in a standard format, outlines each ministry's purpose, a detailed description of the work they do, and a way for parishioners to contact the ministry leader. This should be exportable as in a PDF document.
- Complementary to the digital ministry directory, using the same information and format, update the parish website.
- Identify 1-2 groups that we are not currently reaching and make a plan for outreach this year.
- Establish a Discipleship Group group for the elderly (+70).
- Establish a connection to local charity programs such as Catholic Charities, Salvation Army, Habitat for Humanity to plan NDMC volunteer.

Worship

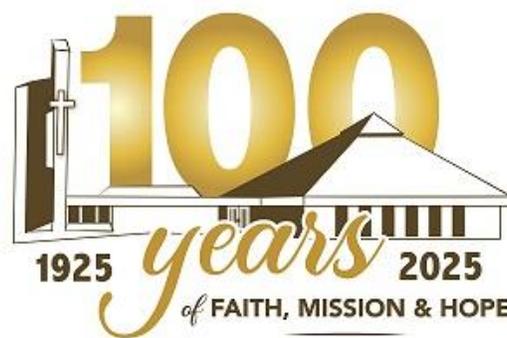
- Meet quarterly to identify responsibility gaps or redundancies.
- Recruit more people to be involved in liturgical ministries so as to rotate those serving at Masses.
- Affected ministries would be Adult and Youth Altar Servers, Eucharist Ministers, Lectors, Live-Streaming, Ushers, and Welcoming and Hospitality.
- Identify duplication and make ministry commitments clearer.
- Promote Ministries more effectively. Awareness could be the root problem.
- Advertise ministry needs to congregation and indicate who heads liturgical ministries.
- Develop a cadence and method for communicating liturgical changes to every affected ministry.
- Each month, a component of the Mass will receive special attention and will be supplemented with instructional elements as recommended by the Pastor (content and delivery adjusted for age appropriateness based on the selected Mass time).
- Each month, offer instruction and reminders about correct and reverent reception of Holy Eucharist, including what to do and what to pray before, during, and after receiving the sacrament.
- Remind parishioners of the meaning and sanctity of the tabernacle, the sanctuary, and the worship space.
- Create a "Mass Minute" feature in the Flocknote mailing and also in an Instagram reel.
- Create a monthly homily that provides education about a particular part of the Mass.
- Special themed Masses can include the following: cultural traditions, teachers, reunion Mass for participation in programs such as Cornerstone and Alpha, Mass for healing, 1st responders, Bishop's Mass, Mass in a language other than English.
- Special themed Masses will incorporate relevant blessings, language usage, patron saint invocations, hymns, intentional homilies and specific hospitality initiatives (song sheets and handouts, signage) related to the Mass theme.
- Make Adoration a priority in our parish.
- Schedule adorers for 8 AM-3 PM on Fridays.
- Address urgent needs for adorers and send a unique Flocknote with details about what Adoration is.
- Create a volunteer list of scheduled adorers and substitutes (include phone numbers).
- Emphasize that Adoration is ongoing and open.
- Communicate with other ministries and publicize at other ministries' events.

Community & Fellowship

- Singles Group Gatherings (quarterly) meetings for single parishioners to connect and socialize. These could be held after Mass or in the evening, and would include food and fellowship opportunities. (Young Adults Ministry)
- Pub Nights: (quarterly) gatherings at a local pub for parishioners to relax and enjoy each other's company in a casual setting. (Men's Ministry)
- Senior Luncheons: (monthly) luncheons for senior parishioners, held on a weekday after the noon Mass. This would provide a regular opportunity for seniors to socialize and enjoy a meal together. (Volunteer Lead Required)

- Conduct a Parish-Wide Event (twice per year): such as pancake breakfasts or picnics, potlucks, game nights, or holiday celebrations to help foster a sense of community and provide opportunities for parishioners of all ages to connect. (Knights of Columbus, Volunteer Lead Required)
- Offer secular activities for the parishioners - yoga, scrapbooking, group trips.
- Conduct parish surveys to assess evangelization needs, music preferences by Mass, youth and young adult groups
- Gather feedback from discipleship groups and ministries
- Reintroduce the use of the hospitality desk with featured ministries and information each week.
- Engage volunteers to support having donuts and coffee after more Masses.
- Encourage all age groups to be part of the Hospitality Ministry.

Notre Dame of Mount Carmel



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