

St. John the Baptist
Mount Vernon, Iowa

Parish Vitality Goals

In response to the Archdiocese's call for our parish to identify ways that we might increase our vitality, Parish Council has worked carefully to identify two goals for the 2023-2024 year.

GOAL # 1: Increase parishioner attendance at Sunday Mass by 5%.

Rationale:

Our Parish is experiencing a decline in Mass attendance, likely driven by Covid-related factors. In earlier years, Mass attendance among parishioners registered with the Parish averaged about 39-41%. In 2014, for example, we had 1,254 total parishioners with a Sunday Mass count of 519, for a participation rate of 41%. In 2016, we had 1,260 total parishioners and we averaged 486 people in attendance at Sunday Mass, for a participation rate of 39%. Although there is a data gap in Mass counts for years 2017-2021, Parish Council members recall that participation rates held fairly steady until the Covid pandemic. As we know, the pandemic had an extraordinarily negative effect on Mass attendance in 2020 and even 2021. But the post-Covid era has not seen a rebound to pre-Covid attendance rates. In October of 2022, for example, our Mass counts ranged from 248 to 300 people, for an average of 277. That's about 57% of our 2016 total count.

To gain back what has been lost, we have a long journey to make, and we must take that journey patiently, step by step. A 5% increase in parishioner attendance from 2022 would place us at a Mass count average of 291, which we would measure at the October Mass count in 2024 (to give us one full year to implement our goal).

We recognize that each of our parishioners plays a vital role at Mass in serving as a member of the Church. And it is Christ as Head together with the Church as members that constitutes the "whole man," *Totus Christus*, in the words of St. Augustine. It is therefore imperative that members of the Church to be present at Mass.

Key Action Steps:

We have identified five key action steps that we will be following this year:

- Create a subcommittee to identify our inactive parishioners and develop an outreach message.
- Launch an outreach effort and invite inactive parishioners to come back for Advent, Christmas, and Easter.
- Coordinate with Cornell College to ensure that Catholic students are actively welcomed to St. John's.
- Contact families with children in the faith formation program to personally invite their children to participate in Totus Tuus.

- Since “singing is praying *twice*,” select and learn five new pieces in a musical style accessible to the parish.

Communication of Goal and Progress:

We will announce our goals to the parish via our bulletin, website, Facebook, email, and announcements before Mass. In December and February, we will create a visual display in the Gathering Space to encourage parishioners to adopt the role of inviting their Catholic friends and neighbors to Christmas and Easter Masses. We will follow up after each action step by placing a feature about the importance of “welcoming new faces to Mass” in our bulletin, website, Facebook, and emails. Finally, we will give a report on the Mass count results after October of 2024.

GOAL # 2: Cultivate opportunities for parishioners of all ages and all levels of commitment to discover their calling as *intentional disciples* of Christ. We will measure the effectiveness of these opportunities according to the number of unique parishioners who are willing to reorder their lives towards increased participation in parish initiatives (“service to others”).

Rationale:

All of us have read about the growing numbers of “nones” as well as the alarming statistics about baptized Catholics who do not participate in the Church as adults. Many Americans seem to feel that the Church is no longer relevant to their lives. These sentiments are not simply reflected in abstract numbers—we see the evidence in our own empty pews. And yet the need for the Church to help one discern one’s true purpose—against the grain of a secular society bereft of hope—arguably could not be greater than at this particular moment.

To change course, we wish to sow the seeds of *intentional discipleship* and measure our effectiveness on the basis of the fruit that is borne. We will make a conscious effort to reach our parishioners wherever they are in their personal faith journey by presenting a variety of ways to engage, so that they might be welcomed to understand, in the words of Blessed Cardinal John Henry Newman, that “God has created me to do Him some definite service [...] I am a link in a chain, a bond of connection between persons. He has not created me for naught. I shall do good, I shall do His work.”

Our efforts will be focused on increasing awareness and visibility of this work so that the relevance of our faith to the world can be concretely witnessed. We want to encourage greater participation in the work that we are already doing at St. John’s (e.g. various ministries), and we also want to provide more opportunities that demonstrate the “fruit” of our faith in the broader community.

Key Action Steps:

We have identified several key action steps that we will be following this year:

- Compile a list of and measure the average number of unique individuals who participate in Church committees, ministries, catechists, etc., as a means of benchmarking (fall 2023).

- Develop and implement a message of intentional discipleship to be shared with all parishioners.
- Establish deeper faith-sharing amongst parishioners through discipleship quads.
- Engage the broader community with floats in the community parades.
- Engage Catholic youth in visible, local service project (clean-up days, etc.).
- Design t-shirts that parishioners can wear while engaging in community-wide activities as an outward sign of our call to participate.
- Dedicate 75% of tithing budget through the Social Justice Committee toward local community needs.
- Invite members of the broader Lisbon-Mount Vernon community, including non-Catholics, to the Willis Dady lecture and Laudato Si' event.
- Organize a "Discipleship Fair," in the spring of 2024, featuring opportunities for parishioners to become involved both at St. John's and in the broader community, and ask our actively-participating parishioners to personally invite others to consider participating in service opportunities.

Communication of Goal and Progress:

We will communicate the message of intentional discipleship to all parishioners via our bulletin, website, Facebook, emails, and announcements before Mass. Social Justice will communicate tithing decisions each quarter. Parish Council will share positive feedback from parishioners who participate in service activities both at St. John's and in the local community. In September of 2024, we will measure any increase or decrease in parishioner participation numbers against our benchmark.