

St. John Chrysostom Byzantine Catholic Church Parish Pastoral Plan Proposal Form

There are three ways that you can submit your ideas for the Parish Pastoral Plan.

1. Use the online form on the parish web site. Go to the *About* menu, select *Parish Pastoral Plan*
2. Email: PastoralPlan@StJohnChrysostom.com
3. Drop this completed form in the US Mail: St. John Church, 5402 Acorn St, Houston, Tx 77092

First Name: _____

Last Name: _____

Phone: _____

Email: _____

What goals and objectives do you wish to propose? You need not respond to every category. Descriptions of each category and example goals and objectives are below.

Liturgy:

Communion:

Preaching:

Evangelization:

Catechesis:

Domestic Church:

Service:

The Parish Pastoral Plan is expected to be completed and published in the next 1-2 months.

Liturgy

The first category of the Parish Pastoral Plan is Liturgy. Liturgy is a Greek word. Its original meaning referred to tasks that, today, one would expect a public servant to perform for the common good of society, the nation, or for political unity.¹ In the Church, the word liturgy came to mean her public services (e.g., morning, evening, night prayers), but particularly the sacraments. Preeminent in the Church's liturgical worship is the Divine Liturgy. Referring to the celebration of the Holy Eucharist as the *Divine* Liturgy emphasizes the mystical (sacramental) radiance of Christ's person and His working among us. The Liturgy is not as much a public service that the priest performs for the people (although it is that), or even the people's participation in it (it is that also), but rather a divine service in which God offers to the human person the grace of salvation and communion with Him. It is Christ's liturgy, the One who serves as the "merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make expiation for the sins of the people" (Heb 2:27).² The liturgy of the Holy Eucharist is the source and summit of Christian life, and that which makes the Church, because there it is Christ the high priest who serves. "For the Son of man also came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). The liturgical life of the Church, then, is an essential category of the Parish Pastoral Plan.

Example Goal (what): Deepen understanding and personal participation in the Divine Liturgy.

Example Objective (how): Create a high-quality display in the social hall about the Divine Liturgy that illustrates and explains its various parts.

¹ See Hermann Strathmann and Rudolf Meyer, "Λειτουργίᾳ, Λειτουργία, Λειτουργός, Λειτουργικός," ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964-), 215–216.

² Only Jesus is priest in the fullest and truest sense. All others are instrumental or ministerial priests of the one priesthood of Christ. They merely act in His person, meaning, that in the liturgical service that the ordained priest renders, it is Christ who is present and serves as our high priest. See CCC 1548-1551 for a more complete explanation.

Communion

Closely related to Liturgy is the category of communion. The Church is a supernatural communion of persons both human and divine. The ultimate source of this communion is the Eucharist. “Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread” (1 Cor 10:17). The essential characteristic of this communion is supernatural love, which is a sign of the Church’s communion with Christ. “By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:35). This category is relational, and it concerns our charitable interactions with others. When this is lacking among believers, such as at a parish, it is arguably the most damaging to faith, both for believers and those would believe. “...for they preach, but do not practice” (Matt 23:3). This, as well as the rest of the categories, is an essential category of the Parish Pastoral Plan.

Example Goal (what): Further develop communion among the members of St. John Chrysostom Parish

Example Objective (how): Organize social outings, such as quarterly dinners out

Preaching

The Preaching category of the Parish Pastoral Plan is in the context of liturgy, particularly the Divine Liturgy. It is centered on the Church’s divine commission to proclaim and expound on the Gospel. “He who hears you hears me, and he who rejects you rejects me, and he who rejects me rejects him who sent me” (Luke 10:16). Regardless of any other meaning that this category may have, it must first be understood sacramentally (Luke 10:16). It is Christ’s Gospel, it is Christ who preaches, and it is He, Himself, who *is* the Gospel, the Word that is preached (1 John 1:1–4; John 1:1-14). The sacramentality of the Church’s preaching is most apparent at the Divine Liturgy because Christ is there, sacramentally, in the flesh. The two parts of the Divine Liturgy, the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist, should remind us

of the Incarnation. At the Divine Liturgy, the Gospel, the Word that the Church proclaims, is made flesh (John 1:14). It is there that the faithful receive the Word as a sacrament both in the inspired Scripture and in the Holy Eucharist. This is not to suggest that the reading of the Gospel is a sacrament in the same sense that the Holy Eucharist is a sacrament, but only that they are intimately related. It is Christ in the Gospel that is read and preached, and it is Christ in the Eucharist. When hearing the Gospel at the Divine Liturgy, one should think of receiving Christ, the Word, in a similar way as one thinks of receiving Christ in His body and blood. It is the same Christ, during the liturgy, who is mystically present and giving Himself to us in the Scriptures, although in a different manner than His body and blood in the Eucharist. There are, however, other forms of preaching, that of evangelization and catechesis. These are the next two categories of the Parish Pastoral Plan.

Example Goal (what): Increase the relevancy of preaching by seeking out questions concerning the faith and suggestions for preaching topics.

Example Objective (how): Create a webform on the parish web site where anyone may suggest topics and ask questions

Evangelization

The purpose of Evangelization is “to lead others to the ‘yes’ of faith in Jesus Christ” (Catechism 429). It is impossible to speak of Preaching as something entirely separate from Evangelization, but this category differs from other forms of preaching because of its aim, which is initial conversion (Catechism 1072).

But how are men to call upon him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without a preacher? (Romans 10:14).

The Preaching category, which is in the context of Christian worship, emphasizes the Gospel’s intimate connection to the Holy Eucharist (i.e., Word becoming flesh). The Evangelization category emphasizes going out into the world to convert sinners, to bring them into Christ’s

sheepfold, to share in the Holy Mysteries, in particular, to be Baptized, Chrismated and to share in the Holy Eucharist. Evangelization is summed up in the words of Jesus to the Apostles. “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matt. 28:19).³ Thus, Evangelization is a different category than the Preaching category (liturgical preaching) because of its fundamental aim.

Example Goal (what): Deepen the parish’s understanding of Evangelization and how to do it

Example Objective (how): Create an evangelization packet that parishioners could have at home to use with people who come to their door, to family or friends who ask questions, or just to leave in public places.

Catechesis

The purpose of catechesis is to mature the faith of Christ’s disciples by means of a deeper and more systematic knowledge of Christian doctrine (CT, 19-20). Whereas the Evangelization category is the *making* of disciples (converts), the Catechesis category is the *maturing* of disciples. Both of these categories lead to the Preaching category, that is, to the Divine Liturgy, the Holy Eucharist, the Word made flesh. As with the Evangelization category, it is necessary to maintain a clear-cut distinction in the Parish Pastoral Plan between the elements of Preaching and Catechesis for the purpose of planning, even if this type of distinction does not always exist in practice. Given the particular circumstances of a parish, preaching at the liturgy may need to focus on evangelization or it may be necessary to take a catechetical approach.⁴ In the Parish Pastoral Plan, Preaching (liturgical), Evangelization (initial conversion) and Catechesis (maturing disciples) are essentially the same in terms of the Church’s proclamation of the

³ The Catechism defines Evangelization in the glossary of terms as “The proclamation of Christ and his Gospel (Greek: *evangelion*) by word and the testimony of life, in fulfillment of Christ’s command” (p. 877).

⁴ The ideal would be that the congregation is evangelized (personal commitment and relationship with Jesus) and are being educated in the faith on a continual basis. Preaching at the liturgy, of course, cannot replace specific efforts to evangelize and catechize.

Gospel, but they have different aims. Goals and objectives related to the Church's proclamation of the Gospel, however, requires that a distinction between these three categories be carefully maintained. There should be distinct goals and objectives in the parish plan that pertain to proclaiming the Gospel at the Divine Liturgy (Preaching), to the conversion of the world to Christ (Evangelization), and to maturing the faith of believers (Catechesis). This brings us to the next primary element, the Domestic Church.

Example Goal (what): Develop a program of Parish-wide renewal of catechesis

Example Objective (how): Establish the study of the Catechism by Adults as the starting point and core of Parish Catechesis

Domestic Church

The Christian family constitutes a specific revelation and realization of ecclesial communion, and for this reason it can and should be called a *domestic church* (CCC 2204).

The Church is a supernatural communion of persons, both human and divine; it is relational and Trinitarian. The Christian family is a unique reflection and realization of this. The Catechism expresses it best, when it states that, "The Christian family is a communion of persons, a sign and image of the communion of the Father and the Son in the Holy Spirit" (CCC 2205). The Domestic Church bears a true sacramental significance, particularly, since it is based on the sacrament of marriage, which is a specific, supernatural communion of man and woman, and an image of Christ and His Church (CCC 2685).

The sacrament of Matrimony signifies the union of Christ and the Church. It gives spouses the grace to love each other with the love with which Christ has loved his Church (CCC 1661).

All families, properly speaking, constitute a natural communion of persons. Christian families, however, as members of the Church, share in a supernatural communion. The supernatural communion of the body of Christ is, as it were, brought home. This is the very reason that the

family is a “specific revelation and realization of ecclesial communion” (CCC 2204). The Domestic Church category, then, involves living out, in day-to-day life, the supernatural communion that is the Church.⁵ The Christian family, as the Domestic Church, is where children receive their primary instruction in faith and morals, both in word and in example. The Domestic Church is “a community of grace and prayer, a school of human virtues and of Christian charity” (CCC 1666). “Thus, the home is the first school of Christian life and ‘a school for human enrichment’ (*GS 52§1*)” (CCC1657). As such, the Christian family is characterized by supernatural love, which is a sign, a sacrament to the world (John 13:35). In the words of Pope St. John Paul II:

“The family is the domestic church”. The meaning of this traditional Christian idea is that the home is the Church in miniature. The Church is the sacrament of God’s love. She is a communion of faith and life. She is a mother and teacher. She is at the service of the whole human family as it goes forward towards its ultimate destiny. In the same way the family is a community of life and love. It educates and leads its members to their full human maturity and it serves the good of all along the road of life. The family is the “first and vital cell of society”. In its own way it is a living image and historical representation of the mystery of the Church. The future of the world and of the Church, therefore, passes through the family.⁶

Analogously, one can say that “Just as the parish is a local church within the diocese, so the Christian family is a little church within the parish.”⁷

The Christian family, then, finds its meaning and source in the Church, which “...is nothing other than the family of God” (CCC 1655). The Church may differ in certain natural ways from the Domestic Church, but it is a family nonetheless. In truth, the Church is a family in the fullest sense of the word because it is “the household of God” (1 Tim 3:15). All those who

⁵ This particular expression of ecclesial communion (Domestic Church) arises from the sacramentality of marriage, but it is fundamentally dependent on the grace of baptism, which is each individual’s fundamental participation in the life and communion of the Church.

⁶ John Paul II, *Homilies of Pope John Paul II (English)* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2014).

⁷ Germain Grisez, *The Way of the Lord Jesus, Volume Two: Living a Christian Life* (Quincy, IL: Franciscan Press, 1997), 611.

belong to the Church “...are no longer strangers and sojourners, but...members of the household of God” (Eph 2:19). It is no coincidence that so many passages in the New Testament use the language of marriage and family in reference to the Church and her members. Below are just a few examples.⁸

For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother, and sister, and mother (Matt 12:50).

For I became your father in Christ Jesus through the Gospel (1 Cor. 4:15).

Love one another with brotherly affection (Rom 12:10).

For this reason, I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named (Eph 3:14-15).

I feel a divine jealousy for you, for I betrothed you to Christ to present you as a pure bride to her one husband (2 Cor 11:2).

If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and in lack of daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace, be warmed and filled,’ without giving them the things needed for the body, what does it profit (Jas 2:15-16)?

Do not rebuke an older man but exhort him as you would a father; treat younger men like brothers, older women like mothers, younger women like sisters (1 Tim 5:1-2).

Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready (Rev 19:7).

And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband (Rev 21:2)

Then came one of the seven angels...and spoke to me, saying, “Come, I will show you the Bride, the wife of the Lamb” (Rev 21:9).

In addition, priests are often referred to as father, monastics as mother and father, religious as brothers and sisters, and in general, the entire body of the faithful as brothers and sisters. The Church is the covenant family of God. God is our Father and His Son is our Brother. Christ is the

⁸ See also Eph 5:21–6:4; Col 3:18–21; 1 Peter 3:1–7, which parallels the relationship of husband and wife with that of Christ and His Church.

bridegroom of the Church, and the Church is His bride (Matt 9:15; John 3:29; Rev 19:7; 21:2,9). The Church is also mother, the embodiment of which is the Mother of God.

There is a close identification, then, between the Domestic Church and the Church—the *parish family*. Many of the same struggles to love, to serve and forgive are present in both. The human condition is difficult, extremely difficult at times. These sufferings, and death itself, were never meant to be, but such is the reality of our existence. There are also many who are left alone, without family, often the elderly, and many people who, not by their own choosing, remain single throughout their entire life. These, and the many other difficulties of the human condition, are the sufferings of the family that is the Church. *The domestic church and the parish church belong to each other, to the same ecclesial reality and communion.*

The category of the Domestic Church, however, includes everyone, even those who live alone. In the words of Pope St. John Paul II, “No one is without family in this world: the Church is a home and family for everyone” (FC, 85). The Domestic Church, as a planning category, is essential to the parish plan. A parish that is neglectful of the domestic church is a parish whose members are not living the faith at home, beyond the parish walls. Such a parish is where families are un-evangelized, un-catechized, failing to live the Gospel in day-to-day life and thus passing it on. The seriousness of this cannot be overstated. Very many Catholics have been overtaken by the values and worldview of secularism. A parish without a sense of the domestic church and its critical importance, is a parish that is failing to live out its mission and vision to be the Catholic Church in that place. It is a parish that is in the process of simply fading away.

Example Goal (what): Help families realize their mission as a Christian family

Example Objective (how): Introduce the Domestic Church Association to the parish and invite member family to give a parish presentation

Service

The last category of the Parish Pastoral Plan is Service. It is last not because it is least, but so that it may be understood in its proper context with the rest of the categories. Human persons, because of their inherent dignity and communal nature, deserve to be loved and to be in relationships in which they can love others. Human flourishing requires this for at least two reasons. First, genuine love is the deepest human need, the deepest desire of the human heart, without which, no one can attain any measure of true happiness. Second, no one flourishes by himself; he depends on many others, such as family, friends and society. Both the need for love, and the interdependence of human persons for actualizing themselves, is bound up with the human person's communal or relational nature. Through acts of love and interdependence, human persons fulfill each other. This is at the heart of service on a purely natural level. In the Pastoral Plan, however, Service is something even greater.

The category of Service concerns faith working through love, a supernatural love working in and through us. In this respect, everyone who believes and is baptized is a sacrament, an instrument of divine love. Without such love, Service has little or no meaning in the Pastoral Plan (1 Cor 13:1-10). Separated from the sacramentality of the Church, the Service category becomes mere social work or activism. In which case, the parish, in its service, is only concerned with this world, as if human effort could ever solve the problem of the human condition. The category of Service belongs to the mission and vision of the Church as a supernatural communion of persons, human and divine. This communion is so profound, so intimate, that whatever we do to another human being, we do to the Lord Himself.

I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.' Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? And

when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?’ And the King will answer them, ‘Truly, I say to you, *as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me*’ (Matt 25:35-40).

In a similar way, whatever happens to any member of Christ’s body, happens to all the members.

God has so composed the body...that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together (1 Cor 12:24-26).

“So, we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another” (Rom 12:5).

Whatever we do to the least among us, including the evil that we do, we also do to Christ and to His entire body, the Church. We can see here that the category of Service in the Pastoral Plan is closely related to the category of Communion. All of the categories, however, are related to each other in a similar way. Service is related to Communion; Communion is related to Liturgy; and Liturgy to Preaching, Evangelization and Catechesis. Conversely, Preaching, Evangelization and Catechesis are all related to Service in the truest sense of the word, because they are aimed at serving the salvation and sanctification of the human person; they serve the person’s greatest possible good. And all of these elements relate to the life of the Domestic Church.

Example Goal (what): Increase individual and parish understanding and involvement in the corporal and spiritual works of mercy.

Example Objective (how): Put up poster display of works of mercy in the social hall with examples.

Example Objective (how): Form a small committee to select at least one annual charity and determine at least one specific activity in which to engage (e.g., 40 days for life, pregnancy help centers, St. Vincent de Paul Society).