

St. Anthony of Padua and Our Lady of Mercy Parishes Diocese of Allentown

Priority 1: Welcoming & Hospitality

For I was hungry, and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty, and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger, and you welcomed me. Matthew 25: 35.

Statement

Hospitality within the parish extends beyond simply having ushers at Mass. It means creating a welcoming environment where people feel known and appreciated. This includes social gatherings, faith-sharing events, and intentional efforts to bridge the gap between English-speaking and Spanish-speaking communities. Hospitality is rooted in Scripture, where Christ teaches us to welcome the stranger and care for the marginalized.

Rationale

In an increasingly disconnected world, people are yearning for community. The parish must serve as a place where all feel at home, whether they are lifelong members or newcomers. A culture of hospitality is foundational for building a vibrant, mission-driven parish where people want to belong. The focus on hospitality now, rather than other areas, is crucial for helping the parish grow and be seen as a welcoming environment that attracts people of all backgrounds.

SMART GOAL #1:

Develop and implement 2-4 welcoming initiatives at all parish Masses, ensuring at least 70% participation across all Masses by December 31, 2025.

STRATEGIES

1. Form a Welcoming Team:

- Assemble a dedicated team of parishioners and leaders to brainstorm, plan, and oversee the implementation of 2-4 welcoming initiatives. This team will ensure consistent execution and alignment with the goal.

2. Provide Comprehensive Training for Ushers and Greeters:

- Conduct training sessions focused on hospitality skills, including greeting techniques, recognizing visitors, and engaging with parishioners in a warm and inclusive manner. Offer periodic refreshers to reinforce these practices.

3. Develop and Plan Initiatives:

- Collaborate with the welcoming team to brainstorm innovative ideas for fostering a welcoming environment. Finalize 2-4 initiatives and create a detailed calendar to roll them out systematically across all Masses.

4. Monitor and Adjust Implementation:

- Schedule regular reviews to assess the progress and effectiveness of the initiatives using feedback from parishioners, ushers, and greeters. Adjust the strategies as needed to ensure the 70% participation goal is achieved.

SMART GOAL #2:

Develop and launch a minimum of three bilingual social events, such as potlucks, family gatherings, or faith sharing sessions with at least 50 participants, ensuring representation from both English speaking and Spanish speaking communities by December 31, 2025

STRATEGIES

1. Form a Social Activities Committee:

- Establish a diverse committee with equal representation from both English-speaking and Spanish-speaking communities.
- Include members with event planning experience and strong connections to their respective communities to ensure inclusivity and effective outreach.

2. Brainstorm and Plan Events:

- Host collaborative brainstorming sessions within the committee to identify three bilingual social events that appeal to both communities, such as potlucks, family gatherings, or faith-sharing sessions.
- Incorporate cultural elements from both communities to foster a sense of unity and shared experience.

3. Secure Event Dates and Locations:

- Work with parish leadership to reserve dates and venues for the three planned events.
- Ensure that event schedules consider cultural and community-specific preferences to maximize attendance.

4. Promote and Engage Communities:

- Use bilingual promotional materials, including social media, bulletins, and personal invitations, to encourage participation.
- Assign committee members as event ambassadors to personally invite families and individuals from both language groups to ensure robust attendance.

Priority 2:

Confidence in explaining the Teaching of the Faith.

*Always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope.
1 Peter 3:15.*

Statement

This priority focuses on equipping parishioners with the knowledge and confidence to clearly articulate the core teachings of the Catholic faith. It emphasizes going "back to basics," covering key areas such as the meaning of the Mass, the importance of Reconciliation, and answering fundamental questions like "Why do we do what we do as Catholics?" It also involves making use of modern resources and technology to aid in catechesis.

Rationale

In today's culture, many Catholics find it difficult to explain the reasons behind their faith when asked. There is an assumption that people know more about their faith than they actually do, leaving gaps in understanding. Addressing this priority is crucial in forming intentional disciples who are prepared to live and share their faith confidently. Given the growing secularization of society, this priority takes precedence because it helps Catholics engage thoughtfully with their faith, especially when challenged or questioned.

SMART GOAL #1:

Increase parish engagement with the FORMED platform by ensuring at least 50% of parishioners register and actively use the resource to explore topics of the Catholic Faith by December 31, 2026

STRATEGIES

1. Develop a Dedicated FORMED Team:

- Assemble a team of parish volunteers or staff members to be trained on the features and resources available through the FORMED platform. This team will serve as ambassadors to promote and support parishioners in registering and using the platform effectively.

2. Host Registration Events:

- Organize designated times, such as after Masses or during parish events, to guide parishioners through the registration process for FORMED. Provide step-by-step assistance and distribute informational materials to encourage sign-ups.

3. Integrate FORMED Content into Parish Life:

- Use the timelines and resources provided by FORMED to plan and promote specific content, such as saint biographies, seasonal reflections, or faith-based activities. Highlight these offerings through bulletins, announcements, social media, and parish events.

4. Promote Engaging Activities and Content:

- Regularly feature specific programs, saints, or topics available on FORMED that align with liturgical seasons or parish initiatives. Encourage participation by

incorporating FORMED resources into faith formation classes, small groups, and family activities.

SMART GOAL #2:

Organize and conduct adult Catholicism 101 sessions on a quarterly basis (4 classes per year), focusing on essential topics like the Mass, Reconciliation, and Catholic Identity with a minimum of 25 participants attending each session by December 31, 2026.

STRATEGIES

1. Form a Planning Team:

- Recruit a team of knowledgeable and committed individuals to create a timeline for covering essential topics like the Mass, Reconciliation, and Catholic Identity in quarterly Catholicism 101 sessions.

2. Curate Supporting Materials:

- Research and select engaging and accessible resources, such as books, videos, handouts, and multimedia materials, to support the chosen topics and enhance participant understanding.

3. Schedule Classes:

- Establish specific dates and times for each quarterly session, ensuring they are convenient for participants and align with the parish calendar to maximize attendance.

4. Promote and Register Participants:

- Develop a communication plan using bulletins, social media, email, and pulpit announcements to promote the sessions. Create an easy registration process to secure a minimum of 25 participants per class.

**Priority #3:
Growing in Discipleship**

“Go make disciples of all nations. Baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them all I have commanded you. Behold, I am with you always until the end of the age.” Matthew 28:19-20.

Statement

Discipleship is about deepening one's personal relationship with Christ and learning to live and share that faith with others. It involves recognizing God's work in your life, being able to share your personal faith story, and understanding and sharing the story of Jesus. This priority focuses on helping parishioners grow as disciples by providing spiritual formation opportunities and creating measurable pathways to engage in the mission of the Church.

Rationale

Discipleship is the heart of the Christian life, yet many Catholics struggle to understand what it truly means to live as a disciple of Christ. In an increasingly individualistic society, there is a need for intentional focus on helping people understand their call to mission, both within the Church and in the world. This priority is key because it aligns with the Church's mission to "go and make disciples of all nations." Without a strong foundation in discipleship, other initiatives may lack the spiritual depth necessary for sustained impact.

SMART GOAL #1:

Organize four annual parish wide events for sharing faith stories, aiming for at least 25% of attendees to feel more confident in sharing their faith journey, as measured by participation rates by Dec. 31, 2027

STRATEGIES

1. **Design an Evening Faith-Sharing Format:**
 - Develop an engaging evening event format that includes two 15-20 minute faith-sharing presentations followed by small group discussions. Ensure the format encourages open dialogue and personal reflection on faith journeys.
2. **Identify and Train Witness Speakers:**
 - Recruit and train parish leaders or volunteers to prepare and deliver 15-20 minute witness talks focused on their faith journeys. Provide guidance on storytelling techniques and connecting personal experiences to the broader themes of faith and discipleship.
3. **Conduct Pre- and Post-Event Surveys:**
 - Create a survey for participants to complete before and after each event to assess changes in their confidence in sharing their faith stories. Use the survey data to measure the effectiveness of the events and identify areas for improvement.
4. **Incorporate Media for Discussion:**
 - Integrate relevant media, such as episodes or clips from *The Chosen*, into the events to provide a shared starting point for discussions. Facilitate group conversations on how the stories resonate with their own faith journeys and what insights they've gained to deepen their understanding of their faith.

SMART GOAL #2:

Establish at least 3 new service opportunities per year for parishioners to engage in community outreach, aiming for a participation rate of at least 30 individuals per opportunity by December 31, 2027

STRATEGIES

1. Form a Service Opportunities Leadership Team:

- Recruit and develop a dedicated team to oversee community outreach efforts, including planning, coordination, and promotion of service events.
- Ensure the team includes representatives from various parish groups to maximize engagement and participation.

2. Identify Community and Parish Needs:

- Conduct surveys or hold listening sessions to identify specific service opportunities within the parish and surrounding community (e.g., cemetery cleanups, food drives, elderly assistance, or neighborhood beautification projects).
- Partner with local organizations to pinpoint areas where parishioners can make the most impact.

3. Plan and Schedule Service Events:

- Organize at least three new service opportunities per year by coordinating dates, securing locations, and obtaining necessary materials (e.g., tools, supplies, transportation).
- Develop a detailed timeline and assign responsibilities to ensure smooth execution of each event.

4. Promote and Encourage Participation:

- Use parish bulletins, social media, announcements at Mass, and direct outreach to invite parishioners to participate in service opportunities.
- Highlight the spiritual benefits of community service and share stories from previous participants to inspire involvement.
- Track participation and gather feedback after each event to improve future opportunities.