Parish Planning Guide

The words of our beloved Pope Francis echo the spirit of Pope Paul VI (and his successors) who wrote: “The church exists to evangelize” which is another way of saying - GROW! Now we are called to a “new” evangelization because, according to Pew Research Center, for the first time in the history of the American Catholic experience, 55% of Catholics no longer identify as active in their faith practice. That means that we are living in a faith growth market. Each parish has a tremendous opportunity to grow. Why aren’t we talking about growth? Why doesn’t every parish have a growth plan?

There are many ways to get folks in the front door, but what we choose to do with them once they arrive, will determine the rest. Growth comes from connecting, welcoming and engaging. Engagement leads to intentional discipleship which causes both personal spiritual vitality and parish vitality. One important question to answer at the outset may be: Do we really want them to stay? Because it is how we receive and engage returnees or newcomers that will be decisive in their decision to stay or keep moving.

Consider the following ideas in each phase of the ChurchGROWTH project. This tool can help to focus parish efforts and direct strategic choices that prepare, equip, connect, welcome and engage those to whom the Spirit sends us in the Great Commission (Mt. 28: 16-20). Create a plan using the worksheet included. All resources referenced below can be found at evangelizebuffalo.org or by contacting the Office for Evangelization and Parish Life 716-847-8393.
This planning guide is easily customized for the unique needs of any parish. The Office for Evangelization and Parish Life is willing to adapt this tool and lead your parish leaders through process of planning for growth. This can include general formation in evangelization, specialized training for outreach with young adults, skills for growing in faith by sharing faith, or for equipping Catholics and parish leaders to use online platforms in energetic evangelization on the digital continent.

**STEP 1: ASSESS THE UNIQUE NEEDS AND CAPACITIES OF THE PARISH**

- What is keeping your parish from growing?
- What would happen if no changes were implemented for ten years?
- What does the congregation look like inside? Who is outside?
- What are the trends in your community? Who is moving in and out?
- Who is attending worship on a typical weekend? Is there a particular population that is conspicuously absent at worship?
- What can we discern about the faith of younger generations – are we handing it on or just holding on?
- What capacities currently exist in the parish – competencies, diocesan and community agencies, facilities, finances, web platforms and expertise, publications, organizational assets, events and programs?

**NEEDS:**

**CAPACITIES:**
STEP 2: CHOOSE THE MOST CENTRAL AND ATTAINABLE NEED AS YOUR PARISH PRIORITY

This need could be a particular aspect of the parish, a target group or particular spiritual need. An accurate reading of the situation in step #1 may indicate the “need” to start with insiders (e.g. revitalize the worshiping congregation, foster greater intentionality for those active, equipping those who are minimally involved, or re-ignite what it means to live joyfully as Jesus’ disciples). The situation may suggest working a particular demographic (young families) or it may justify an outreach campaign to regain inactive Catholics. Select only one area for improvement. Consider using the questions in the S.O.A.R. Analysis developed by Jacqueline Stavros and Gina Hinrichs. An adapted version can be found on p. 16 of this guide.

What is your parish priority? Why?

What is your desired future?

State in simple terms the NEED or OUTCOME that drives the parish priority selected above?

NEED:

OUTCOME:

WHAT IS THE PARISH CAPABLE OF DOING ABOUT IT?
STEP 3: ADDRESS THE REALITY OF CHANGE

Once you identify a priority – need or outcome, take a step back. Every new initiative causes change. Parishes are no different from any other living organisms, in that they must change to grow and thrive. But change is never easy. And organizations, like people, tend to exhibit resistance to change. Parish leaders want to reduce resistance and the negative forces that inhibit growth at each step in the process. In every situation there are forces that both drive change and restrain it. Leaders succeed with innovation when they first warm the atmosphere and diffuse resistance.

A simple way to weigh the pros and cons of any proposed action, anticipate problems and prepare a community for change is to conduct a force-field analysis. The Force-field analysis was developed by Kurt Lewin in May 1943 (cf. "Defining the ‘Field at a Given Time'". Psychological Review. 50(3): 292–310). Through this simple construct you can clarify the most effective next step in this planning process. This is especially helpful when significant confusion or conflict arises in the team. A force-field analysis is especially helpful in naming the subjective issues such as congregational attitudes, general morale, informal aspects of parish culture, approach to personnel management, etc. Insure that everyone shares the same understanding and leave nothing out. The goal of a force-field analysis is to strengthen forces that support innovation and reduce opposition.

Force Field Analysis: Analysis Step 1: State the concern, parish priority, and desired outcome. Analysis Step 2: Answer clarifying questions so that everyone understands both the situation and the proposed response. Analysis Step 3: Brainstorm all positive and negative “forces” that inhabit the situation or “field”. Analysis Step 4: Discuss and clarify what causes each force that exists whether positive or negative.
Analysis Step 5: Estimate the strength of the driving and restraining forces. Analysis Step 6: Consider ways to heighten discontent with the status quo, minimize resistance to the proposed resolution, and warm the atmosphere for change. Let these conclusions inform goal setting and the plan of action. (Use the worksheet on p. 17)
STEP 4: BE S.M.A.R.T. IN CONSIDERING YOUR DESIRED FUTURE

Set priorities and write measurable goals. These goals can be stated in language that is: Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Timely.

- Is this goal expressed in simple and specific language?
- What is our measure for success? Does our aim have accountability?
- What will this demand from parish resources (facilities, ministries/organizations, congregation)?
- What materials or technology will be needed (digital, social media, print)?
- What partnerships will enhance your success (inside parish, local churches, schools, community organizations, donors, diocesan resources)?
- What will implementation of this strategy expect of leaders (skills, attitudes, procedures and policies)?
- Is it achievable in a season or single timeframe? Will it require a phased plan of implementation?
- What is the cause for our confidence about its relevance to the need identified?

S.M.A.R.T. GOAL #1:

(S.M.A.R.T. GOAL #2):

(S.M.A.R.T. GOAL #3):

REMEMBER: The pursuit of many priorities is the same as having no priority. A corollary to this principle is to avoid developing too many goals. Too many targets is often the biggest obstacle to hitting any target.
**STEP 5: DETERMINE THE SCOPE OF PLANNING.**

For whom are you planning - the congregation as a whole, a particular worshipping community (e.g. 11 AM Mass) ministry, a demographic (e.g. ethnicity, age, geographic sector), insiders or outsiders, the engaged, the merely involved, those absent, an organization, a kindred group (children, young families, young adults), or a program (faith formation, life-teen, home-based faith group)? Is there a short range target and a long range plan?

Parameters...

Scope:

Group:

Program:

Immediate Aim:

Ultimate Aim:
**STEP 6: CONSIDER POSSIBILITIES AND EXPAND IMAGINATION**

Consider the following ways to prepare, equip, connect, welcome and engage active Catholics in ways that both grow them into deliberate disciples and grow the church. What would happen if the parish could...

**PREPARE AND EQUIP (Fall Months)**
- Organize a book study on *Forming intentional Disciples* by Sherry Weddell (Our Sunday Visitor, 2012)
- Implement a guest survey (sample at evangelizebuffalo.org), publish, consider and act on the results
- Establish a visitor center with refreshments, spirituality resources other materials about parish activities near the church entrance (all templates for cards, surveys, as well as printed welcome brochures can be found at evangelizebuffalo.org or obtained through Office for Evangelization and Parish Life)
- Refresh the parish website - prominent welcome, mission and identity, dedication to Christ, essential information, donation, directions, phone numbers for day, evening, or emergency, valuable links (e.g. Word on Fire, Laudate, 3 Minute retreat, Pope and Bishop Twitter, CNS, etc.) FAQ’s, photos (Facebook), and a “contact us” or subscribe option
- Do an accessibility assessment. Despite what most parishes report, there are hundreds of Catholics with disabilities in most parishes
- Insure that signs are clear and plentiful and conduct tests with volunteers who are new to the parish property
- Equip parishioners with hospitality skills and practice the *Three Minute Rule* (spend the first three minutes before and after Mass with greeting and getting acquainted with newcomers and visitors)

**CONNECT (For example, start before Christmas)**
- Pass out welcome cards (samples online) at local gathering places and rest stops for visitors and newcomers (hotel, restaurants, gas station, grocery store, café, YMCA and other event boards)
- Give out welcome brochures (free) with a candy cane, or a Word on Fire DVD ($3-$5), Rediscover Jesus or other Dynamic Catholic book ($2), or a Lighthouse Catholic Media CD ($3).
- Transform the registration process into a conversation (and simplify the form if one is used)
- Use a *New Mover* service to connect with those relocating to your zip code when they arrive (.50 - .79 per with monthly ceiling)
- Verify the parish census by mail, email and phone to identify who is currently attending and active. Follow-up with those who have drifted away to welcome them back and express appreciation to others by mail, email, phone or visit.
- Host *Network with Heaven 1.0 or 2.0* workshop to encourage Catholics to use social media to spread the Good News!
- Take advantage of weddings, funerals and baptisms as opportunities to connect and welcome newcomers
- Organize a book study with pastoral council or a ministry related to faith formation or liturgy (e.g. *to Heal, Proclaim and Teach* by Jared Dees) for more quick and easily implemented ideas on connecting, welcoming and engaging with every generation.
- Develop a plan and recruit ministers of hospitality. Figure out ways to identify who is attending (e.g. a guest book) and stay connected via email or texting service (e.g. Flocknote).

**WELCOME (Throughout the Christmas Season... but do not stop there)**

- Have *The Talk* – Preach on the question: Do we really want them back? What would that mean? What are we willing to do to accommodate the messiness of more imperfect folks in this church? Instruct parishioners on importance of: smiles, words of welcome, sitting at the center of the pew, introduce oneself, extend sincere sign of peace, introduce newcomers to someone else, invite newcomers to return
- Provide hospitality training for receptionists, greeters, secretaries, ushers and all who serve the parish as first responders and ministers of first impression
- Recognize newcomers at worship (read *Good Worship Starts with Good Welcome*)
- Host a welcome gathering for newcomers
- Place young people and display diversity in prominent leadership roles
- Put out welcome cards and flyers
- Offer childcare during worship
- Invite newcomers out for a coffee and discuss their interest in your church

**ENGAGE (Post-Christmas and through Lent)**

- Ash Wednesday - do something special. More people return on this date than any other except Christmas. Consider having a brief witness speaker at services speaking on personal conversion, God’s grace, redemption or forgiveness. Staff an information table with spirituality resources. Publish a “Pray with Us” booklet for Lent (see sample) - include schedule of Lenten events. Offer ashes throughout the day. Have priests available for confession at high frequency times. Give each visitor a Lenten symbol: cross, nail, prayer. Announce it well in advance around the community.
- Sponsor the *God Awaits Us... In Our Stories* parish retreat or a Do-It-Yourself alternative - *Life in Christ or Christ Renews His Parish* or attend *Christ Life* training event
- Host a *Living the Eucharist* program
- Equip Catholics with *Catholic and Confident*
- Form an Evangelization Team and provide formation using the Evangelization – the Game-Changer (Office for Evangelization and Parish Life) or a published program (*Paulist Comprehensive Training* videos are available from the Office for Evangelization and Parish Life)
- Offer intentional welcome to visitors at weddings and funerals in 2015. Observe family milestones and vocational choices at weekend worship – graduations, new drivers, school backpacks, and vital professions - first responders, teachers, etc.
- Send students care package at exam times along with location of nearest church and assurance of parish prayers.
- Distribute materials from VibrantFaithatHome.org
- Provide educational sessions on loss, grieving, end of life issues and offer a support group for those who are unemployed or dealing with addictions.
- Participate in a community charity event (e.g. Charity run) as a parish team and invite others to visit the church
- One Book-One Parish – Make twenty copies of a good book available to interested parishioners to read. Do this on a weekend four weeks before Lent. Whether they read 1 paragraph, 1 page, 1 chapter or the whole book it is returned the following weekend. Invite these same people to share it with another parishioner or return it. They can take a second book and do the same. Meanwhile the original book is available to another group of parishioners for a one week review. And so on. After four weeks purchase about 20 copies of each book and invite people to choose the book that they would most enjoy discussing with others for the four weeks of Lent - at parish, in home or online. Provide a coordinator but allow people to self-sort.

Which of these ideas encourages you? Which challenges you?

Do any of these ideas sound especially relevant to your situation? Why?
STEP 7: SELECT A STRATEGY

Review the goal statement and the varied ideas that surfaced in your conversation with a planning team, colleagues or partners (feel free to use or adapt any of the ideas mentioned in step six) and select a strategy. Try to outline it in terms of these five steps – prepare, equip, connect, welcome and engage. Keep asking yourself: How does this strategy respond to the needs of the target population or advances the parish priorities.

Prepare: Who will you prepare? What are you preparing them for? Who will conduct the preparations? How will you prepare?

Equip: What competencies are needed? Who will be prepared? Who will manage training? Who will conduct training? What training resources will be purchased or adapted?

Connect: What population will be targeted? What are the most contact points?

Welcome: Who will be welcomed? How will it happen? When will it happen? What measure will be used to judge success?

Engage: What can the target population get? What can they give? How can we foster belonging? How can we grow in faith by sharing it?
**STEP 8: DESCRIBE THE STRATEGY**

Describe a selected strategy for each element in the implementation process below. Get as specific and detailed in the description as possible. Typically, every minute expended in planning saves three minutes in implementation. Assume that the person implementing the strategy is different from the person or group that developed it.

**PREPARE:**

What -

When -

Who -

How -

Partners, Stakeholders and Authorizers:

Next Steps:

____________________________

**EQUIP:**

What -

When -
Who -  
How -  
Partners, Stakeholders and Authorizers:  
Next Steps:  

CONNECT:  
What -  
When -  
Who -  
How -  
Partners, Stakeholders and Authorizers:  
Next Steps:  

_________________________________________
WELCOME:

What -

When -

Who -

How -

Partners, Stakeholders and Authorizers:

Next Steps:

__________________________________________________________________________________

ENGEAGE:

What -

When -

Who -

How -

Partners, Stakeholders and Authorizers:

Next Steps:

__________________________________________________________________________________
**STEP 9:** For each step (prepare, connect, welcome and engage) use the ChurchGROWTH Planning Sheet (p. 18-21) to organize actions, events, or programs. Describe: WHAT it is, WHEN it will happen, WHO will do it, HOW it will take shape and be evaluated. Name the PARTNERS, STAKEHOLDERS and AUTHORIZERS needed for a successful launch and the NEXT STEPS.

_____________________________________________________________________________________________________

**STEP 10:** Set the calendar - Use the calendar below (p. 22-24) to place event dates, publicity deadlines, planning meetings as well as planning and evaluation steps. Sporadic events and uncoordinated programming are no longer sufficient. Once events are placed in the calendar, double back from these targets or events to insure for sufficient organization, and logistical arrangements. Set completion dates and schedule tasks or meetings for the growth plan accordingly. Let this project grow into an intentional and strategic parish plan for evangelization. Provide needed formation for leaders to insure that everyone grows in competence and confidence. Keep notes learn through a constant regime of evaluation (p. 25).

_____________________________________________________________________________________________________

In Matthew 28: 16-20, Jesus commissioned the church to pursue a growth paradigm. This remains essential if the church is to be true to its identity and mission, and thrive in the years ahead. Thriving parishes are intentional about growing in faith and sharing faith. The Office for Evangelization and Parish Life can provide whatever facilitation, training, resources or consultation that you need to succeed. Contact the Office for Evangelization and Parish Life to see how simple and rewarding this process can be for your parish. Call: 716-847-8393 or email: dmahaney@buffalodiocese.org.
### Everyone wants to grow...  How can we S.O.A.R.?

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<th>Strengths</th>
<th>Opportunities</th>
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<td>What are the strengths of the parish?</td>
<td>What if we could focus on who we need to reach, more than who we want to keep...</td>
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<td>What unique capacities exist?</td>
<td>What new opportunities would we pursue?</td>
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<td>What new partnerships can help?</td>
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<th>Aspirations</th>
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<td>To what do we aspire?</td>
<td>What programs or policies will see adjustment?</td>
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<td>What has God given us to do?</td>
<td>How would staffing be impacted?</td>
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<td>Who do we care about?</td>
<td>How would facilities be used differently?</td>
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<td>What new resources does this parish need to succeed?</td>
<td>What expectations will change for insiders?</td>
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Force-Field Analysis (by Kurt Lewin)

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<th>Parish</th>
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<td>Restraining Forces</td>
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ChurchGROWTH - Planning Sheet

Priority for Action:

Target Population:

Strategy Purpose and Summary Description:

Leadership and Partnerships:

Method Overview:

Prepare:

Equip:

Connect:
Welcome:

Engage:

Desired Result or Impact:

Key Dates and Deadlines:

Facility – on campus, off campus, coordination, documents and details:
Communications and Marketing:

Who?
How?
When?
Where?

Project Management, Record Keeping, Attendance:

Who?
How?
When?

Leadership Requirements – Administration, Management, Program, Clerical

Costs - Initiation, Maintenance, Infrastructure:
Evaluation

Why?
What?
Who?
How?
When?

Implementation Steps:

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# ChurchGROWTH Planning Calendar 2016-17

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**WINTER 2017**

**ChurchGROWTH Diocese of Buffalo**
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Planning Notes

Learning:

Improvements:

Resource Needs: