

Immaculate Heart of Mary
3-Year Strategic Plan (2021-2023)

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Introduction

This three-year strategic plan provides clarity on the aspirations of Immaculate Heart of Mary (IMMACULATE HEART OF MARY) as a Parish. It is not an all-encompassing operating plan; it is more so a high-level snapshot of what we seek to become and how we plan to get there. It is a living, breathing plan that must be continually referenced, updated as necessary, and serve as a measuring stick on our progress. The initial plan itself has been reviewed and approved by the Pastoral Council and will be re-reviewed by this group at least annually if not more often based on need. All parishioners (and prospective parishioners) are encouraged to review the plan and support the cause in any way you can as your engagement is at the heart of this plan. Any comments, questions, or concerns from the parish at large should be directed to any member of the Parish Council.

Background

The IMMACULATE HEART OF MARY Parish Council is a faith sharing body that is in place to do the following:

- 1 – Help **set and execute the vision, strategy, and key initiatives** for the IMMACULATE HEART OF MARY Parish and School
- 2 – **Run a seamless governance process** including the review of the annual budget to provide thoughtful recommendations to the pastor for approval
- 3 – Serve as a **vehicle to promote dialogue, provide advice, assistance, and service** regarding Parish life to the IMMACULATE HEART OF MARY community

In late 2019, the Council identified the lack of a strategic plan as a key gap for the parish. They established the priority to conduct a strategic planning process to deliver a comprehensive 3-5-year strategic plan. A subset of the Parish Council, including Fr. Bob (pastor) convened a series of planning discussions over the following twelve months. The process was fairly simple in nature, and while the group leveraged as much information and stimuli as necessary, it was far from a data rich exercise. That being one of the gaps we endeavor to close in further iterations.

The working group reviewed framework and direction from the archdiocese, IMMACULATE HEART OF MARY parish surveys, conducted a comprehensive SWOT analysis (see output in next section) solicited feedback and input from parish committees and commissions, and drafted a high level plan which aims to further engage, unify, and re-commit our parish to the power of the Eucharist. It's important to note that the group conducted much of this work during an incredibly tumultuous time in our external environment, which was riddled with social injustice, wide-spread scandal impacting the Catholic Church, and a world-wide pandemic of epic

proportion. All of these events have had a significant impact on the perspective of the parish, and we hope that our learnings permeate the resulting plan and how we implement it.

The IMMACULATE HEART OF MARY 2021-2023 Strategic Plan has identified a high-level objective, three major goals we seek to achieve, and a set of action steps to be further defined by staff and committees/commissions for implementation.

Letter from our pastor, Fr. Bob Sims

I have had the pleasure of being the pastor of Immaculate Heart of Mary for the last 14 years. During this time, I have seen our Parish grow in spirit. Our faith has been fed by the liturgy and our new and established ministries and our members are engaged in many programs across our campus and into the community. Even now, with the pandemic forcing us to rethink (and, unfortunately, cancel) so many activities, I am heartened by the spirit and sense of community I see in our Parish. Even in trial, Immaculate Heart of Mary always finds a way to emerge stronger and I am inspired by this commitment to persevere. We remain at our very best when we bond together in faith and when each member contributes their precious time, unique talent and God-given treasures for the good of the whole Parish community.

I'm excited about this Strategic Plan as it represents a clear focus for our Parish for the next three years. As part of the process, we updated our Vision and Mission for the Parish as it was essential for us to further solidify our desired future as well as our approach to meet/exceed those objectives. I'm happy to share the following:

Vision

*Allowing the Holy Eucharist to nourish our Parish so we can, in turn,
nourish the world around us.*

Mission

The Immaculate Heart of Mary Parish strives to be a **vibrant Catholic community** with the **Gospel of Jesus Christ** as our guide. **We invite all to strengthen their spirituality and develop their relationship with God** through **dynamic liturgy, life-long learning, and sharing faith within and outside our community.**

With a newly defined and updated Vision and Mission, complimented by a Strategic Plan to help us get there, I've never been more excited about the future of the Immaculate Heart of Mary Parish. In order to bring this to life, it will require engagement from the entire Parish community. As we enhance our focus on programming, effective and comprehensive communication and our external engagement, I'm confident we will grow individually as Catholics and as a Parish overall. I greatly appreciate your time in reviewing this plan, as well as all of your efforts moving forward to live out our mission – we're counting on all of you.

God Bless,

Fr. Bob Sims

SWOT Analysis

A SWOT analysis is a common technique used in the strategic planning process in order to identify Strengths and Weaknesses (internal and specific to the parish) and Opportunities and Threats that are more a function of the external environment. While the analysis was ultimately more comprehensive, this is the streamlined and prioritized version:

<p style="text-align: center;">Strengths</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Dynamic Pastor – Engaging, well-loved 2. Fiscally secure, well-managed, operationally sound 3. Supportive CORE community w. CORE volunteers 4. IHM School is a strong feeder ministry 5. Highly-engaged, innovative outreach 	<p style="text-align: center;">Weaknesses</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Lack of diversity – Racial, Socio-economic - Landlocked ; lacks social inclusivity 2. Succession Plan – Gaps at all levels, staff and volunteers 3. Supporting programs may benefit from renewed emphasis 4. Communication requires improvement, external xparency 5. Data availability
<p style="text-align: center;">Opportunities</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. “None” engagement 2. Central focus on The Eucharist 3. Engaged young assets 4. Proximity to other parishes 5. Evolving infrastructure / Facilities 6. Many ministries to contribute to 	<p style="text-align: center;">Threats</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Catholic Church perception (disenfranchisement) 2. Declining school enrollment 3. Talent availability (CRE/DRE, Music, etc.) 4. Demographic shift – Engagement (“Nones”), numbers, etc...

Overall Objective:

By January 2024, the faith-based community of Immaculate Heart of Mary will meaningfully increase parishioner engagement, both internal and external to the parish.

Goals and Associated Action Items:

GOAL 1: ENHANCE PROGRAMMING - Enhance programming to better meet the needs of a changing demographic and broaden involvement of parishioners at large

Actions:

- Evolve/Enhance Religious Education centered in Catechesis (Prioritize re-launch of Youth program coordinated w/ school)
- Young Adult Engagement – Draw them in, keep them engaged
- Volunteer Efforts – Drive greater participation (broad and deep)

Commentary:

The mission of IMMACULATE HEART OF MARY is directed twofold towards the people that are already within the community and practicing their Catholic faith there, but also towards the people who are not yet integrated into the IMMACULATE HEART OF MARY community or any other faith community.

Within the community we find different levels of engagement among the parishioners as well as different needs for support and spiritual growth. The strategic goal is to keep up the engagement with those highly active parishioners who regularly attend Mass and programs; volunteer their time, talent, and treasure; and perpetuate the life of the community. At the same time, the bigger group of parishioners showing limited engagement is to be encouraged to participate in the life of the community more actively and more often, pursuing individually and as a community the growth of their faith. Special attention needs to be paid to the goal of keeping our youth engaged and to prevent an exodus of young adults after Confirmation and high school.

Simultaneously, IMMACULATE HEART OF MARY seeks to attract and integrate into their faith community those people who are not yet a part of the community. This includes Catholics who are new to the local area and Catholics who are at the moment not practicing their faith, as well as non-believers whom we are called to invite to a life of faith as well.

Programming that serves these purposes and these groups of people considers that the demographics of the parish and the local community have been changing. Analyzing existing

and generating new data we will better define the segments of the population we serve so that programming can be tailored to them and our actions become more effective.

GOAL 2: INCREASE EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION – Modernize communication methods and infrastructure to optimize information exchange and overall awareness of key parish initiatives

Actions:

- Enhance communication platform/methods (digital and print materials)
- Establish clear governance and requirements for transparent and timely exchange of information

Commentary:

Communication is how we bring the voice of IMMACULATE HEART OF MARY to our members and the greater community including potential members, neighbors, and others who may engage in any of our spiritual or mission programs. Communication is active, it is intentional, and it can drive accountability. We must develop a communication strategy with the objective to interact and build community, raise awareness of the parish and our programs, and provide content to inspire, educate, and evangelize. When successfully deployed, our parish communications program should result in parish growth and a renewed image of the Church.

Over time, our communication platforms have evolved from announcements at Mass and the weekly bulletin to emails and websites. We must continue to find ways to meet and engage our audience where they are as we cannot expect everyone to come to our building or read our traditional content. New tools, like social media, will play an important role in growing engagement. While communication can seem utilitarian in nature, we cannot underestimate the power of effective communication can have on faith formation. According to Pope Francis: "Communication is a means of expressing the missionary vocation of the entire Church; today the social networks are one way to experience this call to discover the beauty of faith, the beauty of encountering Christ. In the area of communications too, we need a Church capable of bringing warmth and of stirring hearts" ([Pope Francis' Message for the 48th World Communications Day \[WCD\], 2014](#)). While much of the conversation about "modern communications" points to social media and other impersonal tools, we must focus on our message and not exclude more traditional face-to-face methods to share our information and news and share the Good News.

GOAL 3: FOSTER EXTERNAL ENGAGEMENT – Retain and grow our community while furthering collaborative relationships both within IMMACULATE HEART OF MARY and with local parishes

Actions:

- Develop and implement a roadmap and execution plan for furthering partnerships with local parishes (Masses, Adoration, Fundraising for non-parish specific causes) – Fill the gaps in our external service line.

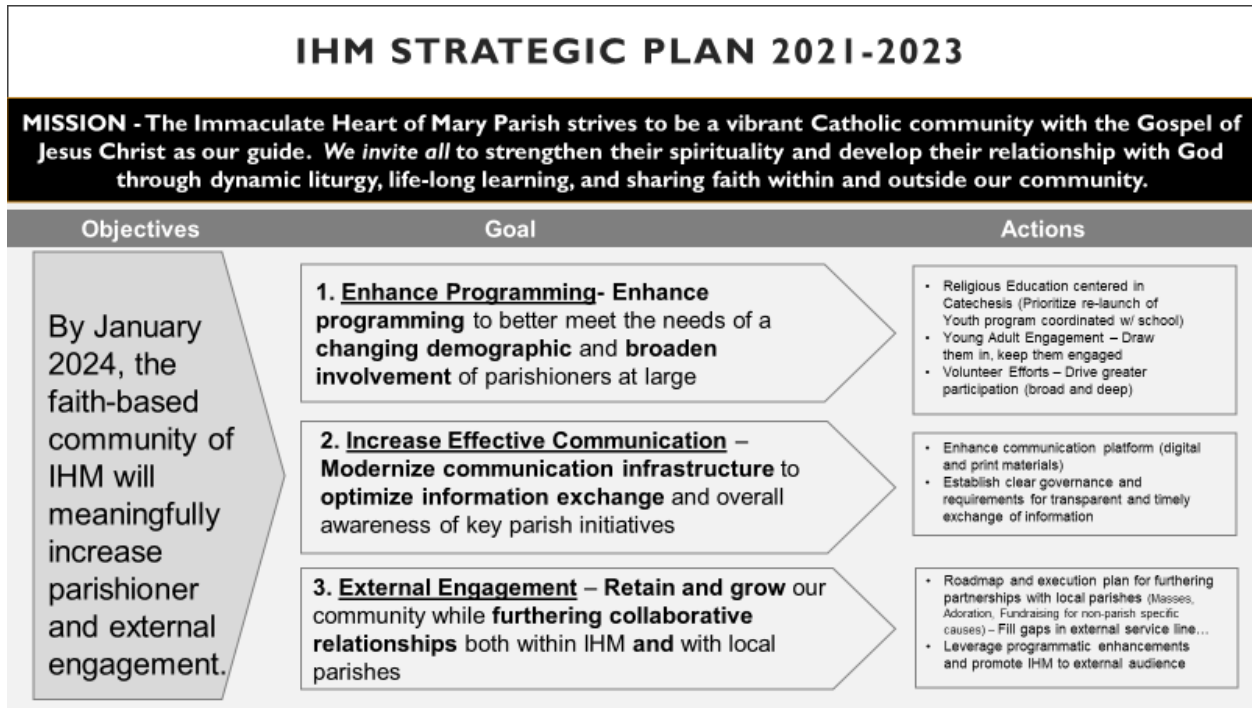
- Leverage programmatic enhancements and effectively represent/promote IMMACULATE HEART OF MARY to the external audience

Commentary:

IMMACULATE HEART OF MARY has a rich tradition in Midtown Indianapolis, especially in the neighborhoods surrounding the church and school. As a Catholic community, we have enjoyed the welcoming heritage set by our predecessors since our founding in 1946. Three quarters of a century later, we still hold dear to the integrity and inclusivity that formed our strong foundation and look for ways to grow our family in Christ by tending to seeking and yearning souls. IMMACULATE HEART OF MARY has collaborated with neighboring parishes for liturgy driven service projects and school programs such as sports. These collaborations help build relationships outside of our parish boundaries; however, a more strategic and structured approach would yield greater opportunities to improve our internal Parish experience and increase our impact on the external community. There are additional opportunities to initiate and grow relationships with non-Catholic faith communities.

IMH's Outreach programs demonstrate our dedication to Christ's teachings to love and serve all people. Recently, the Outreach Commission developed the transformational outreach program as a next step to "transform the IMMACULATE HEART OF MARY community...to help us to better utilize our gifts to enable others, and also to understand and improve upon our weaknesses..." with a focus on poverty reduction. By serving communities outside our immediate neighborhood, we increase awareness of Immaculate Heart of Mary and provide our parish families with more ways to be Christ to others through their involvement by means of time, talent and treasure. Our community strength comes from many sources, one of which is through the tremendous spiritual growth one receives when serving another in need. We must continually seek ways to acknowledge the leaders who are called to direct the outreach programs and the prayer needed to sustain them. Our ongoing task is to continue to invite and encourage others to both lead and participate in these programs and to find ways to maximize participation by breaking down necessary tasks into bite-sized pieces to encourage and promote a larger volunteer base. In another example, the school initiated a "day of service" in 2019 to take our students out of the school and into the community. Looking ahead, we should seek opportunities to further leverage our gifts and make community service and outreach a part of all activities (all committees and commissions, all events). Special attention should be given to opportunities for families to serve together and for newer parishioners to identify opportunities that match their interests and be welcomed by "veteran" parishioners.

Summary and Call to Action



The Parish Council is pleased to approve the preceding Strategic Plan for 2021-2023. This plan will be reviewed by the Council on an annual basis (and more often as needed) during the annual budget planning process to ensure appropriate resources are allocated in support of these ongoing objectives, goals, and resulting actions.

IMMACULATE HEART OF MARY Staff, Committees and Commissions are responsible for keeping this plan top of mind as they carry out their work and ministry, tracking process and providing feedback to the Council when necessary.

Parishioners at large are encouraged to support these efforts as well, identifying specific areas of interest that they are called to serve. Our intent is to further engage you, as we evolve this vibrant Catholic community we share together. As our mission states, we invite ALL to strengthen their spirituality and develop their relationship with God. This plan aims to aid us in unlocking the power of the Eucharist together, as we enhance parishioner engagement both internal and external to IMMACULATE HEART OF MARY. With enhanced programming, increased effective communication, and external engagement beyond the walls of our parish, we are confident we can do just that.

May God Bless the IMMACULATE HEART OF MARY Community.