

Our St. Mary Vision Statement – Living Out the Great Commission **by Jennifer Pepping**

This January, Fr. Jerry revealed new vision and mission statements for the parish. By now you have likely seen these statements in the bulletin or on the banners in the narthex. So, what do we mean that St. Mary has revealed a new vision and mission statement and why do we need one? A vision statement provides an organization, our parish, a clear sense of what we are ultimately trying to accomplish. It should be broad and inspiring. It sets a big dream for the future and will help our parish to stay focused on its purpose. The new St. Mary statements were developed using input from many at the parish including thoughts and ideas gathered during the Parish Transformation process in 2015, hopes and dreams shared by parish leaders at Leadership Summits 2016-2019, all guided by the leadership of Fr. Jerry. As the vision and mission were created, discussion was always grounded in Christ's vision for His Church. Lucky for us, Jesus himself already gave instructions commissioning St. Mary, and all the Church, in the Gospel of Matthew:

The Great Commission

Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age." (Matthew 28: 18-20)

As Christ's church, this is where our vision and aspirations must start, with the Great Commission.

St. Mary Vision Statement

That all generations at St. Mary and in the surrounding community encounter Jesus and live as His disciples.

Just imagine if that were true! If all those in our community lived in relationship with Jesus how different would our world be? We live now in a world divided, a world desperate for hope, peace and understanding. Jesus is that hope. He freely offers salvation and love to a weary world and to every person in Him. As Catholic Christians we are called to share that message of hope and love to a world in need. Because we have experienced the love of Christ, our faith should fill our heart with the desire to help all to know the peace and joy that can come from knowing Jesus.

Mission the Work of all the Baptized

In Ephesians, Paul shares a message for Christian life as mission and sees ministry as a task of all the baptized. He states that the church does not exist for its own sake but for the purpose of mission and that we gain strength in that mission through faith in Jesus.

"so that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the principalities and authorities in the heavens. This was according to the eternal purpose that he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord in whom we have boldness of speech and confidence of access through faith in him." (Eph 3:10-11)

The church is founded by Jesus Christ as the instrument to spread God's plan of salvation. Through baptism, God has given us the gift of redemption, but there is more expected of us. As members of the Church, we are expected to participate in the mission to share God's love and promise of salvation with the world.

Working together as the Body of Christ

It seems like a daunting and impossible task, not to mention a little uncomfortable. How can we possibly accomplish what Jesus has asked us to do? It is easy to be overwhelmed by the size of that mission and to see it as too much to accept. One might think "how can I make a difference?" But we are not asked to do it on our own. Through the sacraments we find strength in the power of the Holy Spirit and when we are nourished by the Eucharist. We are strengthened by one another in community when we come together to pray and share witness. Paul reminds readers of the diversity of gifts given to the body of believers. As members of the Body of Christ we are called to use our individual gifts, given to us by God, for the good of the church and its mission. It is only when all of us are working together, each with our unique gifts that the church can function in the way in which it was intended. When we work together as the Body of Christ, we are most effective in that mission and many hands make light work!

Building Relationship with Jesus

In the gospel this week we heard the story of the Samaritan woman by the well in which we hear a beautiful example of evangelization. The Samaritan woman was touched by her encounter with Jesus and was inspired to share Jesus with others in the town. She introduced Jesus and piqued the interest of the Samaritans, but it wasn't until she and the townspeople spent time with Jesus, grew to know him better, that they recognized him as the Messiah. The Samaritan woman told a few, and the gospel tells us, "many of the Samaritans of that town began to believe in him because of the word of the woman." For each of us, our initial encounter with Jesus was likely through someone else. Just as with the woman at the well, we too can share our experience to pique interest about Jesus. It all starts with the introduction, but all relationships take time and attention. Just like the Samaritan woman, relationship does not happen with one magical encounter but unfolds over time. For each of us to know Jesus well enough to make the introduction we must continue to deepen our own personal relationship with Him. I have the great privilege to share many experiences through adult formation activities here at St. Mary and I am constantly amazed by the many ways in which Jesus touches peoples' lives. Sharing those experiences with other adults here at the parish makes Jesus feel closer. I have certainly learned that there is never an end to the way in which He reveals Himself to us.

Lenten blessings

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