

The Seven Essential Elements of Parish Life

The seven essential elements form the foundation of the pastoral mission of each parish. These elements constantly interrelate, each nurturing and supporting the other. It cannot be overemphasized how important it is to root the entire process of leadership ministry in prayer. It is particularly crucial to have prayer guide the process of discerning the specific directions and focus that a parish will take.

EVANGELIZATION: the element, which encompasses any way in which the parish continues to spread the good news of Jesus, especially, although not exclusively, through personal and corporate sharing of faith. Parishes have active programs of evangelization to share the Catholic faith and mission. People are active in ministries of sharing the faith such as participation in the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) and appropriate resources are made available to support their efforts.

Examples in parish life:

- Efforts are made to reach out to the alienated, the inactive, and the unchurched.
- Opportunities are provided for small groups to gather and share faith as it relates to their everyday life.
- Parish renewals, evenings of prayer and/or retreat days are planned to enliven and deepen the faith of the people.
- The parish takes steps to influence the values and decisions of the larger community through prophetic action and works of justice and outreach.

WORSHIP: the element, which gives expression to the sacramental and prayer life of parishioners. It encompasses both Sunday Eucharist and other ritual forms of sacred celebration. Parishioners recognize worship as their center and the focal point from which everything else flows. Clergy and laity plan and participate in the celebration of the Eucharist and the other sacraments of the Church, devoting appropriate resources to these activities.

Examples in parish life:

- Competent individuals are responsible for every aspect of liturgical celebrations.
- Quality in music, including instruments, musicians, and hymn selection, enables the assembly to participate in sung prayer.
- All the sacraments are celebrated regularly, with attention given to making them true expressions of the life of the parish.
- Devotional prayer is encouraged, but does not interfere with the primary sacramental celebrations of the parish.

WORD – the element that proclaims, explains, informs and forms parishioners of all ages in the Scriptures and tradition of the church. It encompasses many traditional ministries of “education.” Parishioners commit to the religious education and spiritual development of adults and children to bring them to a deeper understanding of Church doctrine, to a deepening conversion to faith and to expressions of personal witness to the Faith. Appropriate resources are made available to support their efforts.

Examples in parish life:

- The parish Catechetical leader has appropriate education, ability, and experience to provide catechist formation and effective administration of religious education efforts.
- Religious formation or catechesis is planned and evaluated for all in the parish: adults, youth, and children.
- Strengthening marriages and nurturing the life of families are priorities for the parish.
- Assistance is provided to help parents understand their roles as ministries to their children in the formation of Christian values.

COMMUNITY – the element which draws parishioners together with Jesus Christ in mutual support, activity, and celebration marked by inclusivity. Parishioners create and nourish a strong sense of community within the larger Church. Members identify themselves with the Catholic Church. They also identify themselves with their parish community and seek to improve it. The clergy and the laity have a deep sense of the importance of unity among the Faithful in the parishes and with the archbishop.

Examples in parish life:

- There is good spirit of working together among parish groups and organizations.
- Programming for parish organizations consistently offers prayer, information, education, entertainment, and hospitality.
- There is an annual review of the purpose, effectiveness, and need for each parish organization.
- The parish collaborates with the neighboring parishes as appropriate to enhance the mission of the Church.

SERVICE – the element that extends the resources of the parish to the needs of others and demonstrates a commitment to works of compassion and justice. Parishioners provide service at several levels. First, parishioners direct some services to the poor in keeping with the Church’s expressed priority for the poor. Second, parishioners work for peace and justice with other people of good will. Third, parishioners contribute in service to the civic community in which the parish exists.

Examples in parish life:

- The parish focuses on the needs of the human community, beginning with its own members and extending to the poor and marginalized in the local area, the nation, and the world.
- The parish makes every effort accommodate persons with special needs.
- Programs that minister to the sick, the bereaved and the homebound are ongoing.
- Racial and ethnic harmony, peacemaking and non-violence, respect for life at all stages, and the practice of spiritual and corporal works of mercy are priority areas for study and action in the parish.

STEWARDSHIP – the element that challenges all parishioners to share their time, talent, and treasure for the fulfillment of the parish mission. Parishes have sufficient resources and facilities to support the current work of the parish and reasonable plans to expand or modify resources as needed without placing unrealistic expectations on the pastoral leadership and staff nor undue burden on the parishioners. The pastor, staff and parishioners are not overly preoccupied

Examples in parish life:

- Formation efforts help parishioners understand their baptismal responsibility to steward their gifts, including the gifts of faith and life in the church.
- Parishioners who offer their gifts in service to the parish mission are given adequate training, encouragement, and supervision.
- The parish is not overly dependent on extraordinary fund-raisers to support its ordinary budget.
- The Finance Council reflects persons with interest and experience in budgeting, facilities management, and fundraising and development efforts.

LEADERSHIP – the element that calls forth gifts of visioning, planning, empowering, and evaluating for the service of the community. Parishioners recognize and accept their responsibilities as baptized Catholics to full participation in the life of the Church. The pastoral leadership encourages full collaboration among the people of God by assisting them to take an active, responsible role in the life of the parish. Parishes have a sufficient number of members in their active years who participate productively in the parish ministry. The number of parish staff and parishioner volunteers, as well as their training and sense of mission, are adequate to carry out all of the work of the parish as identified in the Parish/Archdiocesan Mission Statement(s).

Examples in parish life:

- The pastoral concerns of the parish are assessed, evaluated, and responded to by the parish and pastoral council in collaboration with the pastor and parish staff.
- Decisions are made by consensus after a process of discernment, study, and discussion.
- On-going formation and training of parish leaders is provided for and is informed by universal church teachings.

- Willingness to share staff with other parishes is considered a viable means of ensuring competency in ministerial leadership.

EUCHARIST AT THE CENTER: the convergence point of all seven elements, the source and summit of the parish's expression of its life in Christ.

Examples in parish life:

- The Sunday Eucharist is a priority in the life of the parish and is celebrated with full and active participation of the parishioners.
- Well-trained and effective parishioners serve in many liturgical ministries at Sunday Eucharist.
- Preaching is directly related to the Scriptures and to the real life experience of the people.