



NEXT GENERATION CATHOLIC PARISH

We have some very exciting news to share with our Parish Community. Following our Parish's participation in the Disciple Maker Index, I was informed that our Parish had been selected as a possible participant in an initiative, the **Next Generation Catholic Parish**, to assist me as pastor, as well as our Parish Staff, our Parish leadership and indeed our entire Parish Community, in building the faith and leadership potential of our Parish Community in the ever-increasing challenging mission of the Church. The **Catholic Leadership Institute**, which is based in Chester County, is assisting parishes around the Country, and is currently working with several philanthropists to invest in 12 parishes within the Archdiocese of Philadelphia over the next four years to help and increase the people in those communities.

Daniel Cellucci, President of CLI, indicated in my telephone conversation that they are looking for pastors who are good shepherds to their people, who have an open mind, an open heart, and whose parish has great potential. I met Mr. Cellucci when we were reviewing the results of the CLI Disciple Maker Index Program. He was leading the CLI team as they reviewed the results with the participating pastors and their pastoral staffs. As you will remember, our Parish Community did very well, especially in comparison to the other parishes in our area.

Prior to contacting me, Mr. Cellucci and his team consulted with Monsignor Daniel Kutys, Vicar General for the Archdiocese, who was very favorable toward our parish being chosen. Again, as you know, the Archdiocese is well aware of our participation in the regionalization of our schools in 2010-2011 and also our participation in the merger of parishes in 2014.

After having consulted with our Parish Pastoral Staff, I informed Mr. Cellucci that we would be honored to be part of this most wonderful initiative. The next steps were to review the CLI's invitation and related materials with our Parish Pastoral Council and our Parish Finance Council. I attended a Pastors' Orientation Workshop at the end of January in anticipation of beginning the **Next Generation Catholic Parish** initiative in the spring of 2020; however due to COVID-19, everything was placed on hold. Finally, this past week, I received notice that we will be starting on the **weekend of October 3rd - 4th** when Lori Tedjeske, a consultant for CLI, will be visiting us for the first time. Lori will be here for our weekend liturgies and we will be making arrangements for Lori to meet with our Parish staff, members of our Parish Pastoral and Finance Councils as well as some other parishioners. It is our hope that through these meetings, Lori will gain some insight about our Parish Community. **On Monday, October 5th**, Lori will continue her meetings virtually and she will also be meeting with our Holy Family Regional Catholic School Principal and our parishioner, Mrs. Kara Haggerty.

In my discussions with Mr. Cellucci, he indicated that this is not a program, rather it is a parish-specific accompaniment over a three year timeframe on our Parish Community's unique needs, opportunities, demands and challenges. Although they consulted with the Archdiocese regarding the parishes being approached, Mr. Cellucci indicated that this is not an Archdiocesan initiative. Currently, CLI has this initiative being conducted in 50-60 parishes in the United States. These parishes are located in approximately five archdioceses/dioceses.

Having had conversations with Mr. Cellucci and having read documentation on this initiative, I believe that this opportunity being offered to us is truly an answer to prayer. As our parishioners know, we conducted the Disciple Maker Survey and then we shared the results with our parishioners, but we have not been able to take the next step. This initiative will assist us in evaluating our Parish Leadership, including me, and also our Parish Community, formulate a Pastoral Plan and then implement the Plan.

To be clear, the **Next Generation Catholic Parish** is not a program and it is not an Archdiocesan initiative. Although it has the permission and indeed the support of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia, this is an independent initiative being offered to several parishes within the Archdiocese as a pilot, with perhaps some other parishes being invited at a later time. The **Next Generation Catholic Parish** is an initiative sponsored by and mentored by the Catholic Leadership Institute

We begin by acknowledging some very disturbing facts about parish life today throughout the United States. According to CLI, the disturbing facts regarding Catholics and their practice of their faith are as follows:

- 60-70% no longer practice their faith;
- 13% attend Mass once or twice a month;
- 10% attend Mass weekly, mostly out of habit;
- 7% are highly engaged with their faith.

With these statistics in mind, we can readily see that nationally only approximately 30% of Catholics are attending Mass sometime throughout a given month. Here at St. Frances Cabrini Parish, our attendance rate is actually much less. Before the pandemic, our attendance rate was only 22%. Since the pandemic, our attendance rate is only 12%. With these statistics, we have much work to do. The challenge before us is certainly formidable but not impossible. We want to do more than just survive; we want to thrive as a Community of faithful Catholics.

Having personally witnessed the ever-decreasing level of participation over the last 30 to 40 years and especially the rapid decrease in the last few years, I am not surprised at some other alarming national statistics as follows:

- Catholic marriages are down 55% since 1990;
- 1 in 5 children baptized do not receive their First Holy Communion;
- 2 in 5 children baptized do not receive the Sacrament of Confirmation;
- 85% of children confirmed stop practicing their faith by age 21.
- 91% of children will be leaving the Catholic Church.

These are alarming statistics for the Church in the United States. Our own experience here at St. Frances Cabrini is even more troubling. Marriages and baptisms have drastically decreased in the last 29 years. In 1990, there were 58 marriages and in 2019, there were only six marriages. This is a decrease of 90%. In 1990, there were 169 baptisms and in 2019, there were only 24 baptisms. This is an 86% decrease. Given the current state of affairs here at St. Frances Cabrini, we are blessed to be afforded this special opportunity to do something. Not every parish is being given this special gift of being mentored at this time. For the good of the Church, and especially for the good of our children and grandchildren and future generations, this is the time for our church-going parishioners to become fully engaged in the Next Generation Catholic Parish initiative. As a parish community, let us praise and thank God for this unique opportunity to assess where we are today, and where we want to be in five years and beyond.

The Catholic Leadership Institute was founded almost 30 years ago. As highlighted on their website at www.catholicleaders.org:

“Catholic Leadership Institute was founded in 1991 by a successful Catholic businessman, Tim Flanagan, on the simple vision that God’s gift to us is our potential, and what we do with it is our gift back to God. Tim saw all of the money and resources being invested into leaders in the corporate world, academia, and the military, and asked the question: *why not for the Catholic Church?* Nothing is more important or deserving of our support that deserves the best in leadership development and training than our Church.”

With this vision, the Catholic Leadership Institute has been expanding their ministry within the Church, first beginning with young people, and then offering their services to priests, bishops, diocesan and Archdiocesan staffs, and more recently to parishes, such as our own St. Frances Cabrini Parish.

As previously mentioned, fewer and fewer people are coming to Church on a regular basis. Nationally, 13% attend Mass once or twice a month, 10% attend Mass weekly out of a habit of faith, and only 7% are *highly engaged* in their Catholic faith, attending Mass each Sunday. Here at St. Frances Cabrini, we do not have our attendance rate so well refined as the national attendance rates. In last week's Pastor's Column, I noted that prior to COVID-19, our Mass attendance rate was **22%** and during the pandemic, our Mass attendance rate is currently **12%**. These percentages were based on parishioners identified as **active parishioners**. When we base our Mass attendance on **all our registered parishioners**, these percentages are much lower. Prior to COVID-19, our average weekly attendance rate was only **12%**, and currently, our Mass attendance rate is **6%**. In light of these statistics, nationally and locally, it is clear that current models of parish life cannot be sustained when the number of church goers in their 50s and 60s are declining and, for the most part, young people are not engaging with the Church.

In the spring of 2018, our Parish Community participated in CLI's Disciple Maker Index. One of the main purposes of the DMI was to see how well we were meeting the spiritual needs of our community, especially with regard to our weekly celebration of Mass, including the homilies, and also the formation of our parishioners in the ways of our Catholic faith. CLI believes that a Catholic parish exists to help people develop a relationship with the Lord. They also believe that a Catholic parish equips disciples to share the Good News of Jesus Christ with others.

We were very pleased to welcome Lori Tedjeske to our Parish Community the weekend of October 3rd and 4th. Lori is a consultant for the Catholic Leadership Institute and she will be assisting us as we now actively enter into the **Next Generation Catholic Parish** initiative.

Over the past few weeks, we have been preparing for Lori's visit and preparing for the official beginning of this blessed opportunity being afforded to us by the Catholic Leadership Institute. As I mentioned in my weekly video message on September 24th, in response to CLI's request, I provided them with sacramental, pastoral and financial information on our Parish Community for the past five years. In order for Lori and CLI to better understand our Parish Community, specifically, I provided them with the following information:

Baptisms	Religious Education-Enrollment
Confirmations	Regional School-Enrollment
Weddings	Offertory-Sunday collections
Funerals	Other Income and Savings
Converts	Parish Debt and Expenditures
Parishioners –Number of Registered	School Financials
Mass Attendance	School Debt and Deferred Maintenance
Vocations	

By providing this information, we are assisting Lori and other Catholic Leadership Institute consultants in assessing and tracking our Parish Community's Four Key Factors upon which the **Next Generation Catholic Parish** will depend, namely to:

1. Foster spiritual maturity and a plan for discipleship of its parishioners;
2. Share leadership and maintain a commitment to a healthy organization;
3. Offer a vibrant Sunday experience with excellent hymns, homilies and hospitality;
4. Embrace a missionary impulse to go out and bring others to know Jesus.

In addition to providing this information, Lori met with Monsignor McCormac, members of our Pastoral Staff, members of our Parish Pastoral Council and Parish Finance Council, as well as some key parish leaders, and some non-staff parishioners. These meetings were held on Sunday afternoon in person and on Monday via Zoom. People met with Lori either individually or as part of a small group.

Please continue to pray for our Parish as we now begin the **Next Generation Catholic Parish** initiative.