



“Ministering to the Ministers”

ST. GERTRUDE PARISH STRATEGIC PLAN 2023-2025

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NOTE FROM FR. MIKE GABRIEL



Dear Friends,

This is truly an exciting time to be here at St. Gertrude's. Last fall the Parish Council had many various listening sessions. With your input they have been able to prioritize areas where we as a parish need to pay attention to and walk together. So today you could say we are beginning the road to renewal. We have been blessed with a wonderful past and as we move forward let us know that Jesus walks with us just like he did with his disciples.

Over the years the parish has had the theme All Our Welcome, we continue to build on this theme. At this time, we are asked to renew that call to make everyone feel welcomed, by opening the doors of our hearts and heads, and welcome everyone as we would welcome Jesus. As the family of St. Gertrude this means we first and foremost need to continue to welcome one another, no matter who they are, we need to show hospitality and encourage each other. Like any family, at times there is tension and stress, but we need everyone. It will take the community to renew the call, will you answer?

Warm Regards,

Fr. Mike

ABOUT ST. GERTRUDE

Established in 1912, St. Gertrude has served the parishioners of Edgewater as a center for faith and community for over a century. As a parish, we give thanks for those upon whose shoulders we stand, and support each other with the same living faith which has been the hallmark of St. Gertrude Parish from its inception. As a family of faith, we continue to look to find innovative ways of responding to the ongoing needs of our dynamic and evolving community. Together, we continue to strive to live the truth of our motto – *All are Welcome*.

OUR VISION

We strive to be a community, growing in faith, that welcomes all and brings Christ's love to others.

OUR MISSION

St. Gertrude builds God's kingdom by celebrating the sacraments of life, spreading the gospel, and serving others.

INTENTION AND PROCESS

Beginning in the summer of 2022, a newly installed (post-pandemic) Parish Pastoral Council embarked on a process of discernment to consider how best to serve the needs of an evolving parish. Following the disruption caused by the pandemic, and following the integration of St. Ignatius parish with that of St. Gertrude as a result of the archdiocesan "Renew My Church" initiative, we felt it was time to reassess the needs of the St. Gertrude community, in order to inform our efforts as a council moving forward.

In the fall of 2022, the council administered a survey both in paper and electronic formats over the course of several weeks, and council members and Fr. Mike hosted listening sessions both in groups following masses and individually as requested. All together, we heard from a number of parishioners about what they appreciated about our parish, as well as where they felt there was opportunity to improve or better meet their needs and the needs of others, both in the parish and in the local community.

This Parish Council Strategic Plan is the fruit of these efforts, a working document intended to guide the Parish Council's efforts moving forward. It is the intention of the parish pastoral council to help usher St. Gertrude into a new era by listening deeply, discerning carefully, and engaging broadly with all parishioners, according to the following guiding values.

GUIDING VALUES

The following are some values that have arisen organically as the Parish Council has worked together over the past year. We share them in the spirit of transparency and to articulate the principles that will continue to guide our efforts as we implement this plan.

“ALL ARE WELCOME”

First and foremost, we are grounded by the longstanding motto of our parish, which expresses an explicit and universal invitation to join us in a community of faith. At St. Gertrude, our ethos is nonjudgmental, inclusive, and uplifting. We strive to welcome, to support, and to love – everyone.

MINISTER TO THE MINISTERS

In the spirit of humility, invitation, and service, we endeavor to help create the culture and infrastructure to empower *all* parishioners to help co-create the parish towards which we aspire. We describe our particular calling as “ministering to the ministers” and this will be our guiding principle as we advance this plan.

INNOVATION INFORMED BY LEGACY

We recognize and honor the legacy and contributions of those who have supported this parish community for decades, those who have started and sustained our various ministries, and who have been integral in sustaining the parish through various financial and other challenges. We also seek to honor that legacy by introducing and welcoming new ideas, new ways of engaging with each other, and new initiatives that may better meet the evolving needs and interests of our diverse community of faith.

SHARED RESPONSIBILITY IS SHARED OPPORTUNITY

As a parish community, we are strong and diverse. When we join together with others, we become even stronger. We believe in the mutual benefit of partnerships, with other faith communities, social service agencies, and other entities whose missions align with ours in the Edgewater and Rogers Park neighborhoods and across the city. To respond to Jesus’s call to create the kingdom of God here on Earth is both a shared responsibility and a shared opportunity, and we will remain open to partnerships that may aid in that goal.

Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry, and you gave Me something to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me something to drink; I was a stranger, and you invited Me in.

Matthew 25:34-35

OUR PARISH HUNGERS

As we reflected on the input provided by our parish through the listening sessions and survey responses, several themes emerged as to what our parishioners are seeking from our faith community. We have named these our collective “hungers” in recognition of our responsibility as a Parish Council to help provide for the spiritual nourishment that only a strong community of faith can provide.

Each of these hungers is accompanied by examples of strengths and opportunities. While neither are exhaustive lists, we want to honor and share some examples of where our community feels we are meeting these hungers, and where there is potential to grow.

1) OUTREACH AND INCLUSION

Ours is a community that greatly values inclusivity and endeavors to live up to our motto, “All are Welcome.” As a Parish Council we commit to leading our parish in a manner that sustains this welcoming ethos, while humbly acknowledging where we can do better to make *all* parishioners and guests feel a sense of belonging.

STRENGTHS:

- Past and present leadership consistently advocating for a more inclusive Church
- Vocal support for the LGBTQ+ community
- Integration of cultural celebrations

OPPORTUNITIES:

- Intentional integration of the St. Ignatius community, disengaged Catholics, and those who find themselves on the margin of our faith community
- Enhanced outreach to invite parishioners to get involved beyond mass attendance
- Better use of social media to reach a broader audience
- Developing a street team to have a presence/booth at local summer festivals/celebrations

2) FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

Families – especially new families, nontraditional families, and those with young children – are the future of our parish and our Church. We resolve to find new and innovative ways to meet our families’ needs so they can grow in knowledge, flourish in relationships, be inspired to persevere, and celebrate God’s gifts with the love and support of our parish.

STRENGTHS:

- Presence of Northside Catholic Academy as part of the parish

- Return of the children’s liturgy of the word during mass
- Renewed energy and recent efforts to rebuild youth ministry

OPPORTUNITIES:

- Events and/or new ministries to draw in, retain, and support young adults and those with young/new families
- Pairing families together, to integrate NCA and non-NCA families;
- Hosting topical events and discussions around challenging issues facing modern families

3) *LITURGY AND WORSHIP*

While many parishioners expressed strong appreciation for the quality of liturgies, we also heard many creative ideas for how to enhance the mass experience and offer parishioners other meaningful opportunities for devotions and prayer.

STRENGTHS:

- Overall high quality of liturgies and homilies
- Live stream of mass continues to be available
- Gym mass provides a unique experience

OPPORTUNITIES:

- Ensure that mass consistently enriches the lives of our families and community
- Reconsider scheduling of masses to maximize availability (i.e., Sunday evening mass, gym mass not scheduled concurrently with church mass)
- Offer worship experiences to meet the spectrum of devotional needs of our faith community

4) *SOCIAL JUSTICE AND HUMAN CONCERNS*

Our community’s concern for human dignity and social justice is a core strength of St. Gertrude, and yet there are many ways we can and should elevate our parish offerings to increase awareness and engagement, more vigorously combat injustice, and accompany and care for the oppressed and marginalized both within and outside of our own community.

STRENGTHS:

- Ministries with a strong history of doing exceptional work (e.g., Care for Real, Heart to Heart)
- Collaboration with other local community and religious organizations (e.g., ECRA, United Power, One Northside)
- Consistent support for domestic violence survivors, immigrant needs

OPPORTUNITIES:

- Specific outreach to those who have historically been oppressed, marginalized, or alienated by the Church, including but not limited to the LGBTQ+ community, divorced individuals, and those suffering from addiction
- Intentional resources dedicated to pressing needs in the local community (e.g., food and housing insecurity, immigrant needs)

5) *FAITH FORMATION*

Growing in faith doesn't just happen in Mass. Faith formation is both a personal journey and a communal experience.

Strengths:

- Renewed energy and recent efforts to enhance youth religious education program

OPPORTUNITIES:

- RCIA and adult faith formation opportunities (e.g., retreats, faith sharing groups, book clubs, rosary services, and speaker series)

6) *COMMUNITY AND CONNECTION*

We want to have fun together! While many among our parish value the social activities that are offered throughout the year, there is also a clear hunger for more social and community-building activities that serve to foster connection, develop friendships, and celebrate all the richness and joy that comes with being such a diverse community.

STRENGTHS:

- Existing social events (e.g., cabaret nights, international dinners, Christmas bazaar)
- Theatrical and musical performances

OPPORTUNITIES:

- Intentional welcoming of new parishioners
- Events to form community, get to know each other, and foster connection among those with like interest
- Regular town hall meetings to address emerging needs and concerns within the community
- More resources for large social events, such as summer block parties

THE ROAD AHEAD

Through these initiatives we aim to develop a vibrant community that is faith filled, active, and invested in its own future. We look to our fellow parishioners to continually renew the work of the PPC. The spirit calls on all of us to engage in making this vision a reality.

LIKE WHAT YOU SEE? LET'S MAKE IT HAPPEN!

Whether you are brand new to St. Gertrude or a veteran parishioner, there is a role for you to play in the future of our parish.

New to St. Gertrude or just checking us out? Let us show you around and tell you about what we have to offer (PS: we are really glad you are here!)

Been here a while and now interested in getting involved in a ministry? Let us know and we will connect you to the right point person.

Want to see a ministry, program, or initiative that we don't currently offer? We are committed to supporting you through the stages of planning, recruitment, and launch to help you get it off the ground.

FINAL NOTE OF THANKS

As your Parish Pastoral Council, we are thankful for the vibrancy, participation, service, and gifts we share as the faith community of St. Gertrude. We firmly believe that the diversity of our community – as well as our commitment to embracing that diversity – is our biggest strength, and what makes St. Gertrude such a special place.

Very truly,

Bob Backis, Co-Chair

Michelle Nickerson, Co-Chair

Jen Reyes, Secretary

Fr. Mike Gabriel, ex-officio

Ellen Buttitta

Denise Goodman

Tim Lacy

Tim Love

Sean Williams