

**St. Vincent de Paul Parish Plan, 2008 – 2013**  
**A Marvelous Love**

**INTRODUCTION**

*God has put into my heart a marvelous love for the faithful  
ones who dwell in God's land.*

*Psalm 16:3*

Since the fall of 2006, this House of Vincent has been on a journey of prayer and planning. During that time, we carried out two parish-wide Conversations. More than 200 parishioners took part in 37 small-group discussions led by members of our community. Over and over, the Conversation groups talked about the richness of our community and the power of our liturgy. One participant declared, “The seriousness of parishioners about their faith challenges me to take my beliefs more seriously.” Another exclaimed, “St. Vincent’s is what the Catholic Church should be. . . . The spirit of God feels alive here!” Our journey together has revealed a parish that professes a deep love of God and a great hunger for community.

The first paragraph of the report on our first Conversation, articulates a clear statement of purpose for the journey we set out on: “The goal of these Conversations is to begin a discernment of God’s will for our parish by responding personally and as a community to the question, Who are we? The ultimate aim of our discernment is to listen for God’s call, which we hope will guide us in developing a parish plan that charts our way forward according to God’s will.”

Earlier this year, our journey culminated with the Call to Community: two day-long gatherings at which nearly 200 members of our community sorted through the Conversation themes deemed most important for our faith and the future of our parish.

The Conversations and the Call to Community were not a top-down imposition of strategic planning. They are a bottom-up discernment that emerged over a year and a half as we listened and prayed together, and talked about our experiences at St. Vincent’s while reflecting on who we are as a parish. This parish plan is the completion of that journey and the start of a pilgrimage of change aimed at bringing new life to our parish. The plan is a framework of goals and tasks to guide us in living out our parish vocation.

The last line of our mission statement sums up the very heart of our vocation—the life mission of each of us. “We pray that our commitment to these efforts will further the mission of being one with our God and one with each other.”

Who are we? One with our God and one with each other.

It is our hope that every member of this House of Vincent finds a place for themselves in the plan our community has worked and prayed so hard to put together.

## **INITIATIVE I BELOVED COMMUNITY**

*Strengthening the bonds of love and caring for all the members of our parish family*

Parishioners strongly feel that the idea of a Beloved Community infuses all of the initiatives. The parish needs to foster a sense of connectedness and belonging within our parish community but also broaden the definition of “community” to encompass past, present, and possible members as well as our neighbors in Germantown. The goals of Initiative I focus specifically on building community within St. Vincent’s parish. (Other parts of the plan, particularly Initiative V, will address the goal of expanding the Beloved Community beyond the walls of St. Vincent’s church.)

### **Goal 1**

**Foster community and a sense of connectedness within and beyond weekend liturgies for all members of our parish family.**

Task A: Establish a viable youth ministry.

- Institute youth days around community service.
- Organize basketball games that attract youth from the neighborhood.
- Create intergenerational events.

Task B: Institute seasonal potlucks/luncheons/socials.

Task C: Set up a Caring Committee.

Task D: Reinstate transportation to Mass for elderly and any parishioners in need.

Task E: Reach out to homebound parishioners.

Task F: Revitalize the Hospitality Committee.

### **Goal 2**

**Invite and welcome new members into the Beloved Community.**

Task A: Continue the work of the Outreach Committee (*an expanded version of the Connections Ministry*).

- Reestablish programs for new-parishioner orientation and socializing.
- Reach out to members who are leaving or have left the parish community.

Task B: Develop strategies to bring in new parishioners and reach out to recent college grads.

## **INITIATIVE II FINANCIAL STEWARDSHIP**

*Promoting good stewardship of parish finances*

Parishioners believe that parish finances serve the vision of the community as laid out in the parish plan. If the vision is clear, parish finances will “fall into place.”

### **Goal 1**

**The Finance Council will establish effective means of communicating the financial status and pertinent financial actions to the parish.**

Task A: On a quarterly basis, deliver parish financial information in understandable terms in both verbal and written formats.

Task B: On a yearly basis, explain to parishioners St. Vincent’s financial relationship to the archdiocese and to the independent non-profit ministries (e.g., Face to Face, Inn Dwelling, etc.) located on parish property.

Task C: On an as-needed basis, communicate to the parish important financial decisions and the criteria for how these decisions were made.

### **Goal 2**

**The Finance Council will guide the parish in restoring and maintaining financial stability.**

Task A: Increase e-giving from 65 parishioners to 100 in 2008.

Task B: Develop a plan to promote and revitalize tithing.

Task C: Establish and communicate a 10-year fiscal plan that includes an energy audit and capital-needs assessment plan.

Task D: Promote planned giving in the bulletin and through other venues.

### **Goal 3**

**Under the guidance of Finance Council, create a development committee to identify new funding opportunities.**

Task A: The development committee will create a fundraising plan for each year.

Task B: The development committee will research sources of external grants (e.g., corporate giving, historical church fund, estate planning, etc.).

## **INITIATIVE III**

### **LITURGY**

*Making liturgy central to us*

Parishioners love and draw sustenance from St. Vincent's liturgy. "The celebration of the liturgy is central to us," the parish mission statement says. No changes to how liturgy is celebrated are envisioned. This initiative aims to clarify structures of liturgical planning and decision making, to facilitate coordination and communication within and among ministries supporting the liturgy, and to support those who serve the community through liturgical ministry.

#### **Goal 1**

##### **Renew and support the liturgical ministries.**

Task A: Compile a list of liturgical ministries; identify weaknesses and concerns; create ministry descriptions that include a catalog of duties.

Task B: Develop a plan to address issues raised by struggling ministries.

Task C: Introduce liturgical ministries to the community annually and invite parishioners to serve the community as liturgical ministers.

Task D: Post ministry information and contact names in high-traffic areas and on the parish website.

#### **Goal 2**

##### **Review and assess liturgical needs of the parish.**

Task A: Review how the parish plans and makes decisions about liturgical celebrations. Consider the need for weekly/seasonal prep with representatives from key ministries. Report findings and changes to parish community.

Task B: Evaluate how decisions are conveyed to liturgical ministers and how ministries communicate and coordinate among themselves.

Task C: Devise a plan for introducing and implementing mandated changes to liturgy.

Task D: Incorporate into the liturgy a "holding prayer" ritual for people in need of prayer.

## **INITIATIVE IV COMMUNICATION**

*Fostering a sense of ownership in the parish through communication*

Improving communication is a high priority for parishioners. Effective communication facilitates the goals of all initiatives in the parish plan, and it fosters greater accountability for decision making as well as transparency of parish leadership.

### **Goal 1**

**Foster transparency among councils, ministries, non-profit affiliates, and parishioners.**

Task A: Councils, committees, and ministries provide regular updates to the parish community.

Task B: Once a year, key councils (Parish, Liturgy, Finance) report goals, activities, and outcomes to parishioners.

Task C: Develop liaison relationships between each ministry, committee and the appropriate council (Parish, Finance or Liturgy) responsible for its outcomes.

### **Goal 2**

**Develop and maintain vehicles for connecting and information sharing.**

Task A: Promote the use of permanent and visitor name tags at liturgies.

Task B: Create a parish directory of registered parishioners (include photos with consent).

Task C: The ministries provide regular updates on their activities and needs to the parish community through bulletin and mass announcements and the website.

Task D: Create and update regularly a complete, interactive parish website that includes parish history, Sunday bulletin, current events, ministry information and schedules, and more.

Task E: Create a bulletin board in church vestibule showing weekly events and current needs (concrete) of individuals or groups.

## **INITIATIVE V**

### **WHO IS OUR NEIGHBOR?**

*Getting to know and ministering to our Germantown neighbors*

The Germantown community emerged as a priority—although not an exclusive focus—of St. Vincent’s social gospel goals. By getting to know our neighbors, we aim to extend the Beloved Community outside the walls of our church building. We will endeavor to align our approach to service with the charism of Vincent de Paul and adopt a *we* rather than an *I-they* outlook.

#### **Goal 1**

**Establish a Germantown Ministries Council to carry out Initiative V goals.**

#### **Goal 2**

**Get to know the community around St. Vincent’s church as our neighbors.**

Task A: Create a plan for discussions with our neighbors regarding their experience as residents of the neighborhood and as neighbors of St. Vincent’s. The discussions, which could be one-on-one and in group forums, should identify issues neighbors are facing and the impact—positive as well as negative—of the congregation on the neighborhood.

Task B: Set up a good neighbor policy that includes a response to concerns raised in discussions regarding the effects of St. Vincent’s on the neighborhood.

Task C: Learn more about services provided by parish ministries and nonprofit affiliates as well as local congregations and organizations working in Germantown. Initiate dialogue among Vincentian parishes and other faith communities in Germantown.

Task D: Work in collaboration with our neighbors and neighborhood service providers to develop a plan to address neighborhood issues.

Task E: Together with our neighbors, work with the Philadelphia Mural Arts program to sponsor a mural on church property.

#### **Goal 3**

**Renew, support, and sustain valued parish social ministries and ministers.**

Task A: Initiate a campaign to increase parishioner involvement in parish social ministries and non-profit affiliates.

Task B: Clarify the process for the creation of new ministries including reviewing and publicizing the existing criteria for the creation of new ministries.

**INITIATIVE V (continued)**  
**WHO IS OUR NEIGHBOR?**

*Getting to know and ministering to our Germantown neighbors*

**Goal 4**

**Provide services and social advocacy for neighbors who are poor and vulnerable.**

Task A: Initiate dialogue with Vincentian parishes and other faith communities in Germantown to explore ways of serving the poor collaboratively.

Task B: Promote greater understanding of the parish's nonprofit affiliates and encourage parishioner involvement through annual reports to the parish and in announcements at Mass and on the parish website.

Task C: Initiate a parish discussion of funding for a community organizer and parishioner training.

**Goal 5**

**Support our neighborhood through Martin de Porres School.**

Task A: Create a program to sponsor neighborhood children involved with Face to Face to attend our parish school.

**Goal 6**

**Anchor social gospel activities to the spirit and life of the parish.**

Task A: Tend to those who minister to our neighbors through retreats, days of prayer, and other activities of renewal.

Task B: Through liturgy and faith formation, sensitize parishioners to the social gospel.

## **INITIATIVE VI PRAYER AND FAITH FORMATION**

*Nurturing spiritual growth and maturity*

St. Vincent's parishioners recognize that spiritual growth and maturity provide the foundation for parish life. Through this initiative, parishioners express a strong desire for prayer and formation activities to further their own, their children's, and the community's spiritual growth. Parishioners are less interested in theological education—although there is a desire to see education for youth and adults related to the social gospel—and more interested in experiential programs that include prayer, small faith-sharing groups, and spiritual-formation activities.

### **Goal I**

#### **Develop resources and programs for spiritual formation and education in the faith.**

Task A: Establish a formation committee to identify and promote ways of facilitating prayer and spiritual growth through workshops, lectures, retreats, scripture study, and other programs.

Task B: Determine what parishioners are seeking by surveying interest in formation and education programs.

Task C: Offer a six-week course on spiritual formation.

Task D: Gather and disseminate (in the bulletin and on the website) spiritual-development resources including speakers, prayer events, web-based resources, books, and gifted parishioners within the community.

Task E: Establish a work group to promote liturgical formation for full, active, and conscious participation.

Task F: Establish a task force to explore parish interest in the creation of small faith groups and work to start up and sustain new faith-sharing groups.

Task G: Offer programs to educate and form parishioners in Vincentian spirituality and the Vincentian approach to social service.

Task H: Establish a prayer network/group to disseminate prayer requests to the parish community. (Inform community about the House of Vincent listserv.)

## Next Steps

The term “Scattered Community”—one of the major themes that emerged in the Conversations—describes not just the dispersal of our fellow parishioners in space but a widespread malaise of the spirit. The chronic busyness of our age, with the fast-paced, high-efficiency, multi-tasking mind that it breeds, can sometimes make it hard for us to settle down and pray. Parishioners spoke often of how our longing for community—for personal interaction, intimate prayer, and face-to-face discussion about matters of faith—is undermined by the Scattered Community. One parishioner observed, “Often, we don’t feel we have the time to do what we want to do—or feel we need to do—in terms of ministry and living out the Gospel.” During an extended discussion, someone insisted, “We spend time with what we love.” The insight gave the group a little shock, but as the talk went on, another parishioner offered, “I’d like to see people say they can stop doing some things, so they can be more involved and available to the parish community.”

*God has put into my heart a marvelous love for the faithful ones who dwell in God’s land. (Psalm 16:3)*

The Parish Pastoral Council will coordinate implementation of the parish plan over the next five years. Parishioners will be asked periodically to assess the on-going relevance of the plan’s various elements and propose changes as needed.

The parish plan is a plan *of* the parish, and it is up to parishioners to give it life. Will you sort through the limited time and space at your disposal and give life to one of the goals envisioned in the plan? Will you stretch a little to give renewed life to this House of Vincent? Please reflect and pray and discern how you can bring new life to your parish, fuller life to your community, and greater life to the practice of your faith.

St. Vincent de Paul Parish Pastoral Council  
September 20, 2008