

St. ALOYSIUS PARISH VISION 2016

Final Report with Recommendations

JULY 9, 2006

Committee:

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Vision 2016

For over a hundred years, St. Aloysius Parish has been meeting the needs of Catholics along the

Mendocino Coast from Elk to Gualala and south to Sonoma County's Stewarts Point. St. Aloysius Parish is now a parish with only two churches. The church at Elk withdrew from being a part of this parish several years ago. St. Aloysius Church in Point Arena is the seat of the parish with Mary Star of the Sea a mission church. St. Aloysius Church in Point Arena has the parish hall (Trinity Hall), a rectory and a cemetery. Gualala has a church, Mary Star of the Sea. The pastor lives in a home in Gualala. The parish has met and solved many challenges over the years. These challenges have included many local hardships, lack of priests and nuns and meeting the needs of our ever-changing Catholic Church through the implementation of Vatican II.

Once again, St. Aloysius Parish finds itself in a period of transition. In addition to the challenges of the two church sites, other factors involved are:

- 1.) There is a large non-English speaking Hispanic community. This makes it appear that there are two distinct communities within the parish, English and non-English speaking.
- 2.) There is a decrease in attendance at Mass, especially the long time parishioner, at St. Aloysius Church.
- 3.) There is a lack of cooperation between the two churches.
- 4.) The pastor does not want the rectory located on the same property as Mary Star of the Sea and the rectory at St. Aloysius is unacceptable
- 5.) There is not a Spanish-speaking priest for the entire parish.
- 6.) Many local Catholics no longer attend either church.

Vision 2016 was created to investigate this transition. Our goal was to survey the parishioners as to where they want the parish to be in ten years, in 2016. It was quickly determined that in order to plan for the future, we must first meet the needs of today.

Vision 2016 committee used the focus group process to obtain the necessary information. The process was very dynamic and interactive. The focus groups were conducted in English and Spanish, both at St. Aloysius Church and Mary Star of the Sea. Five small focus groups were conducted. There was a final, all parish focus group. It is important to note that non-English speaking parishioners did not attend the final focus group meeting. The same five questions asked at all of the focus groups were:

- 1.) What are the strengths of the parish?
- 2.) What are the needs of the parish?
- 3.) What changes are needed in the parish?
- 4.) What can the parish do for you?
- 5.) What can you do for the parish?

The questions with answers were recorded on poster paper and then hung up around the room. Each parishioner was given dots to place at the three answers under each category that reflected their main concerns or interest.

The focus groups were conducted in March, April and May, 2006. Fifty-four parishioners attended the English speaking small focus groups. Thirty-one parishioners attended the Spanish speaking focus groups. Thirty-nine parishioners attended the all parish meeting. Several attendees left prior to the "dot" exercise at each of the focus group processes. At the final focus

group, a spokesperson for each of the small focus group gave a review of his/her meeting and reviewed the top three answers for each question. These responses were listed on poster papers that were hung up around the room. Each parishioner again was given dots to place by the top three ideas that reflect his/her views.

Report of Findings

Strengths of Parish

- The vast majority of the respondents believe the volunteers/parishioners are the foundation of St. Aloysius Parish. Volunteerism is demonstrated by parishioners taking active leadership roles, maintaining the buildings and grounds, the outreach programs, Good Buy Clothes and Knights of Columbus and financial support for projects.
- Father Theo is an excellent homilist.
- Sister Maura and Sister Celeste have made significant and valued contributions to the parish over the past ten years.

Needs of the Parish

The five focus groups cited multiple needs for the parish. An analysis of the data revealed that the most pressing needs of the parish are:

- All communications need to be improved.
- Meet the needs of the Hispanic community in Spanish.
- Streamline the parish structure under a parish/pastoral council.
- Build a rectory at Mary Star of the Sea.
- Involve the youth of our community in parish activities.
- Provide religious formation and education.
- Encourage parishioners who are no longer active to return to The Church.

Changes for the Parish

The overwhelming majority of the changes needed involve communications.

- There is a lack of understanding of what each committee does.
- Define the role of St. Aloysius Foundation.
- Explanation of the second collection.
- Spanish speaking priest for all St. Aloysius parishioners.

What can the Parish do for You?

The parishioners are requesting:

- A streamlined organization which communicates with the congregation.
- Stronger ties to the Santa Rosa Diocese.

What can You do for the Parish?

- Parishioners are willing to commit to being involved in parish activities.

Recommendations for implementation of the focus group findings:

1. Improve Communications:

- Committee reports to the parishioners annually.
- Meeting between St. Aloysius Foundation Board and the entire parish to inform parishioners about the history of the Foundation, including who created it, who is on the Board, how the board members are elected and how to request grants from the Foundation.
- Website that is current.
- Monthly bulletins, in English and Spanish (this has been instituted)
- Calendar of events for entire parish.
- Public acknowledgment that Good Buy Clothes (GBC) is a St. Aloysius Parish outreach program. Currently when GBC is featured in the Independent Coastal Observer (the local newspaper), it never states it is a CATHOLIC outreach program from St. Aloysius Parish that assists the public.
- List all committees with a contact number, possibly in the bulletin.
- Parish directory.
- Liaison with Santa Rosa Diocese to access available resources.
- Place a glass enclosed bulletin board outside the churches.

2. Simplify the Parish structure:

- Develop a Parish/Pastoral Council.
- All committees to have the same organizational structure, e.g. mission statements, reports, minutes.
- Organize parish around the “Four Pillars of Parish Life” concept: Mission, Members, Ministry and Management.

3. Build on the strengths of the parish, which are the people:

- Provide incentives to retain volunteers.
- Personally invite new parishioners to become participants on committees.
- Institute annual “Thank You” luncheon for volunteers.
- Provide motivation to parishioners to continue to volunteer.

4. Provide a Spanish speaking priest monthly for homilies, counseling and confessions.

5. Investigate building a rectory at Mary Star of the Sea.

6. Promote parish unity:

- Establish more social events that include all parishioners.

- Have a statue of Our Lay of Guadalupe, patron saint of the Americas at Mary Star of the Sea.
- Create an outdoor altar at Mary Star of the Sea.
- Foster a sense of community by enhancing opportunities for ministries: youth, bereavement, hospitality, education, leadership training, retreats, and outreach.
- Begin a "Father Theo Appreciation Day"
- Support offered to Sister Celeste and Sister Maura.

Summary

St. Aloysius Parish is continuing its journey to fulfill its mission of meeting the needs of the coastal Catholic residents. The parish faces several significant challenges that include, but not limited to, being rural, two separate church sites which are fourteen miles apart, an aging congregation, few families with young children and Catholics who no longer attend Mass or participate in the parish. The parishioners recognized these difficulties are interfering with completing the work of the parish and church.

A self-examination process has been completed by the parish. A strong foundation for any organization is its people. This is a recognized strength of the parish. We must continue to build upon this strength in order for us to succeed in the future.

The parishioners learned that most of the current challenges and unrest are from a profound lack of communications amongst everyone. There is a perceived lack of leadership. The organizational structure of the parish needs to be simplified. The parishioners learned we need to bring unity between St. Aloysius Church, Mary Star of the Sea as well as unity among the Hispanic communities. We are one parish in Christ.

The work of St. Aloysius Parish continues. Hopefully, with improved communications, the formation of a parish/pastoral council and a focus on unity, St. Aloysius Parish will be staged to meet the needs of the future. It will continue with the caring, commitment and dedication of the parishioners, the pastor and the nuns. This work will be accomplished because ministries will be created to utilize the talents of a diverse congregation. In working together, we will meet the needs and challenges of our faith community today and in 2016.