Who Do We Want to Become?
Vision Statement and Initiatives

Last Wednesday, the 7th of January, The Pastoral Council and I met to review the input we received at the last listening session. If you recall, the listening session Discussed a proposed vision statement for the new parish, as well as some initiatives and key projects that will either lead up to its founding or guide the identity and tone of the new parish. I shared perspective on how the listening sessions went last month, and now—with the Pastoral Council's help and advice—we have landed on final drafts of those proposals. I would like give a little explanation behind what we came up with.

Our New Vision Statement:

Glorify God, proclaim the Gospel, and form disciples who love, live, and serve like Jesus Christ.

We were aware of concerns people raised about the draft vision statement not being as explicitly Catholic as they would have hoped, as well as a concern that it was perhaps a bit corporate and general. We also heard clearly that the semicolons separating clauses and quotation marks around the word form were not clear communication. The challenge in the end was to create a statement that was big enough to encompass *everything* the parish wants to be while, at the same time, not delving into excessive wordiness by explicitly mentioning *each* thing (even if important). In the end, we centered it on the notion of the expanding priorities of Christian discipleship: Serving God, then attending to our own spiritual life and needs, then passing on the treasures we have received so that others can in turn pass on what God has given them through our ministry.

Final Initiatives

With regard to the initiatives it is important to recognize that the ones we selected are not the only things we will be doing or the new parish will do but that they are merely important projects that need to be done in the course of founding the new parish or things that will really serve the identity we are wanting to foster. So, If you don't see something that is dear to you listed, remember that ordinary functions of the parish such as Divine Worship, Faith Formation, Hospitality and Welcome will obviously still be part of who we are and what we will be doing. These initiatives are things where we need to produce or decide something concrete for the founding of the new parish or we need to bring together a new or revived body to foster something in the next 1-5 years and beyond. It is also important to note that the people assigned to do the work of an initiative will not be the only voices on an issue, but rather those who will be responsible to lead the effort.

Discuss and Evaluate number of Sunday Masses needed in the new parish

I understand that this and the next initiative are the most sensitive and impactful ones on the list. Evaluating the number of Masses we need will help us glorify God more worthily, gives each Mass a larger pool of potential volunteers, frees priests for other pastoral ministry and presence with the community, as well as inject new energy into the community (a full church just *feels* more alive!). At the same time, the discussions and ultimate decisions will mean difficult changes to our status quo: when we go to Mass, where we go to Mass, with whom we go to Mass. This will be emotional, there will be grief, and so it is crucial we support one another and develop a more holistic self-identity as a parish together and put away any lingering "save my building/time" mentality. The Pastoral Council and I will lead this task, though there will obviously be consultation with you, and I will continue to strive for transparency.

Evaluate activity, storage, and program space and resources (i.e. a facility review)
Similar to the consideration of how many Masses we will have, we need to consider what facilities we have and how that matches with our needs and vision. This will enable us to form disciples, serve the broader Cowlitz/Wahkiakum community, and steward our financial resources better. Part of this initiative will also help us identify what maintenance, repairs, upgrades, renovations, or construction we may need to take on. This can be extremely exciting, but obviously people are very emotionally attached to their buildings and locations for ministries and activities, not to mention that facilities are major expenses and some decisions are by their nature irrevocable. Staff members—who will make sure legal and logistical processes of the Archdiocese are followed—and a planning commission drawn from parishioners with expertise and perspectives will help me make good decisions in this matter.

Evaluate the use of technology to serve the parish
The use of technology and training people to use it will help make formation and community more accessible to people across our large geography. Obviously, this will involve the expense of equipment, installation, maintenance, and training people to use the resources, but we see a lot of opportunities. This is actually a project within the parish staff that we have already begun and will continue and expand.

Evaluate Parish Communication and seek ways to improve it
This will help us to coordinate better to proclaim the Gospel and form ourselves and others as disciples of Christ. This gives us an opportunity streamline and improve things that might not always be as effective as we hope, but also carries the challenge of people needing to accept, engage, and respond to the modes of communication we use. Once more, this will be staff-led by its nature.

Explore ways to foster and support families and the Sacrament of Matrimony
One of the things that came from your input is the importance of giving support and resources to bring Christian formation and living into your home lives. I am going to entrust this, as well as efforts to foster and support ordained and religious vocations, to a vocation committee we will form. This initiative is going to require a number of people to step up to volunteer and lead, and for families to embrace and participate in the opportunities that will be offered.

Evaluate and coordinate Works of Mercy within the parish
Similar to the support of families and vocations, Coordination and communication between our various charitable outreaches, and formation of our community regarding social doctrine, will require a renewed spirit of volunteerism and willingness to include new participants of all ages, but it is so important to show the mercy and love of Christ as his disciples. My hope is to establish a Works of Mercy commission, similar in spirit to the former social justice commission. Now, I am a realist, and I do forsee that a delicate challenge is getting the right people to take on this task, people who can see it though a thoroughly Catholic lens, and eschew any kind of partisan political co-opting or ulterior motives. However, it is important because, as Pope Leo reminds us, love for the poor is not a marginal, but a central work of the Church.

Evaluate the state and needs of Catholic Education in the parish
My hope is to gather a group of faithful parents who provide for their children's education in varied ways: home education, collaborating with our parochial school, or collaborating with other public or private schools. They will help us discern how we can better support parents in their vocation to be the first and primary educators of their children not just in terms of Catechism or Faith Formation, but education and formation of children in general to be disciples of Christ first and for their whole lives. I also want this group to help me foster more integration of children into parish life, help the parish remove barriers to access to preferred modes of education, and fostering social connections between families and children in general. They may recommend things that challenge us, but I am sure will bear good fruit.

Merry Christmas,
Fr Thompson