

Seven Essential Elements of Parish Life

These Essential Elements of Parish Life were introduced during the initial diocesan-wide parish planning process in 2005. They are used as a tool to assist Parish Pastoral Councils in both understanding how parish goals connect to the mission of the church and also in concretely identifying those areas of parish life that require attention. As seen in the reporting tool, at least one element should correspond for each goal, more than one if desired.



The Seven Essential elements find their basis in the Code of Canon Law in the advisement of pastors on the norms of parish life (canons 528-530). They can be identified as: Worship, Word, Community, Service, Leadership, Stewardship, and Evangelization.

These elements have at their core **Eucharist**, the very heart of our identity as Catholics, the center of parish life and of our faith in Jesus Christ.

“It is through the liturgy, especially the Eucharist, that the faithful are enabled to express in their lives and manifest to others the mystery of Christ and the real nature of the true Church.” (Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy).

In its simplest form, we can describe the elements as follows:

Worship - The spiritual life of a parish animates its mission. Personal and communal prayer are essential to the building up of the body of Christ. Worship gives expression to the faith of our communities and our degree of commitment to furthering the Reign of God. Through our worship, we are nourished and strengthened to engage in the work of ministry, which seeks to transform the world.

Word - Our spiritual journey is an ongoing lifelong process. As individuals and as a community we are called to deepen our relationship with Christ and pass it on to others. “Word” indicates a number of ways in which we do this, both formally and informally. Through catechesis, sacramental preparation, family formation, Sunday homilies, or the RCIA process, we build communities of faith through preaching, teaching, and living the Word of God.

Community - We do not worship in isolation for Catholics are a communal people. Church life draws people together in mutual support, activity, celebration, and growth. It is the unity that results from members becoming involved with one another in all other elements of the pastoral mission. Community is the human dynamic through which the mission of the church is embodied and embraced.

“The parish is where the Church lives. Parishes are communities of faith, of action, and of hope. They are where the gospel is proclaimed and celebrated, where believers are formed and sent to renew the Earth.” (Communities of Salt and Light, NCCB)

Service – The Church is called to serve the needs of others and eliminate the causes of injustice. “Service” therefore includes the elements of both charity and justice. Far from being a burden to parish life, social ministry is part of what keeps a parish alive, making it truly Catholic and reflecting the Gospel mission.

These elements are surrounded and supported by **Leadership** and **Stewardship**.

Leadership – While the pastor bears ultimate responsibility and authority with a parish, effective councils require a shared leadership among clergy and laity, which calls forth the gifts of visioning, planning empowering and evaluating. The council leads as servants of God, drawing forth the gifts of others through active Stewardship.

Stewardship – If the Church is to fulfill its mission, we must be deeply committed to sharing our gifts, talents, money, and material resources in the same spirit of generosity as the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave all that He had for our salvation. With an understanding of what membership in the Church involves, this sharing is not so much an option for Catholics but a serious duty that both keeps the church alive and honors those gifts we have been given through the grace of the Holy Spirit.

Evangelization - The term evangelization encompasses any way in which the Church continues to spread the Good News of Jesus. Evangelization is at the heart of the mission of the Church. We evangelize by sharing our enthusiasm for the faith, inviting others to join or recommit themselves to the faith, and fostering gospel values in our families and society so as to transform the world.

The seven elements with the Eucharist at its center provides a filter through all which all the activities of the parish can be sifted, each falling into place as the purpose of the parish is prayerfully discerned. Everything the church does and everything it strives to be fits somewhere into this schema of church life. The elements allow the PPC to quickly connect themselves intimately to what it means to be church in a specific concrete way, helping to provide a vision that will set the stage for the parish plan.