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### **Vision for Holy Family Parish 3/2024**

After serving as Pastor for just over 6 years in Holy Family Parish and as Dean of the Prince Gallitzin Deanery for about 3 and a half years in the Diocese of Altoona-Johnstown, I hope to lead the Parish Community of Holy Family forward, inspired by God. The following 11 categories comprise the collective observations of my time in this region which foreshadow the actions needed to ensure that the faith community here can thrive and not simply maintain their existence.

The success of this effort totally rests on our having an appropriate grasp of our Mission, as taught by our Lord Jesus who is the Christ. Who called us, who we are and what we are to do is expressed in the Gospel of Matthew (28:18-20).

“Then Jesus (after his resurrection) approached and said to them, “All power in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age.”

All of this is respectfully offered to the reader after much time in prayer, observation, and reflection. The following steps build upon each other, so should begin in the order they are numbered, but they also overlap and when appropriate, should be approached concurrently.

Very Rev. Friar Thomas F Stabile, T.O.R., V.F.

- 1) That the Faith Community of Holy Family Parish intentionally work toward Healing and Reconciliation. The following list is not exhaustive, but identifies several wounds, hurts, betrayals of trust and losses this community has suffered and has not yet found healing and/or reconciliation.
  - a) Loss of loved ones to death at a rate of close to a funeral a week in the parish. (We need to provide more bereavement for those grieving the losses they have suffered.)

- b) The economy has been in decline for decades in this region, resulting in a significant portion of the population living below the poverty line and living on fixed incomes. Life has not been easy for a long time for many.
  - c) The “secret” yet powerful rifts in and among families in this region make it almost impossible to build a sense of community. Many families in this region are interrelated and the rifts create factions. How can a parish family joined after several parish mergers build a healthy sense of community if its members will not speak to or associate with each other?
  - d) Many family members moved out of the area, for a variety of reasons, resulting in family disunity.
  - e) The many faceted impact of allegations of sexual misconduct of the clergy has greatly damaged the level of trust between the faithful and their shepherds.
  - f) Stories of how previous clergy insulted and disrespected parishioners has added to the feelings of loss, betrayal, and anger.
  - g) The need to merge, close and/or demolish Churches and other parish buildings has added to the feelings of the loss of one’s spiritual home, ethnic ties, and betrayal of trust.
- 2) When and if the Faith Community of Holy Family Parish experiences significant healing they might regain a reason to have hope in their future.
- a) It seems that many have lost a reason to hope for a future for the Parish in Portage. I have heard several people say, “All the other parishes in town are closed; it is only a matter of time before we close too.” If a significant level of healing and reconciliation can be achieved, then hope for a vibrant future can also be restored.
- 3) That the Faith Community of Holy Family Parish provide more intentional ministry and care for their senior members.
- a) We are currently and likely to remain, for the foreseeable future, a more senior community. The younger families are not financially or physically as involved as the senior members right now. We need to take better care of those who support us by finding ways to make our buildings more accessible, have more events for them so they can be engaged and be even more supportive of those who are homebound. So that they are not lost, our seniors need to be able to share their stories. They need to know they are valued.
- 4) That the Faith Community of Holy Family Parish provide more intentional ministry and care for their children and youth.
- a) Children and youth are not just the future of the Church, they are a vital part of the Church NOW and if we want to keep them, we need to find ways to engage them so that they WANT to spend time at Church and be the disciples God calls them to be.
  - b) They need to know they are important, valued, and respected.

- c) They need to see the Church and property as a safe place where they can have fun, be safe, get good answers to their questions and be mentored.
- 5) That the Faith Community of Holy Family Parish embraces the importance of an atmosphere of welcoming.
    - a) We rarely have visitors at regular services, but when we do, we need to make them feel welcome!
    - b) If we are going to grow by adding new members, we must demonstrate an atmosphere of welcoming to those who attend parish celebrations (funerals, weddings, First Communions, etc.).
    - c) Jesus said (paraphrasing...) I have come to heal those who need healing and to find those who are lost. And so, we need to be and recognized as being open to people of all ages, to those who have disabilities, to those who are suffering, to those who are searching, to those who are former Catholics, to those who divorced, to those who are divorced and married outside the Church, to those who are struggling with addictions and those who are struggling with identity.
  - 6) That the Faith Community of Holy Family Parish regularly celebrate their incredibly rich history.
    - a) Instead of nursing the wounds for what was lost in the merging and closing of parishes, we need to discover ways of celebrating our richly diverse ethnic heritage. This could be in annual ethnic festivals that would invite the sharing of culture, food, music, etc.
    - b) Each time in the year when a significant anniversary of one of the five parishes (including Holy Family as the combined location for Roman Catholics to worship in Portage) occurs, that it be celebrated with honor.
  - 7) That the Faith Community of Holy Family Parish, in ever greater numbers, participate in ongoing formation.
    - a) It is typical for Catholic adults to think that they learned all they needed to know about the faith as children, but this is clearly a grave error. If we are going to meet the challenges of the local community, let alone the challenges facing the universal church, the world, and our country, we need to constantly be open to ongoing formation. This will not only form us and keep us up to date, but serve as an inspiration to children and youth, and the rest of the population of our region.
  - 8) That the Faith Community of Holy Family Parish, in ever greater numbers, grow to fully appreciate and fully participate in the celebration of weekday and weekend Liturgies.
    - a) There are some who understand that celebration of the liturgies of the Church require full and active participation. Too many just “show up,” not singing and barely speaking. Too many arrive late and leave early. If we are to be inspired and inspire others, let alone truly worship God in a manner deserving of our

Creator, then we need to learn better how to worship, and, to volunteer for ministries in the parish for which the participation of the faithful is not a luxury but a welcomed mandate of our Baptism into Discipleship.

- 9) That the Faith Community of Holy Family Parish will continue to grow in a sense of belonging, of being family, of being a community of faith on a mission to be and to make disciples.
  - a) According to the history of the Catholic Faith's growth in this area, the faithful recognized a need, actively researched how to meet that need, volunteered in great numbers and did what needed to be done to meet that need. Our current culture has lost that can-do and pioneering spirit. We are the largest Christian community of faith in this area. We need to recognize who we are in God's eyes, who we are called to be for this community and be willing to be the disciples God needs us to be for our own good as well as the community's welfare.
- 10) That the Faith Community of Holy Family Parish learn about Stewardship as taught in the Scriptures and embrace it as a way of life by which we care for what we have been blessed with and seek to gather what we need to continue our (really, God's) mission. The fund raisers that rely on games of chance and the winning of prizes are potentially dangerous for those who have gambling addictions, result in fund raising being done with an attitude of getting something for oneself out of the effort put into it, and do not emphasize that ALL we have – our very existence – is a gift from God.
- 11) That the Faith Community of Holy Family Parish will achieve a solution to our facilities issues, namely, increase parking and appropriately determine what is best to do with our aging former school and aging rectory buildings. These actions are crucial to our ability to provide an inviting and safe place to meet and to fulfill our mission.