

Saint Bernadette Parish, Severn
Parish Visit Commendations and Recommendations
September 22, 2011

The purpose of a parish visitation is to help me be better aware of the situations and challenges facing the parishes within the Seton Vicariate. It also allows me the opportunity to provide guidance, encouragement, assistance and direction to support the ongoing effectiveness of ministry in and among our vicariate's parishes. Finally, it allows me a way to appreciate and affirm the abundant, ongoing grace of God evident in the faith and witness of the church in the communities of our Seton Vicariate.

With these purposes in mind I thank your Pastoral Life Director, Ann McDonald, the pastoral staff, councils and the entire community and all concerned with the 2011 pastoral visit for their consideration and cooperation with me and the staff of the Seton Vicariate Office.

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I make the following commendations and recommendations to guide and support the Pastoral Life Director, (PLD) the professional and volunteer staff and all the parishioners of Saint Bernadette Parish, Severn, Maryland as you work together to be church and to extend the presence and the power of God's love in the communities of Severn, Maryland.

Commendations

Religious Formation

- 1. I commend the Faith Formation & Youth Ministry programs for their approach of integrating the Human Sexuality curriculum, in the pre-school program through high school curriculum._**

- 2. I commend the Religious Education curriculum for integrating service/outreach projects in all phases of the curriculum during the year, including the 4th, 5th and 6th grades studying and taking active parts in the Liturgy, Vacation Bible school**

- 3. I commend the approach to the Middle & High School curriculum, including Sunday evening meetings, including themes relevant to the participants' lives of faith, including social justice, the New Roman Missal, family life, and including a Confirmation retreat at the beginning of the curriculum, assisting with parish service projects for the parish and community involvement and the study and service focus, such as work camps in Baltimore City and in Appalachia, the "summer madness" program and cooperative efforts with the other area cluster parishes in doing service projects.**

- 4. I commend the focus of the religious formation process which supports youth returning after Confirmation and High School to become active in the parish. Using methodologies such as the Youth News Newsletter sent to all parish families of middle and high school students. The parish website and Facebook are most creative vehicles to engage the families and youth of the parish to continue and to succeed in the faith formation process.**

- 5. I commend that the parish provides a joint celebration with the clustered parishes for Confirmation and the leaders choice to**

collaborate with A.A. Co. Youth Min. Assoc. and regular meetings with APYM.

Adult Faith Formation

- 1. I commend the team approach toward RCIA, as a year round process and the approach of immediately working with people who register as soon as they enroll in the process.**
- 2. I commend the variety of formats for Adults formation in the parish, including the Lenten retreat, a development day for liturgical ministers and the Soup and Speaker series in Lent.**
- 3. I commend the process by the staff of looking at ways to reach out to the parish's adult population, including Bible studies, especially connecting with current events and searching out different topics and speakers for Soup & Speakers program.**
- 4. I commend the efforts to involve more parish members in the Equip for Ministry development program, to support awareness of outreach to support Gay and Lesbian Ministries and to help all who find themselves "excluded" to "reclaim" their place in the Church. I also commend the energy to seek out and find new populations who need to have a place in the community of faith.**

Liturgical formation

- 1. I commend that every parishioner is encouraged to choose and participate actively in a ministry of the parish and, in particular, I value the processes connected with Commissioning Sunday**

when members of ministries are recognized and supported during Mass.

- 2. I commend the relationships established and nurtured between the Parish Life Director (PLD) and the assigned priests and the liturgical planning and practices in the parish. It is clear that a vibrant worship is the heart of the parish life and I commend the relationship between leadership and liturgical presiding which is so vital in this effort.**
- 3. I commend the creative approaches toward involving people in liturgical ministry activity and supporting new/innovative different ways to celebrate the Triduum, Easter Vigil, RCIA, to get people more interested in and able to grow in their faith.**
- 4. I commend the collaborative manner in which faith leaders look to the community for inspiration in their work, a shared regard which is obvious in the manner by which the parish “business” is conducted.**
- 5. I commend the exceptional work of the music ministry in enlivening the parish with its range of expression and engaging performances to support the community’s worship. I also commend the professional music leadership which grows the ability of the cantors, choirs (including the teen spirit choir) and the community to support the worship of the community.**
- 6. I commend the use of “Diversity Sunday” sponsored by the Diversity Committee to generate a celebration that includes all members of the parish in a celebration of cooperation that happens when people of good faith come together seeking good for one another.**

- 7. I commend that people are supported in discerning their gifts and encouraged to participate in the life of the parish, i.e., showing initiative when seeing a problem and helping to address it.**

- 8. I commend the leaders of the community for living a philosophy of acceptance which allows for errors and efforts to be blended into a graced relationships and assumptions that all are in this effort for the good of others, so we are all learning how to work effectively together and will learn even from the errors of each other.**

- 9. I commend the approach of the liturgy committee to move from “planning” to “shaping” the rituals to express the life of faith and the life of the community. I support these expressions with music and environments which allow people to discuss and share their thoughts to creating or shaping a liturgy which uplifts and invigorates the people of the parish.**

- 10. I commend the creativity in the use of space design to be able to accommodate various sized groups using the combination of hall and Church for worship.**

- 11. I commend the Liturgy Committee’s success in keeping good records of their previous liturgies, cooperating with parishioners in recognizing and respecting each other’s gifts and working efficiently and well together.**

- 12. I commend the priority of liturgical formation for the parishioners by the presiders/preachers whose homilies intentionally blending themes of gospel values, justice and responsible living in their preaching.**

Social Outreach

- 1. I commend that social outreach is a focus that causes parishioners to respond to needs and to put the Gospel into action, including focusing on coordinating with the Arundel House of Hope, coordinating with other churches of the area and the churches of the cluster and the Haiti outreach.**
- 2. I am particularly impressed with the cooperative process of providing overnight shelter for about 35 homeless persons and providing dinner, breakfast, and a bag lunch is a wonderful example of gospel mission and personal generosity. The parish's pledges \$5,000 per year and of the over \$60,000 already provided over the years to the transitional housing programs is an outstanding commitment.**
- 3. I commend the parish for the complete inclusive and extensive list of programs and donations to support many social justice causes as found in the Annual report. I am especially pleased to highlight the commitment of the parish in service to your sister parish, Our Lady of the Visitation in Haiti. The amount of charity and concern as well as action on behalf of all these causes is most commendable.**
- 4. I commend the parishioners for their contributions in support of the social justice mission and the way in which the parish staff assists by informing the parishioners regarding how contributions are distributed and employed.**

5. **I commend the way the various parish committees work with the PLD and the easy flow of leadership between the staff and parishioners on developing and implementing good ideas and implementing worthy missions.**

6. **I also commend the parish for your consistent support and hospitality for the AA meetings at your church. This type of caring hospitality makes a major difference in the lives of those of those in need of support and care in our own backyards. Thank you on their behalf.**

Regarding Fiscal management and applications

1. **I commend the organization of the staff which provides for cooperative efforts and which promote transparency, shared confidence and a purposefulness as good stewards of the parish's resources.**

2. **I commend the monthly publishing of financial statements to the corporators, finance committee and parish as a way to keep all updated as to use and application of the financial resources.**

3. **I commend the parish for its current financial situation achieved by carefully managing its resources keeping the parish expenses under control.**

4. **I commend the fiscal policy that has built and sustained the present staffing levels, and provided program efforts that are obviously supported by the parish members.**

5. I commend the connection between the parish's vision of social justice and the faith of the parishioners which is demonstrated by the successful appeals for financial support and participation by the parishioners.

6. I commend the commitment to responsible stewardship which includes fiscal discipline, education and information updates regarding financial stewardship and a commitment to support a mission of justice in the decisions made by parish leadership.

7. I commend the freedom of exchange which characterizes the conversations by the various groups I witnessed and the care and concern expressed by seeking to understand and participate in the mission and work of the church in all its aspects.

8. I commend the Staff for "tightening their belts" in using zero-based budgeting and in watching the budget and controlling expenses. I am aware and grateful for the PLD's leadership in this budget management process.

Communication

1. I commend that the "marketing" of the parish begins in the worship by the community where people learn a style of parish management founded in transparency, information and awareness which helps all parishioners to feel included and aware of the commitments and relationships which characterize the life of the parish.

2. I also commend the annual “state of the parish” report provided to all parishioners to keep all informed and updated on the fiscal and programmatic efforts of the parish.

Pastoral Council and Committee, Staff

1. I commend the responsible manner in which the PLD and other pastoral leadership groups have joined to guide the growth of the parish.
2. I commend the Council for their involvement and continuity in the mission of the parish. I was particularly impressed with the role of the parish staff and committees in the development and work of the strategic plan.
3. I commend how the council is formed according to the ministry vision of the parish, representing every age group, diversity, etc. and how the discernment process is used to guide the work of the council truly implementing the “Servant Leadership” concept to guide the work of the Council.
4. I commend that the Council sees itself as a visionary body of the church – no one is left out as it creates and sustains a positive influence on the morale of the parish, encourages participation, creates cohesiveness and sustains a vibrant community of faith.
5. I commend the Council members for their vision of sustaining an attitude of energy and enthusiasm, being unafraid of

stretching beyond comfort zones, realizing and expanding their giftedness as a priestly people, available for others and joined in a common search for guiding the parish in faithfulness.

Recommendations:

It is clear that St. Bernadette is an outstanding community of faith. In light of the learning from the visit, the following recommendations are offered to the parish leadership for their consideration and dedicated work. I suggest that you continue a dialog with Dr Little for considerations of these areas for thought and action. Of course, my office continues to be available to the parish for any ways in which we might continue to support and cooperate in your ministry.

Please consider the following areas for your ongoing planning and ministry outreach.

- 1. I recommend an outreach to those in the community in the 18-35 age period. The “young adult” is in a challenging life period in many ways and needs attention and support to address their age and life agendas. I trust the parish will give due consideration for this group.**
- 2. I also recommend that the diversity agenda of the parish consider ways to reach out to those who are divorced and Hispanic members of the community. I commend that the parish leadership examine these two communities in their outreach and inclusion activities.**
- 3. I recommend that the parish’s participation in the archdiocesan planning process include a reflective planning for a mission and outreach to your young adult members, ongoing collaboration with the other cluster parishes, exploring ways to use social media vehicles for marketing, ongoing communication and adult faith formation.**

- 4. I recommend that the staff do an assessment of the security of the parish buildings, in particular with a focus on access to the office area.**

Finally, thanks to all who have cooperated in this visitation process. I feel very encouraged by the faith and energy I discovered at St. Bernadette's Church and I look forward to working with you for the glory of God and the benefit of all the people of your area. Be assured of my prayers for all involved in this wonderful ministry.

Sincerely.

Most Reverend Mitchell T. Rozanski