

**STRATEGIC PLAN**

**For**

**St. Bernard Parish**  
**North Kingstown, RI**

**September, 2002**

## **BACKGROUND**

In the summer of 2000, The Futures Committee of St. Bernard Church in North Kingstown, Rhode Island was established to examine the Parish, its programs and activities and assess whether the needs of the parish and parishioners were being met. In responding to the changing needs of a growing parish, the Futures Committee wanted to ensure the parish is postured to meet the challenges of the new millennium. Father Dennis Reardon was in full support of this effort and clearly articulated his desire to create a vision for the parish including a mission and a clear set of objectives. Initial discussions between the Futures Committee and the Parish Council focused upon the importance of long-term planning. It was emphasized that all efforts and activities within the parish be integrated, coordinated and mission-driven.

### **Task 1: Needs Assessment**

St. Bernard began the planning process by entering into a consulting arrangement with Dr. Elaine Notarantonio, Professor of Marketing at Bryant College. It was determined that the first task was to conduct a comprehensive needs assessment consisting of two phases:

#### ***Phase I: Depth Interviews and Focus Groups***

The first phase began in February, 2001 and included personal interviews with the Pastor and key organizational leaders within the parish. A number of issues began to emerge at this point related to communication, parishioner involvement and morale. Focus group sessions were held in order to further identify issues of concern to the parish. These groups were made up of 4 to 10 parishioners who were identified based upon significant criteria. These dimensions included years with the parish, level of parish involvement, age and perceived satisfaction with parish experience. Participants were invited to discuss a number of general issues related to the parish. From these discussions emerged a variety of issues and insights. These were formulated into survey questions and were used as a basis for the strategic planning initiatives discussed in a later section of this plan.

#### ***Phase 2: Survey***

The second phase involved the development of a survey, which was administered in April 2001. The survey's content was based upon the results of the depth interviews and focus groups as well as a review of previous studies conducted by religious organizations. Categories of questions were identified using a) the critical dimensions identified by the Pastor, parish leaders and the Futures Committee, b) responses of focus group participants and c) common issues faced by religious organizations. A copy of the survey and the results can be obtained by contacting the Parish Office.

### **Task 2: The Planning Process**

In June 2001, the parish held its first Community Forum, presenting to the parish at large the findings of the needs assessment and the results of the survey. In addition, parishioners were informed of the upcoming strategic planning process and were invited to participate. Areas of concern, critical issues, and significant trends that were identified during the needs assessment phase were reinforced during the forum and used to validate the picture that the Futures Committee was forming in preparation for the strategic planning phase.

Dr. Notarantonio, the Futures Committee, and a group of 25 volunteer parishioners formed a planning team. A workshop was held in August 2001. Workshop participants brainstormed and were encouraged to be innovative in their recommendations. From this session emerged a list of action items which revolved around the five initiatives identified during the needs assessment phase.

During the fall of 2001, the Action Items were further developed. Work teams consisting of individuals who were members of the initial planning team as well as other parishioners who volunteered or were invited to become part of the process were given a time-line to study and make recommendations to the Futures Committee. The teams worked through the winter and spring to develop and refine the Action Items. Recommendations were made either to proceed with the Action Item, gather more information or abandon the proposed Action Item. All of this information was distilled into this Strategic Plan.

### **STRATEGIC ASSESSMENT**

An important output of the August 2001 workshop was a strategic assessment of the parish developed by the planning team. This assessment of the parish’s strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats has been the foundation of our strategic planning efforts. The details of this analysis are provided in the following table:

<p><b>STRENGTHS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Pastor</li> <li>❖ Strong Sense of Community</li> <li>❖ Talent Pool</li> <li>❖ Parish Growth</li> </ul>	<p><b>WEAKNESSES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Lack of Communication</li> <li>❖ Limited cooperation</li> <li>❖ Duplication of Efforts</li> <li>❖ Volunteers drawn from same group</li> </ul>
<p><b>OPPORTUNITIES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Acquisition of Davis Property</li> <li>❖ Growth in area population</li> <li>❖ Significant Giving Potential</li> </ul>	<p><b>THREATS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Negative Image and Publicity of Catholic Church</li> <li>❖ Perception of Parish as Mission church</li> </ul>

## **BRIEF HISTORY OF PARISH**

The earliest Catholic Eucharistic liturgies in nineteenth century Wickford were celebrated in private homes, the Saunderstown schoolhouse, and even in the town hall. By summer of 1874, the Catholic community had grown large enough to support the building of a new church in Wickford. It was a diverse parish community, comprised of artisans, merchants, small manufacturers, shopkeepers, lawyers, doctors, and Irish and French-Canadian mill workers. Parishioners contributed materials and labor to buy a one-half acre lot and build the central portion of our present church for \$6,000. Over the next decades, St. Bernard parish would expand to include a rectory, a larger lot, and carriage sheds (all for the sum of \$12,750), electric lights (1913), an oil burner in 1924, and a school (1950-1970).

The church grew as a vibrant community along with its changing physical structure and sacred space. Clergy, women religious, and parishioners worked together to nurture the Christian mission in prayer, through the sacraments, within and beyond church doors. Breaking bread and celebration were a constant hallmark of the parish, as the community hosted missions, lawn parties, bake sales, fairs, minstrel shows, plays, musical and sporting events, appreciation dinners, benefit whist parties, harvest suppers, bingo, and even a week long carnival with rides and fireworks.

Parishioner involvement in the liturgy grew too, as the decades went by. With Vatican II, Latin was dropped for the more familiar English. Laymen and women gradually joined priests at the altar as lectors and Eucharistic ministers. Girls gained the opportunity to participate in the liturgy as altar servers.

Service, change, celebration, and growth are woven into St. Bernard's history. So too are they woven in our church mission in this third millennium. Our mission proclaims a continued trust in the guidance of the Spirit and an active response to Christ's call to live the Gospel in service to the community, through prayer, the sacraments, and commitment to a just society. St. Bernard's history and mission are similarly woven into plans for the future. Action items that have emerged in this planning process reflect the same spirit of service, change, celebration, and growth found in our tradition and in our recently articulated mission statement.

## **MISSION**

In 1998, Fr. Sabourin commissioned the Spirituality Committee to present a Mission statement that would represent our parish. A group of four active parishioners met to discuss the Mission Statement and what it is St. Bernard's wanted to say. The group examined parish bulletins from different states to identify any that might relate to what was representative of our parish. The committee drafted a statement and provided it to Fr. Sabourin for review. After several iterations a final Mission Statement was accepted and implemented.

## St. Bernard Mission Statement

*We, the family of St. Bernard's parish, proclaim our call to live Christ's message. Our mission is to deepen our love of the Gospel; to grow in holiness through prayer, sacraments and worship in union with the universal church; and to evangelize in our daily lives through serving His community; and to proclaim the Word of God to all. Trusting in the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we commit ourselves to work for a just society that is respectful of human life in all its stages.*

The distilled information, the SWOT analysis and the parish mission statement were the driving factors leading to a list of actionable, measurable goals in each of the initiative areas, as follows.

### INITIATIVES, VISIONS AND GOALS

#### INITIATIVE 1: COMMUNICATION

*Vision: To establish an image as an institution that recognizes and appeals to the needs of all parishioners and community members.*

##### GOALS:

1. To ensure a consistent and integrated flow of information within the Parish
2. To maintain communication and visibility with the external community.
3. To create a clear image for St. Bernard's Church

#### INITIATIVE 2: YOUTH EDUCATION AND PROGRAMS

*Vision: To be a destination of choice for all within the community for worship, educational and social events.*

##### GOALS:

1. To consider programs for all age groups from infancy through teen
2. To actively include all youth in the liturgy
3. To encourage interaction among all age groups and generations

#### INITIATIVE 3: ADULT EDUCATION AND PROGRAMS

*Vision: To be a destination of choice for all within the community for worship, education and socialization.*

##### GOALS:

1. To become a part of the overall parish planning effort
2. To provide a forum for all adults to celebrate faith
3. To create partnerships with other parishes in our community

**INITIATIVE 4: STEWARDSHIP AND VOLUNTEERISM**

***Vision: St. Bernard's will be active in social outreach within the parish, community and third world countries.***

**GOALS:**

1. To bring a sense of community and belonging for all parishioners, young and old
2. To educate the entire parish on the meaning of stewardship
3. To encourage and inspire parishioners to give of their time, talent and treasure

**INITIATIVE 5: STRUCTURE AND PREMISES**

***Vision: To be a destination of choice for all within the community for worship, education and socialization.***

**GOALS:**

1. To conduct and complete a feasibility study regarding the physical structure needs of our parish
2. To conduct a capital campaign for the purpose of improving our physical premises
3. To construct a new church and/or adapt our existing premises to meet the needs of our parish

**ACTION ITEMS**

In the spring of 2002, the action teams submitted their recommended action plan to the Futures Committee. The core team carefully reviewed them for their role in fulfilling the Parish mission and carrying out its objectives. The plan that follows identifies individual action items and describes the progress of each to date. It should be noted that action items were in various stages of development at the time this document was written. Some were in the idea stage while others had already been implemented. Issues which remain to be addressed are also identified in each section.

## ***THE PLAN***

### **INITIATIVE: COMMUNICATION**

#### **Action Item 1: New Parishioner Welcome Program**

*Develop a protocol, process and coordination of responsibility for individuals and families who are new to the parish. Establish a program for ongoing interaction among all parishioners including coffee after Mass and a Hospitality Ministry.*

It is agreed that the current process of visiting new parishioners, which may occur several weeks to months after registration needs to be enhanced and centrally coordinated. The new welcome program will consist of the following:

- Make an appointment as soon as possible to meet with pastor.
- Appoint a Welcome Committee Coordinator.
- Newcomers Dinner and Welcome Mass.
- New members will be welcomed in church bulletin and/or newsletter.
- Newcomers visit should be separate from evangelization visit.
- Strongly recommended that St. Bernard's Parish Information booklet be printed with names and telephone numbers of all coordinators.

More specifically, the process will include the following:

1. Upon registration newcomers will make an appointment to meet with the Pastor.
2. Welcome letter is sent out.
3. Copy of Registration form is to be put into a folder that will be picked up by the Welcome Coordinator weekly.
4. Coordinator will phone newcomers welcoming them to the Parish and offering their assistance. Depending on the newcomer's preference, the Coordinator can either visit them at home or mail out a copy of the ***St. Bernard's Information Booklet***.

The ***St. Bernard's Information Booklet*** would provide a list of all Ministries with coordinator's names, phone numbers, as well as general parish information. A committee to develop this booklet should be appointed.

- Booklet would be a folder with replaceable pages as updates warrant.
- General Parish Information.
- Mission Statement.
- Stewardship Pamphlet.
- List of Ministries.
- List of Committees.
- Parish Activities etc.

The Newcomers dinner will be held at least twice a year and a monthly Welcome Mass to introduce new parishioners, followed by a coffee hour to be sponsored by different ministries.

**Action Item 2: Parishioner Communication**

*Determine ways of implementing ongoing parishioner communication and feedback from it.*

Communication should be an ongoing process rather than based upon the immediate need. Modes of communication should cultivate ongoing discussion and serve as a means of disseminating information. An annual Community forum should be held. These forums should be modeled after the June, 2001 forum. Approximately 150 parishioners attended this Community Forum where the results of the Survey and Needs Assessment process were presented.

A quarterly newsletter will be instituted which can be received on line or through the mail. All ministries and committees as well as the Pastor will be invited to submit articles, editorials and comments. An editorial team will be appointed to oversee this publication. An e-mail list should be maintained. Updates will be provided and will include the parish council agenda as well as any pertinent upcoming religious or social events. A web page will be maintained. This is described in greater detail in the External Communication action item.

**Action Item 3: External Communication Program**

*Develop a program, responsibility and guidelines for ongoing external visibility and communication. Examples might include (but are not limited to) media relations, format and maintenance of web site).*

External Communication tools include, but are not limited to; personal invitations, distributable material, press packs, new neighbor packets, visitor follow-up packets, electronic media (web, email list, CDs, DVDs), and video.

To enhance the parish's internal and public visibility a distinctive but simple logo and slogan should be developed.

A communications "czar" is needed to serve as a single point of accountability with regards to contact with the media, and for any external communications efforts, electronic or otherwise. This person would be responsible for ensuring that information supplied to the press is current and accurate. This person would be proactive in ensuring that all public mention of the parish includes the correct address, phone numbers, email addresses, web site address, and any contact information for those serving as points of contact for any particular issue or event. All press releases should be released only from this individual, whose name would also be attached to the release as the return point of contact. All publicly-released documents from the church should also have this individual listed as the primary point of contact - NOT the pastor.

This would not be a position for the casual volunteer; public relations, when done correctly, is a lot of work. The ideal candidate would be a retiree who has experience in public affairs and the time to put into it.

A church advertising campaign could include such tools as making the parish bulletin available in public places, not just distributed at the church. Public distribution could also include a calendar of events for the upcoming season (six months - summer/winter). A good example of information that would be a natural for public distribution would be a brochure listing all of the community services provided by St. Bernard Parish, particularly if those community services touch individuals that may not be Catholic.

## **INITIATIVE: YOUTH EDUCATION AND PROGRAMS**

### **Action Item 1: School Feasibility**

*Ascertain whether St. Bernard's has the capability to support a parish school and whether the market can support the endeavor. Identify alternatives to a Parish-supported school.*

The concept of a Parish School has been studied and discussed. It is the opinion of the team assigned to this action item that a school that would be built and supported by the parish is not feasible at this time. It is noted that a Regional School is desirable but would have to be built by the Diocese of Providence and supported by multiple parishes.

**It is recommended that after a new church, Parish Center and Rectory are planned and financed, the issue of a Parish school supported by the diocese be reconsidered.**

### **Action Item 2: Sports Program**

*Investigate the potential for establishing sports programs for boys and girls. Recommend specific sports and investigate league membership requirements for each sport. Consider how these recommendations relate to current physical structure plans.*

This action item is still under discussion. Preliminary discussions have focused upon the establishment of a CYO sports program. Youth sports teams would become part of the CYO league within the state and participate in competitive sports. Other sports programs will also be investigated.

### **Action Item 3: Other Youth Programs and Activities**

*Investigate the feasibility of instituting the following youth programs. Recommend implementation plan for each and assignment of responsibility for implementation:*

- *Children's Mass (including youth lectors, greeters, choir and ministers)*
- *Babysitting program for Masses*
- *Adopt a grandparent/child*
- *CYO*
- *Youth dances and programs with other parishes*
- *Vacation bible school*
- *After school tutoring*
- *Religious Formation for K and Pre-K*

This Action Item is still under discussion.

## **INITIATIVE: ADULT EDUCATION AND PROGRAMS**

### **Action Item 1: Speaker Series**

*Develop an ongoing speaker series that would address a variety of issues and interests. This will include identification of sources of speakers, funding requirements and opportunities.*

The speaker series will initially explore the meaning of “church” (e.g. the broad spectrum of thought among Catholic believers, the role of the laity, and the role of women). Programs will be developed that celebrate and affirm our Christian faith. The dissemination of information on and generation of sincere discussion of the complexities of our faith in the third millennium will be goals. Engaging dynamic speakers who inspire attendance and commitment to the faith community will accomplish this. Greater participation by more parishioners including disaffected Catholics, men, women, married couples, and parents of CCD students will be sought. The first year of the program will be built around the rubric of Vatican II in order to provide some continuity.

Committee members contacted local churches and attended lectures to explore the mechanics of starting a program. An initial funding proposal of \$2,000 was submitted to the Finance Committee. In order to engage as much of the parish community as possible, all ministries will be contacted and asked to submit ideas for names/topics to create a pool of topics and speakers. The first series will begin in October 2002 and will focus upon Women in Scripture. Relevant reading material will be distributed at each lecture, and a date announced for a follow-up discussion of the topic (preferably about two weeks later). Speaker sessions will be followed up by discussion sessions.

The External Communication team will be asked to assist in developing a publicity plan for the series.

### **Action Item 2: Adult Faith Formation Committee**

*Establish a committee, articulating its goals and suggest agenda items for Adult Faith Formation including initiatives for leadership development and married couples.*

This committee would serve to seek cooperation and communication among parishioners who are involved in any type of adult faith formation and would serve to enhance and augment existing programs. It is anticipated that once communication channels are reinforced and overall goals are identified, the committee will act as a team to better respond to the diverse needs of our parish.

Specifically, St. Bernard’s will establish a committee of six to seven members. This group will consider the demographic profile of the parish to determine who is being served and to develop goals to specifically meet the needs of this group. (Use Ruotolo study and others that may emerge from school/church feasibility studies).

The committee will identify focus areas on an ongoing basis for new adult faith formation programs. One area already identified is a need for programs for married couples

(Marriage Encounter or Christian Family Movement) and young parents whose children are enrolled in CCD.

The committee will identify and partner with the ministries within the parish with some direct relationship to adult faith formation. In addition, the committee will facilitate a fall and winter meeting and encourage representatives from other ministries involved in AFF to attend.

Finally, the committee will investigate the need for a part-time/full time coordinator of AFF.

## **INITIATIVE: STEWARDSHIP AND VOLUNTEERISM**

### **Action Item 1: Parish Nursing and Health Counseling Program**

*Establish a program to counsel parishioners who are facing health issues. Program might include nursing, food and nutrition services and a clothing distribution program.*

Parish nurses serve as health educators, offering seminars, workshops and classes on a wide range of health and wellness topics. In addition nurses would serve as personal health counselors. They would be responsible for training volunteers. Program volunteers would serve as visitors and leaders of programs. Finally, the participants would serve as liaisons with other health organizations. Under this program, Parish nurses will not give medications or change dressings.

Programs which have been developed and implemented already include the Parish blood drive, flu clinic, Gaudette Sunday carnations for HIV/AIDS, babysitting, first aid and CPR classes, placement of first aid kits in the church and parish center, and an annual healing Mass in collaboration with St. Francis de Sales parish.

Among the programs which we are considering for future implementation are the following:

- Blood pressure screening
- Health fairs
- Memory Walk for Alzheimer's
- Meals on Wheels
- Coat distribution

### **Action Item 2: Parish Resource and Outreach**

*Create a Volunteer Resource Center to actively seek, coordinate and pool all parish talents and opportunities for volunteers. The Center might include an Emergency Outreach program to cope with disastrous events. The program should also include a youth division. This effort can be coordinated with the parish census effort.*

The Parish Data System (PDS) is a computer program used by the entire Diocese. This program has the ability to search and sort on multiple dimensions including talents and

ministries, sacramental and member pages and keywords for occupations. This file is updated continually and has been used for a number of years.

**A resource list and database will be established.** A starting point will be to cross reference the PDS list with the lists of the existing ministry leaders. This should be augmented by generating names using the following: new family questionnaire, announcements at mass, flyer-in bulletin and sent home with CCD students, gatherings after mass, stewardship fair, and the parish database.

A central database of programs and volunteer opportunities/needs will be generated. The Parish Census will become the means by which this information system is kept current.

It is important that new programs and outreach opportunities are continually identified, developed and added to the resource system.

It is recommended that monthly meetings be held to ascertain the specific needs of parishioners. It is also recommended that the program not be limited to St. Bernard's Parish. Relationships within the local community and local hospitals should be established.

## **INITIATIVE: STRUCTURE AND PREMISES**

### **Action Item 1: Use for Davis Property**

*Conduct a feasibility study regarding the physical structure needs of our parish. Assess feasibility of a capital campaign to improve our physical premises. Assess cost of constructing a new church and/or adapting our existing premises to meet parish needs. Assess feasibility of using Davis property for a new church.*

The existing site and properties of St. Bernard is in serious need of repair, upgrade and/or replacement. It has been estimated that construction repairs would cost anywhere from \$850,000.00 to \$1,500,000.00. Even after that expenditure the site would still have a number of drawbacks, the largest of which is the busy highway dividing the property. The physical layout of the church property makes it difficult for many parishioners to attend Mass safely or with ease. The need for new programs for the elderly, young adults and youth of the parish has been expressed in the parish's strategic planning. The parish should be able to provide facilities for these programs. Separation of the church and the parish center is a hindrance to the full, active, and exciting life of the parish community.

The Davis property, located at the corner of Ten Rod Road and Tower Hill Road, was a bequest of the Davis Family Trust. St. Bernard's holds a 10% share of that bequest. If the Parish decides to build a new church and possibly a new school on the Davis Property, the Diocese has talked about selling the land to the Parish. Favorable financing arrangements could be made to make the deal as affordable as possible. At this time, only minimal engineering studies have been completed. More studies will have to be made to determine the amount of buildable land available on the 24-acre site. It appears that there will be enough land to build at least a new church, rectory and parish center.

The Parish would have to organize a capital campaign to raise the funds as well as set up interim financing so that the project could begin while pledges are collected. A complete report regarding this issue may be obtained from the Parish Center.

**Although additional engineering studies must be conducted and a capital campaign organized, we recommended the construction of new Church, Parish Center and rectory on the Davis Property.**

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

**This planning process represents a fruitful initial effort on the part of the Futures Committee and all involved. We realize there are many ways in which the process can be improved as St. Bernard Parish moves forward. With the submission of this strategic plan, the Futures Committee has completed its charge and is formally dissolved. It is therefore recommended that an implementation team be formed immediately with representatives from throughout the parish to carry our mission forward.**

**This Strategic Plan represents a challenge to all members of the St. Bernard community. It requires change. It should be recognized that the task of creating major change in any organization is a difficult one. This task will require strong leadership, and great cooperation. The commitment to a changing vision must continually be communicated.**

**In order to facilitate our Mission, it is recommended that leadership development become a priority at St. Bernard involving the broadest possible segments of the parish. The current framework appears to be in place to achieve this. The Pastoral staff, the Parish Council, and the Finance Council constitute the major leadership groups. It is recommended that an expansion of the pastoral staff be a priority. The mentoring and training of leaders for all areas of parish life may become the charter of a sub-committee of the Parish Council or a designated task-force.**

**Finally, it is imperative to create a process for ongoing assessment and monitoring of the goals articulated in this plan. This monitoring system will help to develop the framework for continued revision of the strategic plan as the parish evolves.**