



LITTLE
Embracing
THE FUTURE
FLOWER

a pastoral plan for
St. Therese Little Flower Parish
2010 – 2015

They devoted themselves to the Apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. [Acts 2:42]

August, 2010

Greetings and blessings to you and to all the members of Little Flower Parish!

As you may already be aware, our parish is now entering an exciting new phase of its history, the implementation stage of a parish pastoral plan that we have been calling *Embracing the Future*.

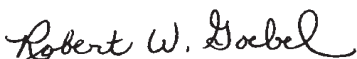
Back in the fall of 2008, soon after beginning my second term as pastor of Little Flower, I assembled a team of nine parishioners to serve on a steering committee to help me formulate a five-year pastoral plan for the future of our parish. Under the guidance of James W. Brown, an organizational consultant with an expertise in Catholic parish life, the *Embracing the Future* committee coordinated interview sessions with some 120 parishioners in May 2009 to gather information about your vision for the future of the parish. After processing this data, they extracted a list of six pastoral priorities to form the backbone of the plan, then organized a special brainstorming session involving 45 parishioners to generate ideas for action steps to address the needs raised by these priorities. Since then, the committee has been meeting regularly to develop a complete pastoral plan involving dozens of individual action items.

This booklet will provide you with the key elements of this plan. Consider it as an “executive summary”; if you wish, you may consult the more detailed version of the plan at the parish web site (**littleflower-church.org**). The six priorities are outlined here in a convenient order, but this is not meant to suggest a particular order of importance. Some of the most important elements of the plan are highlighted as Key Action Steps in the following pages.

I am sharing this plan with you so that you may prayerfully consider how you might help your fellow parishioners and me realize its underlying vision during the coming days, months and years. The last page of this booklet gives suggestions for getting involved with whatever part of the plan interests you.

I invite you to reflect on the example of the early Church, that small and vulnerable group of believers of Christ who, moved by their faith in Him, “devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship” (Acts 2:42). It is this fellowship which is the model of parish life to which we aspire, and which I invite you to share in a deeper way as we move forward to “embrace our future” as a parish.

Yours in Christ,



Rev. Robert W. Goebel, Pastor



This pastoral plan is the work of every parishioner who participated in the interview sessions back in May 2009, and who was involved in the brainstorming workshops in February 2010. But it is mostly the work of the *Embracing the Future Steering Committee*, with additional help from *Sr. Francis Margaret Maag, CDP, Director of Religious Education, and Mr. Carl Roskopf, Business Manager, and all under the expert guidance of our organizational consultant James W. Brown*, without whom none of this would have been possible. We gratefully acknowledge their contributions.

Embracing the Future Steering Committee

Mark Albert

Debbie Albert

Margaret Haskins

Kathy Shannon

Pat Kennedy

Danny Otero, *Chair*

Mike Ruhe

Don Weinkam

Sheri Williams

Leadership

At its best, parish leadership is characterized by the Christ-like manner in which it makes decisions, sets policies and moves forward in addressing challenges and creating opportunities for service. Thus, parish leaders are called to be servants and apostles, faithful to the gospel. We are blessed to have a pastor, parish staff, committee heads and organizational officers who are committed to following this ideal. To build on this foundation, we plan to create a parish leadership framework that fosters further teamwork, openness, respect and trust. Reestablishing a Pastoral Council for Little Flower will be the most important step in this direction. This Council will then play a key role in guiding and coordinating the on-going efforts to implement this Pastoral Plan.

Faith Formation

The central activities of the parish continue to be fostering the faith formation of its members—especially our children, and engaging in transformative communal worship. In the next five years we envision these efforts moving forward with renewed fervor. While our parish school is now a shared enterprise with neighbor parishes, we will invest no less effort to raising our children in the faith. And we will still offer several exciting formation programs for adults and children alike on our home campus. Liturgical and extra-liturgical worship nourishes our spirits daily, and we will work to maintain a high quality of worship. Finally, spiritual transformation is not limited to the walls of the church: we strive to live out our faith in every facet of parish life, within our families, in our parish community, into the neighborhood, and even by reaching out across the world.

Communications

Effective communication is an important challenge to any organization; it is vital in a parish community for whom sharing the gospel message is our divine command. The parish already uses important tools of communication internally and externally: a weekly bulletin, a monthly Newsletter, a website, and the Colerain/Kirby outdoor sign. But we recognize a need to promote a deeper sense of mutual responsibility in this area, so we have raised these challenges to a high priority in the coming years.

Stewardship

Best identified as “time, talent and treasure”, parish stewardship describes how all of us as members of the parish live out our shared solidarity in response to that greatest commandment to “love your neighbor as yourself.” Little Flower parish is blessed to have dedicated members who give of their time in service to others in many ways, who give of their labor, skills and talents. No less important, they are generous with their financial contributions to the parish. But a steadily declining membership and decreased revenues requires our rededication to responsible stewardship so that we can meet the needs of our parish as we move into the future.

Community Building

A parish becomes a community when its members share a sense of belonging; feel welcome to join in social activities and works of charitable service; and know each other as friends and neighbors. Our parish abounds with events, activities and social groups that build community and keep it alive. Our annual Festival, Lenten Soup Suppers, Fish Fries and monthly Hospitality Sundays are a few examples. Groups such as the Merry Seniors, Men’s Society and Old Timers create fellowship and offer recreation. Our pastoral plan seeks ways to strengthen this aspect of parish life, such as making meeting space available and resolving scheduling issues. Although the formation of a regional Catholic elementary school has meant that some opportunities to work together, socialize and support each other have been diminished, we can find new opportunities to generate togetherness, cooperation and fun. Finally, when we participate in the Good Friday Way of the Cross and Mt. Airy Thanksgiving Prayer service, we also build community on a broader, neighborhood basis.

Neighborhood Outreach

As Christians and Catholics, we are called to respond with charity and justice to the needs of the poor and oppressed in our midst, many of whom do not belong to our parish. The St. Vincent DePaul Society at Little Flower has already set a fine example of charitable outreach that addresses urgent needs both in and around our parish. Yet the changing nature of the Mt. Airy neighborhood invites and challenges us to do more. Our pastoral plan envisions both inward and outward expressions of our rising response. We will look within ourselves to discern and refine our prayerful awareness of community needs, as well as to find untapped talents and resources on which we can draw. Likewise, we will look earnestly at the wider community to assess its needs and develop an appropriate response. This response may involve working with other churches and parishes in our pastoral area.

Leadership

Little Flower parish should be a community in which leadership is honored as a shared responsibility, where parishioners take personal ownership in its mission and ministries, and where no one feels ignored or unheeded. Consequently, we aim to develop a parish leadership structure that fosters teamwork, delegates responsibilities, and coordinates decision making among parish groups, committees and organizations. Acting together, our pastor and parish leaders can guide and direct us as we build a community of faith that is a strong and grace-filled expression of the Body of Christ.

A top priority of this plan is the reestablishment of a Pastoral Council for the parish by the spring of 2011. The Pastoral Council provides valuable input and support to the pastor in his role as pastoral leader and fellow shepherd of the parish community. The first step in this direction will be the creation of a committee to review archdiocesan guidelines on the formation and function of a pastoral council, and then propose a method for discerning its members. This committee will be at work by the end of 2010. Once in place, the Pastoral Council will be charged with monitoring and coordinating the on-going activities outlined in this pastoral plan.

A second priority in the plan is to build a sense of shared leadership among all parish commissions and committees. One immediate step to this end will be creating an organizational chart that includes all levels of parish staff and active parish groups. Likewise, efforts to develop leadership skills among parishioners and foster positive, appreciative approaches to leadership will be explored.

Key Action Steps

- **Reestablish Pastoral Council**
- **Build sense of shared leadership**
- **Create organizational chart**
- **Develop leadership skills**

Faith Formation

Meeting for spiritually transformative worship and assisting in the formation of its members in the faith is at the heart of the mission of a Catholic parish community. The pastoral plan for the future of Little Flower parish fully embraces these central facets of our Christian lives.

We will continually strive to make our celebrations of sacramental worship and of communal prayer spiritually uplifting and occasions for the Divine to touch us, heal us and nourish us. Dwindling numbers of parishioners need not inhibit us from sustaining this into the future.

We respond to Christ's command to "go and make disciples" by working to form Catholics—especially our children—in the faith, by growing in the Spirit as we share our own faith journeys with each other, and by living out our baptismal call to love our neighbor as we participate in works of charity and justice for people in need who come before us.

During 2011, we will become more familiar with the texts of the new Missal for celebration of Mass, whose introduction is expected in Advent of 2011. We plan to strengthen our very successful Bereavement ministry and RCIA program, and will work to expand participation in the Madagascar Twinning Project. We will encourage more parishioners to form small faith communities to meet regularly so as to support their spiritual well-being.

Over the next five years, we will explore ways to educate parishioners in Catholic social teaching with an eye to supporting our efforts at neighborhood outreach. We will also investigate efforts at outreach to Hispanic members of the parish, a still small but growing segment of our community.

Key Action Steps:

- **Introduce the new Missal**
- **Strengthen Bereavement ministry**
- **Encourage formation of small faith communities**
- **Educate on Catholic social teaching**

Communications

We are building a communication strategy at Little Flower parish so that everyone can be informed about the exciting things that go on at our parish. We believe such a plan will foster a sense of solidarity and belonging to the community, help us stay in touch with each other, work together effectively and inspire each other. We will strive to promote transparency in parish decision making and greater mutual responsibility in the communication process. In this way, we will share the good news of our own stories and advance the gospel at the same time.

By June 2011, we plan to create a Communications committee to take ownership of the communications strategy for the parish. Its responsibility will be to facilitate the flow of information between parish groups and the parish community. As a parish, we will continue to use the weekly bulletin and the Focus newsletter as important vehicles of internal communications.

Over the next five years we will make more effective use of the Colerain/Kirby Road sign to communicate with the wider community. We will also take more advantage of email communications within the parish and expand the parish website, perhaps even with a presence on Facebook, to design a user-friendly internet location where everyone can learn more about what goes on at Little Flower.

Key Action Steps:

- **Create a parish Communications Committee**
- **Increase the use of email**
- **Improve the parish web site**
- **Make more effective use of street sign**

Stewardship

Little Flower parish has long been blessed with members who are generous with their financial support of the parish. We have a greater understanding today that good stewardship is more than just putting money in the collection plate. It is also living in solidarity with the other members of the community; it is taking responsibility for its welfare; it is giving of one's time to participate in the ministries and programs at Little Flower and getting to know other members of the parish; it is supporting charitable programs that extend our connection with the People of God in all corners of the globe; it is sharing one's unique gifts in ways that benefit others.

In 2011, we will conduct a parish census to help the parish leadership better assess the needs of the parish. We will provide more frequent and regular financial updates to the parish.

During the next five years, we will provide the parish resources that explain more fully what good parish stewardship entails, examine ways to boost volunteerism in support of parish programs, including support of fundraising activities, participation in social outreach groups like St. Vincent de Paul, involvement with parish leadership organizations, etc.

Key Action Steps:

- **Conduct a parish census**
- **More frequent financial updates**
- **Explain what good stewardship means**
- **Boost volunteerism**

Community Building

We seek to be a parish that shines with all of the hallmarks of a genuine community. This means that Little Flower should be a welcoming place where a sincere and hospitable spirit prevails, where fellowship and support are available to all and where gatherings for worship, study, service and recreation are life-affirming. The members of our parish look to support each other and care for each other, whether it is in noting their achievements, celebrating their joys or sharing their sorrows. We will strive to strengthen the existing sense of parish community, as we explore and develop new opportunities to extend our Christian hospitality to all our neighbors in Mt. Airy. Renewing these efforts to build a spirit of neighborliness will extend to all aspects of parish life.

The pastoral plans calls for forming a new committee to coordinate and oversee community-building activities by the beginning of 2012. Making good use of parish space will be one priority in this area. Another objective of this committee will be to learn about new ideas for community building through contacts with other parishes without an on-site school.

Likewise, we hope to enlarge and enhance regular opportunities for fellowship. An example of this might be forming a group to help families organize gatherings with food and fellowship after funerals. Other possibilities include forming a book club, a theater group, craft guilds and youth-oriented service activities.

In addition, we hope to develop further ways to share our spirit of hospitality with the wider community. Events such as the Good Friday Way of the Cross and the Thanksgiving Prayer Service are examples in which greater parish participation can be encouraged.

Key Action Steps

- **Form a committee to coordinate activities and events**
- **Address space requirements and scheduling issues**
- **Create new fellowship opportunities**
- **Encourage participation in neighborhood events**

Neighborhood Outreach

Responding to the call to be Christ to our neighbors is not optional—it is a necessary aspect of our response to Christ's own outreach of love and grace. Thus, as individuals and as a parish, we respond with charity and justice to the needs of the poor, oppressed and suffering in our midst. Little Flower parish embraces the Mt. Airy neighborhood and in solidarity seeks to share in its struggles and work towards its progress. We recognize that Mt. Airy is a changing neighborhood. Its growing diversity calls on us to renew our understanding of the underlying problems, challenges and needs arising within it and to take a fresh look at how we can help. Our parish can also combine its efforts with those of other local churches and organizations to expand the benefits of this vital work.

Answering the call to be Christ to our neighbors involves several closely related objectives. For one, we hope to develop an appropriate parish response to the needs of the Mt. Airy community. This will entail empowering a new Peace and Social Justice Commission to coordinate and oversee our parish outreach efforts.

Our St. Vincent de Paul Society has identified a Choice Pantry as an immediate need to better serve their current clientele. We hope to make the Choice Pantry a reality by the end of 2011.

Another objective is to increase awareness of community needs and our Christian responsibility to respond. This will include prayer, study and dialogue, to help our parish understand more fully the good work that God's love inspires. An assessment of the needs of the neighborhood is one step toward fulfilling this objective, to be performed as early as the end of 2011.

We also look to collaborate with others in the community. Combining forces with other local churches and other parishes in the region in new and cooperative ways will make outreach both more effective and more efficient.

Key Action Steps

- **Form a committee to coordinate outreach efforts**
- **Choice Pantry for St. Vincent de Paul**
- **Assess community needs**
- **Explore collaboration**

An Invitation to Participate

Now that you have learned about this pastoral plan, you—and every parishioner at Little Flower—are invited to participate in its realization! The life of a parish is only as strong as the life of its parishioners, so our ability to bring this plan to life is really up to us.

There are so many ways to get involved. First, be informed: read the weekly bulletin and monthly FOCUS newsletter, visit the parish web site (**littleflower-church.org**), or even better, chat with your fellow parishioners about what's going on at Little Flower. Then, offer your time and talents to some parish activity that interests you: offer to assist with data collection for the parish census which is called for in this plan, or work on one of the new committees that will be formed to address one of the key priorities; volunteer to assist with the parish Bereavement ministry or the St. Vincent de Paul Society; support our twinning project with the Madagascar missions or help out with the annual Festival; join a group that meets regularly for communal faith formation and prayer or respond to the many financial appeals that allow us to share our wealth with those with even greater needs. These are just a few ways to participate. Help us to build up our little corner of the Kingdom of God here in Mt. Airy so that we can better imitate Jesus' example of love and spread His good news of salvation wherever we go!

And however you choose to get involved, you can always offer your support with your prayers, for Our Lord told us to "ask, and you will receive; seek, and you will find" (Lk 11:9). We are limited in our efforts only by our own weaknesses, and we pray that the Lord will strengthen us to overcome them.

Here is a prayer, written by one of our parish's patron saints, that calls on the Lord to strengthen us for the work ahead:

***Thanks be to you, our Lord Jesus Christ,
for all the benefits which you have given us,
for all the pains and insults which you have borne for us.
Most merciful Redeemer, Friend and Brother,
may we know you more clearly,
love you more dearly,
and follow you more nearly,
day by day.
Amen.***

—St. Richard of Chichester (1197-1253)