



## ARCHDIOCESE OF BALTIMORE

AUXILIARY BISHOP OF BALTIMORE  
OFFICE OF THE SETON VICAR

*Parish Abstract: St Michael's Parish, located in southwest Howard County, is a community that is in active transition from a small country parish to a vibrant suburban parish. The successful management of this transition will offer both opportunity and challenge in the years ahead. The parish has been blessed for the past twenty years with a pastor who offers quiet, stable, kind, and gentle pastoral care. Our pastoral visit found a parish that recognizes the importance of religious education, actively ministers to the poor, provides engaging liturgy and offers many opportunities for individual and community stewardship.*

### St. Michael Parish Visitation Report – March 3, 2009

#### INTRODUCTION

As Vicar Bishop of the Seton Vicariate, I take seriously my responsibility to visit the parishes within the Vicariate. I value the opportunity to spend a day in the parish listening and learning about the hopes and concerns of parishioners. I am keenly aware of the goodness of so many committed individuals who are working daily to carry out the mission of Jesus. The persons who are attended to as a result of the wonderful ministries going on at St Michael's are a testament to the faith and devotion of both staff and parishioners. Spending 12 to 14 hours in a parish provides me with a good "snapshot" of the life of the community and offers me a firsthand glance at the good work carried out so diligently and humbly.

I thank you for the hospitality extended to me and to my pastoral team throughout the visit. Your warmth and your pride in your parish were obvious.

You have a dedicated pastor, staff and parishioners all looking out for the welfare of the parish. You have experienced tremendous growth and the consequent physical, financial and emotional challenges that come with transition. Growth has its blessings and challenges. You have now what many parishes in the Archdiocese yearn for. You have very young parish demographics which is so important for the preservation of your legacy. Your challenge is now keeping those young families actively engaged in the life of the church. You have so many talented, gifted people who wish to help in so many ways. Your Pastoral Council is insightful and planning the future in the right direction. It is inclusive and visionary.

Your pastor challenged you to build for the future and that was important. I commend the way your facility is used by all ages. All people of all ages must feel welcome. Now you face the challenges of paying for the future. I challenge you to continue thinking of creative ways to overcome your deficit. I hope that an audit report from the Archdiocese will help you begin a process that puts your financial security first and foremost and allows you to begin a collaborative budgeting process.

Your Church is inviting and well kept. Your challenge is to resist the lure of deferring important maintenance or simply 'patching' up problems until your mortgage is completely paid. The Archdiocese is here to advise and help explore funding alternatives so that critical

mechanical and building systems are kept in good working order. It always costs more in the long run to defer maintenance or design 'work arounds.'

You have a budget process but now that process needs to be expanded and more collaborative. Your challenge will be to work together as a team to change outdated processes that had worked when the parish was small. Professional staff can and should manage their own budgets with the Pastor and Finance committee's oversight.

You recognize how important communication is and you have taken steps to advance technology use. You publish an informative bulletin, a newsletter, and I have been impressed with the publications and movie you produced for your recent anniversary. You now have email capability for reaching the young and young families of the parish, you are using Parish Soft effectively, and you are using QuickBooks on line. I challenge you to continually broaden your communication efforts always keeping in mind the young demographics of your parish as well as those who may not be computer savvy.

A rapidly growing parish presents both opportunity and challenge for pastoral and support staff. You have command of the issues that confront you and you are searching for answers. Those answers will become apparent as you continue to adjust past practices to meet the needs of current realities and future demands of the parish.

Over 150 years ago your ancestors were confused and disappointed when a stranger appeared at the Kuhn homestead, promised a Mass the next week, and then was never heard from again. Your ancestors recognized the reality of the situation, reached out for help and the good priests of Woodstock College helped you through a difficult time. I challenge you now to recognize the reality of your current situation and please do not be afraid to ask for help. I am certain that 150 years from now your own descendents will be telling the story of how St Michael's Parish in Poplar Spring dealt successfully with its turn of the century growth.

## PARISH HISTORY

St. Michael's Church was founded in 1879 with the assistance of the rector of Woodstock College. The rector sent Rev. Charles Ferrari, S.J. to Poplar Springs to look into the odd appearance of a mysterious man who had promised some weeks earlier that he would say Mass for the community. Woodstock College offered to supply a priest to say Mass once a month for the community if they would build a church. The faithful responded in 1880 by building and dedicating a church. In 1892 the Archdiocese of Baltimore gave the parish Mission status which lasted until 1964 via St Joseph Parish in Sykesville. In 1983 the parish built a new church that seats approximately 600 and in 2004 dedicated an addition to house religious education, youth and parish activities.

## STATISTICAL INFORMATION

St Michael's Parish is located in western Howard County. The parish uniquely serves a four county (Howard, Carroll, Fredrick and Montgomery) area of Maryland. St Paul's Parish in Damascus (Archdiocese of Washington) is located 9 miles or approximately 16 minutes drive time to the south. The closest Archdiocese of Baltimore parishes include St Louis Clarksville to the southeast (18 miles), St Ignatius Loyola (13 miles) and St Peter the Apostle Libertytown (17 miles) to the Northwest, St Joseph Sykesville (17 miles) to the Northeast.

According to the most recent consolidated report from the parish, there are 1458 households registered although the anecdotal information during the visited referenced 1600 households.

Data related to the age of those registered in the parish in 2008 demonstrates St Michael's is a young parish with a number of young families. There is an almost even split between three of four age cohorts. Parishioners under 17 years of age comprise 32% of the parish, those 18-39 years of age 29% and those 40-59 years of age 31%. Parishioners over 60 years of age comprise 8% of the parish.

The majority of registered members are Caucasian. Approximately 33 members are Asian/Pacific Islander; 16 are Hispanic and 9 are African-American.

The average median household income in 2005 of parishioners who worship at St Michael Poplar Springs was \$ 98,453. The 2008 average household offertory gift to the parish was \$619.

## SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS AND COMMENDATIONS

A significant purpose of the Pastoral Visit is to bring to the attention of the Pastoral Leader, the Staff and Parishioners commendations and a few specific recommendations that I would like you to address. These items are based on my observations as well as information gained through this pastoral visit and through various archdiocesan offices that track specific data. As Bishop, I wish to bring these matters to your attention in the firm belief that you will make every effort to attend to them to strengthen the administration and ministries of the parish and the community

### Pastor

1. I commend the Pastor, Father Mike Ruane, for his gentle pastoral care of the good people at St Michael's parish.
2. I commend the Pastor for his focus on continued learning through the establishment of your excellent parish library.
3. I commend the Pastor for his attentiveness to the needs of his parish resulting in the addition of a beautiful and much needed addition.

4. I commend the Pastor for the seriousness with which he takes the maintenance of parish sacramental records.
5. I commend the Pastor for his willingness to support continued education by encouraging parishioner attendance at the Church Leadership Institute.
6. I commend the pastor for his support of the professional development of the catechetical staff and for his support of catechist formation.

### Parish Community

I hope to offer you support encouragement and direction as you move into the future as a faith community.

1. I commend the Parish Community for their warmth and hospitality extended to me and my staff during the Pastoral Visit.
2. I commend Parishioners for their high level of volunteerism and concern for the poor. I particularly note the ecumenical food cellar that feeds the poor of your area and your work in Jamaica.
3. I commend the Parish Community for their innovative use of technology to reach parishioners. I cite specifically the use of email to reach the families of children enrolled in religious education and youth ministry programs.
4. I commend the Parish Community for the development of a wide variety of ministry opportunities for parishioners' involvement—there is something for everyone at St Michael's!

### Pastoral Council

I was impressed with the vision and planning evident in the Pastoral Council They recognize the importance of evangelization, continued building of the faith community and communication. These three tenets form the base of what their vision and plans for the parish.

1. I commend the Pastoral Council for their commitment to an annual retreat.
2. I commend the Pastoral Council for their obvious love of the parish and their dedication to council ministry.
3. I commend the Pastoral Council for including the professional staff as ex officio nonvoting representatives on the Council.
4. I commend the Pastoral Council for their willingness to visit with the leadership of each parish organization.

5. I commend the parish for their vision of improving the narthex into a parish gathering and welcome center.

### Recommendations

1. I would ask the Pastoral Council and parish to investigate the establishment of a St Vincent DePaul Society chapter so that cash is not distributed directly from the parish office.
2. The parish clearly recognizes of importance of fundraisers. I ask you to look at staffing, money handling policies, and plans to actively help recruit workers for fund raisers. I was, for example, especially concerned that one person does most of the work for one of your historically well attended monthly fund raisers. More assistance is needed to run fundraisers but new people are reluctant to volunteer or come back. I would like to suggest that the Pastor and Pastoral Council convene a committee of new and experienced parishioners to look at the whys?

### Staffing

Clearly the parish recognizes the importance of hiring professional staff of the highest caliber.

1. I commend you for hiring professional staff who are credentialed and actively participate in Archdiocesan and national professional organizations.
2. I commend you for maintaining a legacy staff that understands the rich history of the parish.
3. I commend the Religious Education Staff and Youth Ministry staff for their commitment to work together to insure multiple and varied opportunities for catechesis of children and youth and adults on an individual, group and family level.
4. I commend the Religious Education and Youth Ministry Staff for taking advantage of professional development opportunities.
5. I commend the Religious Education and Youth Ministry staff for the incorporation of Catechesis for Human Sexuality and Child Protection into their catechetical curriculums.
6. I commend the Youth Ministry staff, young people, and volunteers for their commitment to service and outreach through their work with summer work camps and soup kitchens.
7. I commend the Religious Education Staff and volunteers of the parish Vacation Bible School for providing an enjoyable faith-filled program for students and volunteers.

8. I commend the Religious Education and Youth Ministry Staff for their maintaining and strengthening relationships with the Archdiocese and neighboring parishes.
9. I commend the Staff for their dedication, enthusiasm and professionalism in their respective ministries. I particularly note the pride and commitment of Staff to the parish and their desire to present a comprehensive picture of the vitality of the parish.
10. I commend the Administrative Office Staff for their efficient running of the parish operations on a day-to-day basis.
11. I commend the Facilities Manager and custodian for their efficient care of the parish plant.

### Recommendations

1. It is my hope that you hire a professional parish manager with an accounting background. I believe this position would help the parish successfully move through this time of transition. In parishes where this approach has been used the pastor is able to concentrate on the pastoral issues while the parish manager facilitates infrastructure changes necessary for continued growth.
2. Religious education/Youth fundraisers must have a checks and balances in place for collection and deposit of money. Professional staff should have easy access to budget and balances in their accounts at all times.

### Finance Committee and Development

The parish Finance Committee and Development Committee are to be commended for their foresight, concern and oversight of parish finances.

1. I commend the Finance Committee for recognizing the value of the parish addition and also anticipating the operating costs.
2. I commend the Finance Committee for taking seriously the importance of explaining to the parish the benefits of cathedraticum
3. I commend the Finance Committee for supporting the establishment of a Development committee

4. I commend the Finance and Development Committees for recognizing and promoting and creating parish endowments for the parish, cemetery and education.
5. I commend the Finance Council for promoting direct deposit.

#### Recommendations

1. Request information on how you might be able to renegotiate mortgage into longer time frame and/or request a second collection specifically for assistance in reducing your mortgage strain.
2. Be as diligent in looking for savings in the budget as you are in looking for ways to insure safeguards of money and safeguarding personnel. I ask you to take seriously the recommendations that will be made in an upcoming audit report.
3. A drop safe is sorely needed. This is the type of safe that one literally 'drops' cash into. It can be used to safeguard your offertory collection, your activity proceeds and miscellaneous cash coming into the parish offices.
4. Establish a truly collaborative budgeting process. Staff members should be involved in not only actively budgeting for their departments but they also see monthly variance reports on income and expense related to their departments. A direct feedback loop to your committee explaining discrepancies from those staff members will help you manage your finances in the long run.
5. Actively participate in looking into rental agreements for parish and non parish activities. There is overhead in every single group, whether parish based or not, using facilities. Look at other parishes and publish you rental costs for all to see.

#### The Parish Corporation:

1. I commend the Parish Corporators, Tom Dorwart and Wade Gallagher, for their years of service as members of the Board of Corporators and for their commitment to their fiduciary responsibilities.
2. I would like to remind the Corporators that the Archbishop recommends quarterly meetings and that the minutes of those meetings be forwarded to the Chancellor.

## Liturgy and Music

1. I commend the parish Director of Music for her creative thinking to make dismissal from religious education to the Church more reverent by using classical prelude music.
2. I commend the Director of Music for her appreciation of diverse talents and devotions. A plan for the addition of music for Divine Mercy Chaplet is an example.
3. I commend the Deacon—Harbey Santiago—for his dedicated pastoral and liturgical service.
4. I commend the parish community and Director of Music for their support of 4 Choirs and for moving those choirs from Mass to Mass so that everyone can enjoy these parish treasures.
5. I commend the Director of Music for her willingness to work with other area parish musicians to find answers to questions regarding common liturgical practice and music.

### Recommendations:

1. I ask the parish to consider paying for the parish and music director's registration in the National Association of Pastoral Musicians.
2. As a parish and a pastoral council seriously consider if there is a need for another Sunday or Saturday evening Mass. As part of that evaluation please consider especially the worship environment at the 10:30 Sunday Mass during the school season.

## Facilities

You are blessed with beautiful facilities that clearly are cared for with expertise, devotion and pride.

1. I commend you for building an addition with ample space and building that structure to a stringent building code.
2. I commend you for creating a kitchen in the new addition that is professional, versatile and multi functional.
3. I commend you for providing a work environment in the new addition that has natural light and openness.
4. I commend you for establishing a close working relationship with the Archdiocese Department of Insurance in developing lease agreements

## Recommendations

1. Please consider gathering and recording the history of your cemetery. If you have not already done so please send a copy of your recent parish anniversary publications to the Archdiocesan archives.
2. Deferred maintenance always ends up costing more. I challenge you to fix what needs to be fixed now and to work with the Archdiocese to develop funding options.
3. I challenge the entire parish to support the narthex improvement plans of the Pastoral Council. These improvements include improved lighting, new paint, and adding an air of openness and welcome to the parish offices

## Acknowledgements:

I wish to acknowledge the following offices and persons from Central Services who were identified by the Pastor and Staff as very helpful to them as they carry out their respective responsibilities in the parish. They are:

- Deacon Charlie Hiebler – Seton Vicar Office
- Michelly Merrick -- Human Resources
- Tom Alban –Risk Management
- Petra Phelps – Insurance
- Lisa Garfield and Jessica Clarke – Child and Youth Protection
- Chris Weber, Carol Augustine, Joe Swiss, and Joanne Haney – Catechesis and Evangelization
- Susan Smith and Ann Marie League – Youth Ministry
- Dot Acosta – Fiscal Services
- Nolan McCoy and Matt Regan – Facilities Management

## CONCLUSION

During the pastoral visit, I became more aware of the strong bonds of community that permeate the parish. It was obvious to me that parishioners care deeply about their parish and take great pride in its vitality and history. It was a pleasure to be with you. As your Bishop, I promise my support and prayers as you continue to be the presence of Christ in the community. I ask your prayers and support as I continue my ministry to the parishes of the Seton Vicariate.

