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# Saint Irene Pastoral Planning Report

Fall, 2012



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## Overview

It is clear that most people love St. Irene's because it is a loving community where they and their families feel at home. The parish has groups and programs that appeal to a number of people; it has a nurturing pastoral staff who provide examples of Christian life; it welcomes people from around a wide region. It is in the midst of change and has the opportunity to embrace a new and exciting model of parish life with the right planning, even as it anticipates eventual collaboration with Holy Family Parish in Concord. Its main challenge will be to develop an effective plan for welcoming and nurturing younger families.

## Analysis

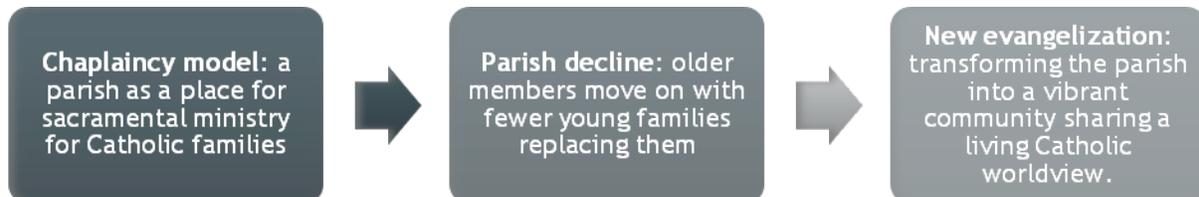
1. It is important to consider specific questions as the parish moves into the next phase of its history:
  - a. How will it continue to reach Catholics in the region who may not seek out a parish on their own?
    - i. Moving from word-of-mouth to proactive marketing
    - ii. Offering programs to draw in young families, single adults, etc.
  - b. How can it use newer methods of communication to enhance the existing community and draw in new members?
    - i. Social networking
    - ii. Digital media for news and updates
2. The adult education program has been strong at St. Irene's, but it will be necessary to pass the torch and perhaps set up some process to insure its growth.
  - a. This is an opportunity during the Parish Collaboration process. St. Irene is in a position to offer programs to benefit a wider area than it is currently serving, and digital media offers one way of doing that
    - i. Communication with webmasters of other area parishes
    - ii. Advertising through the Archdiocese (and perhaps the Regional Vicar)?
    - iii. Use of the *Mosquito*
  - b. It will be useful to think about how to further cultivate the spiritual growth of adults in the parish. In addition to good liturgy:
    - i. Resources for reading and prayer (online and in the parish collection)
    - ii. Small groups for sharing and building faith
3. Many of the activities of the parish are *ad intra* (serving the people of the parish). Developing specific initiatives *ad extra* (serving people outside the parish) will do two things.
  - a. It can unify parishioners around a large, shared task (the "Stone Soup" model)
  - b. It can draw in disaffected Catholics as well as "co-laborers" from other faith traditions.
  - c. Critical question: what great task might a motivated group of parishioners undertake in order to grow the parish?
    - i. The biogas initiative was one example that surfaced that might draw in people of different generations and talents. Are there similar ones?

A theme that will run through our discussions is moving from being **hearers of the Word** to being **doers of the Word**. Our shared work of evangelization will be through doing what Jesus has called us to do, inviting others to join us, and using our friendships with them to share our faith heart-to-heart.

This work is part of a larger evolution within the Church in the United States that has, over the past three generations, been moving from a primarily immigrant community with tight, ethnic Catholic subgroups supporting parishes as homes outside of the home. (Indeed, the word "parish" comes from the Greek *para oikos*, meaning "next to the home.") Our task is to become missionary, moving into the world and inviting others to join us at the table of the Eucharist.

## Three snapshots of parish life in the United States

Below is a sketch of three snapshots which characterize parish life over the past three generations.



**Chaplaincy model:** For a century, from the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century, large groups of Catholics immigrated from various European countries and established parishes with native priests in cities and towns across the United States. There was a very strong devotional culture within these parishes, with ministries like the Legion of Mary, the devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus or Mary, the Rosary, various Sodalities, and so on. Parish identity was caught up with ethnic identity, and parish practice was a marker of one's social identity. Catholic culture and Catholic worship went hand-in-hand.

**Parish decline:** With the decline in immigration (with the significant exception of Latino/Hispanic immigration, though that is less a factor in New England), there has been a decline in the Chaplaincy model of parish practice. Older Catholics move on, but younger Catholics have a less strong sense of Catholic identity, having lived in much more pluralistic environments: not Catholic ghettos in a city or town, but diverse communities that are in general more affluent than the generation prior. There is a certain inertia: old practices remain, but their practitioners are older and not being replaced by younger ones.

**New evangelization:** The picture that is emerging is of the parish as a place where people go less often out of the old sense of obligation, or out of family loyalty; and more often as a place for **spiritual growth, authentic community, and shared service**. The parish can no longer afford to wait for strong ethnic Catholics to show up; members must be dedicated to a common vision which attracts people.

## Opportunities

### 1. Develop a plan for welcoming, recruiting, and nurturing **young families**.

This is a golden opportunity for a parish like Saint Irene. The challenge is specifically to re-vision what parish life can be like when those families do not automatically show up at the door. How can this community provide what young families need and want? How can it identify ordinary human needs that St. Irene's Church can be a forum for addressing, but also offer opportunities to encounter the Christian story?

- Pregnancy support
- Preschool groups
- Employment resources/networking
- Family game night with child care
- Adoption resources

Further, how can St. Irene's involve the parents that drop off their children at religious education but do not go to mass or otherwise involve themselves in parish activities?

- Social events
- Adult education (both secular and religious)
- Offering short, pithy "teasers" about what their children are learning to jumpstart conversations at home.

- “learn with a parent” assignments each week (“spend some time googling ‘Christmas’ and talk with your parent about what you learn” or “the parent/child team who comes up with the best list of 5 unheard-of saint biographies wins a \$5 itunes card”)

## 2. Saint Irene’s has good children’s and youth ministries.

Below are a number of ideas that emerged from session three of how to enhance them.

- Find creative ways to use music
  - Encourage high school students to develop a “best songs” list—songs that they find particularly moving or that have spiritual themes. Which help them to name their deepest longings?
- Be proactive in asking parents to help, and be clear about the time commitment.
  - Having children involved is a great opportunity for evangelization, in the sense of helping draw people into the community of faith. Make it easy for them to say yes.
  - Find ways to show appreciation of people’s time—small gifts, etc.
- Be creative about offering parents something to engage them while their children are at Religious ed. or confirmation classes: social events, opportunities for learning, etc.
- Clarify the role of the catechist as a regular Mass-goer.
  - Develop resources to catechize the catechists.
    - C21 Online ([bc.edu/schools/stm/c21online/](http://bc.edu/schools/stm/c21online/))
    - various publications (like *C21 Resources*)
    - links on the website for learning prayer (see sidebar)
- Start establishing relationships among young families with a baptismal preparation ministry.
- Establish a preschool group for both children and parents.
- Offer handouts to parish with summaries of weekly readings. (See the Boston College Echo Program page for examples: [bc.edu/echo](http://bc.edu/echo))
- Develop a “pocket guide” for parents of first communicants and confirmandi: something like “the ten most important things to know about the sacrament.”
- Increase the frequency of family Masses that involve family members of all ages
- Revive the Youth Board with parents and pastoral staff
  - Review curricula
  - Develop new resources
  - Plan activities and events for parents
  - Develop a reading list for both kids and parents
  - Host “how to raise your faith-filled child” workshops
- Develop a peer leadership think tank
  - Ten Best Spiritual Films
  - A social network for the youth ministry (Facebook or other, with contributions from youth leaders)
  - Develop a resource page for cultivating prayer as a teen (some of the sites in the sidebar could be used, as well as youth-specific sites like [bustedhalo.com](http://bustedhalo.com)).
- Plan field trips
  - Cathedral of the Holy Cross
  - Cor Unum in Lawrence
  - Other pilgrimage sites (St. Kateri shrine in New York?)
- Plan service trips open to people of all ages.

### Resources for Catholic prayer that can be linked to the parish website

1. <http://www.sacredspace.ie/>
2. <http://www.pray-as-you-go.org/>
3. <http://www.universalis.com/>
4. <http://www.shrinesf.org/franciscan-prayer.html>
5. <http://www.ewtn.com/devotionals/prayers/rosary/scripture.htm>
6. <http://conservation.catholic.org/prayers.htm>
7. <http://education.crs.org/prayers/>
8. <http://www.ignatianspirituality.com/>
9. <http://www.contemplativeoutreach.org/>

### 3. Plan new ways of evangelizing

- Use opportunities when visitors come to the parish: baptisms, first communions, confirmations, weddings, and funerals. Have visible signs of parish life: handouts, pictures, names of contact people, lists of ministries where people can get involved.
- Practice habits of welcome with the congregation. Teach everyone to be more welcoming.
- Develop a youth choir and involve parents.
- Plan the visitor-heavy liturgies very well. Involve a youth choir, get the most clear lectors, involve people of many ages as greeters and ushers, look around the worship space with the eyes of a newcomer. Think of ways that would elicit from a visitor the feeling “I want to be part of this place!”
- Develop an online ministry committee and identify people (especially youth) who might help think through how to sustain this ministry.
- Consider a unique “Saint Irene’s Mission”—a ministry to which people of all ages could contribute time and energy, thereby building relationships in service to building God’s kingdom.
- Think through habits of welcoming people to the parish
  - Training greeters of all ages
  - Having a “new member packet” visible at the back of the church
  - Inviting visitors to identify themselves at the beginning of Mass
- Involve parents frequently in confirmation program planning
- Schedule family evenings (wine and cheese for adults; events/games for kids)

### 4. Celebrate great liturgies

- Engage congregation in music (example of gospel choir)
- Greeters at the door (need for training on welcoming people)
- Better signage connecting welcome to faith
- Sign outside the church (electronic)
- Sending forth for caring liturgy (shut-ins) at end of mass
- Group visiting neighbors to come to church
- Vocation: traveling chalice going to each family (home with CCD participants) to talk about over family meal
- Vocation day (Priest, religious, lawyer, doctor, electrician)—how faith matters to me
- Get kids to recruit altar servers
- Blessings at communion for non-Catholics announced
- Be sensitive about competing messages in the bulletin: better coordination
- Put welcome packets at local real estate agents’ offices

### 5. Be a loving, generous, welcoming community

- Home visit committee for new members (who are you, where from; what can you do)
- Ask people to stand up at Mass on birthdays, anniversaries
- Imagining ourselves as missionaries, a task force with a personal touch (“what talents do you have? What are your interests?”)—identifying people and shepherding them to appropriate activities. Being tactical.
- Help integrate into the larger community
- Get beyond the “hang the sign” model. Let younger people (40-somethings) start and organize activities.
- Widen the circle. Sit with someone new at parish dinners, etc.
- Announcements in local paper
- Talk to specific people about specific tasks; don’t issue general invitations.
- Establish term limits for people who serve in various ministries (3 years: 1 year to learn, 1 year to do, 1 year to teach the successor)

### 6. Be strong stewards of finances

- Identify specific causes to give to and make them clear in parish communications.

- Communicate those needs more effectively (what the Archdiocese wants; what the second collections are). Make the website a place that tells a story about the parish that people want to contribute to.
- Weblinks to second collections on website. Schedule of mission collections.
- Ways to give (envelopes take too long); electronic transfers; ParishPay
- Issue of privacy—some don't want to be in a database.
- Identify parish special needs: short term (physical plant) and long term. Identify clearly on website.
- Allocate funds for specialized training: cost for those who can minister most effectively (certificates, workshops, conventions, etc.), even for unpaid ministers.
- Setting aside money for the parish mission (short and long term)

7. Saint Irene's Church is a beautiful **worship space**.

It is worth considering hiring a professional photographer to capture people in active prayer in this space.

Consider highlighting the following on the parish website:

- A wedding page with photos showing the worship space, together with a brief statement of how the parish is committed to supporting young marriages (pre-Cana mentoring; a resource page for communication in marriage with a link to the US Bishops' website [foryourmarriage.org](http://foryourmarriage.org); young couple's gatherings; young family events.
- Photos of first communions, confirmations, funerals and other liturgical celebrations that show the parish as a welcoming community



## Appendix 1: Report from the first planning meeting

1. It is clear that most people love St. Irene's because it is a loving community where they and their families feel at home. The parish has groups and programs that appeal to a number of people; it has a nurturing pastoral staff who provide examples of Christian life; it welcomes people from around the region.
2. It is important to consider specific questions as the parish moves into the next phase of its history:
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3. The adult education program has been strong at St. Irene's, but it will be necessary to pass the torch and perhaps set up some process to insure its growth.
  - a. This is an opportunity during the Parish Collaboration process. St. Irene is in a position to offer programs to benefit a wider area than it is currently serving, and digital media offers one way of doing that
    - i. Communication with webmasters of other area parishes
    - ii. Advertising through the Archdiocese (and perhaps the Regional Vicar)?
    - iii. Use of the *Mosquito*
    - iv. Others?
  - b. It will be useful to think about how to further cultivate the spiritual growth of adults in the parish. In addition to good liturgy:
    - i. Resources for reading and prayer (online and in the parish collection)
    - ii. Small groups for sharing and building faith
4. Many of the activities of the parish are *ad intra* (serving the people of the parish). Developing specific initiatives *ad extra* (serving people outside the parish) will do two things.
  - a. It can unify parishioners around a large, shared task (the "Stone Soup" model)
  - b. It can draw in disaffected Catholics as well as "co-laborers" from other faith traditions.
  - c. Critical question: what great task might a motivated group of parishioners undertake in order to grow the parish?
    - i. The biogas initiative was one example that surfaced that might draw in people of different generations and talents. Are there similar ones?

### Where we find grace at St. Irene's

1. Community: positive experience of being greeted at Church. (Being known as a Catholic in Carlisle)
2. Being known: experience of welcoming a child in the midst of a difficult circumstance.
3. Seeing people who care about faith and want to live it out.
4. Participating in the music ministry.
5. Hospitality, drawing together diverse communities in the region.
6. Being drawn into participation in the liturgy, as a lector
7. Children celebrating the sacraments here; foundation for family life.
8. Down-to-earth
9. Pastor dropping in at home
10. "where everybody knows your name"
11. communal intimacy
12. others in the parish sharing a baptism when no other family members were present
13. Knights of Columbus
14. Building family life

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15. People
  16. Eucharistic ministry
  17. Knowing the pastor
  18. Music ministry
  19. Religious education
  20. Returning to the church and feeling a sense of family
  21. The murder mystery play (!)
  22. Being called to help build the church
  23. Leaving a parish where no one talked to us and coming to St. Irene where people were friendly.
  24. Confirmation program: being challenged by the young people.
  25. Trivia night
  26. Prior fear of big formal church, experience of small and welcoming community
  27. Pastoral and non-judgmental (40 years ago dealing with divorce)
  28. Pastor delegating and giving power to those doing the work.
  29. From other people, as when I give communion as a Eucharistic minister.
  30. Feeling another church was too big and cold, and that this is a warm and welcoming place.
  31. Experiencing stress because of a sick child and feeling welcomed, after being a sometime Catholic.
  32. Welcoming community.
  33. Smaller than some city parishes where it's hard to get to know people.
  34. Ministry Sunday drawing people to take part in the work of the parish.
  35. Hospitality committee
  36. Great priests
  37. Seeing second graders receive the Eucharist for the first time.
  38. Feeling at home with a great mentor priest. "You gave me Jesus"
  39. Golf league
  40. Caring friends network
  41. Religious education program
  42. Parish like a symphony; pastor conducts well
  43. The witness of a priest who has lived through catastrophe
  44. Invite to the parish; invite to committees; invitations to be part of something bigger.
  45. Working with youth of the parish
  46. Working at the Middlesex shelter
  47. Women's club, Christmas giving
  48. Pastoral care toward an adult child (marriage, baptism) and with a grieving friend.
  49. Adult education classes
  50. Catholic Charities food baskets
  51. Working with young people in developing an intellectual faith, and cultivating a desire for sanctity. Raising awareness of their places in the world.
  52. Wanting to hear Fr. Tom preach, wanting to hear the choir sing
  53. Growing up Baptist and being welcomed into a new parish, and experiencing beauty.
  54. Working on a biogas initiative for a seminary in Rwanda

#### What is the "more" (*magis*) at Saint Irene?

1. Find ways to integrate our younger people. How can we be where they are? How to compete with overscheduled lives?
2. Adult education: passing the torch
3. Learn to tell our own story and our own truths more effectively so that our young people are not catechized by the media. Become better at catechesis. Find ways to include Catholic teaching on tough moral issues.
4. Find new ways to extend invitation to people
5. Activities *ad intra* and activities *ad extra*
6. Promote the Church as a welcoming (not exclusionary) community.

7. Cultivate our own spirituality and use our educational gifts, but recognize that our young people are asking new questions that we must educate ourselves to answer. Develop conscience and help young people to develop theirs.
8. Raise questions about vocations
9. Seek out mothers looking for a place to play (faith and play).
10. Tell people what is the good result (or bad) by participating/not participating in church.
11. Expand online presence.
12. Let others take the reigns.
13. Connect with parents more effectively. (example of using email vs. using text messages)
14. Challenge young people. Present them with models of vocation.
15. Provide parents with overviews of what is happening in religious education so they can reinforce the topics at home.
16. Get a catalogue of parishioners' talents and then recruit.
17. Use the Mosquito more effectively. Reach out.
18. Increase giving campaign. Increase parishioners.



## Appendix 2: Suggestions from the second planning meeting

### General

- Term limits for leaders of ministry: select replacements
- Model habits of welcome (moving into the pew, saying hello to new people)
- Learn to ask people to participate in parish activities
- Find our own unique ministry by which we are known

### Liturgy

- Ask before mass who is new and invite greetings
- Back of church: prominent display for new member packet
- Home visit committee for new members (who are you, where from; what can you do)
- Ask people to stand up on birthdays, anniversaries
- Engage congregation in music (example of gospel choir)
- Greeters at the door (need for training on welcoming people)
- Better signage connecting welcome to faith
- Sign outside the church (electronic)
- Sending forth for caring liturgy (shut-ins) at end of mass
- Group visiting neighbors to come to church
- Vocation: traveling chalice going to each family (home with CCD participants) to talk about over family meal
- Vocation day (Priest, religious, lawyer, doctor, electrician)—how faith matters to me
- Get kids to recruit altar servers
- Blessings at communion for non-Catholics announced
- Sensitive about competing messages in the bulletin: better coordination (example of men's group in Westford)
- Put welcome packets at local real estate agents
- Take advantage of funerals, weddings, confirmations, baptisms to reach people (pre-evangelization)

### Community

- Imagining ourselves as missionaries, a task force with a personal touch ("what talents do you have? What are your interests?")—identifying people and shepherding them to appropriate activities. Being tactical.
- Help integrate into the larger community
- Get beyond the "hang the sign" model. Let younger people (40-somethings) start and organize activities.
- Widen the circle. Sit with someone new at parish dinners, etc.
- Announcements in local paper
- Talk to specific people about specific tasks; don't issue general invitations.

### Mission

- Big, galvanizing mission or ministries we're already doing? What do we care enough about?
- We are practical and compassionate: food baskets, etc. Malawi: clean water and latrines and a piano. Rwanda: biogas. People see the way they directly affect people's lives. We have a global view. We have talented people in professions.
- Person to person: we know where our money is going and the good it accomplishes.
- Holy Family has its own food pantry. We can do something different.
- How to move people's commitment to St. Irene's to the top of people's priority list?
- Old survey for ministry Sunday not much participation
- CCD directly after mass; lost opportunity for community.
- Lakota reservation
- Food effort: 700 families received baskets last Thanksgiving (3 parishes; St. Irene the largest giver). Better communication of a vision and logistics.

- Need for a publicist—get the word out for what we do. Take pictures and tell stories; post online and it's got global presence.

#### Finances

- Identify specific causes to give to.
- Communicate those needs more effectively (what the Archdiocese wants; what the second collections are)
- Weblinks to second collections on website. Schedule of mission collections.
- Ways to give (envelopes take too long); electronic transfers
- Issue of privacy—some don't want to be in a database.
- Identify parish special needs: short term (physical plant) and long term. Identify clearly on website.
- Long term: a second priest, etc. for planning.
- Specialized training: cost for those who can minister most effectively (certificates, workshops, conventions, etc.), even for unpaid ministers.
- Setting aside money for the parish mission (short and long term)
- How to task this work: develop a strategic plan

#### Evangelization

- CCD kids can evangelize parents through things sent home
- Confirmation: parent-child classes a few times a year.
- Adult ed: target audience? Regional church. Saint Irene's will host three events that deal with Religious ed. certification.
- Wine tasting with babysitting/movie and a speaker for the adults
- Online ministry: hire somebody? No, because there is a great deal of talent in this parish and local people will have ownership of it.
- Develop a technology subcommittee.

Preschool evangelization. Hosted masses and other family-oriented activities.



### Appendix 3: Suggestions from the third planning meeting about handing on the faith

- Young people more sophisticated than in earlier years
- Youth board inactive at present
- Students bringing parents back to church
- Don't want students blown away by things that happen in college—developing a relationship with the Lord
- Kindergarten program once a month. Starting them early
- Develop a moral compass: spiritual-corporal.
- Parents of different religion: how to pass faith on to children.
- Today more information: but less moral compass
- Important to get to the experience of the Lord in their lives.
- Children willing to learn and have real questions. Exposing them to the scriptural, spiritual, liturgical traditions. Wanting them to continue to learn as adults.
- Moral decisions rooted in a spirituality.
- Adult children: some not practicing. One that is made a critical retreat. Non-practicing child remarked that returning to Mass “like riding a bicycle.”
- Involving kids in various religious practices at home.
- Limited time in religious education: can we make a difference?
- Conflicted moral compass
- Problem with parents dropping off kids at religious education but not participating.
- Deacon Charlie: great peer leadership program
- **How to retain teenagers after confirmation program**
- Support parents of young families
- Confirmation program: formation in faith. Rite of passage.
- Teaching our young is a source of light.
- Create opportunities for role models.
- When parents are involved in the parish, the kids are better learners.
- In order to pass on the faith it must be practiced.
- Feeling incompetent to pass on the faith to young people?
- Peer leadership program in its third years: great energy.
  - Need for parents to join
  - Encouraging a personal relationship with Jesus.
  - Desire for service
  - Retreats
  - Some inertia in religious education due to the limited time.

<b>Challenges and Opportunities</b>	<b>Ideas</b>
Living in a "pagan" world	Use music
<b>Lack of parental involvement</b>	
Getting others in the parish involved in ways that doesn't scare them.	Be clear about the time commitment
Messages from the world about the church	Show appreciation when people give of their time
Less connections among parishioners	
Busy lives	Young people build relationships among sports teams; build friendships here
Call to mind the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist and in each other	<b>Require catechists to be churchgoers</b>
	Give parents supplementary materials week to week
	Preschool parent group
	First confirmation class: review of tenets of faith
	Peer leaders help with younger CCD classes
	Family Mass once a week?
	Revive Youth Board
	Review curricula
	Introduce children to good books
	Field trips
	Plan service trips open to all comers
	Create peer leadership think tank: how to get their peers involved
	Classes meeting in the church to talk about the Mass