

THE 2016-2020 STRATEGIC PLAN

FOR

THE AMERICAN CATHOLIC COUNCIL

This bold plan was created to define who we are as American Catholics who joyfully accept the spirit, values, practice and invitations of Pope Francis to “*rebuild*” our Church to best reflect Gospel values in all we are and all we do. There is a dichotomy between practicing Gospel values and following the manmade laws of the Church. This, we believe, is our mission: to make known the kind of Church Francis is working toward and the kind of Church the People of God long for. We want to replicate the lived merciful model of faith that Francis has shown us in so many different ways.

Problem Definition and Opportunity Recognition

Our church has been administratively dysfunctional for too long and until Francis’ Pontificate, there has been little real hope of change. Vatican II (V-II) was ignored, called a mistake, re-interpreted and subsequently died of unnatural causes. Many today no longer remember the potential and the joy that V-II evoked in the People of God. We, the American Catholic Council, were developed to be a V-II movement to keep the Spirit and practice alive. We begin all our efforts by defining the needs of the faithful, the Sensus Fidelium promoting initiatives that allow us to “return to the future” for change to occur.

Pope Francis by his own admission is a V-II priest and Bishop of Rome. His style has transformed many peoples’ perception of the Church and it’s potential. It is having an impact on its culture as demonstrated by the two Synods he called (2014-2015) where he called for the monarchical behaviors of our bishops to radically change and adopt more of a shepherd’s role where they are called to walk our life journey with us, to establish meaningfully deeper relationships with us.

A small contingent of bishops has chosen a different path, a path to retain the status quo and to topple the direction Francis has defined by devious and disrespectful means. Their sabotage efforts have been malicious and manipulative to discredit this Pontiff and his strategic view of a New Evangelization not one modeled by stern punishments if not followed but adopting a mantle of Mercy on all we are and all we do.

Francis is transforming the culture of the Church to reflect mercy and service as the two institutional pillars moving the institutional Church and us toward a New Evangelization, a practice of a lived faith. We have been called; we are gifted and we can respond.

Programs & Services We Should Provide to Respond to both the Problems & Opportunities

The grassroots have suffered from decades-long abuses from a clerical culture disconnected from the real world. These abuses have taken multiple forms from the abuses of power in

dealing with the faithful (attitude) to the clerical sexual abuse of minors with no accountability or punitive measures administered to “enabling bishops” and the malfeasance, misconduct, depravity and injustices of the Vatican Bank.

Monarchical mindsets have marginalized the people while elevating the clerics to superiority and “ontologically different” status. The Pope has already addressed this dysfunction and called them to mingle with us and begin to “smell like the sheep” yet many of our bishops and priests have looked the other way ignoring this invitation while devising malicious actions to discredit the Pope and his preaching. Therefore, we earnestly believe that it is now clear that the work needs to be ours if the Church will have any potential to change.

Francis is transforming the culture of the church to reflect mercy and service as the institution moves from a keeper of laws to a church fully and completely espousing and embracing love as the *life force* binding us together. Francis is modeling the culture of the future yet few of us and even fewer of our bishops have opted to replicate that model. It’s up to us now! Proof of position at least here in the United States is the most recent meeting of the USCCB (the United States Council of Catholic Bishops), which focused around the same old issues that appeared on prior agendas fully and arrogantly ignoring Francis’ invitation and mandate.

The grassroots need:

- A deeper understanding of the faith so that all can defend Jesus’ teachings and theology to questioning and/or dissenters, lay and clerical alike.
- A clearer understanding of the institutional Church and its evolution to explain what it is today and why to establish a context for learning.
- Calls to action around the dissenting manipulation of some bishops to Francis’ style, methodology and effects to challenge these individuals respectfully with Gospel values.
- An understanding of local changes needed and how to achieve that change.

Our Mission

As a grassroots movement of and for the Catholic faithful, we dialogue with and encounter one another to best understand the *Sensus Fidelium* and their immediate and long-range needs. As the institutional church moves to become a pastoral way-station, a field hospital, we will “think the unthinkable and do the incredible” (Ilia Delio, “Making All Things New” p. 118).

We function as a respectful, just, inclusive, collegial and compassionate church that is welcoming, inviting and nurturing to all. We will achieve this by developing realistically

specific goals, strategies and objectives with definitive outcomes (we value process but we are about results!) so that we can all celebrate our achievements together as a community of faith.

Our Values Actualized in Our Strategies

Above all, we value the following:

- **Work toward Transformation of the Individual** from a passive, obedient and mute believer to one that is aware, informed and active in living the Gospel message. We believe in *intentional living practices* where faith is the core of our being and is reflected in who we are and what we do.

Toward that end, we will practice:

- **Full Transparency** of all we plan, all we communicate and all we are and hope to become utilizing an Open System* model. We believe the Closed Organizational System practiced by the clerical culture is dysfunctional, secret, narcissistically rigid and destructive to all.
- **Vatican II Principles and Spirit**, which called for a New Pentecost, a new people of God alive in Gospel values in the world. Our initiatives will always be based and enacted by the principle of collegiality, a principle advocated in V-II but never realized until Francis' Synods. There, dialogue and encounter were reintroduced to the chagrin of the naysayer bishops recognizing that Francis is calling for a new order, a more horizontal governance structure in the Church.
- **Respect** for the faith and the faithful, in that order, while recognizing that the governance (the structural issues, systemic processes, shared values, staff choices and the skills and style they manifest) must be re-imagined to reflect a field hospital model. The processes Francis introduced within the two Synods in 2014/2015 demonstrated that there is value in hearing all sides of all issues in understanding the breadth and depth of the solution/s entertained.
- **Flexibility and Adaptability** emphasized in all our planning allows us to be sensitive and responsive to external variables. Because we live in a dynamic, chaotic time where everything around us is changing, we must be mindful of how a position we take today may change because the world is more inter-dependent causing an external issue to moderate a position we may have taken. We focus our initiatives on adaptability to the current state. We must be flexible. We will develop highly specific strategies, goals and objectives that are easy to understand and execute to facilitate success.
- **Best Practices** are not alien to change and are rarely used in change in the Church; we strongly believe that we can expand solution-based strategies using these practices. Our movement model and practice is holistically broad. We attempt to review all related variables in developing our plans of action.

* **Open Systems** are systems that continually exchange feedback with their external environment. Healthy systems regularly exchange feedback with its external environment, analyze that feedback, adjust as needed to achieve the system's goals and then transmit necessary information back out to the environment.

- **Collaboration** is a priority and, where appropriate, we will extend invitations to other reform organizations to collaborate with us in meeting a well-defined objective. We believe collaboration is less about a "y'all come" invitation than it is to define the skill sets and support possible from potential collaborators who must share the same value system we do or the collaborative effort will fail. Collaboration is an empowerment tool for all who join in the effort.

History

The American Catholic Council (ACC) was created to be the peoples' voice on issues of institutional governance of the Church. In 2009-2011 as we planned our inaugural event in Detroit on Pentecost Sunday that the root cause of the dysfunction we were experiencing in the Church is caused by poor governance. This was proven to be true as the criteria for the selection of our current Pope. We define governance as the structural issues, systemic processes, shared values, staff choices and the skills and style they manifest.

We are a movement inviting a network of individuals, organizations, and communities to consider the future of our Church in light of the problems of the past but because we believe our Church is at a turning point. We vividly recall the promise of V-II for a renaissance of the roles and responsibilities of all the Baptized through a radically inclusive and engaged relationship between the Church and the World.

Toward that end, the American Catholic Council developed a product document as an outcome of the inaugural event called the Catholic Bill of Rights and Responsibilities. Two thousand attendees affirmed and adopted this document as the cornerstone of our movement.

We recognize that working for better governance is confusing to some as the language is not generally discussed in church circles. Because of the arrival of Pope Francis and his directive toward governance, we have adopted a route toward that end: *personal conversion*. Until the individual Catholic recognizes s/he has rights with commensurate responsibilities, we are not functioning as the Church. We want a church in conformity with Jesus' message, and our lived experience.

We study the root causes of the needs of the faithful and work to find resolution to these issues first locally, then regionally, nationally and eventually, globally, where appropriate. We are sensitive to the fact that not all needs are globally identical or parallel and we respect the diversity of cultures and peoples. Because of that we are prepared to offer assistance where

needed with strategies and outcome goals to assist them in moving toward a higher level of responsiveness to specific needs.

We are not a single-issue movement though we fully support movements with specific symptomatic issues. To us these issues are all relatedly important but are subordinated to governance issues. If governance is changed for the better, symptomatic issues have a strong chance of disappearing. We focus on the people and their lived experience needs to find alternative solutions grounded in Jesus' teaching.

Our Four-Year Plan: 2016-2020

These large initiatives were built over the past year and constitute a direction we believe is needed in our church today. We will accompany these initiatives with others as the year moves forward but are in hold until the Pope releases his Apostolic Exhortation, the final document developed by the Pope built upon the two Synods previously mentioned but is the final word on the results of those Synods. We want our initiatives to be stepping stones, building blocks connecting like dots to a final outcome.

We commit to developing initiatives that sequentially lead to larger outcomes. We do not believe in standalone actions that of themselves do not achieve systemic change. We believe there will be abundant smaller initiatives that have a nuanced community ownership that can rouse Catholics to stand up and speak out. The potential list of such initiatives follows the disclosure of our large initiatives marked Action Potentials.

Built upon current opportunities congruent with our mission and values, we offer three major services to move our agenda forward with the same goal-oriented outcomes:

I. Listening Circles (Beginning January, 2016)

The goal of our Listening Circles is to hear the faithful address critical issues in our Church and review aggregate opinions to determine how Jesus would resolve them mercifully. Pope Francis has asked us to engage in encountering one another to build deeper relationships. We named this initiative after an ancient custom gathering people to listen to one another free of daily trappings allowing the beauty and value of our collective thoughts and "traditions" to be heard and understood. Thereby a "level playing field", where all individuals and opinions are equally respected.

The purpose of listening circles is listening to truly hear with an open mind and heart and in so doing we actually hear the "Spirit's call" as we speak with intention coupled with a responsibility for the well being of the group.

In creating a sacred space with agreements in advance on how to speak with confidentiality and compassion coupled with an ability to pause to gather our own thoughts, reactions, etc. (rather than argue or debate with the other) to establish a "mindful" understanding of where we are personally and where the group is. We are

in a way modeling the processes that Pope Francis used in the 2014/2015 Synods. Storytelling is a vital ingredient in the process--much like parables were for Jesus.

What is unique about these circles is that they represent shared responsibility of what church could be. All share in leadership and tasks to keep the circle vital; there are surprises because of the openness to the whole, their shared experiences and feelings. It is a democratically creative community-building process where participants take "ownership" in both the process and the outcome.

These circles have been extraordinarily successful in Canada causing us to adopt them in these changing times when the institutional Church is waking up prompted by Pope Francis "alarm" for change.

We offer a couple template-opportunities for those who want to organize one of these listening experiences. If you choose to do so, you may really experience a slice of the church that Pope Francis is encouraging us to build with him.

For more information on the Listening Circles, you may contact Helen McCarthy (hmccarthy6@hotmail.com) or Janet Hauter (JWHauter.acc@gmail.com)

II. A Jubilee Year Pilgrimage on the Camino de Santiago: October 4-14, 2016

Embracing Pope Francis' invitation to "journey together", we are engaging in a Pilgrimage, an ancient practice of self-renewal while walking together, sharing life experiences as walkers proceed to a sacred destination. The Camino de Santiago is poignantly highlighted in a powerful movie called "The Way" starring Martin Sheen. The movie and its message of personal transformation was inspiration for us in light of Pope Francis' invitation during this Jubilee Year. We learned of a parallel opportunity being organized in Georgia and are collaborating with them for this experience.

The Camino has continued to be a transformational experience for tens of thousands of pilgrims and our goal is to build ambassadors for the New Evangelization.

This pilgrimage has been co-developed by the Catholic Community of Georgia, Fr. Bob Cushing and the American Catholic Council. It was formed with a focus on the individual and his/her giftedness to help us engage in self discovery.

"We are living through the greatest shift ever in Christian thought. New images of our universe and our planet, along with knowledge about the long, slow development of life on this planet providing us with a new context in which to understand the divine presence e call God – always present and active everywhere. Reflection on the universality of this presence leads to further reflection on and renewed appreciation of

Jesus as revealer of this mysterious presence in our everyday living and loving, rather than on Jesus as the mediator between us and a faraway deity. A Church always in need of renewal must engage, at all levels, this shift in images and thought if it is to have integrity and relevance in the twenty-first century."

Michael Morwood

Registration form can be found at www.pilgrimages.com/ccsg. As we join the Catholic Community of Georgia we will have prayerful opportunities and Mass daily with Fr. Bob Cushing.

The History of El Camino

The Way of St. James, often known by its Spanish name, el Camino de Santiago, is the pilgrimage to the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela in northwestern Spain, where legend has it that the remains of the apostle, Saint James the Great, are buried. The Way of St. James has existed for over a thousand years and was one of the most important Christian pilgrimages during medieval times. There are multiple routes.

Santiago is such an important pilgrimage destination, named one of UNESCO's World Heritage Sites in 1993. Today tens of thousands of Christian pilgrims and other travelers set out each year to make their way to Santiago de Compostela. Most travel by foot, some by bicycle, and a few travel as some of their medieval counter-parts did, on horseback or by donkey.

We invite you to consider this wonderful opportunity to live the experience of Church by journeying together, singing, praying and sharing stories while building a relational core of companions in faith.

III. A Peoples' Synod: 2018

An event yet in development to create a "Response to the Vatican" both congratulating the advances made to date and the areas that continue to remain. We anticipate offering collaborative solutions to help resolve what reforms remain engaging the grassroots to work together to experience reform efforts locally. Telecon is planned for early February, 2016 to invite collaboration across reform communities.

The Goal of such a synod is to give the faithful a legitimate voice to respond en masse with one voice on the work of the institutional Church on responding to the Sensus Fidelium.

Action Potentials:

- ❖ Evaluating the performance of our current bishops in light of success criteria already defined by Pope Francis. It could be the peoples' evaluation alone and/or engage priests in the dioceses to complete a confidentially-held survey. Objective: to remove the bishops who have missed the Pope's theology of servant-leadership.

- ❖ Engaging with the Association of US Catholic Priests (AUSCP) to develop an action to remove the current liturgy because of its poor grammar, language and dualistic thinking. Potentially return to the prior liturgical format or engaging the faithful to co-create a new one. Objective: to create a liturgy that engages the people in respectful language that the people can understand.
- ❖ Etc.