



Our Lady of Light

Family of Parishes | Incarnation & St. Francis of Assisi

My fellow brothers and sisters in Christ,

It is with great joy I write this letter to you to inform you of the state of Our Lady of Light Family. These first phases of Beacons of Light have shown us the great potential for the future. We have a school with 924 students, and our Religious Education programs of Awaken, Edge, and Life Teen consists of about 550 members. This means that we have 1500 youth in formation. We will have 150 first communions and first reconciliations, and 120 confirmations this year. All of this gives us great hope for the future along with the many people who pray, volunteer, teach, catechize, serve, lector, take food to the poor and many other great works. Thank you for all you do.

Our Mission and Vision

Beacons of Light is to guide us to consolidate the best of our resources, strengths, faithful, etc. to help us form Missionary Disciples, or followers of Christ to help build up the Kingdom of Heaven here on earth. We are called by Christ to seek his loving face and rest in his loving embrace. This is the first and best relationship we will all have. Our family must be a place for people to be spiritually fed and have a community who knows and loves them with holy and active worship of our God.

We must provide pathways for people to grow in this relationship with Christ. The ones we are putting in place are:

1. Rescue Project to help those deepen and reconnect with their faith.
2. Alpha to help those who are unchurched learn about the Christian faith.
3. Called and Gifted to help us find our natural charisms to know what gifts God has given to us.

Coming Together

As we remember this past year, we have had many positive things happen in our family staff structure, community building, and Mass attendance. There is a Family Leadership Team which focuses on building and living the culture we want for this family, and our full staff extends this as culture development as well. The parish councils have joined together to make one family council with 6 representatives per campus. Lastly, our family of parishes also has one online calendar to help us facilitate better organization and communication on our campuses.

We had several large events in common like the Festival of Saints, and the Americana Fest. At the Americana Fest on the 4th of July, we successfully engaged with many people for a joyful time and prayer. There was also a convocation for ministry heads and one for liturgical ministers to help address needed areas within our family. Lastly, our Sunday Mass attendance average has grown in the past three years. In 2021 our combined Mass attendance was 2,236; in 2022, 2,437; and in 2023, 2,595. Last year, we had amazing participation during Holy Week and Easter, that culminated with Easter Mass counts at just under 5000 people.

For strategic planning, we have also partnered with the Institute of School and Parish Development (ISPD). This began with a survey that rated us "above average" as to who would recommend Our Lady of Light to others. Using a rating scale of 1–10, 65% rated us 9 or 10. We have had successful planning sessions with 7 planning teams to help us create a strategic plan as we work to complete Beacons of Light within the next 3-4 years. These sessions culminated in a convocation on November 8, where we gathered more people to give additional strategic answers to the challenges identified by our planning teams. We will use this information as we plan for any necessary church renovations and/or expansion.

Moving Forward

We have a unique issue within this family of Our Lady of Light. While some parishes are facing empty pews, we find ourselves running out of space! Looking around our campuses it is clear we are getting very tight on meeting space, office space, storage space and worship space. While this indicates a vibrant and growing congregation, it is concerning.

Thirty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time · November 19, 2023



An additional issue facing us as well as the entire Archdiocese of Cincinnati relates to the number of priests. Within 3 years the Archdiocese will be down to 130 priests* which in the most concrete terms, means that each family of parishes should and must plan to have one less priest than it presently has. For Our Lady of Light Family, it means we must responsibly plan for having just one priest to serve the entire parish family within 4 years. (*See the Pastoral Vitality Report of Fall 2023, which discusses where we are after the first year of Beacons of Light. <https://pathway.catholicaoc.org/download/202/parish-vitality-report/18199/parish-vitality-report-fall-2023.pdf>)

Since there are limits set by Canon Law as to how many Masses a priest may say per day, we must consider the size of our churches and how many people they can hold. Fire Code has church seating capacity at 925 for St. Francis and 1189 for Incarnation, using an 18" calculation per person. Because people also bring coats, purses, bags, baby carriers and other items with them to church, the fire code measurement of 18" per person is not realistic for our worship setting. The Archdiocese recommends a measurement based upon 27" per person. Using this datapoint, Incarnation church holds 785, and St. Francis church holds 611, with a combined capacity of 1396. Somehow, we need to figure out how to have more capacity in our churches.

This challenge was made very evident at our latest 7:00 pm All Saints Day Mass at Incarnation. The church and the parking lot were full and people were still showing up. Since we have had this issue occur at both of our campuses this past year, we need a hospitality ministry presence at both campuses.

An additional consideration is the projected population growth of 5-10% in the surrounding area in the next five years, especially in our parish boundaries. We are projected to see a growth in Latino populations which may be as high as 30%. Sufficient planning must make us ready for an influx of people moving into the area. Whatever the challenges, we must be an inviting and welcoming family of parishes to help them know that Christ truly is present, and we are true followers of Christ.

Lastly, what is the path for the future?

We talked about our wins, what we have done successfully, and some challenges we are facing. We have discussed vision, and now move on to developing our culture. Culture refers to the habits and traits we want to live out as members of Our Lady of Light Family. As our vision unfolds, it is necessary to actively discern and intentionally cultivate a culture worthy of our calling as disciples of Christ. We must embrace the better traits and characteristics of each campus.

The first and most important trait is prayerfulness.

Without God, we can do nothing! Prayer is always the first trait of a disciple. Soon you will see more of these traits of what it means to be an Our Lady of Light disciple of Jesus Christ.

We remember an equation. The equation is **E + R = O**. That is **Event + Response = Opportunity**.

How will we respond to the Beacons of Light event so that we can create our own opportunity for making Christ more present to our people in the pews, the community around us, and to be a beacon for other families in our Archdiocese? We must remember that our hope always is in Jesus Christ first. He reminds us to "Be not afraid. I am with you until the end of the age."

God bless you all. Thank you for all of your great faith, response to the challenges we face, and courage to answer our Lord's call.

In Christ,
Fr. Brian Phelps