



**Recommendation Report
John 17 Discernment Project
July 2018**

*“And I have given them the glory you gave me,
so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in
me, that they may be brought to perfection as one,
that the world may know that you sent me,
and that you loved them even as you loved me.”*

INTRODUCTION

In 2017, St. Leo Parish adopted a Five Year Plan. Goal IV of the plan is: St. Leo will honor the diversity of all community members. To meet the goal, an objective was set to form a Multicultural Task Force to study and make recommendations on how the community should proceed in a way that honors and represents all cultures in all aspects of St. Leo community life.

Members of the parish were invited into the work of the Task Force and the group formed under the name **John 17 Discernment Project (JN17:DP)**. The members of this group were: John Nourse, Ariana Haidari, Emily Ignacio, Barb Gorzinski, Mike Hoag, Tricia Ramos, Antonio Gomez, Donna LaVallie and Barbara Henderson, as well as staff members Fr. Alan Yost, Joe Hastings (Pastoral Assistant for Faith Formation) and Anne Tropeano (Pastoral Associate).

PROCESS

Discernment is at the core of how St. Leo Parish makes decisions. The JN17:DP spent time understanding and aligning to the steps of discernment. The steps can be summarized in a few points (but what we found to be a multitude of nuances):

1. Looking at the decision prayerfully from all angles;
2. Taking time with the question and issues before the group. We committed to be patient, trust the process, and ultimately trust that God will lead us to the right place if we do our part as best we can; and,
3. Follow what our heart and gut tell each of us and what seems right to us collectively.

The purpose of JN17DP is to lead the St. Leo community in discernment about how to best honor the diversity at St. Leo. This process has gone forward in three movements:

- During our first two months together (Jan & Feb), we looked **within St. Leo** and gathered information that could reveal what the charism of St. Leo is and what the history of St. Leo's response to the Holy Spirit has been. We also asked who is here currently in our community and what their current experiences and needs are. We considered who is participating in sacramental preparation and explored whether people who come mainly to receive sacraments stay as part of the community or leave for various reasons—and if that matters. Finally, we considered whether we could discover what the attitude of parishioners toward change is and if there are issues our parish may face in adapting to change.
- In Mar & Apr we looked **beyond St. Leo**. We asked what are the signs of the times? What is happening in the larger American church in terms of diversity, race, and inclusion? We specifically focused on what might be happening in our own deanery and the Archdiocese of Seattle, and what the values and direction of the Jesuits West Province.
- In the final months of meeting (May & June), we involved the community in its first Unity Liturgy at Pentecost. We also received the unexpected news of the cluster with Sacred Heart and explored how this might impact our work of the ongoing commitment to diversity. Finally, we created a list of recommendations to the community. We make these recommendations trusting that God understands our constraints of time and resources, and that God will communicate to us, and the whole parish, within those constraints.

KEY DISCOVERIES

Our recommendations are built on some key discoveries we found attractive throughout the discernment process:

- Doing this multicultural work and cultivating a deeper commitment to diversity is much more about who we are as St. Leo Parish—our charism of radical hospitality and inclusivity—than about how many of each ethnic or racial group may or may not be present at a particular moment.

- There is a history of a pastoral response present over time within the St. Leo parish community to embrace the margins and to openly follow the invitation of the Spirit to what comes next.
- The various focus groups from the five year planning process shared clearly their desires of what they want to be included in the liturgy. The different ethnic groups desired more multicultural images, symbols, songs, stories, music and saints.
- It is moving to hear the stories of meaning of Catholic symbols and gestures that are important to cultural groups in our community.
- The spirit running through focus groups from the five year planning process and other sources of information from the parish speaks to the action of a movement in which a deeper commitment to multiculturalism will bond us spiritually.

RECOMMENDATIONS

After six months of our work together, we recommend the following steps for the community to prayerfully consider.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE LITURGY COMMISSION

- Incorporate unity liturgies throughout the year. We recommend the planning and implementation be done by the Liturgy Commission in conjunction with the Pastoral Assistant for Liturgy and Music.
- When unity liturgies are implemented, have various cultural groups explain any cultural pieces to the community prior to the liturgy. Useful spaces for this are the bulletin, the order of service, the web site, the electronic newsletter. This will help the larger community understand and be inspired by the meaning of these cultural pieces when they experience them.
- Do an honest evaluation of the sanctuary and come up with a plan to more permanently incorporate saints, cultural artifacts, and artwork from different cultural communities. One immediate action item is to find a more prominent place for the St. Martin de Porres that now resides in the northwest corner of the church.

- Begin a conversation with the community about whether to include pieces of the liturgy that certain cultural groups noted as missing during listening sessions. These include the Creed and the Confiteor.
- Begin a dialogue with the community as to whether to include projection screens in the sanctuary to help aid people in participating in multilingual liturgies. This would also require recruiting liturgical ministers willing to create the content for projection.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PARISH VISION

- Parish leadership including staff, commissions, councils and ministry leads adopt a lens of equity and justice through which to view all work that happens within the parish.
- To support this effort, the JN17:DP concludes its work as a discernment body and rolls into a working Equity Commission, a central resource body that works with all commissions and groups in the parish on issues of equity, diversity and inclusion. It may have some or all of the following elements: educating and facilitating conversations on equity, racism and white privilege; soliciting and receiving feedback on these issues through listening sessions, surveys or town halls; designing relevant parish-wide programming; building empowering participation of people from various cultural groups; ensuring the voices of members of various cultural communities are heard.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CLUSTERING PROCESS

NOTE BENE: It must be noted in regards to the clustering process, that the two communities have two distinct ways of proceeding. We make the recommendations below only if the Sacred Heart community is open to them.

- We recommend the body that will lead the discernment for the clustering process have a mix of staff, Pastoral Council and parishioners from both St. Leo and Sacred Heart, and that at least one member of JN17:DP is included. We recommend the work done by this body be periodically shared with the Archdiocese and the Jesuits West Province to ensure cohesion.

- Think of this year as a year of preparation before the official clustering process begins. Ideally, both communities will get to know each other and allow one another's charism to reveal itself before any merging takes place. We recommend:
 - A parish-wide focus on prayer, programming and education that examines white privilege and racism. This can be paired with prayers throughout the liturgy asking for the graces needed to overcome these challenges.
 - We encourage a focus on intercultural community building. Parishioners can periodically attend Mass at Sacred Heart in both Spanish and English over the next year, with a particular interest in special celebrations, such as Our Lady of Guadalupe. We recommend that parishioners be open and willing to learn about and encounter the community as it is, holding off a desire to compare, judge or change it but rather to allow the parish charism to reveal itself and be known.
 - We also encourage St. Leo to extend invitations to the Sacred Heart community to attend Mass and special events at St. Leo, especially those that communicate our own charism. Sharing meals on such occasions is encouraged!

RATIONALE FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

LITURGY

We received considerable positive feedback about the Unity Mass on Pentecost and feel that incorporating several of these Unity Masses throughout the year will help to keep the same spirit of welcome and experience of loving union in liturgy alive throughout the year. We are also hopeful that the experience will help us remain open to different ways of celebrating and experiencing our Catholic faith to ensure that all parishioners may engage in a complete and fulfilling expression of their spiritual lives in community, regardless of their cultural or social background.

We think the Liturgy Commission is the best group to carry this work forward with the strong support of the Pastoral Assistant for Liturgy and Music. The work of preparing and planning future Unity Masses is in line with Liturgy Commission's mission of "seek[ing] to cultivate prayerful liturgies that help the community deeply encounter the divine, nourishing our collective relationship with the Triune God."

Many members of the parish indicated a desire either for more explanation of some of the cultural components added to the Unity Mass or expressed a desire to provide a greater explanation of those additions. Providing that information will increase understanding of other cultures represented within our parish while allowing those cultures a fuller participation in parish and liturgical life through that sharing.

Our recommendation regarding pieces of the liturgy such as the Creed and the Confiteor stems in large part from our review of data from the five-year planning and from other historical documents. After reflection within the John 17 Discernment Project group, we believe that this bears further conversations with the community and particularly with those cultural communities within our Parish to understand the importance of those pieces of the liturgy and the impact to other members of our community of their inclusion or omission.

Our recommendation regarding the use of tasteful projector screens is related to feedback from the Unity Mass and also has roots in discussions about models and tools used in multicultural parishes and liturgies in other places. We believe this to be a possible tool for increasing a sense of inclusion among all of our parishioners and visitors, but we understand that there are logistical hurdles that will require additional consideration.

Similarly, based on feedback from the community in the five-year plan, our own observations, and the positive reception of the inclusion of diverse symbols of religious significance in the presentation of the gifts at our Unity Mass, we believe that an honest evaluation of the prominence of such symbols within our sanctuary will create a more inclusive and welcoming environment by giving due prominence to the important saints and symbols of the many cultures represented at St. Leo. This would be a natural expression of our charism of radical welcome and inclusion of all people.

PARISH VISION

We believe it to be the will of the Spirit and the will of the community that the work done by JN17:DP be transformative and ongoing. Our recommendation that all parish leadership include the lens of equity and justice as a constant part of their evaluation of work that happens within the parish will encourage the work of honoring diversity and seeking equity to continue in every aspect of life at St. Leo.

To support this goal, the parish needs to create a body to catalyze, vitalize, and inform the parish's work of honoring diversity, equity, and justice consistent with our Jesuit and Catholic identity. Providing education and facilitating conversations both parish-wide and with individual ministries and commissions will help ensure that equity and justice remains a lens through which all parish work is evaluated, and that that evaluation is done with understanding and honesty. Providing programming for the entire parish will keep the parish engaged in the issues of equity and inclusion.

Our review of the great changes within the parish over past decades made clear the need for communication between the larger parish community and parish leadership. Becoming a conduit for communication between the larger parish community and parish leadership is especially necessary to ensure that the work of inclusion stays grounded in the voices and needs of the people and communities represented in St. Leo and our greater community.

CLUSTERING

While the cluster with Sacred Heart is still a year away, we think the year ahead is an opportunity to prepare the hearts and spirits of our community for the official process to ensure that it is an opportunity for grace to both our parish communities. Formation of a discernment group that encompasses members of community members, leadership, and parish staff from both parishes is consistent with the Jesuit value of discernment to seek the will of God in all things. Inclusion of a member of JN17:DP will help to ensure that issues of diversity and equity remain at the forefront of the clustering process.

The clustering announcement was unexpected for us as well as to the rest of St. Leo. Understanding discernment to be a process of trying to understand the movement of the Spirit in guiding a decision, it is our hope that including frequent communication with the Archdiocese and Jesuits West Province throughout the clustering process will help the leadership within the

Archdiocese and Province understand and account for where our parishes are in the process, as well as provide up-to-date information for the discernment group to consider in their discernment process.

In the course of our discernment process, the question “What is the charism of St. Leo Parish” arose repeatedly. Each time, the answer—especially in relation to the work of JN17:DP—tied back to welcome, inclusion, and social justice. Our recommendations for the coming year reflect our belief that these values lie at the heart of what is essential to the character and charism of St. Leo as a parish community. We understand that Sacred Heart is a different parish community with different needs, different gifts, and a different charism. We hope that this year can be taken as an opportunity to learn about our neighbors at Sacred Heart, to learn about ourselves and how we can best prepare ourselves to welcome the coming changes and the new community we will be forming with Sacred Heart, and to begin to stitch our communities into one community in solidarity and in love.

NEXT STEPS

The work of the JN17:DP has come to a conclusion. We recommend that the best way to move forward is to have the Pastoral Council hold a series of town halls in the Fall to receive help the community discern which of these recommendations they would like to embrace.

CONCLUSION

This is the beginning of a long process that will happen over years, especially in light of the impending partnership with Sacred Heart parish. We trust that God will lead us as long as we remain people of prayer and cultivate a disposition of openness so that we may identify the promptings of the Spirit well enough to follow.

The Unity Pentecost Mass and Celebration are just a taste of what we hope can unfold in the ongoing work toward goal IV of the St. Leo Strategic Plan: St. Leo will honor the diversity of all community members. The parish will have the opportunity to participate in a further discernment of how the community should proceed in a way that honors and represents all cultures in all aspects of St. Leo community life.