

**Saint Thomas Aquinas – Flatlands  
Brooklyn East #1  
May 13<sup>th</sup>, 2010**

**Christ Jesus, Our Hope Parish Strategic Planning Process**

As part of the planning process our parish:

- Distributed the Parish Data Report to all Parishioners
- Held a gathering of only parish leaders, 21 attending
- Gathered the PPC and Finance Council to answer the Questionnaire

Participants in Planning Questionnaire Meetings

**Pastoral Staff of Saint Thomas Aquinas**

Rev. Fr. Thomas V. Doyle  
Sister Denise C. Nolan, OP  
Mrs. Lisa Allongo

Rev. Fr. Antonius Peter Gopaul  
Sister Teresa Agliardi, RSM

**Parish Trustees**

Mr. Mario Capellan

Ms. Julia Kubis

**Parish Finance Committee**

Mr. Edward Antonio  
Mr. Thomas Donahue  
Mr. Christopher Spinelli

Mrs. Paula Antonio  
Mrs. Ann Cortese

**Parish Leaders**

Mr. William Canna  
Mrs. Catherine Morrissey  
Ms. Diana O'Saughessey  
Mrs. Ana Sanchez  
Mrs. Maina Small

Mrs. Maryanne Dean  
Mrs. Mary Cassandra Odenat  
Miss Barbara Rogus  
Mr. David Small

**Church of Saint Thomas Aquinas  
Strategic Planning Process – 2010  
“What Others Have Done – We Shall Continue”**

Parish Mission Statement

We, the People of Saint Thomas Aquinas Parish, Flatlands, Brooklyn, are a multicultural community; invigorated to respond to the call of Jesus, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Consistent with the tradition of the Catholic Church, we are:

- United in worshipping, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit by serving Him through one another.
- Devoted to unity within the Body of Christ, supporting and promoting one another to live the message of the Gospel through the celebration of the sacraments.
- Committed to a Church community that fosters evangelism, service, hospitality, stewardship and a need for greater unity and belonging.

**(1) What are the signs of growth in our parish?**

- a. New parishioners
- b. Development of support ministries
- c. Dedicated people of our parish community
- d. Strong and vibrant pastoral care supporting sick and homebound
- e. Midwood Catholic Academy and their use of the “Boy’s School”
  - i. Solid Catholic Education
  - ii. Strong Academic Program

**(2) What is the greatest strength of our parish?**

- a. People come to Saint Thomas Aquinas because they choose to
- b. Diversity represented in the parish
- c. Liturgy and Music Ministry
  - i. RCIA
  - ii. Ministries
  - iii. Spiritual Programs (i.e. Parish Mission, Days of Prayer)
  - iv. Children’s Liturgy of the Word

**(3) What are the greatest concerns or challenges facing our parish and in the projected future?**

- a. Changing neighborhood and demographics - increasing non-Catholic population
- b. Only two full time priests on staff - knowing that in the future there will be one full time priest
- c. The hiring of a “full-time” or “part-time” Director of Faith Formation
- d. To encourage greater “ownership” on part of parishioners
- e. Hard to “break into” established groups
- f. Lack of ethnic diversity in liturgy; lack of opportunities to recognize and celebrate ethnic diversity
- g. Little relationship with Flatlands community and interfaith community

**(4) Which of these challenges do you feel the parish can address or has been addressing? How?**

- a. “Consumer consciousness” – shopping for parishes limits people’s willingness to invest
- b. Bridging the varieties of needs of parishioners (social, spiritual, liturgical, educational)
- c. Financial support
- d. Faith Formation for adults
- e. Development of Lay Leadership

**(5) Which challenges seem beyond the ability of the parish to adequately address with your current resources?**

- a. Hiring full time support staff is a challenge we are facing
  - i. The Rectory Office is only opened four full days (Monday to Thursday) and on Saturday and Sunday from 9:00am to 2:00pm. As the young women who work in the office on the weekends go off to college we can cut back on this time.
  - ii. The need for a full time maintenance person to take care of the many needs of many and aging buildings.
  - iii. Potential capital repairs – see question 10.

**(6) What are our pastoral priorities for the next five years (2010-2015)?**

- a. To recruit, develop, train and support responsible and qualified lay leaders
- b. To develop a community of believers who appreciate, enjoy and share diversity of culture as a gift to each other in worshipping God.
  - i. Bring people together through social activities to build relationship and enhance community.
  - ii. Intentionally spread the news that Saint Thomas Aquinas is a place to grow nearer to God, share the Gospel, and enjoy close fellowship.
- c. To develop a ministry that will include reaching out to active and inactive Catholic members that will include areas of welcome and hospitality and adult religious education.
- d. To guide and serve the young people of Saint Thomas Aquinas Parish in the call to holiness through the development of a personal, loving relationship with our Lord Jesus Christ and His call to evangelize those in their sphere of influence.
  - i. Active participation in Church worship, study and prayer life
  - ii. Through a commitment of charitable service to others
  - iii. Sports – working together with neighboring parishes and programs

**(7) What ministries need to be developed or be strengthened in the next five years?**

- a. A coordinator should be placed in charge of generating volunteer efforts within the parish. This person would be responsible, along with the Pastoral Staff and Pastoral Planning Council to mount a campaign throughout the parish to renew the spirit of volunteerism; motivating parish members in determining where they can share their skills and talents with the parish community.
  - i. Encourage and facilitate the involvement of confirmed youth to take on leadership roles within the parish.
- b. Continue to offer a strong and vibrant pastoral care ministry supporting the sick and homebound.
- c. Continue to offer and expand bereavement ministry for grieving family members. A possibility of developing a Consolation Ministry.

- Begin working with area parishes with bereavement ministries to offer a Cluster program or “zone” program”.
- d. Determine the need to formalize a ministry to address the needs of the elderly/senior of our parish.
  - e. Youth Ministry – has been given a priority both in the Parish and the Diocese; preserving and developing the faith, morals and worship practiced by our youth.
    - i. To participate in spiritual, Christian service and social activities that will lead to a desire to learn more about their faith and participate in the religious education program
  - f. We will be warm and welcoming to all and will instill a sense of belonging that is evident at our liturgies and in every place of our community life
    - i. Welcoming Program/Hospitality Committee
    - ii. Strengthen existing programs and developing new venues to bring people together
    - iii. Evangelization efforts
  - g. Technology at Saint Thomas Aquinas – we have barely begun to scratch the surface of the technology that already exists! The connectivity of our communication system is just beginning to have a tremendous influence on how our parish family communicates with itself and the surrounding community.

**(8) Based on your review of the parish financials, do you believe that the parish is financially sound and sustainable for the next five years? What factors lead you to this determination?**

- a. The Parish has been able to secure an extended lease with the Department of Education of the city of New York of the “Girl’s School” located on Flatlands Avenue, this lease is for 20 years and the income increases gradually throughout the term of the lease, there will be an increase of \$1.90 per square foot in the fiscal year of 2012, the sixth year of the lease agreement.
- b. The Increased Offering Campaign that was recently undertaken has seen an increase, although slight, in the weekly offertory. We will need to do a follow-up to this program.

- c. The Pastoral Staff, along with the Parish Finance Committee will need to continue to examine how to cut expenses and increase the income.
- d. In the facilitation of stewardship of the resources entrusted to us by the community of faith we are concerned over the ever increasing diocesan assessments levied to the parish especially in regard to the lack of “market-rate” rental income in regard to Midwood Catholic Academy and the agreement between the parish and the sisters in the convent.
  - i. The lodging stipend determined by the Interdiocesan Stipend Committee of the Diocese of Brooklyn and Diocese of Rockville Centre has been waived in light of the special ministry provided by the Sisters. The Institute of the Servants of the Lord and the Virgin of Matara is responsible for the ordinary expenses and necessities dealing with the personal needs of the Sisters.
  - ii. Midwood Catholic Academy is located in the “Boy’s School” of the Parish of Saint Thomas Aquinas and recently we were able to obtain “market rate” rent. In August 2009 the Parish no longer has that rental income coming in, but we have a partial responsibility for utilities and maintenance of the building.

**(9) How does the parish plan to address any financial challenges that exist or may emerge?**

- a. We need to continue to be open and transparent regarding the fiscal picture of the parish. The weekly offertory has slightly increased with the Increased Offertory Appeal and we will need to revisit this again in the fall.
- b. There will be a slight increase in the rental income from the Department of Education; the hope is that we would be able to put this aside for necessary repairs to the Convent and Aquinas Center (Brother’s House); a separate heating system in Monsignor King Hall (Gym) and ongoing repairs to aging buildings; along with money for our investment portfolio with the Diocese.
- c. There is no potential for rentals and renting out space to outside groups for functions and parties is not an answer, we will have to be good stewards of the resources we presently have.

**(10) What is the status of all parish buildings? Are there any capital repairs to any buildings that you anticipate in the next five years? Do you have any buildings which have the potential to be rented or used in an adaptive manner?**

- a. There are presently eight buildings that consist of the Parish of Saint Thomas Aquinas
  - i. Rectory – work needs to be done on pointing the exterior of this building. In the past 6 years windows have been replaced, a new roof has been installed and a new heating system.
  - ii. Convent – presently the home of 7 contemplative sisters. The windows have been replaced; a new heating system has been installed. There are issues in regard to the roof as well as pointing of the building.
  - iii. Church – The interior of the Church was renovated through the generosity of the parishioners with monies from the Alive in Hope Campaign, but is in need of painting. There is a question on the state of the roof, the stained glass windows are in need of repair.
  - iv. “Girl’s School” – presently leased to the Department of Education of the City of New York and the responsibility for the interior and exterior of the building is their responsibility. This is a 20 year lease.
  - v. “Boy’s School” – presently the facility used by Midwood Catholic Academy. The building has recently had a new roof and new windows, along with a new energy efficient heating system. Prior to Midwood Catholic Academy coming in September 2009, the building was painted and flooring repaired. As this building is also used by the parish, we share in a portion of the maintenance and upkeep of the building.
  - vi. Aquinas Center – this was the former residence of the Holy Cross Brothers and for over 20 years leased to Catholic Charities as part of their Mental Health Clinic. This building also has a new heating system, new windows and a new roof and is now a parish meeting space and office space (Main Office from Monday to Thursday from 9:00pm to 5:00pm; Office of Faith Formation; Office of Music Ministry; Office of

Pastoral Care). There is a possibility of renovating the top floor for a “small” group of religious to live.

- vii. Monsignor King Hall – the largest of the parish meeting space is also the gym for the parish sports program and the gym for Midwood Catholic Academy. We have addressed the issues of windows and roof, but there is a need to have the bathrooms in this building renovated and to look at a separate heating system; right now the heating system is connected to that of the buildings used by Midwood Catholic Academy.
  - viii. “The Little Chapel on Flatbush Avenue” – the original structure used by the parish and has been used as a Church and a gym by the school throughout its history. This is also the only Catholic Church presence on Flatbush Avenue. Presently the building has a limited use to outside groups such as AA and NA. There has always been a question on the structure, the roof and what to do with this building. There is a potential for future use, but the reality of not having the monies available to fund such a project has always been in the forefront. Some present and former parishioners truly have a deep affection for this building and a concern for its future preservation.
  - ix. Sidewalks surrounding the property (Flatlands Avenue, Flatbush Avenue, Hendrickson Street and Coleman Street) need attention and repair. The parish has already received violation notices from New York City and these have been sent to the Building & Property Office for their review and suggestions on how to proceed.
- b. Approximately 4 years ago we examined the possibility of doing a major capital campaign and realized that the base needed to run a successful campaign is no longer here. We have been able to maintain the buildings through the lease with the Department of Education and a former lease with The Brooklyn Amity School, and to place necessary monies into the parish investments.

**(11) How do you see your parish collaborating with other parishes in the future?**

As we plan for the future the Parish of Saint Thomas Aquinas can see collaborating with:

- a. Working with area parish(s) in regard to Faith Formation for our youth. The possibility of one full time Religious Education Director for both parishes is a possibility. Classes can be at both sites and a site manager at one or both locations.
- b. The Parish of Saint Thomas Aquinas has a Gym (Monsignor King Hall) and this can be a benefit to the parishes in the area that do not have a facility for Sports and other activities. The possibility of a “Cluster” Sports Association can be in the future with the parishes of Mary Queen of Heaven, St. Columba, St. Bernard, Resurrection, Our Lady Help of Christians, St. Brendan, St. Edmund and Good Shepherd.
- c. The possibility of sharing pulpits with a few of the surrounding parishes so that parishioners in the neighboring parishes can become familiar faces.

**(12) What is your hope for the faith community of Saint Thomas Aquinas in the coming years?**

Prior to writing the response to this last question the committee (Parish Council members, Trustees, Pastoral Staff, Finance Committee) discovered in us two competing sentiments. On the one hand we felt exhilarated to see this bold dream taking shape in a carefully laid out plan. On the other hand we felt somewhat overwhelmed.

To see all this brought together in one place makes it clear that our work is really cut out for us – an opportunity for all to take “ownership” of this community; to make this place of worship a more active, hospitable and welcoming; to work together for the building up of the Kingdom of God here in Flatlands. We have a wonderful diverse parish community, but this time in our community and in the life of the Church is no time to rest on our laurels. Jesus Christ and His Gospel proclaimed in the Church are needed now more than ever! Drawing upon our 125<sup>th</sup> Anniversary theme, “What others have begun....we shall continue!”

We need to remember that this will not be the work of only a few. Implementing this plan will not be the sole responsibility of the Pastor or the Pastoral Staff. The implementation of this plan will be the work of the entire community of Saint

Thomas Aquinas – Flatlands. It will not be the task of a few, but of thousands. Leaders will need to step forward and so will people of all ages and backgrounds, each to do his or her part.

Hopefully you have found in these pages a vision that has been in fleshed as a pastoral plan. An elaborate process has reached a successful conclusion – or has it just begun?

**Post Script:**

The leadership of Saint Thomas Aquinas believes that this Pastoral Plan will benefit the parish greatly by outlining specific ways in which we may better seek the reign of God and practice gospel values and develop spirit of “oneness” among parts of the whole community. At the same time we realize that either parish priorities or, more likely, some objectives may change over the next year. Therefore we intend to annually review our pastoral plan to make sure it is still relevant. This review will be conducted each spring by the Pastoral Staff, along with the Pastoral Planning Council. Any changes to the plan will be communicated to all parishioners.