

**A Reflection on
*The History and Mission of St. Monica Parish
and our
Past Strategic Plans for Living our Mission***

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Our Mission: To form loving disciples who will transform the world

St. Monica Catholic Church, originally named Saint Monica Parish, was established in 1886 when Santa Monica was still an unincorporated part of LA County and of Ballona Township. Both the city and the church were named for Saint Monica who is remembered for her outstanding Christian virtues, particularly the suffering against the adultery of her husband and a prayerful life dedicated to the reformation of her son, Saint Augustine.

The parish was originally located on what is now the Third Street Promenade between Santa Monica Boulevard and Arizona Ave. At the time it was the only parish between Oxnard and Wilmington and downtown Los Angeles and the ocean. Fr. Patrick Hawe served as the first resident pastor until 1923. During his tenure, the church flourished. Fr. Hawe had planned to build a new and larger church, but died on August 30, 1923 before that goal could be realized.

Monsignor Nicholas Conneally, was Fr. Hawe's successor as pastor and served until 1949. Soon after becoming pastor, Father Conneally moved his rectory to a house on Fourth Street near the original church. He then sold the original parish site and the old church was razed. Until the present church was completed in 1925, services were held at a former Protestant church at the corner of Arizona and Lincoln, the site of the present Santa Monica Boys Club. The new Saint Monica's, described as a cathedral in its time, was dedicated by Bishop John J. Cantwell on July 11, 1926. (Pictured above) Its cost was reported to be \$340,000. The new rectory was built shortly afterward. Saint Monica experienced explosive growth during that time which included the addition of two schools. For those who are Bing Crosby fans, the movie *Going My Way* was based on some of Msgr. Conneally's anecdotes about his work in the parish and schools and was also filmed partly at St. Monica.

St. Monica Catholic Elementary School and St. Monica Catholic High School trace their origins respectively to 1899 and 1901 when the Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary opened a small school in 1899 near the corner of Third and Arizona Streets in Santa Monica. It initially was an elementary school for kindergarten through 8th grade and was staffed by four Sisters, under the guidance of Fr. Hawe. In 1901, a high school was added and the school was named

Academy of the Holy Names. In 1930, the elementary school became Saint Monica Parish Elementary School and was transferred to its present site on 7th Street. In September 1938, the Sisters consented to sell the Academy and staff a high school at Saint Monica's, now St. Monica Catholic High School. The faculty consisted of five sisters and two priests. The first graduating class numbered twenty students--seventeen girls and three boys.

Additional land was acquired and several buildings were built throughout the ongoing years to accommodate the growing community until St. Monica encompassed the entire city block of Lincoln Blvd., California Ave., Washington Ave., and 7th Street. The Gymnasium was built in 1946 and underwent a complete renovation in 2012. The East Wing of the High School was built in 1958. In 1961 a convent was completed for the Sisters of the Holy Names and was later converted into the Pastoral Center, now the location for a new Community Center. The original Annex, built in the 60s, was replaced with the Trepp Center in the mid 90s, and the Duval Center, named after Monsignor Anthony Duval who served as pastor from 1978-1986, was built in 1998.

In January 1994, the Church suffered extensive damage in the Northridge earthquake forcing its closure until repairs could be made. During that time, Mass was held in the Gymnasium. Through the persistent power of prayer, the leadership of St. Monica's pastor, Monsignor Lloyd Torgerson, and the hard work and commitment of staff and parishioners, the restored church was reopened on Holy Thursday, April 13, 1995. Monsignor Torgerson continues to serve as pastor today.

In 2007 St. Monica, embarked on an aggressive capital campaign for \$27 Million to meet the needs of the growing community and aging buildings. The Pastoral Center was demolished in late 2011 to make room for a new Community Center and Reception Pavilion. Groundbreaking took place in January 2012. Construction was completed in August of 2013 with the grand opening celebration on November 3, 2013.

Scripture Meditation and Reflection Questions

I rejoiced with those who said to me,
 "Let us go to the house of the Lord."
 Our feet are standing
 in your gates, Jerusalem.
 Jerusalem is built like a city
 that is closely compacted together.
 That is where the tribes go up—
 the tribes of the Lord—
 to praise the name of the Lord
 Psalm 122

1. In what ways has St. Monica's been the house of God for you, the meeting place of the Divine?
2. As you review the history of the parish since 1886, what stands out for you as expressive of the uniqueness and "vocation" of the parish in how it lives and serves Christ?

History of Strategic (Pastoral) Planning at St. Monica Catholic Community

The following history consists of six time periods beginning with the appointment of Msgr. Torgerson as pastor and continuing to the end of 2019. During this time, four 5-year strategic plans were developed covering 4 of the 6 time periods. The other two time periods are included in this report because some very strategic decisions or initiatives were taken during those times.

Strategic Planning 1987 - 1992

Cardinal Roger Mahony's appointment of Msgr Lloyd Torgerson was arguably the most strategic decision made since 1987. In the first few years as pastor, Msgr. Torgerson quickly took some strategic initiatives. The overnight removal of the old communion rail was symbolic of the kind of pastorate St. Monica parishioners would likely experience.

While Msgr. was comfortable making quick decisions on his own, he also believed in sharing leadership with the laity. The professional lay staff began to grow quickly and steadily through 2010. In these first years, several new strategic paid positions were added to the parish staff, including that of Parish Administrator, Adult Formation coordinator, Young Adult Ministry coordinator, Older Adult Ministry coordinator, Confirmation coordinator, and Bereavement coordinator.

Msgr. also formed a pastoral council made up of one or two representatives from each of about 25 newly created geographical regions. The responsibilities of these representatives included:

- Welcoming new members
- Inviting members to socials and home Masses
- Listening to the concerns of the members
- Communicating the needs of the members to the pastor and staff.

Msgr. consulted with this pastoral council on a number of strategic issues including the following.

One of the most strategic decisions of this time period was the creation of the current mission statement: “To forming loving disciples who will transform the world.” This replaced a rather lengthy mission statement that few could remember or recite. Msgr. and the core staff of the community adopted this mission statement after attending the annual L.A. Archdiocesan conference of pastors, principals, and religious education directors. At this conference, the guest speaker, James Dubois, Director of Religious Education for the Archdiocese of Baltimore, suggested that all parishes should have this as their mission statement. The St. Monica core staff felt strongly that this was the right thing to do.

Msgr. also started the strategic tradition of capital campaigns during these first few years. This strategy consisted of cultivating new donors and soliciting major gifts to 1) create a school endowment fund, 2) renovate Cantwell Auditorium and the elementary school, 3) repurpose the convent into a new pastoral center, and 4) build a new Conference center/school library (Trepp Center).

In 1993, a parish wide survey was conducted at all the Masses, consisting of basic demographic, multiple choice, and open-ended questions. The staff also consulted with Rev. Philip Murnion of the National Center of Pastoral Life. This led to the first 5-year strategic plan.

Scripture Meditation and Reflection Questions

He tends his flock like a shepherd:
 He gathers the lambs in his arms
 and carries them close to his heart;
 he gently leads those that have young.
 Isaiah 40:11

1. What gifts have been experienced and realized in the parish due to Msgr. Torgerson clergy, staff and volunteers?
2. How is the mission statement “To form loving disciples who will transform the world” expressive or not of the life of the parish?
3. In what new ways may God be calling us as a parish to lead?

Strategic Plan 1994-1999

In early January of 1994, 12 of the parish and school staff met for an all-day session, sifting through the results of the recent parish survey and Rev. Murnion's feedback, and looking at how to forward the new parish mission. At this meeting, sixteen areas of pastoral concern arose. Out of the sixteen, six emerged as the highest priority: activating Catholics, adult formation, leadership, liturgy, family/parent support, and spirituality. Action steps for each year and the responsible staff for each priority and each year were designated. Most of these actions' steps were accomplished and many new ministries began during this period and continue today. Several strategic decisions in staffing were made during this time as a result of this plan: liturgy coordinator, family religious education coordinator, technology coordinator and development coordinator. The staff also began the tradition of an annual evaluation and planning overnight or day-long session in May to move the plan forward.

God sent the next strategic event to St. Monica – the Northridge Earthquake, also in January of 1994. The parish took some strategic initiatives as a result of the earthquake and damage to the church building. Along with the repairs and strengthening of the church building, \$1 million was spent to make Vatican II inspired modifications, primarily to separate the shrine elements from the liturgical and sacramental elements of the church. Accessibility provisions were also incorporated (confessionals, glass wall in vestibule). The altar was moved closer to the congregation by 10 feet, provided ample space for the choirs behind the altar.

A theme was created for the time of renovation and repair: "Let us build a house where all are welcome". This "all are welcome" phrase became a strategic "mantra" and charism to complement the parish mission, that has continued through the current time. It also began a tradition of annual themes to give focus to parish activities.

In early 1996, the parish organized a weekend of home visits to as many parishioners as possible. This gave additional information about parishioner needs and help to move the 5-year plan forward.

Scripture Meditation and Reflection Questions

Unless the LORD builds the house,
the builders labor in vain.
Unless the LORD watches over the city,
the guards stand watch in vain.
Psalm 127:1

1. In 1994 the Church suffered the Northridge Earthquake. How did this challenging event also surface the deeper qualities of this community? What were some of these qualities.
2. Given the current Covid-19 reality; what might God be doing within us given our new challenging context? How is it a spiritual opportunity?

Strategic Plan 2000-2004

In the fall of 2000, the parish asked the Parish Evaluation Project team from Milwaukee, founded by Rev. Tom Sweetzer to implement their Parish Assessment and Renewal (P.A.R.) process. A PAR team of staff, parish leaders and parishioners were set up to work with Fr. Tom and his associate Sr. Peg Bishop over a 2-week period in the winter of 2001. The first step of the process was to conduct a survey of parishioners and leaders consisting of 60 questions regarding all areas of ministry and parish life. Confidential surveys were sent to a random sample of 430 parishioners, and 80 staff and lay leaders. 116 parishioner and 57 lay leaders responded. Responses were compiled by the PAR team to understand and prioritize needs identified by the survey. Many suggestions for improvements were made in response o specific survey questions and the results provided the starting point for PAR team decisions. A town hall meeting open to all parishioners resulted in further input in the PAR process. 125 participated in small groups to answer the questions:

- What do we need to keep?
- What do we need to let go of?
- What do we need to begin to develop for the future?

The PAR team met several times to review and digest the feedback from the surveys and town hall meeting. More than 40 leaders worked with staff in six groups to represent the six areas of parish life.

The most strategic initiative from the PAR process was the recommendation by Fr. Tom and Sr. Peg to develop a new governance structure for the parish. With the possibility of a change of pastors in the coming year, Fr. Tom urged St. Monica to involve many more parishioners in the decision-making process of the community. Prior to this time, decisions were being made primarily by staff with limited feedback from the pastoral council. Fr. Tom pointed out that a new pastor could more easily make changes in a heavily staff governing environment. A similar structure adopted in numerous other parishes across the country was proving to be very effective.

The new structure consisted of a new parish council and six ministry councils. The ministry councils focused on a special area of parish life. The parish council included four at-large members appointed by the pastor and two representatives from each ministry council. A covenant book was drafted to clearly describe all the provisions and guidelines of the new

structure. This covenant book was revised several times over the ensuing years to fill gaps and respond to changing needs of the parish.

Each ministry council was asked to develop 5-year goals and objectives. They brought strategic proposals in their areas of parish life to the parish council for a formal recommendation to the pastor. Many proposals began to result in new growth and life for St. Monica. One example included the development of a comprehensive communication plan from the Administration Council, that resulted in the hiring of a communications director and a community branding process. The Community Life council recommended new ministries to various age groups and life situations: post young adulthood, divorced and separated, and gay and lesbian Catholics). The Pastoral Care and Social Justice council recommend the develop of a Stephens Ministry.

A strategic feature of this new structure included the provision for specific terms of office for the council members, to continually bring in new leadership from the parish. One ongoing challenge of the structure concerned the relationship of staff to council members and the need to frequently clarify roles and responsibilities. It has also been challenging for council members to limit their role to visioning and oversight, rather than implementing programs and projects.

Scripture Meditation and Reflection Questions

“I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener.

He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful.

You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you.

Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

“I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. John 15:1-5

1. What do we need to keep?
2. What do we need to let go of?
3. What do we need to begin to develop for the future?
4. How do our parish structures support or limit our response to the Gospel?

Strategic Plan 2005-2010

In 2004, the parish developed the third 5-year strategic plan (2005 – 2010). Parishioner Jonathan Vehar, founder of New and Improved LLC, guided us through a process for this plan. He first had staff and council members review some strategic planning concepts from Franklin Covey and Jim Collins. *One chapter from Jim Collins book “Good to great” entitled “the Hedgehog concept” was particularly relevant in our process. A hedgehog concept is a simple crystalline concept that flows from deep understanding about the intersection of three circles:*

- *What are you deeply passionate about?*
- *What can you be the best in the world at?*
- *What drives your economic engine?*

The next step was inviting all parishioners to “Share Your Dream for St. Monica.” For several weekends, cards were distributed at all Masses inviting parishioners to 1) spend a few moments reflecting on what you think is the single most important value that drives what we do at St. Monica and 2) in one sentence write one thing you feel is “wildly important” for St. Monica’s over the next 10 years. Speak up sessions were conducted after all the Masses one weekend, during which parishioners could share their dream. In the next step, parish and school staff, volunteer leaders, and a few leaders from the civic and religious community were invited to participate in a half-day session billed as “Creating the Future of St. Monica”. Jonathan Vehar facilitated this session; a process he described like panning for gold. Generating and sifting through the sands of many ideas (share you dream cards, Collins book) and possibilities, and with God’s grace, discover a good number of nuggets that would enlighten our hearts, minds, and imaginations. The goal was creating a short list of options for further consideration to be in our desired future 10 years from now.

After the session a small group drafted three 5-year community wide vision and goals simply worded: In 2010 St. Monica is

- A community of compassion and healing
- A center for dynamic lay leadership
- A catalyst for social justice

Over the next few months, community members were invited to give feedback about this vision.

The parish council recommended moving forward with these goals and tasked the ministry councils to develop five-year objectives and action plans aligned with the goals. This was surprisingly challenging for many of the ministry councils.

Scripture Meditation and Reflection Questions

Then he led me back to the bank of the river. ⁷
 When I arrived there, I saw a great number of trees
 on each side of the river. ⁸ He said to me,
 “This water flows toward the eastern region
 and goes down into the Arabah,⁹ where it enters the Dead Sea.
 When it empties into the sea, the salty water there becomes fresh. ⁹
 Swarms of living creatures will live wherever the river flows.
 There will be large numbers of fish, because this water
 flows there and makes the salt water fresh;
 so where the river flows everything will live.
¹⁰ Fishermen will stand along the shore;
 from En Gedi to En Eglaim there will be places for spreading nets.
 The fish will be of many kinds—
 like the fish of the Mediterranean Sea.
 Ezekiel 47: 7-10

1. What are you deeply passionate about?
2. What can you be the best in the world at?
3. What drives your “economic” engine?
4. How are we “a community of compassion and healing”?
5. How are we a “center for dynamic lay leadership”?
6. How are we a “catalyst for social justice”?

Strategic Plan 2007 - 2014

One of the objectives of the administration council in the 2005-2010 plan, was to create a master site plan for the community. They formed a Master Site committee of parish and school staff, parishioners and school families, under the leadership of parishioner Tom Zanic. Architect Joe Pica guided the community through a comprehensive Master site planning process. This included a physical inspection of all buildings, a facility-use study, several charettes to identify desired elements of future construction. The parish and school councils recommended moving forward on this new strategic master site plan. The implementation included a \$30 million capital campaign “Building our Future Together” with the guidance of Community Counseling Services and Grethen Willison, and planning and eventual construction of the major part of the master site plan (community center, grand pavilion and patio, child and student center, and subterranean parking garage (from 2007 – 2014) led by the team of Tom Zanic, Joe Pica, a construction manager and Del Amo Construction.

This implementation required most of the focus and energy of parish and school staff and leaders in the years following the start of the 2005 pastoral plan continuing until 2014. The

results were lauded as a significant achievement for St. Monica and a very strategic resource for the future.

In 2010? St. Monica participated in a process with St. Ann and St. Clement to form a Tri Parish Collaboration with a steering committee and several action committees. This collaboration was widely regarded as having strategic potential and was heartily supported by Bishop Clarke, regional bishop of the Our lady of the Angels region. A number of initiatives and events were enthusiastically begun but the energy has faded over the past 10 years with the lack of even representation and participation and lack of focus by each of the parishes.

Research shows that the spiritual health of individuals, families and communities are based on 2 factors: spiritual commitment and member engagement. So, in the spring of 2013, the parish conducted the Gallup engagement survey, with over 2000 parishioner participating. The process provided benchmark data from 25 questions measuring the 2 factors as well as the level of life satisfaction and the effort of inviting others to the parish. *The highest score was for "in my parish I have opportunities to learn and grow (4.11 compared with 4.04 of all other churches).*

The lowest score was for "someone in my parish has talked to me about the progress of my spiritual growth. (2.70 vs 2.96) The biggest contrast was "I have a best friend in my parish" (2.96 vs. 3.99.)

The parish engagement committee felt it was strategic to address the question "as a member of the parish, I know what is expected of me". (3.78 vs. 3.97). After much discussion and discernment, 5 expectations were chosen "to worship, connect, grow, serve, and give. These expectations were communicated and reinforced in pew stuffer, the parish bulletin and website, and pulpit announcements. The parish also outlined on the pew stuffer - six things the parishioners could expect of the parish: welcoming place, catalyst for ministry/service, place for spiritual formation, opportunities to connect, prudent stewardship of resources, leadership development, and fidelity to Catholic doctrine.

The engagement survey, expectations process, and the new facilities became inspiration and impetus for the next strategic plan: "Vision 2020."

Scripture Meditation and Reflection Questions

Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria
 enjoyed a time of peace and was strengthened.
 Living in the fear of the Lord and encouraged
 by the Holy Spirit, it increased in numbers.
 Acts 9:31

1. How have our facilities and resources aided in our ministry?
2. What dreams might we still have beyond the building campaign that led to our present reality?
3. What might it mean for you personally and for a parishioner of St. Monica's to say I am spiritually committed and engaged in the life of the parish?

Strategic Plan 2015-2019

Parishioner Patricia Summers, led a team of parish and school leaders in a process for developing Vision 2020. In a daylong session in January of 2015, 100 parish and school leaders developed guiding principles, vision, and strategies to support seven 5-year key goals and 11 key assumptions. The seven goals came from the seven things the community could expect from the parish. Committees were formed for each goal area with 3-7 strategies for each goal area.

Results of this plan was mixed. Most of the energy and action evolved around hospitality, St. Monica University, facility development and social media development. Arguably the biggest disappointment was the failure to hire an engagement director as recommended. The biggest challenge of this plan was the large quantity of goals and strategies – making it difficult to make progress on all 35 strategies. One encouraging result of the plan came from the results of a second Gallup engagement survey conducted in 2018. St Monica improved in all questions but one (best friend).

The schools also developed a strategic plan for this same time period. Great progress was made in the area of facility development: optimizing the use of the campus for collaborative student spaces, improving resources for the athletic program and student fitness with renovations of the gymnasium, and increased capacity of middle school grade level.

This school's facility development helped to fulfill most of the remaining aspects of the original master site plan. The schools raised over \$5 million dollars for the construction. The rectory and church building also received major renovations in this time period after another parish capital campaign. The Cantwell Auditorium was the only element of the master site plan left to complete. Plans are underway to address this final element.

Scripture Meditation and Reflection Questions

²⁸ "Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Won't you first sit down and estimate the cost to see if you have enough money to complete it? ²⁹ For if you lay the foundation and are not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule you, ³⁰ saying, 'This person began to build and wasn't able to finish.'

³¹ "Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Won't he first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand? ³² If he is not able, he will send a delegation while the other is still a long way off and will ask for terms of peace. ³³ In the same way, those of you who do not give up everything you have cannot be my disciples.

³⁴ "Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? ³⁵ It is fit neither for the soil nor for the manure pile; it is thrown out. Luke 14:28-34

1. What consolations and desolations have you recognized in yourself during your reading of the history of the parish and its strategic plans?
2. What learnings from our history can be built upon?
3. How is our current context entirely new, demanding creative responses that could not have been anticipated?
4. How has God been consistent in the life of our parish and the community's call to live its mission and where might we be drawn today?

Final Comments and Observations

1. Instincts of a few sometimes lead to very strategic results.
2. Outside resources were enthusiastically sought and embraced and found to be extremely helpful.
3. Plans with fewer goals seemed to be more effective.
4. Some events beyond the control of St. Monica were strategic blessings.
5. Prayer and discernment, while not specifically mentioned in this report, were always integrated in the processes, plans, and implementation
6. Some on past parish councils or ministry councils feel the involvement of parishioners in decision making through the councils has lessened in the last several years and that provisions of the covenant book are not being followed very much anymore.