



Shepherds, Guardians and Family Circles

Purpose and Explanation

The purpose of creating a *Good Shepherd* culture in your parish is to develop an involved, dynamic, and extended Catholic community that goes beyond the Pastor and the church door on Sundays. Pastors and priest come and go but parishioners remain; they form the extended family of the *domestic church*¹ that makes the parish warm and caring and inviting – an important part of relationship building so vital to forming *Dynamic Disciples*.

Every parishioner belongs to a Family Circle. Each Circle and has a Shepherd and an assistant to stay in touch and maintain a personal bond with those members. Such groups already exist in the parish in the form of ministries such as Knights of Columbus, Society of St Vincent de Paul, the choir, school organizations, RCIA, rosary guild, and youth groups. The Shepherd's for those who do not choose to be active in a Family Circle may only extend to a personalized Christmas card, birthday or anniversary card or to check on them during difficult times such as extreme heat, cold, hurricanes or even during quarantine. The Shepherd's responsibility for these families is to stay in contact and to be available if there is a need or sometimes only to share a cup of coffee.

¹***Domestic Church** Catholic parents must learn to form their family as a **domestic church**, a **church in the home as it were**, where God is honored, his law is respected, prayer is a normal event, virtue is transmitted by word and example, and everyone shares the hopes, the problems and sufferings of everyone else.*

Roles and Responsibilities

The most important part of creating a *Good Shepherd* Culture in your parish is a supportive and involved pastor and Parish Leadership Team (Guardians).

Roles

Pastor, other priests, Deacons

Guardians

Shepherds

Family Circle Members

Pastor and Parish Guardians

The Pastor and the Guardians are the foundation to build the culture of a dynamic parish. They begin with a time period of prayer and discernment. Prayer asking the Holy Spirit to open the hearts of parishioners; discernment asking to place the right people with the right people. This is not a *program* nor is it short term...it becomes a normal way of living in the parish community. Leaders will change, external challenges will present obstacles, and not all will want to be a part of the new parish culture, however, Jesus the Good Shepherd, never gives up and meets people where they are.

The Guardians also serve to provide and keep current available parish, diocesan and external resources. This will assist the Shepherds in their ministry to the families. The Guardians collect information about the Family Circles from the Shepherd's *Contact Report*.



Shepherds, Guardians and Family Circles

Family Circles

A *Family Circle* can be any group of people who know and support each other in various ways. There is not a limit on how many or how few should belong to a Circle. A Family Circle may include many families, single persons, people who share the same interests or hobbies (choir, Eucharistic Ministers, CCD teachers) or even a neighborhood. A person may belong to more than one Family Circle. The goal is to create a culture where people know each other, care about each other and form a relationship of support during the good times and difficult times.

Shepherds

Each Family Circle will have a Shepherd. The role of the Shepherd is to be a spiritual and physical resource for the families within the Circle. Spiritual resources may be gatherings for dinners, retreats, prayer services, individual counseling, and support or maybe just a friendly voice. The Guardian will ideally be in contact with the Shepherds weekly but for some this may only be bi-monthly or monthly. The Guardians use the information provided by the Shepherds in their Family Circle to work with the other Guardians and parish leadership team members to determine the continuing needs of the parish and all parishioners.

Shepherd's Assistant

Many parishes are so large that the pastor/priests/deacons do not have time to build a personal relationship with each family and each member of the parish. The role of the Shepherd is pastoral and is meant to build that trusting relationship. This is vital to building a parish of Dynamic Disciples and confidentiality is a critical trait of a Shepherd.

Each Shepherd is provided information on members of the Family Circle. This should include full registration information including marital status, children, line of work or job, hobbies, etc. The Shepherds keeps a record of visits, calls, or contacts with each family in the circle. (See FAMILY CIRCLE CONTACTS)

As the relationship of trust grows, the Shepherd becomes a resource in difficult times and celebrates in joyful times by always representing the parish community as a whole.

The Shepherd's role is also to be an example and teach the Assistant the responsibilities of being a Shepherd. The Assistant is an important resource for the Shepherd and the Circle during difficult times or when the Shepherd is not available.

Sustainability

The monthly report by the Shepherds to the Guardians is a simple written document outlining any activity between the Shepherd and the members of the Family Circle. If a Shepherd discovers a family is in financial need, has a medical need or is facing some other difficulties, he/she may be able to offer resources and assistance. If there are suggestions, these can be taken to the Guardian.



Shepherds, Guardians and Family Circles

Each Family Circle is different and each family within the circle may have different needs or may choose not to participate further or change circles. The secret to success is that every person in the parish has a personal connection to someone on the Parish Leadership Team and that communication and accountability remains paramount.

Parishioners are free to choose their own Shepherd or even create their own Family Circle (perhaps a neighborhood or a large family group or a ministry group). Those who do not want to actively participate will still be assigned to a Shepherd who will only be a contact and resource person for the parishioner.

Lessons Learned

One large parish tried forcing people to belong to groups and pressure activity. There was no accountability, no support, no resources or training for the Shepherds and communication regarding the purpose and roles was not well communicated to parishioners. The program did not last very long. The only parishioners who participated were the same ones who were already involved.

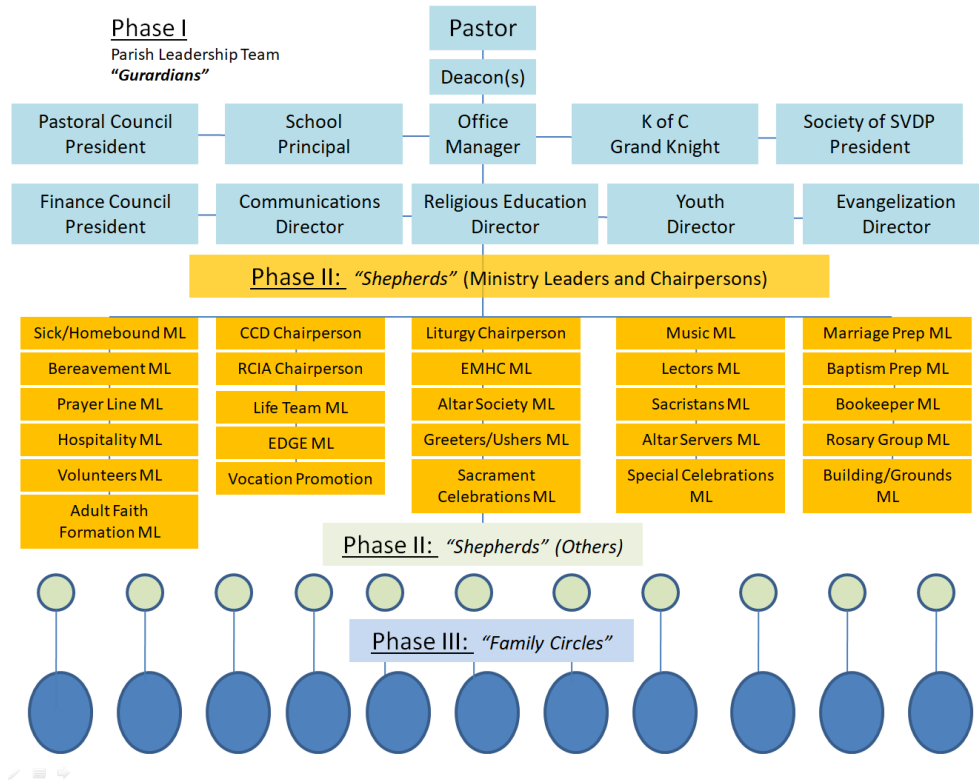
Another parish randomly assigned parishioners to a family circle. There was limited communication and some long-time parishioners completely resisted the entire idea. The program did not last.

Just like in business, vision, planning, preparation, communication, and training are vital to success of any endeavor. For the Good Shepherd culture to be successful, prayer is the greatest need and the best measure of success.

Use this section as a catalyst and adapt it to for your parish...the goals are simple:

- A focus on creating a Dynamic Disciple parish
- Building a culture of trust and personal relationships steeped in prayer, study, generosity, and evangelism

Shepherds, Guardians and Family Circles



Teaching our Children to Pray

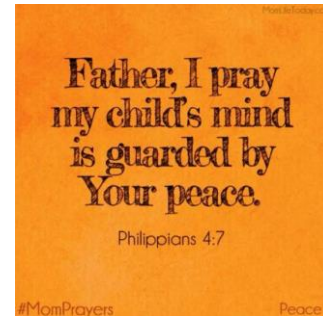
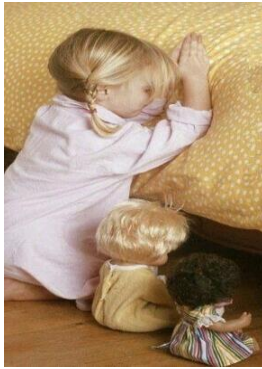
Becoming a parish of *Dynamic Disciples* begins with *Dynamic Catholics*. According to Matthew Kelly (*4 Signs of a Dynamic Catholic*), the four signs of a dynamic Catholic are Prayer, Study, Generosity and Evangelization. Prayer is the foundation for all we do and *Teaching our Children to Pray* is paramount to everything else we do in our journey and their journey. A child begins learning immediately from those around him and prayer is no different.

Prayer is how we communicate with God, our Father and nothing is more important to Him than prayer. *Teaching our Children to pray* begins in the home, the *domestic church*. Prayers do not have to be long and memorized or scripted but should always be from the heart. Teaching children to pray begins from the earliest ages. Even when children are as young as one, they understand the body language that something special is happening. As they grow, they learn to participate in their own ways. They learn by watching their parents and those around them. In Scripture, we see Jesus prayed often and when the apostles wanted Him to teach them how to pray, He taught them the *Our Father*.

Praying for each other and asking others to pray for us is one of the greatest ways to live our lives in Christ. There are many ways to pray and some are listed below. Teaching children to pray can be brought into our parish schools and our parish as a whole through the power of prayer. The additional benefit is the caring community of love and support for each other. Please feel free to share how you use these and any ideas to improve. wanda.lighthouseideas@gmail.com or like us on Facebook.

There are 5 Things I want to Teach My Children about Prayer

1. **You can pray anywhere and anytime.** God is always there, always listening, and always wanting to hear from HIS children!
2. **Always Praise Him** – The best way to start and end a prayer is PRAISE! HE is worthy of it and everything we are and have and hoped to be is because of HIM!
3. **Prayer is not about asking as much is it's about personal relationship** – I want my kids to know they can pray about anything and any request, but prayer should be more about personal relationship. It is where we can feel close to God and HE wants to hear from us. If there are two strangers in a room and we start up a great conversation with one and ignore the other which one will we have a relationship with once we leave? Of course, the one we talk to. We can't grow our relationship with HIM if we spend no time with HIM!
4. **Nothing is too small** – do you know how many times I spent the day looking for keys or some lost item and then suddenly, I decide to pray about it. God cares even about our smallest burdens! HE really does. Give it all to him!!
5. **Prayer changes everything** – Prayer is POWERFUL! I believe God can still heal the sick, perform miracles beyond our wildest dreams and change lives that seem unchangeable. Prayer works and it is amazing to watch it! It can grow your faith like nothing else!



FIVE FINGER PRAYER: T
THUMB: Those closest to
POINTER: Those that point
 Such as teachers,
 and support for t
INDEX (Tallest): Those tha
 ask for guidance, wisdom and understanding
RING (Weakest): Those that are weak, in trouble or
 In pain. We cannot pray too much for them.
PINKIE(Smallest): Our prayers for ourselves and our
 own needs



BLESS YOUR CHILDREN EVERY DAY

Blessings are an indispensable way to exercise your spiritual authority as a parent. They're quick, simple, and powerful. Just like Aaron in Numbers 6:22-27*, you can put the name of the Lord on your kids so God will bless and protect them.

Your children need protection against the forces seeking to turn them from holiness and spiritual freedom. You are your child's guardian, not only in the physical world, but in the spiritual world as well. Bless your children daily – at night as they go to bed, each day before they go to school and any other occasion when you know they will be somewhere that you cannot be with them.

Blessing #1: *The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make His face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you; the Lord pour down His grace upon you, and give you peace.*

Blessing #2: *“God bless you and watch over you today. In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.”*

Testimonial: “I started blessing my younger kids (dry) every night. I thought the older ones were too old to start something like that and they wouldn't like it. One-night, big sister was putting them to bed and let on that the big kids didn't do that. So, one of the little ones blessed her instead. Now it is a whole family tradition.

Testimonial: “I bless my children with Holy Water every day before they go to school and at night when we put them to bed. I use a small plastic bottle that I wrote *Holy Water* on. One time we ran out and my kids kept reminding me we had to go to church and get some more.

NOTE: At most parishes, a dispenser for Holy Water is in the church. Ask the Usher or Greeter.



Shepherds, Guardians and Family Circles

Classroom Prayer Angels (CPAs)

Purposes

- Connect parishioners of _____ Church in prayer and support of the children in the school in prayer for
- To provide encouragement for families to pray together for their Classroom Prayer Angel
- Provide encouragement for children to learn to pray for others especially (their personal prayer angel)
- Surround our school with prayer everyday

Development

Meet with members of _____ Church who would like to become classroom prayers angels.

- Determine which angels would “adopt” what classroom
- Take photos of each CPA to give to teacher to post in room
- Take class photo to post in CPAs home (With parents’ permission)
- Provide “angel” store for CPAs to “shop” to send things to children or even make (like Cursillo palancas) for special occasions (test day, field day, holidays, birthdays, special events)
- Encourage children and children’s families to make/send notes to CPAs for holidays, birthdays, get well cards, etc.
- Possibly have CPAs attend a special snack or appreciation day with the class/school events/meet the parents

NOTE: Older parishioners could also come together to make crafty little things like we make for Cursillo such as - cards, words of encouragement, crochet toys, etc. Let children know they are praying for them with posters, cards, etc. when testing or special occasions. Let the children present prayer request that could go out into a little newsletter to the CPAs. CPAs could have special requests for children to pray for them. A similar praying relationship could be developed with the youth in the CCD programs or Confirmation classes or RCIA.

If your parish has a school or is affiliated with a school, this is a great way to involve the youth and their families with the senior members in the parish. This provides an extended, caring family and brings the parish together as a family. Parishes can also encourage members to pray for their children, the school teachers/staff and for all families either when dropping their children off to school (prayer in the car with children) or encourage to pray throughout day while at home. For more information, contact wanda.lighthouseideas@gmail.com

Personal Prayer Angels (PPAs)

Purposes

- Connect parishioners of _____ Church in prayer and support of the families in the parish
- To provide encouragement for families to pray together for their Personal Prayer Angel
- Provide encouragement for children to learn to pray for others especially their Personal Prayer Angel
- Surround our families with prayer everyday



Shepherds, Guardians and Family Circles

Development

- Meet with members of _____ Church who would like to become Personal Prayers Angels.
- Determine which Angels would “adopt” what family
- Take photos of each Personal Prayer Angel and give to their “adopted” prayer family
- Take photos of the “adopted” prayer family to post in PPAs home
- Encourage PPAs and families to send holiday, birthday, or special event cards to each other
- Encourage children and their families to make/send notes to PPAs
- Possibly have PPAs attend a special snack or appreciation day with the class, or attend school or family events

Praying as a Family

God is mindful of you and your family, and He hopes you approach Him in prayer as a family. Praying as a family brings you closer to God AND closer to each one another.

Prayer strengthens your family and when you kneel with your family to pray, you are doing more than speaking to God, you are *demonstrating* faith. You are serving God through your prayers. Praying as a family fortifies your love as you pray for each other. Your family prayers can bless your children for generations to come. Prayer bring blessings and peace to your home.

Prayer blesses others when your family prays together. Choose one person to say the prayers and ask everyone else to listen, kneel, and bow their heads in reverence. Teach other members of your family how to pray and take turns praying each day. By remembering the needs of others, you help your family members realize that there are people around you who are sad, less fortunate, or in need of help. Through prayer, your family can focus outward and develop a deeper love for all people.

Daily prayer with your family doesn't have to be formal, eloquent, or memorized but should be from the heart. You can talk to God like you would any other person.

- Address God as father “Dear Heavenly Father.
 - Talk to God as you would a good friend
 - Express gratitude and tell Him how you feel
 - Ask for blessings for you and your children.
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- End your prayer by saying, “In the name of Jesus. Amen.”
 - Pray often

Developing a Dynamic Praying Parish

Another way to create *Dynamic Disciples* is to center everything we do around prayer. Some other ways of including prayer into our individual lives and our parish is to focus on certain aspects of parish life.

Many people are not comfortable about praying *off-the-cuff* and even admit they do not know *how*. While there are many ways to pray, here are a few ways that are easy to remember and comes directly from the heart.

Prayer Giants/Warriors

A prayer warrior is someone who earnestly lifts others in prayer. They ask in the Lord to release the troubles, pain and sorrow from their lives. Prayer warriors positively pray with all supplication, endlessly and tirelessly to bring strength, endurance, patience, understanding and hope to all others unconditionally. This enables them to find peace, joy, freedom and be lifted in His Light and Love.

Becoming a Dynamic Disciple

4 Signs of Dynamic Catholic – Matthew Kelly, Dynamic Catholic.com

1. PRAYER

“When we are spiritually healthy, nothing bothers us.” - Matthew Kelly 7 Signs of a Dynamic Catholic

Key Concepts: Daily Routine of Prayer; Routine w/in the Routine; The Prayer Process; Spiritual Health; The Classroom of Silence; Prayer Giants

Daily Routine of Prayer

- Specific time and place for prayer
- Routine within the Routine (specific time of day)
 - Reading Bible
 - Praying prayers of Church
 - Reading a favorite book; listening to a CD, watching a religious movie/show (i.e. EWTN)
- Spends time in *Classroom of Silence* (being comfortable with our own company; block out distractions (Re: *Screw Tape Letters*);

Prayer Process (Matthew Kelly)

- Address God as father “Dear Heavenly Father.
- Talk to God as you would a good friend
- **GRATITUDE:** Thank God in a personal dialogue for whatever you are most grateful for today
- **AWARENESS:** Think of the times in the past 24 hrs. when you were and were not the **Best Version of Yourself**¹ Talk to God about these situations and what you learned from them
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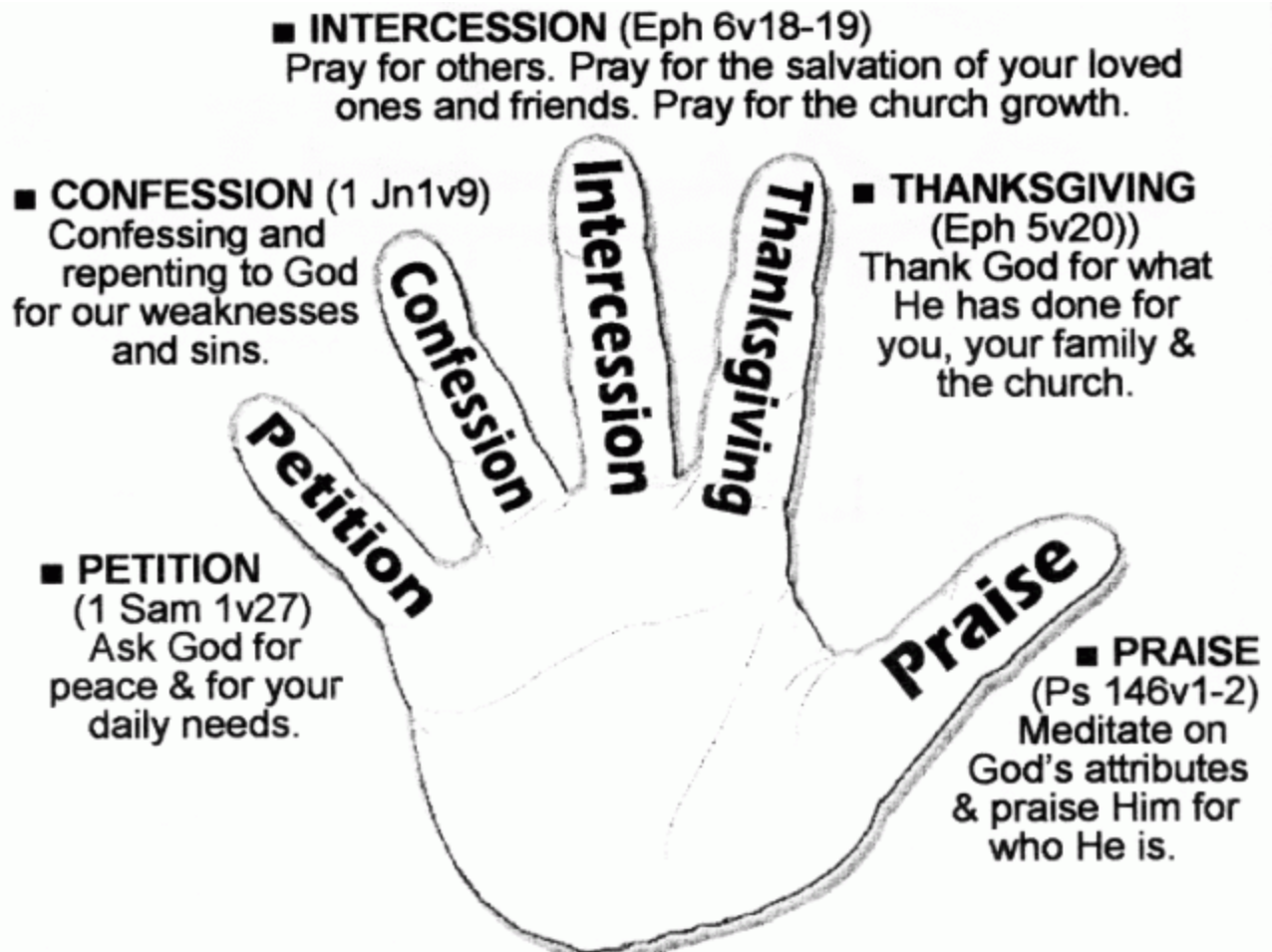
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- **SIGNIFICANT MOMENTS:** Identify something you experienced in the last 24 hrs. and explore what God might be trying to say to you through that event (or person).
- **PEACE:** Ask God to forgive you any wrong you have committed (against yourself, another person, or Him) and to fill you with deep and abiding peace
- **FREEDOM:** Speak with God about how He is inviting you to change your life, so that you can experience the freedom to be the **best-version-of-yourself**.
- **OTHERS:** Life up to God anyone you felt called to pray for today, asking God to bless and guide them
- **PRAY:** The *OUR FATHER* prayer
- End your prayer by saying, "In the name of Jesus. Amen."

¹ *Best Way to Live* (CD) Matthew Kelly (dynamiccatholic.com) <https://youtu.be/v44jxQDYb9M>

How to Pray - P.T.I.C.P.

Praise – Thanksgiving – Intercessions – Confession - Petition



Intercessory Prayer

Example Intercessory Prayer

“Lord Jesus, I come to you today and thank you for the privilege of praying for others. I've been the recipient of others' prayers so often, I understand how powerful intercessory prayer can be. I ask you first to cleanse my heart and show me if there is any unconfessed sins.

*I pray for teachers, for students, and for **all those in authority and leadership, both locally and throughout the world**. Give them your mind, and surround them with godly counselors who will exercise integrity and work for justice, morality, and freedom. Help them to esteem you, not dismiss you. Send revival, Lord.*

*I pray for the lost, the hurting, the lonely, **the sick**, the bereaved, and those who are imprisoned—behind both visible and invisible walls. Send your comfort, **your peace**, and your calming presence to those who are without hope. Protect the defenseless, and hold them close to your heart. I pray for laborers to tell the good news of Jesus to people around our world.*

Jesus, my heart cries out for persecuted believers, too. Make them brave, and give them your powerful protection. I pray you will bring swift justice to those who want to destroy the innocent and those who carry your name.

Bind the power of Satan, and strengthen believers everywhere.

So many needs, Jesus, but you are adequate for every need. Your name is powerful, and your power is great. So it's in your name that I pray—and believe.

Amen.”