

# THE JOURNEY TO EMBRACE A MULTICULTURAL COMMUNITY

## Case Study

St. John Vianney Catholic Church in Orlando, Florida, is a *Next Generation Parish* that has experienced continual growth since its founding in 1958. In recent years, the parish welcomed a great influx of Hispanic Catholics joining the congregation. Hispanics and Latinos are now the largest racial or ethnic group of the area population, accounting for over 36% of the region surrounding the parish.

Engaging Hispanic Catholics is critical for the future of our faith. According to the USCCB's Hispanic Ministry at a Glance, Hispanics account for 71% of the growth of the Catholic population in the United States since 1960. [1] The National Study of Catholic Parishes with Hispanic Ministry reported in 2014, "Hispanic Catholics are about 40 percent of the approximately 78 million Catholics in the country, 25 percent of all Catholic parishes intentionally serve Hispanics." [2]

The Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate reported in 2016, "Some 29.7 million U.S. residents who self-identified as Hispanic or Latino were estimated to be Catholic, representing about 58.9 percent of the 50.5 million people of this race and ethnicity in the country in 2010." [3] These statistics represent a huge opportunity for hospitality and evangelization in the Catholic Church, which St. John Vianney Parish has fully recognized and embraced.

## THE OPPORTUNITY

With rapidly changing demographics accelerating in the 2010s, St. John Vianney Parish initially struggled to keep pace with the cultural shifts to properly integrate and welcome the Hispanic population into its community. "While parishioners, no matter their culture, have the same desires for their parish, how these desires are met differs from culture to culture. One cannot generalize thoughts, feelings, or desires of a particular culture, whether at the national or the local level. Each cultural community has its own history and ethos." [4]

The parish council at St. John Vianney attempted to address the task of welcoming this influx of new parishioners with love and faith but needed a guiding framework.



During this same time, the Diocese of Orlando began a collaboration with Catholic Leadership Institute to extend the opportunity to a chosen group of 12 parishes for the *Next Generation Parish* process – a four-year initiative aimed at cultivating vibrant, faith-filled communities. St. John Vianney was among the participating parishes, which was exactly what the parish needed to create a plan to address its changing dynamic and offer a warm, culturally sensitive reception to new members of the community.

## KEY LEARNINGS

The parish’s commitment to more effectively engage its multicultural community was a substantial undertaking. *Next Generation Parish* was a catalyst in establishing priorities and intention around embracing this change in demographics.

In 2018, St. John Vianney launched its effort to craft a pastoral plan focused on the opportunity to embrace its diverse community more effectively and leverage its strong heritage, successful school, and changing demographics. This work took place in the following four phases, with accompaniment by Catholic Leadership Institute, over a four-year period, which led the parish toward a “communion of cultures”:

### 1 Prepare

In this initial data-gathering phase, the focus is on orienting pastors, gathering data, administering the Disciple Maker Index (DMI) survey (CLI’s 75-question survey of over 600,000 responses on parish life), and interviewing key leaders to benchmark parish health – spiritual, organizational, financial, and sacramental. The ability of the Disciple Maker Index platform to sort and view data through the lens of demographics gave St. John Vianney Parish insight into how to plan for the future. (See graphs on pages 4-5.)



“Our parish has undergone a transformative journey thanks to the Next Generation Parish initiative. Without it, we would have faced considerable challenges, particularly in response to an inevitable shift in demographics. This experience empowered us to proactively address this change and make our decisions with careful intentionality. The deep passion I have for my Hispanic culture is met with a sense of fulfillment as I witness significant progress in serving our parish community. There is no clear model for integrating two cultures in parish life, and Catholic Leadership Institute has been instrumental in helping us navigate this intricate process. We eagerly anticipate the continued positive impact of initiatives like Next Generation Parish.”

- Stewart Marquina, St. John Vianney Parishioner (pictured below with his family)





## 2 Envision and Plan

The second phase commissions an Envisioning Team to clarify the parish vision, choose the top three priorities from data collected, and create SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound) goals, while coaching pastors and training and supporting staff/key volunteers. As a result of its work, St. John Vianney created this vision:

“St. John Vianney Catholic Church is a joyful and vibrant communion of cultures, united in the love of Christ, welcoming all in our desire to grow in faith, live with compassion and reach out in service.”

The parish’s pastoral plan identified the following priorities:

- **Hospitality:** Become a welcoming parish, creating an environment of inclusion for all.
- **Vibrant Liturgies:** Celebrate liturgies that deepen the desire for all parishioners to attend Mass regularly and to invite others.
- **Forming Missionary Disciples:** Grow discipleship through ongoing formation for the parish community resulting in a culture of stewardship throughout the parish.



Within *Next Generation Parish*, a parish plans and prepares for the future with a particular focus on four key factors:

- **Fostering spiritual maturity** and a plan for the discipleship of its members,
- **Sharing leadership** by maintaining a commitment to organizational health,
- **Offering a vibrant Sunday experience** with excellent hymns, homilies, and hospitality,
- **Embracing a missionary impulse** to go out and bring others to Jesus.

## 3 Implementation

This is the phase in which the work outlined in the plan begins. The parish assembles an Implementation Team to drive the plan forward and parish leaders align ministries with pastoral priorities, mobilize staff/key volunteers, train lay leaders in missionary discipleship, and create a culture of parish discipleship and evangelization.

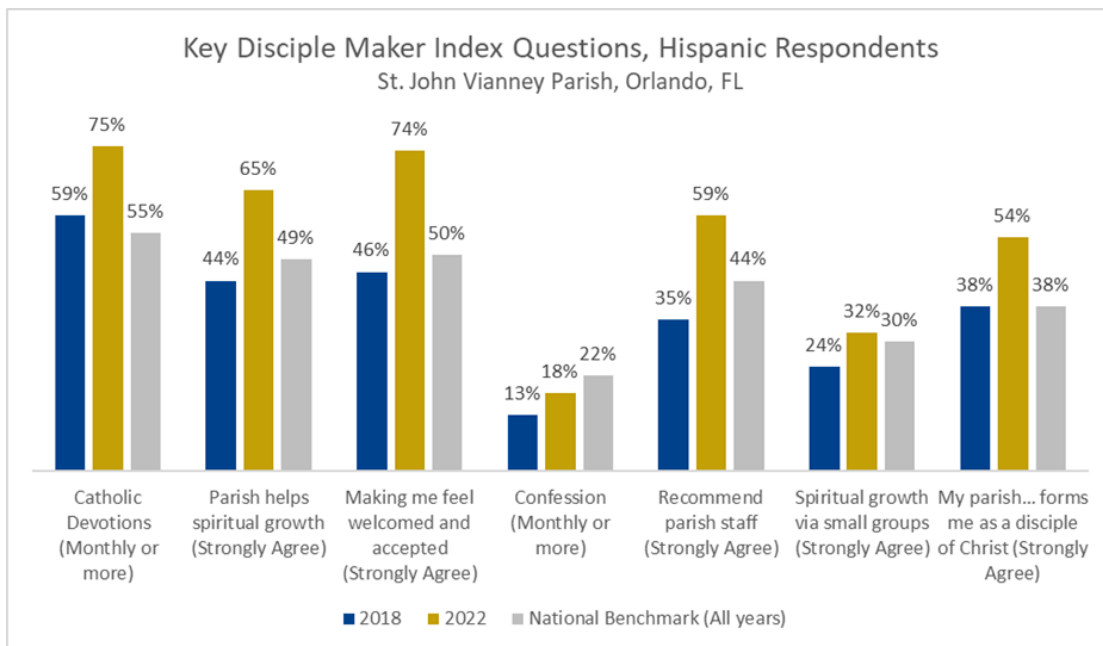


#### 4 Assess, Learn, and Grow

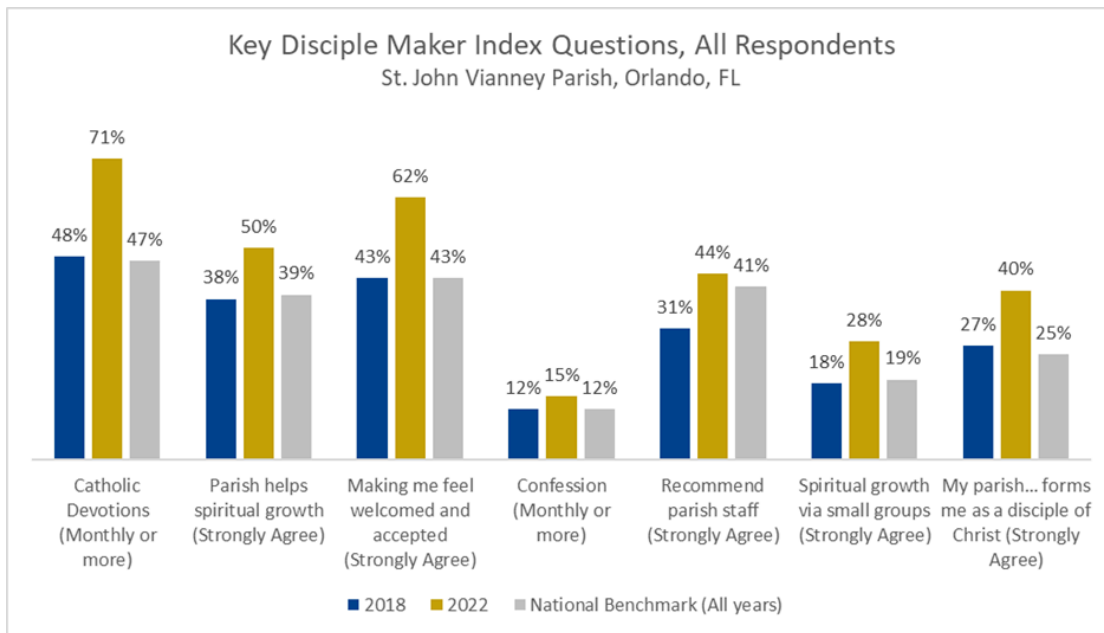
The final phase is focused on measuring impact, administering the Disciple Maker Index survey again for measurement and accountability; reassessing parish health, celebrating successes, learning from what did not work, refining the NGP journey, planning for the future, and analyzing and disseminating learnings.

The St. John Vianney pastoral plan (see appendix) was grounded in data measured by the Disciple Maker Index. It included specific percentage-related goals of fostering the parish’s sense of community. For example, one of the goals included “increasing the feeling of welcome in the parish by 12 [percentage points],” followed by action items and timeframes for St. John Vianney to implement and carry this out. As a part of the *Next Generation Parish* process, the DMI was administered once in 2018 and again in 2022; the results demonstrated the success of the parish’s priority of welcoming the growing Hispanic community. Within four years, the parish had surpassed its goal, with 62% of all parishioners feeling welcomed and accepted (an increase of 19 percentage points), and 74% of the Hispanic respondents specifically confirming that feeling (an increase of 28 percentage points), both well above the 50% national benchmark.

Utilizing tangible data, St. John Vianney was able to identify areas of opportunity and leverage its strengths, instilling a renewed sense of vitality within the parish.







One of the greatest findings for the future of the Church is that by intentionally welcoming and engaging a new demographic group to a parish, the entire parish community can be positively impacted. The DMI reflected the following progress for the entire parish:

- Increase of 23 percentage points in parishioners' participation in Catholic Devotions monthly or more
- Increase of 12 percentage points in the parish helping with spiritual growth
- Increase of 19 percentage points in feeling welcomed and accepted
- Increase of 3 percentage points in participation of Confession monthly or more
- Increase of 13 percentage points in recommending the parish staff
- Increase of 10 percentage points in spiritual growth via small groups
- Increase of 13 percentage points in the parish forming parishioners as disciple of Christ
- Catechumens progressed from 0 in 2013 to 4 in 2017 and 21 in 2022

Pastors of Hispanic communities rank “Access to Sacraments and Worship” as a top response to community values important to their parish. [5] Thus, for St. John Vianney, creating a communion of cultures united in Christ has helped the parish better understand and plan to work with the natural tension of blending languages and cultures most effectively.

As it looks forward, St. John Vianney is focused on keeping the strong momentum among Hispanics while working to increase scores among Caucasians, driving stronger integration, and better serving those from other cultures, including parishioners from the Philippines and Haiti.



“It was important for us to look at where we fell short, what we would do differently going forward, where we exceeded expectations, and what we would build on. What we have done is create a very vibrant Spanish community and very vibrant English-speaking community – and we are still working to do more every day to keep our vision moving forward.”

- Stewart Marquina, St. John Vianney Parishioner

## THE INVITATION

The successes of St. John Vianney, with the guiding support from Catholic Leadership Institute, offers valuable insights for any parish to consider. Below are some inspiring lessons that St. John Vianney Parish uncovered during the *Next Generation Parish* endeavor:

### Language Matters.

- Hispanic parishioners can struggle when their gifts, talents, and ideas are not fully understood or appreciated. This is often due to a lack of Spanish-speaking, culturally formed pastors and parish staff. Communication barriers prevent Hispanics from fully participating in the parish's life, including the parish council and finance council. Consequently, their gifts, talents, and ideas are not being fully engaged. [6]

Language is powerful – it can be a great divider, but with intentionality, language can also serve to unite and welcome. Strong communication can lead to collaboration, and ultimately greater communion.

- Many of St. John Vianney's new parishioners did not speak English as a second language. Spanish was the language spoken at home by nearly one-third of the households in the area, so the parish's commitment to bilingual communication through songs, hymnals, signage, and other parish information was a key aspect to foster a sense of welcome and participation within the parish.

Fr. Carlos Caban came to St. John Vianney as the pastor during the *Next Generation Parish* endeavor. As a Spanish speaker, he was able to help in these areas and concelebrate Mass with English-speaking priests to create unity.

This visible expression of making people feel welcome was a key first step for St. John Vianney.



“We also must let go of the assumption that all Hispanics speak Spanish. Young adults and second- or third-generation Hispanics often do not speak Spanish.”

“Exploring Vibrancy in a Multicultural Church,” Catholic Leadership Institute in collaboration with the Conference for Pastoral Planning and Council Development (CPPCD), 2024

### Embrace Cultural Heritage.

- The Hispanic community is diverse, encompassing a multitude of cultures and traditions. “Just because a person speaks Spanish, does not necessarily mean that they share the same heritage or cultural background as other Spanish speakers. In the U.S., Hispanics may come from Mexico, Puerto Rico, Cuba, or the Dominican Republic, as well as Central and South America. They often represent different countries, each with its own cultural version of their faith.” [8]

To foster authentic connection, it is important to be thoughtful, ask questions, and spend time learning the heritage. By embracing what resonates across diverse cultures, a parish can extend Jesus' love to others, which is what living the Gospel is all about.

- “Pastoral leaders are asked to pay attention to how newly arrived Hispanics are integrated into the regular customs of the parish. For example ... those of Mexican heritage may struggle to understand why parishioners are singing along with the choir. This is not their experience in Mexico, and it feels disrespectful. Another example mentioned was how puzzling it can be that there are no flowers laid at the Blessed Virgin’s altar. While these may seem like small things, they point to the fact that, at every level of the parish experience, care needs to be taken.”[9]

At St. John Vianney, in addition to regular bilingual Masses, the parish also takes great care to learn about the traditions and unique qualities of a Hispanic Mass. For example, at the end of their liturgies, the priests welcome everyone who is visiting and new. It is also extremely important in Hispanic culture to celebrate birthdays, milestones, births, and anniversaries, which create community among the entire parish community.

- Devotions are incredibly important to members of the Hispanic community, including those to Our Lady of Guadalupe, other Latino saints, and Advent Masses. All parishioners are invited to celebrate their Latin-American Catholic devotions. Recognizing these moments throughout the year not only meets Hispanic spiritual needs, but it also educates the Anglo community on how important these celebrations and devotions are in our Catholic faith.
- “Where inter-culturation is happening, pastors and parish staff are intentionally working towards inclusion and being culturally sensitive ... Pastors, staff, and parishioners alike talked about the energy and pastoral care needed to bring together diverse cultures.” [10] For example, English speakers should consider studying Spanish to communicate better and parishioners could host intentional gatherings to encourage intercultural conversation.



### **Leadership Training is Critical.**

- Spanish-speaking parishioners have “a deep desire to offer their gifts, talents, and ideas about how to improve the parish. A significant consequence of language barriers is that Spanish-speaking parishioners are unable to communicate to the pastor and staff what they need, or how to become involved in the life of the parish.” [11] Many of the Hispanic parishioners at St. John Vianney had the passion and commitment to undertake leadership positions in the parish but also lacked appropriate training.



- St. John Vianney has been very intentional to correct this. The parish participated in V Encuentro (Fifth Encounter) – a national ecclesial gathering focused on Church leadership. The parish also established a comprehensive Hispanic leadership team that seamlessly coordinates various ministries and groups within the parish. This team prioritizes the inclusion of Spanish-speaking parishioners in all key ministries and groups, fostering a sense of unity and representation.

### **Integration Works for the Common Good.**

- Engaging both the Anglo and Hispanic cultures together – whether at the parish or the school – can foster a beautiful sense of community. Offering a breadth and depth of bilingual parishioners and priests – beyond Welcoming Committees – in visible roles throughout the parish, both paid and volunteer, sends a message to the entire community that the parish seeks to involve everyone through the fabric of parish life.
- St. John Vianney’s affiliated parish school is the only dual-language Catholic school in the Diocese of Orlando. Recognizing this as a valuable opportunity for enhancing inclusivity, the parish took deliberate steps to make the school more accommodating. It expanded its team by hiring additional Spanish-speaking faculty and staff. Another significant aspect involved offering scholarship programs, with a particular focus on assisting Hispanic students in need. The parish emphasizes the importance of learning Spanish within the English-speaking community and transformed the Parent and Teacher Organization (PTO) into a bilingual group. Working together, the parish created opportunities for altar serving, choir, service opportunities, and events to link the parish and school that invited both English- and Spanish-speaking families and children.



“Having worked with the Catholic Latino community for many years, I am aware of the need for greater investment in leadership and faith formation of Latino lay leaders in our local Church. The fast growth of Hispanic Catholics in the US Church, which is estimated to account for 71% of the growth of the entire Catholic population in the United States since 1960, serves as an invitation to church leaders and leading organizations like Catholic Leadership Institute to not only serve but effectively equip key faith leaders to become missionary disciples in their families, communities, and parishes... CLI’s ministry is impacting entire multicultural communities of faith and setting the ground for them to grow and welcome new people as is expected in the upcoming years.”

-Allan Caballero, CLI Bilingual  
Ministry Leader

---

### **USCCB REPORT**

V Encuentro has been completed and the conclusions of this process have informed a national plan for Hispanic/Latino ministry. The USCCB’s report can be found at <http://vencuentro.org>



## CONCLUSION

St. John Vianney employed a carefully crafted pastoral plan, created with the help of Catholic Leadership Institute, to navigate shifting demographics within the parish. Mr. Marquina said: “The discipline and accountability of having a methodology throughout the planning helped. It gave us the forum and steps to achieve our goals.”

By recognizing the opportunity of shifting demographics, the parish identified the most important steps to take to be a more welcoming community. These learnings demonstrate the importance of taking the time to assess the ever-changing landscape in which Catholic parishes operate and respond with intentionality.

As parishes across the country encounter more diversity within their congregations and communities, it is important to consider how to offer truly welcoming hospitality and to be prepared to accompany a new, growing population through ecclesial integration.



*How is your parish welcoming, engaging, and respecting people from diverse cultures and ethnicities into your parish community?*

## DEFINITION:

“By (ecclesial) integration we mean that all (cultural/ethnic communities) are to be welcomed to our church institutions on all levels. They are to be served in their language when possible, and their cultural values and religious traditions are to be respected. Beyond that, we must work toward mutual enrichment through interactions amongst all cultures.”

– National Hispanic Plan for Pastoral Ministry, #4

To learn more about Next Generation Parish, visit:  
[www.catholicleaders.org/next-generation-parish](http://www.catholicleaders.org/next-generation-parish)



[1] <https://www.usccb.org/committees/hispaniclatino-affairs/hispanic-ministry-glance>

[2] <https://www.usccb.org/upload/lem-summit-2015-hispanic-ministry-in-catholic-parishes.pdf>

[3] <https://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/cultural-diversity/upload/Cultural-Diversity-Summary-Report-October-2016.pdf>

[4-11] “Exploring Vibrancy in a Multicultural Church,” Catholic Leadership Institute in collaboration with the Conference for Pastoral Planning and Council Development (CPPCD), 2024

## APPENDIX

### Saint John Vianney Parish Pastoral Plan

As of 10.17.18

#### PURPOSE STATEMENT

*To form missionary disciples who make Jesus Christ present in their world*

#### VALUES

PARISH FAMILY: - We are a communion of cultures living in fellowship as Disciples of Christ.

1. We actively strengthen the relationship among the members of the parish.
2. We provide opportunities that foster a bond between the families of the parish and the school.
3. We promote a welcoming atmosphere to all.
4. We treat all members of our church community with respect and kindness.

ENGAGEMENT- We believe that every member of the Parish actively participates in and shares Gospel values to be the Body of Christ.

Examples/Behaviors:

1. We provide multiple ways to share ministry and formational opportunities with parishioners.
2. We promote an atmosphere of hospitality encouraging parishioners to personally invite new members.
3. We encourage parishioners, especially new ones, to get more involved in parish activities and outreach.
4. We form ministry leaders who value "servant leadership" and mentor next generation leaders.

SPIRITUALITY - We believe that forming and continuously growing a personal relationship with Jesus Christ is essential to being Christian.

Examples/Behaviors:

1. We promote family prayer by providing support and tools for families to share within their home.
2. We encourage a deeper relationship with Christ through personal and communal prayer opportunities.
3. We provide impactful liturgies and sacraments that grow the spirituality of the Body of Christ.
4. We provide faith formation opportunities for all parishioners to increase their knowledge and love of Jesus

#### VISION

St. John Vianney Catholic Church is a joyful and vibrant communion of cultures united in the love of Christ, welcoming all in our desire to grow in faith, live with compassion and reach out in service.

#### PRIORITIES

1. HOSPITALITY: Become a welcoming parish, creating an environment of inclusion for all.

RATIONALE:

- People (parishioners) want to connect and belong to a community. Those who feel welcomed and accepted credit the parish with helping them grow spiritually and are more likely to recommend others to come to the parish.

Goal #1: Launch a comprehensive hospitality ministry by Advent 2019 that engages the community through phone, social media, on-campus (personal & environmental), and new member connections.



Goal #2: Increase Strongly Agree responses on DMI survey to “The parish makes me feel welcomed and accepted” from 43% to 60% by end of 2020.

2. VIBRANT LITURGIES: Celebrate liturgies that deepen the desire for all parishioners to attend Mass regularly and to invite others.

**RATIONALE:**

- The Eucharist is the Source and Summit of Christian Life. “Taking part in the Eucharistic sacrifice, which is the fount and apex of the whole Christian life, [the faithful] offer the Divine Victim to God, and offer themselves along with It.” *Lumen Gentium* 11. The Eucharist is the most nourishing substance of Christian discipleship and should be an act of love and enjoyment rather than an obligation or duty.
- Mass attendance has declined at SJV in the past few years. We believe that vibrant liturgies can bring people back to the church. Greater attendance will grow our parish physically and financially, and allow us to be better equipped to be missionaries.
- Dynamic liturgies will help educate our parishioners so they can understand that which they are celebrating, and live accordingly through active participation.

Goal #1: Increase weekend Mass attendance from 2000 to 2200 by end of 2020.

Goal #2: Increase Strongly Agree responses on DMI survey to “My parish offers vibrant and engaging Sunday Masses” from 37% to 50% by end of 2020.

3. FORMING MISSIONARY DISCIPLES: Grow discipleship through ongoing formation for the parish community resulting in a culture of stewardship throughout the parish.

**RATIONALE:**

- A “missionary disciple” is both a disciple and a missionary— a disciple being a follower of Jesus Christ and a missionary being one who goes out into the world on a mission.
- To be a disciple is to have Christ at the center of my life. Stewardship comes from a deep level of personal relationship as a disciple of Christ.
- DMI shows many opportunities to improve on areas related to spiritual growth and personal witnessing

Goal Area #1: Increase participation in Parish Ministries from \_\_\_ to \_\_\_ by end of 2020.

Goal Area #2: Increase Strongly Agree response on DMI survey to “Forming me as a disciple of Jesus Christ” from 27% to 40% by end of 2020 through comprehensive faith formation and stewardship programs and vibrant liturgies.

### The Virtuous Cycle of Stewardship

