

Feast of Epiphany | Homily
A Pastoral Vision to Develop a Pastoral Ministry Team
as a Resource for Our Beloved Epiphany Parish

January 4–5, 2025 (Isa 60:1–6 **Sung** | Eph 3:2–3, 5–6 | Matt 2:1–12)

Many of you have noticed that I often preach from my heart with notes that I have previously prepared. Today I decided to preach from my written text.

I want to focus the message today on the meaning of the phrase “My Pastoral Vision for Our Beloved Epiphany Community.” My vision has been inspired by this very Feast of Epiphany—also the founding name of our Parish. This Feast reminds me that God made himself known to humanity from the beginning of time.

In Isaiah, God’s glory came upon the land of Jerusalem, so that nations shared in Israel’s salvation (Isa 6:1–2). In Ephesians, God sent Paul to bring the good news to different groups of people (Eph 3:2).

In today’s Gospel, the Magi received knowledge of God’s manifestation in the person of the baby Jesus through his rising star.

But who are the Magi? Our Christian tradition tries to number them as **three** Magi. The story as Matthew tells it says nothing about their being “three in numbers” or even “three kings.” What Matthew tells us in today’s Gospel is theologically rich enough to stand by itself.

Matthew tells us that the Magi are plural in number, implying many people coming from the East and arriving in Jerusalem to pay homage to the newly born Jesus who is figured as the “Only King” of the Jews and the “Lord” of the whole universe. The Magi, according to Matthew, were **NOT** kings. Rather, they were ordinary people whose knowledge of God was regarded as “great”. The Magi were wise because they were open to God’s revelation regarding his Son Jesus.

Who are the Magi in our own times? I believe that the Magi of today are those who listen to God’s whispering voice then follow **their vision** to a place to worship God. The Magi are we all gathered today in this Worship Center—including the members joining us in this celebration via livestream, those in nursing homes, and those in hospitals. Also, the Magi are those who previously were members of this beloved Epiphany Community.

That said, I wish to make a connection to the vision for my own pastoral ministry. I will begin by calling “**the parish ministry team at Epiphany.**”

In response to the needs of the church in this third decade of the 21st century and echoing the call of Pope Francis to develop synodal processes as a model for the church of the future, this my pastoral vision will describe briefly the path for Epiphany Parish as we move into the future to be an intentionally synodal parish within the Archdiocese of Louisville.

The word “synod” implies “walking or journeying together”. A synodal church is envisioned by Vatican II. A synodal church is a listening church. A synodal church is an accompanying church. With these values in mind, the members of the parish ministry team at Epiphany must be evaluated, and work expectations must be restructured to implement these core principles of listening and accompaniment. Epiphany is blessed with a skilled and dedicated ministry team, and I am confident we all are up for the challenges this vision will hope to carry out.

My pastoral vision for our Epiphany community is to become an accompanying and attending church by empowering members to assume a greater share in and responsibility for parish ministries and services. To that end, the staff, whom I now prefer to call the parish ministry team must be resources to, rather than managers of, these entities. In a caring parish, members of the ministry team bring the towel and basin to the foot washers, they bring the baskets to those feeding the community’s hungers, and they bring the bandages to those dressing the wounds of the injured. In short, team members must be what Gregory the Great, upon becoming the Bishop of Rome in 590, considered himself to be a “*Servant to the Servants of God.*”

An accompanying parish recognizes that every baptized person is a member of the church of God and, therefore, deserves to be heard and accompanied with the care and dignity that God has bestowed on them. The ministry team members are the welcomers at the door, ushering in everyone who seeks an encounter with God through this community, rather than for them being the community’s gatekeepers. The work of the ministry team must be to make that welcome easy and available to all who come to us. We must make accessible the facilities and funds intended to serve the life of our members and others, especially those hurting in any way.

With this vision in mind, we will assess and redesign each previous staff position to promote the creation of a pastoral ministry team caring for parishioners. In addition to reviewing job responsibilities, we will consider the team schedule changes that would maximize accessibility to parishioners, aligning work schedules with the rhythms of the parish. This will include some evenings and weekends, when the community gathers for services and events. Flexible working patterns are necessary to make this pastoral vision a reality; and working collaboratively with parishioners will help create the accompanying and attending church described in this vision.

Like any worthwhile endeavor, bringing about this vision will require everyone's buy-in, effort, and commitment. As pastor, I will oversee the development and implementation of the processes we establish to become a parish consisting of parishioners walking with one another. In many cases, miracles start with a small change of attitude or a simple redirection of the mind.

In retrospect, let us just ask the questions: What would have happened if the Magi had **not** accepted God's revelation about the newly born Jesus? What would have been the situation, had the Magi **not** followed their vision to Bethlehem to worship God's Son?

Today's Feast of Epiphany reminds us that we have been given a vision to be here to worship God. And members of the pastoral ministry team, including myself, will be at the doors of Epiphany to welcome any one who enters. I look forward to hearing everyone's input and accompanying each of you on our pilgrimage toward our unity and fellowship with one another and with God and Jesus. Thank you.

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