

SAINT JOHN CATHOLIC CHURCH
Charleston, Mississippi

Mission Plan 2016-17

The mission of St. John parish continues to be the preservation of the Catholic Faith and Catholic parish life in the town of Charleston and in the surrounding counties of Tallahatchie and Yalobusha in north central Mississippi. The present state of the parish reflects the situation of the town of Charleston and the surrounding counties, especially those in the Mississippi Delta area. At St. John most of us are getting on in years and are, retired. The young people have all moved on attending college or in seeking employment in neighboring cities.

At present St. John has about twenty-five parishioners, mostly of retirement age, all are white, except for one African-American member. There are no Hispanic parishioners. The one Puerto Rican-Spanish family of five moved to another state last year. The few other Hispanics families that live in our area attend church at St. Mary in Batesville where there is a larger Spanish speaking community and Mass in Spanish. There are no Native Americans and no reservation land in this or neighboring counties. All the parishioners would be described as "middle class." The number has varied over the last few years but has fallen of late. One couple is planning to relocate but another older couple is hoping to move into Charleston and become members of the parish. The younger members have either moved away seeking employment or are now in college. Mass is offered each Sunday by a priest who comes from Grenada. It is usually well attended. Often there are visitors, especially in the summer and during the hunting season. A Communion Service is held each weekday morning and attended usually by two or three parishioners.

These statistics mirror the challenge to a Missionary Servant working as a deacon and resident ecclesial minister. The numbers are small but each individual is of great importance. In this coming year we will try to continue as we have in the past. Adult Religious Education programs will be offered seasonally and RCIA will be offered if someone shows interest in joining the Church.

Even with our small numbers, parishioners have a good reputation in helping in social and charitable projects. The local Food Pantry is supported by a monthly grant from the parish and the Missionary Servants. Some parishioners help with the distribution of the food. The parish joins with other churches in helping those in need, visiting and sponsoring Bingo one month of the year at the retirement center and in taking part in the town's development organization, in the hospital and retirement home association. All are encouraged to be apostolic and make the Catholic Church known and visible in the community. Since we are so small in number, parishioners often join with other churches and local clubs in community service programs. The upkeep of the church property always involves a number of parishioners.

T. G. Reuviel
5-31-16

There has been some interest shown by a few individuals in our Community. I've given out some of the Cenacle Family publications for them to read. I've given some thought to the possibility of starting an MCA in the parish, but with the average age being what it is and the small numbers, I doubt that this would be possible or practical. In any case we try to be apostolic and make the Church know. The Cursillo movement has been encouraged since I have been quite active in it, but so far only one man has made a weekend. But we will keep trying.

I continue helping in the neighboring parish of St. Mary in Batesville, being the catechist for the RCIA program, offering study classes and in being a member of the K of C. I try to keep my Community life alive in my daily prayer, attending funerals at Holy Trinity when possible, and in visiting and keeping in contact with the confreres in Camden, Tucker and Holy Trinity. At present I am one of the few active deacons in the Jackson Diocese so I am at times called to serve at the Cathedral and to assist the bishop at other ceremonies; something which I consider a great privilege. Happily six men will be ordained permanent deacons for the diocese in June.

As far as finances are concerned, the parish is stable. The people are very generous in Sunday and special collections. The diocese, each year, has been giving the parish a grant to help with expenses. The parishioners are very thoughtful of me and always concerned with my health and needs. No Community funds go into the parish except for some charitable help for individuals and some local programs.

As you can see with this plan, our hopes for the future, at least for the coming year, are positive. But one must be honest and frank: our numbers have been declining and the average age of all at St. John keeps increasing. I am now 80 years old, with a few health problems that are under control and able to keep quite active, but am noticing some decline in energy. If I should have to move on, I do not foresee another Missionary Servant replacing me in the future and I wonder if the Bishop of Jackson would consider keeping the parish open, closing it or making it a mission.

In any case our hopes and plan for the coming year are that, with God's help, we will be able to continue keeping Catholic parish life alive and in making our Faith known and respected in this part of Mississippi. We still hope that there will be a growth in numbers in our little parish, but in any case, we trust that God will bless us with His grace and peace and that unity and charity will flourish among us.