Per Aspera ad Astra
Overview of who we are:

Our mission is: *To live and communicate the love and values of Christ in the world around us, so that others in this world might become followers of Christ.*

The parish of Saint John XXIII has had a relatively short existence of 41 years in the neighborhood of Cole Harbour. During this time however, we have made our presence known and felt in the community. We regularly gather over 800 people for our weekend masses and we welcome many visitors during special celebrations of Holy Week / Easter and Christmas as well as for special sacramental celebrations.

Statistics:

- 33% of us are over the age of 65 and only 23% under the age of 45.
- 80% of us are married
- 60% of us do less than 2 hours of volunteer work per week

We have over 25 active ministries in our parish falling under 3 umbrellas
1. Liturgy & Worship
2. Evangelization
3. Social Outreach

Strengths of our parish as determined by responses to our Pastoral Letter discussions:
- willing spirit
- variety of talents
- eagerness & creativity
- strong leadership (in our Pastor and in various committee heads)
- time and resources to be able to do more

Weaknesses
- focused leadership
- our community of Colby Village
- aging congregation
- 20-80 rule
- lack of paid staff

Opportunities
- with little requirement for financial need in our community our focus can be spiritual needs
- another Catholic Church in close proximity with whom we can work together
- roles available to be filled in our parish now
- beautiful facilities
- many active and engaged committees who can do more with more resources
Section 1 – Mission

To be a community of missionary disciples we must…

*Bring the message of Christ’s love and mercy to the wider community by:*
  - Sharing the impact Christ has in our lives
  - Inviting our friends, family and neighbors to experience the Gospel
  - Creating spaces and places of hospitality and belonging

*Minister to those in need by:*
  - Visiting the sick, homebound and imprisoned
  - Serving the poor and disenfranchised
  - Mentoring and serving married couples
  - Offering healing and reconciliation for families suffering the pain of divorce
  - Recognizing and serving the unique needs of men, women, youth and children in our community

*Allow the Holy Spirit to empower our mission by:*
  - Prayerfully discerning and following God’s will in all our activity
  - Discovering the power of the Word of God
  - Celebrating our faith in joyful worship
Areas explored:
- what we do currently
- what did we do
- why did we stop doing it,
- is room to expand or grow in the ministry
- is there interest in doing more in this area
- additional feedback that was provided

Key Messages:
- there is a lack of focused leadership in some areas
- people seem to want to do more but feel unfocused
- there is a recognition that more can be done and should be done and people are willing to do it, but they do not know where to start or have the contacts in place
- there is more being done than most people realize
- there are a lot of informal and formal activities taking place
- groups seem to be ‘tight knit’ and take care of ‘their own’ very well, but there is a large part of the congregation who may be outside or on the fringe of these groups
- people are generally unaware of everything the parish does and what can be offered
- events that are well organized, well planned and well executed have a high success rate

ME25 Parish statistics
- in our parish 60% of our parishioners volunteer less than 2 hours per week
- 59% of our parish is over the age of 55, with 11% over the age of 75
- 82% of our parish is married or living as a couple, while 18% is single (single/divorced or widowed)
Conclusions and Suggestions for moving forward:

Bring the message of Christ’s love and mercy to the wider community by:

1. **Visiting the sick** - suggest that cards (or a notice in the bulletin) be created to advise people that we have volunteers who’s ministry it is to visit those at home or in the hospital and to bring communion to them and to encourage people to take advantage of this ministry. It is suggested that Pastoral Care ministries be highlighted in the bulletin from time to time explaining who they are and what they offer.

2. **Witness talks** – these should continue with an aim to encourage a cross-section of parishioners to participate. The suggestion of inviting a Confirmation student to share their witness was presented.

3. **‘Why am I Here?’** – these letters should be re-encouraged with an aim to have one letter per month shared with the congregation. Visitations to ministries by Father would encourage participation in this sharing. These letters are a great testimony and as well, allow us to get to know one another on a more personal level.

4. **Sharing of Witness testimonies in committee meetings** – this is similar to the ‘Why am I Here?’ concept but with the added twist to include ‘...and sharing my talents with xxx committee’.

5. **Youth Group** - inviting others to share in our faith seems to be most easily and successfully done within the youth population as they are open to inviting their friends to join them in Youth Group activities. No data is available to confirm the success rate of this phenomenon, but the perception is that this is working and there are witness stories to evidence a few cases. The notion of inviting someone to explore our faith seems to be more easily done when they are invited to activities that are apart from mass. Engagement in the social aspect of the parish seems to be a precursor to someone taking the step to join us in celebration.

6. **12 step program** - Deacon Larry has proposed he would like to put together a 12 step program to teach people how to share their faith in personal witness. This will be a long term project to pull together, but will be a useful tool when ready.

7. **Hospitality** – we have taken great strides in the past number of years to become a more hospitable parish and it seems to be working. We have greeters who welcome parishioners and visitors as they arrive. The greeters represent a cross section of the parish with the involvement of the 1st communion class and the confirmation class. One small area that was noted where we may fall short is welcoming families for baptism when they are not regular members or our parish. Clarification for the families of what to expect and where to sit could be beneficial (along with some protocol of the mass with respect to photo taking may be helpful). The new parishioner luncheon appears to be a fantastic success and is enjoyed by all who attend. Having a small intimate gathering allows for real personal interaction. It was suggested that Fr Irek or another designate visit all ministries to remind them that hospitality is part of our mandate and to encourage ministries to become open and welcoming.
Minister to those in need by:

1. **Support for those with ill family members** - It was also felt that support for those dealing with family members who are ill is required. No suggestions for how this would unfold at this time. Praying for the sick needs to be more than just reading a list of names in the intentions at mass. It is suggested that this directed Adoration take place again, perhaps one of the Advent Adorations and possibly every 3rd Adoration outside of Advent and Lenten seasons.

2. **Flowers during Lent and Advent** – every year we adorn the sanctuary steps with beautiful flowers during Christmas and Easter and at various other celebrations, these flowers are donated in memory of loved ones by parishioners. It was suggested that after the Christmas and Easter celebrations that perhaps these plants could be shared with those who are homebound instead of leaving them on the altar or placing them in the ‘plant graveyard’ to die. Some of the plants may find their way to the gardens, but possibly we can consider sharing this with others who are unable to come to the church. It is hoped that those who donated the flowers would be supportive of this idea as the flowers would remain for the Christmas season or for an appropriate time after Easter and then we can share a part of the church with those at home.

3. **Cards to shut-ins** – the CWL is very good about remembering their members at Christmas and other holidays by sending appropriate cards and greetings. It is possible that perhaps this can be a project that the younger children in the parish can undertake.. they can be asked to create a Christmas card (birthday card, Easter greetings, Valentines etc…) and the cards can be shared with those who visit the sick.

4. **Coordinator** - Someone to take on the role of coordinator to organize the volunteers and to keep up to date with new needs

5. **Correctional Services Ministry** – this previous ministry ran for approximately 8-9 years with a dedicated group of men who visited the Correctional Centre regularly. This ministry had a very powerful impact on those involved and the KoC received a national award for this work. Due to changing circumstances this ministry dissolved and it is perceived that the opportunity to get back into this ministry at the correctional centre may be difficult. Possibly an interested group of volunteers can work with regional services to share their ministry to ‘half way’ houses or other similar facilities. Care must be undertaken by anyone wishing to participate in this ministry.

6. **Pastoral Care Ministry** – much can be done in this area, but strong leadership and focus is required to bring this ministry to all that it can be. Currently 12 people participate in this ministry in an ‘official capacity’ but they are simply ‘filling holes’ while not being proactive in their approach in this area. Within our community there are many identified and unidentified people who are lonely, grieving, widowed, sick, suffering in one capacity or another and would benefit greatly from a simple visit, to a meal to a phone call. Isolation is a very dark space and an extended hand out to individuals would be certainly welcomed by most. It was thought it would be nice to have some materials to share with this group – prayer cards, bibles, crosses, cards, etc.. something tangible that people can hold on to). Included in this area would be support for family members who are dealing with / living with sick or in some way incapacitated individuals. Prayer for these individuals is key, but sometimes more is required. Suggestions on how to assist in this area at this time have not been decided upon.
7.) **Donating needed items** - People respond very willingly and eagerly to request for tangible items. The St Vincent de Paul Society at Christmas time is able to put together over 70 hampers of food, the Birthright Shower that happens in May is well supported as are other drives initiated by the CWL and the KoC in support of various causes. People are willing to donate items regularly when it is clear what the need is.

8.) **Outreach programs** - such as Bingo at the NS Hospital and serving meals at Hope Cottage are primarily activities of the CWL and KoC although the volunteers have been faithful to this ministry for many, many years the increased average age of the members is making these commitments more and more difficult and in jeopardy of demise. Opening up these opportunities to the parish congregation at large would encourage participation from a wider base and potentially increase membership in these aging groups.

9.) **Programs targeted at various groups** - are few in our parish and in the local community. A few programs targeted to support married couples have happened in the past, and only 1 program recently has taken place for married couples hosted by Dave MacKinnon and his team. Programs targeted at other groups in the parish are fewer with the exception of the Seniors who have developed card socials and quarterly luncheons and other activities and is attracting many seniors of our parish and in some cases the neighborhood.

10.) **Separation or divorce** - for those experiencing or have experienced divorce or separation, no structured support is available.

11.) **Follow-Up care** – once a parishioner has suffered the loss of a family member, and in particular if they are home alone, they tend to unintentionally slip off the radar of our care. The majority of the parishioners who have suffered the loss of a spouse are elderly and now on their own for perhaps the first time in their life. Adjusting to their new reality leaves many feeling alone and lonely. Visitation, phone calls or care in this area may be welcome.

12.) **Events targeted at various groups** – ie married couples, youth, those seeking adult formation, renewal of marriage vows, mass remembering our deceased, blessing of the unborn, are typically well attended as we have a reputation of putting on quality programs and events.
Allow the Holy Spirit to empower our mission by:

1.) Intercessory Prayer Line – This ministry needs to be promoted more for 2 reasons – it is a ministry that ALL can participate in on their own terms and in their own time, there are no meetings and what a gift that can be provided to others at no cost, but simply time. This would encourage more parishioners to become connected with the parish by offering their gifts in such a special way. As well, for those who wish to submit prayer requests it would be nice for them to understand a bit more about how the process works. Although Sandy and Annette are faithful in having a display at the Ministry Fair, only a very small percentage of people visit the fair and an even smaller number would engage anyone at the table.

2.) Small Group formation – these groups allow participants to study scripture passage with a few others and discuss thoughts and questions. In small groups it could be extended to showing of religious movies and programs in parishioner’s homes to promote discussion of the word and our faith.

3.) annual retreat for parish leaders – this would allow for support of other leaders in our parish and gives us the opportunity to support and work together and collaborate and ultimately grow our faith community of St John XXIII

4.) Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament – First Friday Adoration is becoming a tradition in our parish, however far too few people are taking advantage of this opportunity.

5.) Study programs in the parish and Diocese – Bible Study, Women’s Faith Group, Alpha, Koinonia, Diploma in New Evangelization, Youth Alpha, Edge, LifeTeen
Section 2 – Community

To be a community of missionary disciples we must…

*Share Christ’s love and mercy with one another by:*
- Coming together in the Eucharist as members of one family
- Hearing, and acting on, the Word of God
- Praying with and for one another outside of the Liturgy
- Creating small communities to serve and support one another
- Celebrating the sacraments with joy, intentionality and reverence

*Organize our community around our mission by:*
- Showing and offering consistent care for the community
- Being good stewards of our financial and material resources
- Building awareness of opportunities to get involved
- Recognizing the hectic pace of today’s world
- Using our gifts and talents to support our pastors
- Using technology to support our community, mission and formation

*Participate in the life of the universal church by:*
- Fostering a relationship of mutuality and accountability among parishes, regions and diocesan offices
- Sharing resources and best practices across the diocese
- Building on our strengths by developing partnerships with nearby parishes

“The Simple Path
Silence is Prayer
Prayer is Faith
Faith is Love
Love is Service
The Fruit of Service is Peace”
— Mother Teresa
Conclusions and Suggestions for moving forward:

Share Christ’s love and mercy with one another by:

1.) *Pray for Me cards* – these cards are shared by the 1st communicants and those preparing for confirmation with members of the congregation as part of their sacramental preparation. These cards are becoming coveted by parishioners who are so willing and excited to pray for our youth.

2.) *Small Groups* – these groups form to discuss scripture and scripture readings but many of these groups are turning into long term friendships and gatherings and are providing support and encouragement to their members.

3.) *Greeting our neighbors before mass* – prior to the initiating of this small gesture very often we did not connect with the people we sat around each week. Looking someone in the eye and saying a brief ‘Hello!’ or ‘Welcome’ is very welcoming and changes the atmosphere in the church.

4.) *Name Tag Sunday* – we get to know each other and we begin to miss them when they are not in church, we know their name and they become ‘friends’, we pray for our friends and care about their well-being.

5.) *Committees* – many committees become tight knit groups, which has its pros and cons, but the ‘pro’ is that we begin to know each other on a deeper level and we begin to pray together at the beginning and end of our meetings and we become a tighter knit community as we begin to know each other on a more personal level.

6.) *Intercessory Prayer Line* – this is an under-utilized committee who is there simply to pray for us outside of the structured liturgy. A small team coordinates hundreds of prayer requests and shares them with the team so many people are praying for those they don’t even know. It is recommended that this ministry be highlighted in the bulletin as many may not be aware of its existence. There is no limit to the number of volunteers this ministry can accommodate and certainly no limit to the prayers they are willing to offer.

7.) *Joyful Celebration of the Sacraments* – it was felt that there was a small percentage of parishioners who avoid the masses where a sacrament is being celebrated, but those who attend experience the joy of the church welcoming new members at various stages and extending care for those who have gone to their eternal rest. Parishioners need to be reminded of the joy of celebrating the sacraments and encouraged to attend and show their support and experience the joy.
Organize our community around our mission by:

1. **Outreach to the Community** – our parish is blessed as someone only need raise a request for assistance for a project and the parish responds very generously. Our St Vincent de Paul committee is able to service the community in so many ways due to generous support of food donations to keep their shelves full, Christmas hampers and financial assistance for those in need. When a specific tangible need is raised parishioners respond quite generously.

2. **Opportunities to become involved** – it was generally felt that perhaps we are not as open as we should be or think we are. When a committee has a need they will generally turn to someone they already know, who is typically someone already volunteering in the church. It was felt that some parishioners may shy away from invitations to become involved for fear of their ‘yes’ turning into a long term commitment. It was suggested our web page have a button ‘One Person, One Job’ whereby parishioners could volunteer for a single ‘job’ in the parish without fear of a long term commitment, this would encourage those parishioners who may not be able to commit to monthly committee meetings or not yet be ready to step forward.

3. **Gifts and Talents** – we have many parishioners who generously share of their talents, but many more are unknown, perhaps specific requests for specific jobs could be included in the bulletin from time to time. I.e. – we need parishioners who can sew albs, we need a volunteer who can paint. people would be willing to share something they are comfortable doing but may not realize the need or that their skill is valuable. The *Living Your Strengths* program needs to be promoted more and parishioners encouraged to attend to find out what they are good at, this program is a gift to parishioners and more should be encouraged to take part in it, aside from those already involved in ministry.

4. **Support for our Pastor** – our parishioners regularly pray for our Pastor and this should be encouraged, but perhaps they can offer more. Our pastor is responsible for over 800 members of our parish and many more who seek his guidance and counseling. When volunteers are sought for special celebrations such as the ‘Year of the Priest’, Father’s 25th anniversary of ordination, the celebration of his anniversary in May this year, volunteers are generally more plentiful then required. How else do we support our pastor.. perhaps he has to let us know… Parishioners will step up willingly and plentifully.

5. **Technology** – our parish has a Facebook account, a Twitter account, a Webpage and email availability for the bulletin. All things required of an entity in 2015. With added resources to this team it was felt these avenues could be enhanced. Overhead slides before mass are very popular and a great way to share information, assistance at some masses is required so that all masses enjoy this benefit. An online calendar for our webpage is in creation and will be useful for committees and to show people all that is going on in our parish.

Participate in the life of the universal Church by:

It was generally felt that we were lacking in this area. We have a neighboring parish very close to us and we have not come together with them in many years. In our Dartmouth-Eastern Shore Region the parishes have come together to offer reconciliation services in Advent and Lent. However when it comes to volunteers for Diocesan events, Saint John XXIII is always very well represented.
Section 3 – Formation

To be a community of missionary disciples we must…

_Grow as disciples of Jesus Christ by:_
- Being part of a small Christian community within the larger community of faith
- Learning and teaching the faith in our families and in our homes
- Inviting Christ into each new stage of life
- Growing an ever deeper knowledge and appreciation of our Catholic faith
- Praying personally and daily
- Seeking spiritual direction to discern life decisions

_Empower disciples for leadership by:_
- Praying that God will help us all to take up the challenge of leadership in our own lives
- Participating in the sacramental life of the church
- Creating small support groups for leaders
- Helping people identify and use their gifts and charisms
- Offering ongoing leadership training and formation

_Empower disciples for service by:_
- Praying for our leaders, particularly our pastors
- Praying for vocations to the religious life and priesthood
- Forming leadership teams from various vocations
- Providing specialized human resources for sensitive pastoral needs (confessors/counselors, parochial administration, etc.)
- Having clear roles and expectations for all members for our community (Deacons, Priests, Episcopal Vicars, Lay People, Diocese, Region, Committees, etc)
- Ensuring continuity of leadership and smoother transition of pastors
- Serving local communities with competent staff and consultants

_Celebrate the Sacraments with joy, intentionality and reverence by:_
- Being properly disposed and formed to celebrate the sacraments, when the person is ready and not before
- Freely choosing the sacraments as individuals or families
- Providing particular formation for catechists
- Walking with the newly initiated and those discerning or entering new vocational stages
- Assisting those who are sick and standing by them at the end of their journey of life
- Identifying, accompanying and encouraging those who seek to serve the Church as responsible lay leaders or in the religious life or ordained ministry
Grow as disciples of Jesus Christ by:

1.) **Small Groups** – the early church began as people meeting at each other’s homes. It is here that we feel most comfortable and those gathering with us are ‘friends’. Small groups fulfill the need an allow for personal sharing and reflection and questioning of the meaning of scriptures. Small groups are becoming more popular and are a non-threatening way for people to question their faith and share questions with others.

2.) **Lenten Brochure** – it was felt this was a unique and positive way to share ideas with parishioners about praying every day and suggestions for other various ways to encourage people to grow in their faith. It was suggested this year that the brochure could take its direction from the pastoral letter and the ideas and suggestions could reflect the direction of the parish.

3.) **Personal** – it was generally felt that this area was generally very much a personal faith journey of each and every member of our parish and we may not know what people are doing in this area.

Empower disciples for leadership by:

1.) **Leadership support** – it was suggested that an annual meeting (at least annually) be setup in the parish for leaders of all ministries so they can share their plans and goals for the year and it was hoped that ministries could come together to support each other for common initiatives and it would encourage all ministries to work together towards our common goal. It would also be a nice way to say thank you to those who have stepped up and offered their time and talent in these important roles.

2.) **Leadership succession** – it was suggested that all ministries look for those who can be encouraged to learn more about the ministry and assume a leadership role so transitioning leadership roles would be smoother for all. Having succession plans would encourage people to potentially come forward as they will be ‘taught and shown’ what the leadership role is all about instead of coming into it ‘cold’.

3.) **Leadership training** – most ministries work as autonomous units and not knowing what is expected of them in the larger picture being that of the parish. Training and support can easily be encompassed into the Leadership meeting (as suggested in item #1). Some leaders do not know what resources are available to them or simply who the right people in the parish are to contact with questions.

Empower disciples for service by:

1.) **Clear roles for all members of the community** – when people know what is expected of them they are better able to meet the needs and expectations of the parish. Once a direction has been established committees and leaders can work towards the common good.

2.) **Praying for vocations** – to mark ‘The Year of Consecrated Life’ adoration in February was directed towards praying for our Pastor and those discerning a call to the priesthood and religious life. This adoration was one of the best attended Adoration evenings. This was a ‘one-time’ event that certainly resonated with the congregation so this is something perhaps we should look at focusing on again.
Celebrate the sacraments with joy, intentionality and reverence by:

1.) **Formation for catechists** – catechists come forward to share their faith with the youth of our parish, we should be offering them support and training to ensure they are well-equipped to pass on the faith. Sessions are offered by our DRE annually and attendance is less than stellar, we have to look at ways to encourage catechists to take advantage of these workshops.

2.) **Accompanying those who are sick** – those who are sick and those family members who are enduring the pain of losing loved ones need our support during the journey and after as they adjust to their new reality. After a loss those left behind need support and may suffer from loneliness and isolation, we should not forget these members of our parish an much can be done with little effort… a phone call, a card, a smile, a cup of coffee, the offer of a ride to mass or an invitation to come to mass… all gestures that can mean a lot to those in isolation. We have volunteers in the Companion Care program that could be better utilized and more could be welcomed into this ministry.

3.) **Encouraging those who seek to serve the church** – we don’t often enough encourage those who express a call to serve in particular ways in our church, sharing what options are out there for those discerning religions life, ordained ministry or lay leadership roles, most don’t even know what their options are. It was felt that the Salvatorians offer a Lay Apostolate, we should be made aware of what this is and how it works and what it means to be a part of a ‘group’ like this. We are blessed to have a Pastor who is of an order where this is available; however, this has not been presented as an opportunity for the parishioners.