

**St. Vincent de Paul Parish**

120 North Front Street

Baltimore, MD

**Annual Report – FY2023-2024**

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**CONTENTS**

1. **Overview** **2**
2. **Internal Operations, Spiritual and**

 **Material Health of the Community 2**

 Finance **3**

 Facilities Stewardship 4

Parish Council Work and Initiatives                    4

1. **Community Engagement, Service & Outreach 5**

Hosting Events and Outreach 6

Committee Ministries and Service 6

1. **Conclusion 7**

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1. **Overview**

This FY 2023-2024 report illustrates the St. Vincent de Paul Parish community's dedication to securing its future and legacy. Focused on internal governance, community engagement, and structural improvements, the Parish Council guided a committed journey marked by resilience and adaptability, ensuring both spiritual and organizational stability.

In this past year, every effort was made to ensure that the parish’s commitment to synodality was deepened. Discernment and dialogue processes were designed to promote deep listening, understanding and journeying together.

While faced with the challenges and engagement related to the Seek the City process and initial announcements of possible merger and closure, St. Vincent’s dedicated itself to three critical priorities during the year:

1. Preparing for the Future
2. Revitalization of Our Governance, Structures and Physical Environment
3. Deepening our Commitment to Synodality

The Council was able to guide the community in these priority areas as the parish remained steadfast and grounded in being a Eucharistic community living in word, sacrament and service.

The Parish remains financially strong and stable and has been diligent in ensuring the maintenance and upkeep of the church and property when and as permitted by the Archdiocese.

The Parish Council has successfully revised its constitution and established by-laws, addressing a long-standing need for formal governance and enhancing organizational stability.

Challenges regarding security and safety around the church environment continue and there were several incidents involving threats of violence and actual violence outside and within the Church. Though complex the Pastor, staff and Parish Council recognize this as a top priority to be addressed and recognize that these issues can be an obstacle to increasing membership and attendance.

Perhaps the greatest challenge has been maintaining trust in the Seek the City process and outcomes and consequently membership in the face of closure. It has not been easy to maintain confidence in the opportunity given to St. Vincent’s to work with St. Leo’s for a year or more to determine the best way forward for our parish communities, given that the public announcement of closure of St. Vincent’s has not been corrected by the Archdiocese. Despite this the parish is resiliently moving forward in earnest in dialogue and exploration with St. Leo’s.

1. **Internal Operations, Spiritual & Material Health of the Community**

This year brought renewed energy to our liturgical, social action, and service efforts, deepening our parish’s commitment to being a Eucharistic community. Following COVID recovery, parishioners re-engaged actively, supporting initiatives such as 'Restoring Creation,' a multi-phase environmental project aimed at revitalizing the church grounds and park.

Despite the emotional and traumatic impact of the announcement of proposed merger and closure of the parish, community members have continued unfailingly to support the parish financially, spiritually and materially with their time and efforts. The cycle of life naturally meant the loss of some of our beloved parishioners, we continue to see slow but steady growth and engagement of new young families and other young adults in the parish.

Liturgy and being a Eucharistic community are central to the very existence and life of the parish community and is what makes the community hopeful for the future. Lay participation in liturgy is vibrant and inclusive of at least 1/3-1/2 of community members. Celebrating All Saints and All Souls Days together in the Mexican tradition of commemorating the Day of the Dead continues annually and is cherished by the community.

Many St. Vincent parishioners have been supportive of and active in the “Discerning Deacons Circle”, attending virtual meetings and prayer services. Last year St. Vincent’s hosted a “Tea Time” with members of 5 different faith communities, including St. Leo’s. While enjoying a lovely tea together, they read and delved into scripture stories of women who had server their communities as a reminder of the centrality of women in the church. A special liturgical celebration of the feast of St. Phoebe in 2023 was planned in collaboration with the Committee on Church Reform and another is being planned for this year that will be inclusive of other parishes.

The Archdiocese Seek the City process and reactions to the proposal of a merger with St. Leo’s and closure of St. Vincent’s demanded a great deal of time and attention from the Parish Council itself and compelled over 25 parishioners to participate in various meetings organized by the Archdiocese.

The Executive Committee of the Council met with Bishop Lewandowski several times. While there is still a long way to go, those robust conversations were fruitful in making some progress in mutual understanding of how the Archdiocese views St. Vincent’s versus the reality of we are and our vision.

**Finance**

St. Vincent’s remains financially robust, with a surplus in operating accounts despite minor shortfalls in Offertory Collections. Total revenue for FY2024 was $905,600, and significant capital improvements, such as bell tower repairs, were undertaken with the support of dedicated funds and donations.

Both the Council and the Finance Committee regularly review the financial status and actual results compared to approved budget.  FY2024 Offertory Collections fell very slightly short of budget, but overall revenue was substantially above budget, and attendance grew from 2023.

St. Vincent’s benefitted from an especially large rebate from the Archdiocese for the Annual Appeal for Ministries, which is being donated to City Springs School and St. Francis Academy. Through its endowment the parish continues to provide scholarships to students in need attending Mother Mary Lang. Overall, there is a solid surplus in core operating accounts.

                        FY2024 Operating                       FY2024 Charitable

Total Revenue                                    $905,600                                         $129,000

Total Expenditures                            $654,300                                         $155,000

Surplus before non-op revenue

and capital expenses                $251,300                                        -$26,000

Monitoring the effects of inflation and the impact on staff, it was determined that a 3% increase in lay staff salaries in FY25 is warranted to continue to ensure that staff are compensated fairly.  Except for the addition of a part-time communications aide in FY2025, our staffing levels will remain the same as FY2024.  We will once again have a JVC position in 2025.

Our social outreach programming continues to be a critical part of our mission as described in other parts of this report.  Thanks to the commitment of so many parishioners, we have a substantial base of financial resources to deploy toward these critical ministries.

 **Facilities**

There is a continued focus on critical physical plant needs, given the age of the facilities.  Repairs of the bell tower were undertaken in FY2024, utilizing resources from the St. Vincent de Paul Church Historic Trust, generous donations from parishioners restricted to that purpose, and St. Vincent’s own operating funds.   Roof repairs were started, and repair and reinstallation of the Stations of the Cross in the church was completed.

  **Parish Council Work and Initiatives**

Council continued to work on improving the work of the Council itself and the active participation of Council members.

**Governance Improvements**

With a ratified constitution, the Parish Council continues to embrace consensus-driven decision-making and is enhancing representation through six foundational committees. This structure not only ensures active council member participation but strengthens our shared commitment to church reform and inclusive governance.

The new constitution changed the timing of Parish Council elections to September so as not to be hampered by other important events happening in May and June and confirmed the addition of one new “foundational committee” – Committee on Church Reform. There are six foundational committees (Finance, Liturgy, Education & Enrichment, Facilities, and Social Action) whose chairpersons are members of the Parish Council. A draft of the constitution was shared with the entire community for feedback and suggestions. The Council adjusted the document in consideration of the community feedback. It was then ratified by the congregation.

**Preparing for the Future**

There are several priority processes and actions involving the Council and the community of St. Vincent’s.

* First, was engagement with the Archdiocese on the Seek the City proposals.
* Second, was and is engagement with St. Leo’s in an exploration and discernment process on the relationship of the two parishes and the ways in which we as church may serve the city of Baltimore.
* Third, is St. Vincent’s own internal discernment about its future and how the parish wants to move forward to achieve its vision.

**Seek the City**

As highlighted above St. Vincent’s community was fully engaged in the process and in responding to the Archdiocese. In addition to attendance at Archdiocesan meetings, and several Parish Council Executive Committee meetings with the Bishop, many parishioners wrote insightful and compelling testimonies justifying the continuation of St. Vincent’s as a place of worship.

Parish Council meetings were open to all parishioners so that all voices could be heard as we prepared a formal response to the Archdiocese. Four “Conversations in the Spirit” sessions were organized for parishioners to pray and discuss the case to be presented. Almost all parishioners attended.

The Council had an extraordinary session/retreat to determine the focus of our response and letter. A comprehensive letter was presented to the Archdiocese responding to the proposal to close that advocated for the Church’s continuity. It stressed St. Vincent’s sacramental life, evangelizing potential, service to the poor and homeless, and being well-resourced. It reflected the resilience and tenacity of the parish and its service to the community.

With the suspension of the decision on merger and closure, St. Vincent’s engagement in the Seek the City process and ongoing discussions with St. Leo’s reflects our community’s openness to discernment and collaboration. With regular meetings, open parish dialogues, and active participation, we are laying the groundwork for a potential partnership that respects and uplifts the strengths of both parishes.

At the same time, St. Vincent’s internal discernment in planning for the future, includes research and planning for alternatives should the Archdiocese decide to close the parish.

**Collaboration with St. Leo's:** Initiatives to foster dialogue and explore potential collaborations with St. Leo's were undertaken, signifying a commitment to build relationships and strengthen the Catholic church's presence in the area. Formal and informal meetings, social events and attendance at liturgies have been happening for several months, including attendance at Parish Council meetings.

**St. Vincent’s Task Force on the Future:** A Task Force, including a representative mix of Council, staff and non-council community members was formed to guide a strategic planning process. The mandate is to ensure a process that will involve the entire community. It is charged with addressing three critical themes:

* 1. **Retention and Evangelization:** Strategies to retain and attract parishioners.
	2. **Service to the Poor and Homeless:** Continuing the mission to serve and make a difference in the lives of the community’s most vulnerable.
	3. **Radical Inclusivity:** A focus on inclusivity as a guiding principle that underpins other initiatives
1. **Community Engagement, Service & Outreach**

Our community remains deeply committed to social action, evident in initiatives such as racial equity education, environmental justice, and outreach to underserved populations. Through programs like 'We Have a Dream – A World Without Racism,’ The Resource Exchange, and Friday night dinners for the poor and homeless, St. Vincent’s is recognized as a pillar of advocacy and support, actively addressing the needs of both parishioners and the broader community.

St. Vincent’s ALIVE initiative for outreach to the LGBTQ+ community is one aspect of being a welcoming parish. Many volunteers are active in early childhood development, tutoring young children, in a nearby school. Through the devoted service of many parish volunteers, the Parish’s long-established Emergency Services ministries continue to assist our neighbors with a “Food Pantry” providing groceries, and with clothing for men. Poor Box donations provide critical eviction prevention, utilities payments, sober house stays, emergency travel aid, and other invaluable financial assistance to well over 100 individuals and their families each year.

St. Vincent’s outdoor space always other social ministries to outreach and provide service to the poor and homeless at its doorstep.

**Hosting Events and Outreach**

* With the leadership of the Green Team, St. Vincent’s is planning a celebration of creation in honor of the feast of St. Francis of Assisi, inviting the surrounding community to an outdoor liturgy, blessing of the animals and other activities related to the environment for family fun and learning.
* The Social Action Committee has been active in getting out the vote campaigns.
* Preparations are underway for St. Vincent’s to be part of “Doors Open”, A Citywide Festival of Architecture and Neighborhoods.

**Committee Ministries and Service**

Several of St. Vincent De Paul’s committees serve the parish itself, and some serve both internally and externally.

 Liturgy

The Liturgy Committee enhances parish life by a deep commitment and expertise in planning liturgies that resonate with the diverse spiritual needs of the community. With strong lay participation, this committee fosters a space for spiritual growth and inclusivity, key to our identity as a Eucharistic parish.

The Liturgy committee continues to ensure that all liturgies are deeply rooted in scripture and sacrament and connect to our commitment to service. The Committee itself has attracted new members and has also been successful in growing the number of parishioners who desire to be lectors and Eucharistic ministers. Of significance is the desire for and commitment to active and diligent lay participation, which is deeply appreciated and honored by the community.

St. Vincent’s makes every effort to plan liturgies that are responsive to the different spiritual needs of the community. The Saturday evening Mass, for example, is more contemplative.

Social Action

The Social Action Committee has several sub-committees for outreach and action. The Green Team catalyzes responsible behaviors in our homes and community to care for God’s creation. The ALIVE group, as already mentioned, has been actively engaged in spreading the word that St. Vincent’s is welcoming of LGBTQ+ Catholics looking for a place to worship. The Resource Exchange continues the ever successful and impactful ministry of furnishing and helping to settle homeless individuals and families who are being housed.

“We Have a Dream-A World Without Racism” is an initiative of St. Vincent’s Social Justice/Social Action Committee. For three years now the project has continued to organize and sponsor a robust agenda of continuing education and reflection for the community on racism, white supremacy, and Christian nationalism. Seminal books and articles have been shared and discussed, and several prominent experts in these areas, such as Fr. Brian Massingale and Dr. Robert Jones, were guest speakers. In addition to monthly ZOOM meetings, discussions, learning events, this past year the initiative focused on providing information on how political candidates and various pieces of legislation would impact racial equity. The group also spearheads and shepherds St. Vincent’s relationship with the South Baltimore Community Trust.

Committee on Church Reform

The Committee first began as an ad hoc committee who purpose was to help the community heal and respond to the sexual abuse crisis in the Church. Overtime the committee understood its role to be more broadly involved in meaningful reform in the Church. As such the committee has been involved in the Synod process since its inception. St. Vincent’s Parish believes that if meaningful reform is to come to the Church, it will come from the Synod. The committee shepherded the Parish’s own synodal process and its report to the Archdiocese. It has also discussed *Instrumentum Laboris* which was issued by General Secretariat of the Synod. It laid the groundwork for the October worldwide Synod. The Committee will facilitate the Parish’s review and discussion of the final report of the Synod. will be discussed.

A member of the Committee has been actively involved with the National and International Discerning Deacons. She subsequently attended the October Synod in Rome with the Discerning Deacons. The committee has collaborated with the Liturgy Committee in planning the St. Phoebe’s Feast Day liturgies.

The Committee will play an active role in ensuring that St. Vincent’s or any configuration of parish life remain true to Vatican II.

1. **CONCLUSION**

Looking ahead, St. Vincent de Paul remains dedicated to its mission of word, sacrament, and service. Through ongoing discernment, strategic planning, and unwavering parishioner support, we are building a vibrant and inclusive future.