

I. Paulist Charism and Mission

Paulist Mission “Faithful to the example of our patron, St. Paul, who was the Apostle to the Gentiles, and to the example of Isaac Hecker, who sought to evangelize America with a view primarily to those outside the Catholic Church, we are committed to encountering, accompanying, and entering into dialogue with the other — personified in our present times as those who are distant from the Catholic Church and its practice, and also those who have been relegated to the peripheries, including:

- women,
- members of the LGBTQIA community,
- those in their 20s and 30s, and
- people of color

In a few paragraphs, share how this foundation or ministry helps us to fulfill our mission now and in the next 5 years?

As the Paulist Center is neither a full parish nor a campus ministry, we focus our resources on mission to/with people traditionally considered to be “relegated to the peripheries” of the Church. Our members have intentionally chosen to come here because of the Center’s mission: “Attentive to the Holy Spirit and nourished by vibrant liturgy, we are Catholic community that welcomes all, fosters healing and reconciliation, and acts for justice.” A high percentage of our members are talented and passionate people, involved in multiple ministries.

*Historically, the Paulist Center’s best-known ministries have been to/with populations that have been “relegated to the peripheries.” We have been **feeding hungry people every week** for nearly 60 years, and we created the **first pledge walk in the country** to support that ministry. Our ministry to **divorced & separated** people was among the first in the world. **Landings International** – a ministry to assist people exploring the possibility of returning to the Catholic Church – had its origin here, too. Today, the Paulist Center’s ministry to the four populations explicitly mentioned in the Paulists’ 2022 Mission Priorities is prominent in every edition of the bulletin, and mentioned in the prayers or the preaching at almost every Sunday Mass:*

- *The Paulist Center is renowned for giving women as large a leadership role as possible within the bounds of canon law. Of our three lay full-time pastoral staff, two are women with MDiv degrees and more than 50 years of ministry experience between them. Women regularly preach and preside at liturgies outside of Mass, such as our weekly Advent and Lenten online services, our two annual reconciliation services, Ash Wednesday, and an ecumenical “Seven Last Words of Christ” service on Good Friday. Women sometimes write the weekly pastoral reflection in the bulletin. This year, the Pastoral Council, the Finance Committee, and the Worship Committee are all chaired by women. The Paulist Center is sensitive to the use of inclusive language in our preaching, prayers, and scripture readings. (Gendered language has not been completely eliminated from these, but it is considered carefully.)*
- *People who identify as LGBTQIA are fully integrated into the life of the Paulist Center, taking important roles in almost every ministry. Our LGBTQIA Ministry maintains a confidential support listserv for 120 people. The Ministry has reached a point where they do not just host events for themselves, but host events in service of the entire Paulist Center Community. At the beginning of the pandemic, they started hosting 30-minute weekly online prayer services that have attracted both Center members and others who live far away; they continue to host and organize these weekly services in Advent and Lent. With the approval of the archdiocese, we play a prominent role in the collective of Catholic communities within the archdiocese hosting LGBTQIA ministries. Paulist priests often facilitate the Collective’s monthly support*

group for family and friends of LGBTQIA people, and they can be found staffing the table at the annual Pride Parade. This year, the Paulist Center will likely hold the Collective's Mass of Welcome the night before the parade. Our Family Religious Education Program (FREP) has a significant number of children in it who identify as transgender or nonbinary. The word has gotten out that we accept all people as they are, where they are.

- The Paulist Center had a vibrant Young Adult Ministry in the 15 years preceding the pandemic. Members who belonged to this ministry before 2020 were (and still are) well-integrated into the ministries of the parish, often serving in prominent leadership roles. For the past 15 years, we have employed a series of part-time Young Adult Ministers to assist with this ministry. However, the pandemic has led us into a time of rebuilding. We have a notable number of Gen-Zers in our worshiping community, and we are dedicating resources to get them involved in other ministries. Our newest Young Adult Minister came on board in fall 2023, and he, along with the rest of the community, are actively exploring multiple forms of outreach, including a digital media campaign, to rebuild and grow our Young Adult Community.
- While most of our members over the age of 50 are Caucasian, the younger generations of members are more racially diverse. Most notable are the children of color who have been adopted by the parents in our community. Many of the Paulist Center's social justice ministries — e.g., our St. Dismas Ministry's advocacy for criminal justice reform and the Wednesday Night Supper Club — address injustices that disproportionately affect people of color. In response to the death of George Floyd, 62 members of our community spent the summer of 2020 in intense online reading groups, after which we formed a new Racial Justice Advocacy Group. Members of RJAG have led several initiatives, including adding our voice to Greater Boston Interfaith Organization's current campaign on housing justice reforms, and leading a series of 5 intergenerational classes on bias and racism in the 2022-23 Family Religious Education Program year. The last three recipients of the Isaac Hecker Award for Social Justice (Bryan Massingale, Norma Pimentel, and Len & Cherylann Gengel) have received it in part for their ministry to/people of color. This weekend (March 2-3), the Paulist Center will participate in large multi-faith, multi-ethnic rallies on behalf of housing reform and the rights of poor people. This year's "Spirit of Hecker" Award recipient has advocated for racial justice for more than 60 years.

These are not the only marginalized groups to whom we minister. We are known for our welcome and accommodation of people with special physical, mental, and emotional needs. We have a history of extensive charitable outreach ministries: we have built genuine, long-lasting relationships with people suffering from poverty, mental illness, and homelessness, some of whom now feel comfortable enough to come inside and join us for liturgy. We are currently assisting 6 large refugee families. We also run an emergency food pantry. Almost all the people served in these various ministries are people of color, and a large percentage of them are women, young adults, and members of the LGBTQIA community. For example, most of the 300 households using our emergency food pantry each month are Chinese.

The Paulist Center continues to play an important role in attracting and supporting all kinds of people — including those who don't necessarily belong to groups "relegated to the peripheries" — who are disenchanted with the other options available to them for a spiritual home. There are too many stories to include here that document how individual women, divorced Catholics, and LGBTQIA people have had a major spiritual hole in their lives filled by finding the Paulist Center and eventually becoming members of the community. By accepting people as they are, where they are, the Paulist Center has kept many of its members within the Catholic Church.

Paulist Charism

Paulist Fathers are apostolic missionaries with a history of listening to the Holy Spirit and responding to the signs of the times. Paulist Fathers are pastors known for their relatability, preaching, and presence, as well as for their welcoming and inclusive faith communities. In a few paragraphs, share how this foundation or ministry helps us to live our charism now and in the next 5 years?

A few years after Isaac Hecker's formative experiences in the Boston area, his Transcendentalist friends dubbed Boston "The Hub of the Universe." Even today, everyone seems to pass through Boston! It is home to a remarkable number of universities, technology companies, major financial institutions, and government entities. It is the largest city in New England, and the Paulist Center sits in the middle of it all. Located in the shadow of the Massachusetts State House, along the Freedom Trail, across from the Boston Common, and within a few hundred feet of the hub of Boston's public transit system, it is rare for us to celebrate a Mass without welcoming visitors from around the world just as often as from the greater Boston area.

At the same time, our community includes leaders in academia, non-profits, journalism, business, and government. Two of the three Catholics in U.S. history who have been nominated for president by a major political party (John Kennedy and John Kerry) have had connections to the Paulist Center. The first lesbian couple in Massachusetts legally allowed to adopt a child (Susan Love and Helen Cooksey) belonged to the Paulist Center, and the Director of the Paulist Center testified on their behalf. The Paulist Center has inspired many members' careers and activities in service, caring for marginalized communities, and climate justice. In the past week, we have received more than 50 testimonials from members, including quite a few that indicate that the Paulist Center influenced where members bought homes and chose to raise families.

The Paulist Center Community membership now includes a high number of young families with children. 11 new families joined us this fall for the first time for our Family Religious Education Program. We've already mentioned FREP's welcome of children of color and of children exploring their gender identity, but it's also worth mentioning that FREP does a lot to incorporate the Paulist mission into its lessons. From 7th grade onwards, we allow our children to ask tough questions about Church teachings. This academic year, FREP has collaborated with our social justice ministries and Pastoral Minister of Liturgy & Music to put together well-attended, well-received intergenerational programs on immigration, the Mass, and racial advocacy. We'll have a similar program on care for the environment in April.

The Paulist Center is regarded as a center for evangelization by the Archdiocese of Boston. Several nearby parishes do not offer OCIA themselves, but they send their inquirers to us. We offer adult confirmation classes twice a year for people throughout the Archdiocese. We provide Marriage Preparation classes for 400-600 couple per year, which we estimate is approximately half of the couples preparing for marriage in the Archdiocese. When couples join the Paulist Center's Family Religious Education Program, they often tell us that their first encounter with us was in Marriage Preparation a decade earlier.

The Paulist Center has a long history of creating ministries in response to "the signs of the times," and our focus changes as the needs around us change. Our Creation Care Ministry, Immigrant Advocacy Group, and Racial Justice Advocacy Group are new in the last 6 years.

The Paulist Center engages in several ecumenical and interfaith endeavors. We host a Bible study once a week and a divine liturgy most Saturday mornings for 80-100 Coptic Orthodox young adults. A number of non-Catholic people regularly participate in our liturgies and have used their skills in ways to enhance our community. (For example, our first communion students will attend a seder next month organized by one of our Jewish parents.) The Paulist priests participate in the Downtown Boston Clergy group, through which the Paulist Center hosted and organized a prayer service for the Week of Christian Prayer in 2024, attended by Coptics, Episcopalians, Swedenborgians, and American Baptists. The Paulist Center has collaborated with a variety of religious communities in recent years: our three Afghan families were resettled in partnership with a Muslim community, and our two Ukrainian families will be resettled this spring in partnership with a Jewish community. The Paulist Center participates in multi-faith, multi-ethnic justice initiatives, including the Walk for Hunger (founded by the Paulist Center), Greater Boston Interfaith Organization, and the Poor People's Campaign. Rich has partnered with the rabbi at Jewish Senior Life Independent Living to offer Advent and Lent prayer services that are spiritually relevant for Christians, Jews, and Muslims together.

One of the hallmarks of the Paulist Center is the full, active, conscious participation at our vibrant liturgies. Every aspect of our liturgies has been carefully considered. Our "Lector team" model produces skilled, informed lectors, well-educated in writing relevant prayers of the faithful. Visitors and members alike speak of how well we "do" liturgy: the assembly sings with gusto, yet also respects the need for pauses and silence.

Members expect a quick and relevant response from the Paulist Center Community to the needs of the world and to developments in the Catholic Church. In the past 12 months, we:

- preached homilies and wrote reflections about confronting toxic polarization, the Synod on Synodality, racism, care for the environment, and the Israel-Hamas war,*
- hosted a two-day Symposium on Mental Health and the Catholic Faith,*
- hosted the Archdiocese of Boston's 3rd Annual "Green" Mass,*
- designed a rite after communion to pray for peace in the Holy Land,*
- gave Hecker Awards to people advocating for Hispanic refugees and Haitian orphans,*
- were pleased to see articles and tributes in national publications to other people whom we honored with Hecker Awards long before they were as well known (Larry Kessler in 1987, James O'Connell in 1989, Jeannine Gramick in 1995),*
- reported on developments from the Synod on Synodality and the release of Vatican documents regarding the baptism of transgender people and the blessing of people in irregular marriages,*
- hosted two talks by an Israeli interfaith dialogue expert re: the Israel-Hamas war (one on Zoom in November; one in-person in February),*
- donated ~\$500 each to 52 different charitable organizations*

The Paulist Fathers have regularly sought the assistance of Paulist Center Community members to serve on national boards. At various points, Paula Cuzzo, Denis Hurley, Barbara Lapinskas, Mary Sullivan, and Richard Allegra have all assisted with the Paulist Associates at the national level; Mary Lesko and Pat Rutherford sit on advisory boards regarding the health and finances of the Paulists; Bob Bordone is in the working group combatting Toxic Polarization; Susan Timoney is on the Paulist Lay Advisory Board.