



St. Francis Springs Prayer Center
2023 – 2026 Strategic Plan

Submitted to the Board of Directors
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Executive Summary

In 2020, the new Director of St. Francis Springs Prayer Center initiated a strategic planning process with support from a Strategic Planning Consultant. The Director identified 12 individuals, diverse in terms of age, race, gender, and prior engagement with the Center, to work with the Consultant in an advisory capacity. This Strategic Planning Committee convened at three points throughout the past year to offer insights and recommendations as the 2023–2026 Prayer Center Strategic Plan was developed:

- In October 2020, the Committee gathered for a weekend retreat at the Prayer Center. At this time, the Director offered some context for the Committee’s work by reviewing the Center’s history and providing a snapshot of its current operational structures and finances. The Strategic Planning Consultant also shared findings from a series of interviews that were conducted with key stakeholders of the Prayer Center to gain a nuanced picture of the Center’s purpose, vision, and values. Committee members were then invited to share their collective vision for the Center.
- In December 2020, Committee subgroups met virtually to think specifically about justice priorities for the Center in four key areas: racial equity, gender equity, religious and spiritual inclusion, and environmental stewardship.
- In January 2021, the Committee gathered for a second weekend retreat at the Center. Justice priorities that emerged over the winter break were shared and synthesized for inclusion in the strategic plan. The Consultant then shared results from surveys that were distributed to friends of the Center (i.e., donors, staff, and volunteers) and past retreatants to better understand the interests, priorities, and perceptions of these stakeholders. Keeping in mind interview findings, survey results, and newly defined justice priorities, the Committee worked to identify three strategic priorities for the Center: justice education, welcome and inclusion, and youth engagement.

In the Spring of 2021, the Consultant refined goals and objectives to serve as a roadmap for achieving the Committee’s strategic priorities. Additionally, in consultation with the Director, the Consultant identified a series of goals and objectives related to three “organizational pillars” of the Center: operations, communications, and finances. The goals and objectives in these areas are designed to support and facilitate execution of the strategic priorities that lie at the heart of the strategic plan.

What follows is a description of St. Francis Prayer Center’s mission and values, which guided development of the strategic plan, and detailed descriptions of the goals and objectives the Strategic Planning Committee recommends pursuing in the years ahead to ensure the Center continues to live fully into its mission and values.

Mission and Values

The following is the mission of the St. Francis Springs Prayer Center:

Inspired by the charism of St. Francis and St. Clare, the mission of St. Francis Springs Prayer Center is to nurture and nourish the contemplative dimension of our life which hopefully will lead to promote justice. We seek to provide a comfortable, peaceful environment where one can experience the beauty of nature, the sanctity of silence, and the joy of Franciscan hospitality.

The core values that undergird the Center's mission are:

- **Hospitality.** The Prayer Center is a place where guests are welcomed by name, their needs are generously attended to, and no effort is spared to make them feel at home.
- **Spirit of welcome.** At the Prayer Center, guests are invited to come as they are and are embraced as they are.
- **Comfort and cleanliness.** Indoor spaces at the Prayer Center are impeccably maintained, inviting to guests, and elegant in their simplicity.
- **Natural beauty.** Outdoor spaces at the Prayer Center are cultivated to ensure a peaceful and secluded setting for prayer and contemplation.
- **Reverence.** The Prayer Center is a sacred place where one can experience holy rituals and encounter God in all things.

Strategic Priority: Justice Education

Each strategic priority outlined in this plan is accompanied by **goals**, which are broad and point to change; **objectives**, or specific and concrete steps that will be taken to operationalize goals; an estimated **timeline** for when objectives will be addressed; and an overview of who will hold **primary** responsibility for executing the objective (understanding that other individuals will play support and oversight roles).

Strategic Priority: Inspire a deeper commitment to justice that encourages and equips retreatants to journey toward contemplative action.		
Goal 1: Offer a series of signature justice events tied to significant holidays and occasions to be hosted annually.		
Objectives	Timeframe	Responsible
Public event for Indigenous People’s Day that celebrates Native American spirituality and features the history of the Center’s land. This event will serve as an “open house” for members of the public to learn more about the Center while also increasing their understanding of the region’s indigenous history.	2023	Invited speakers; various staff to coordinate logistics and marketing
Black History Month book series, “Meditations on Black History,” with in-person and virtual options. The series will run for four weeks and will feature writings from prominent Black authors as well as facilitated discussion and reflection.	2024	Invited facilitator; David Hyman; various staff to coordinate logistics and marketing
Public event for International Women’s Day featuring women creatives, theologians, and justice activists from different faith traditions. This event will serve as an “open house” for members of the public to learn more about the Center while also increasing their awareness of women’s perspectives and contributions to action and contemplation work.	2023	Invited speakers; various staff to coordinate logistics and marketing
Semi-annual events (Earth Day and the Feast of St. Francis) will focus on environmental justice and stewardship. They will include educational sessions at an on-site food farm and service activities cleaning up the property. These events will serve as “open houses” for members of the public to learn more about the Center and ways to get involved.	2024	Eric Mathis; various staff to coordinate logistics and marketing

Goal 2: Restore right relationships between Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) communities and the land.		
Objectives	Timeframe	Responsible
Conduct research on the history of the Prayer Center’s land and its original inhabitants; create a written narrative of the history to be shared at Indigenous People’s Day and in the Center.	2023	Volunteer researcher in conjunction with local historians
Develop workshop for BIPOC communities that centers food, farming, and contemplation to be offered semi-annually in conjunction with Earth Day and the Feast of St. Francis celebrations.	2024	Eric Mathis
Goal 3: Create an environment where people working for justice, particularly those from marginalized communities, can seek rest and respite.		
Objectives	Timeframe	Responsible
Offer “Listening Groups that Heal,” small groups dedicated to sharing stories of justice, mercy, and love, on a quarterly basis.	2024	Invited facilitators; various staff to coordinate logistics and marketing
Cultivate regional partnerships with 5–8 justice organizations; invite each group to use the Center at a reduced cost for a designated number of overnight or single-day programs each year.	2025	Board of Trustees; Steve Swayne
Schedule racially and culturally diverse spiritual directors to be present at the Center on a weekly basis and available to retreatants.	2023-2024	Bob Pearson; Steve Swayne

Strategic Priority: Welcome and Inclusion

Each strategic priority outlined in this plan is accompanied by **goals**, which are broad and point to change; **objectives**, or specific and concrete steps that will be taken to operationalize goals; an estimated **timeline** for when objectives will be addressed; and an overview of who will hold **primary** responsibility for executing the objective (understanding that other individuals will play support and oversight roles).

Strategic Priority: Strengthen our Franciscan-informed hospitality by co-creating a space that embraces people of all backgrounds and beliefs.		
Goal 1: Convey welcome and inclusion through programs that foster dialogue and understanding of people of different faiths.		
Objectives	Timeframe	Responsible
Offer an interfaith-themed program once per year featuring stories of St. Francis (e.g., share St. Francis' encounter with the Sultan in conjunction with an event promoting dialogue between Christians and Muslims).	2025	Secular Franciscans; invited speakers; various staff to coordinate logistics and marketing
In collaboration with interfaith partners (see Goal 3), develop a series of ecumenical events to be held annually during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity.	2025	Steve Swayne; interfaith partners; various staff to coordinate logistics and marketing
Goal 2: Convey welcome and inclusion through words, images, and rituals people encounter at the Prayer Center and online.		
Objectives	Timeframe	Responsible
Design an "all are welcome" logo to accompany prints that express words of welcome from different traditions; display these prints prominently throughout the Center.	2023	Graphic designer; task force/committee of volunteers
Incorporate diverse rituals for prayer and spirituality into daily/weekly offerings at the Center. Included in that is the offering of spiritual direction from a group of 6 trained spiritual directors led by Bob Pearson.	2024	Bob Pearson and David Hyman.

<p>Conduct an inventory of words and imagery currently featured throughout the Center and create a record of all artifacts (e.g., location in the Center, who donated them, what tradition or perspective they represent). Identify alternative or additional pieces that could be added to the collection to improve representation of diverse races, cultures, genders, and religions.</p>	<p>2023-2024</p>	<p>Task force/committee of volunteers</p>
<p>Goal 3: Build relationships with leaders of diverse faith communities in the region.</p>		
<p>Objectives</p>	<p>Timeframe</p>	<p>Responsible</p>
<p>Invite potential interfaith partners to quarterly meetings at the Center for community building and discussion of collaborative programming opportunities.</p>	<p>2024</p>	<p>Steve Swayne</p>
<p>Add or repurpose two prayer/meditation spaces at the Center as a gesture of welcome to interfaith partners; one will focus on the Divine Mother and images across cultures and faith traditions and the other will be a multifaith space adaptable for use across various faith traditions.</p>	<p>2025</p>	<p>Task force/committee of volunteers</p>

Strategic Priority: Youth Engagement

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Strategic Priority: Become a model of multigenerational engagement in contemplative action by engaging youth and young adults.		
Goal 1: In conjunction with local/regional partners, co-create opportunities to introduce the next generation of justice leaders to contemplative action.		
Objectives	Timeframe	Responsible
Establish a council of 5-10 high school or college-aged youth/young adults to serve as contemplative action ambassadors among their peers and advise the Center Director on youth-centered programming. Work with local youth and young adult leaders to promote the council as a leadership opportunity.	2024	Steve Swayne; Tatum Elliott and Julia Dibiase
Initiate partnerships with regional colleges, universities, and programs like the Greensboro Fellows to connect student interns and recent graduates with the Center.	2024-2025	Board of Trustees; Steve Swayne
Goal 2: Engage youth and young adults with older adults who are long-time Prayer Center staff, volunteers, retreat leaders, and retreatants.		
Objectives	Timeframe	Responsible
Host quarterly intergenerational discussion groups or service activities; use the Center’s existing networks to recruit older participants, and the youth council (see Goal 1) to invite younger participants.	2024	Tatum/Julia, in collaboration with various volunteers
Develop proposal for a year-long, residential, full-time service program drawing from models like the Franciscan Volunteer Ministry.	2025	Intergenerational task force/committee
Goal 3: Tailor justice programs that prepare youth and young adults to take action in their home communities.		
Objectives	Timeframe	Responsible
Host annual youth retreat with programs that equip participants with knowledge and tools to advance the justice priorities of the Center: racial equity, gender equity, religious and spiritual inclusion, and environmental stewardship.	2024	Invited facilitators;

Organizational Pillar: Operations

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Goal 1: Develop a staffing plan that aligns with the Prayer Center’s strategic priorities and ensures long-term sustainability.		
Objectives	Timeframe	Responsible
Draft three staffing options for Board consideration that reassign major operational responsibilities currently carried out by volunteers and the Director.	2023	Steve Swayne
Institute term limits for Board members to ensure individuals with perspectives and expertise relevant to the Center’s strategic priorities can be invited to serve.	2023-2024	Steve Swayne
Create a job description for a new staff member who will be responsible for volunteer management, communications, and marketing.	2023	Steve Swayne
Articulate a permanent role for a Franciscan priest, deacon, or secular who lives in residence at the Center.	2023-2024	Steve Swayne
Goal 2: Develop guidelines for Prayer Center use by groups, individual retreatants, and select partner organizations.		
Objectives	Timeframe	Responsible
Articulate which spaces will be reserved for individual retreatants and use these guidelines to inform anticipated revenue financial plan (see “Organizational Pillar: Finances”).	2024	Steve Swayne
Articulate how often and at what rates space will be offered to justice organizations (see “Strategic Priority: Justice Education”) and use these guidelines to inform anticipated revenue financial plan (see “Organizational Pillar: Finances”).	2023-2024	Steve Swayne
Goal 3: Develop a master plan for the Prayer Center property that aligns with strategic priorities.		
Objectives	Timeframe	Responsible
Articulate specific capital investments that should be included in a master plan based on the priorities outlined in this strategic plan (e.g., residence for long-term volunteers and/or Franciscans, food/flower farm, solar panels, pond).	2023-2024	Board of Trustees; Steve Swayne
Contract with a master planner to draft a plan and estimate expenses for elements of the plan. Use the estimated expenses to inform a capital campaign see “Organizational Pillar: Finances”).	2023-2024	Board of Trustees; Steve Swayne

Organizational Pillar: Communications

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Goal 1: Enhance marketing of Prayer Center programs, centering strategic priorities in all marketing efforts.		
Objectives	Timeframe	Responsible
Create a display in the lobby of the Center that features a different justice organization partner each month.	2023	Various staff and volunteers
Use programs detailed in the strategic plan to develop an annual calendar of events for the Center.	2023	Julia Dibiase
Create a robust marketing plan that leverages the Center website and social media channels to promote each event on the annual calendar.	2024	Julia Dibiase
Goal 2: Reach a broader audience with Prayer Center programs.		
Objectives	Timeframe	Responsible
Develop a proposal that identifies which of the Center’s programs would be well suited as a virtual offering.	2023-2024	Julia Dibiase
Acquire necessary technology to offer high-quality virtual programs and train staff on technology use.	2023-2024	Julia Dibiase
Goal 3: Improve relationships with Prayer Center stakeholders.		
Objectives	Timeframe	Responsible
Implement customer relationship management (CRM) software to better track engagement of retreatants, volunteers, and donors and ensure all staff are appropriately trained to use the tool.	2023	Steve Swayne
Mine CRM data on an annual basis to identify opportunities for engaging Center stakeholders more effectively.	2023-2024	Julia Dibiase
Identify creative engagement opportunities for older volunteers in particular as staffing becomes more robust and as intergenerational programming increases (see “Organizational Pillar: Operations” and “Strategic Priority: Youth Engagement”).	2024	Steve Swayne; Julia Dibiase
Create Marketing Plan for Columbarium	2023	Steve Swayne; Julia Dibiase

Organizational Pillar: Finances

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Goal 1: Develop financial planning guidelines that reflect strategic priorities and operational goals.		
Objectives	Timeframe	Responsible
Identify revenue models for calculating retreat revenue vs. fundraising revenue in light of strategic priorities.	2023	Steve Swayne
Determine a formula for calculating the staffing budget based on overall revenue (e.g., what percentage of revenue will be dedicated to staffing) and ensure budget aligns with the proposed staffing plan (see “Organizational Pillars: Operations”).	2023	Steve Swayne
Draft an annual budget plan that accounts for anticipated revenue, fundraising revenue goals, and operational expenses (including expenses associated with initiatives outlined in the strategic plan).	2023-2026	Steve Swayne
Goal 2: Initiate a campaign to draw down the debt and support capital investments outlined in the master plan.		
Objectives	Timeframe	Responsible
Create a campaign “pitch” that emphasizes the importance of paying down existing debt (the Center’s past obligations) while setting the Center up for future success (by investing in the master plan).	2023	Steve Swayne
Devise a plan for diversifying the donor base and acquiring business sponsorships to achieve campaign goals. Identify metrics against which to measure success of these efforts.	2023	Steve Swayne

Organizational Pillar: Franciscan Spirituality

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Goal 1: Ensure Franciscan presence at SFSPC longterm		
Objectives	Timeframe	Responsible
Identify 2 nd Franciscan for board membership. 2 Franciscans on the board.	2023	Board
Discussion with Father Kevin regarding future of SFSPC as a Franciscan site/priest location	2023	Steve Swayne
Consider multiple plans for friars to live on the property	2023	Steve Swayne
Goal 2: Promote Franciscan Spirituality on a deeper level		
Objectives	Timeframe	Responsible
Ensure staff has 2 days of contemplative listening to God at the Center each year	2023-26	Steve Swayne
Ensure at least 4 programs each year around Franciscan spirituality	2023-26	Julia Dibiase
Goal 3: Friary		
Objectives	Timeframe	Responsible
Research the feasibility of a friary with the Holy Name Province	2023	Steve Swayne
Preliminary study of where the 3 rd cottage should be located	2023	Steve Swayne
Identify baseline cost of a friary and how it will be funded.	2023	Steve Swayne