



Next Generation Parish Apostolic Practicums (July 2026)

As part of Next Generation Parish, Catholic Leadership Institute's parish renewal service, parish teams participate in four hands-on practicums that progressively develop their ability to see, listen, accompany, and intentionally build relationships with people in and beyond the parish. The practicums are not designed to be stand-alone events or programs; they develop repeatable missionary habits that can shape everyday ministry. The long-term goal is a parish culture in which accompaniment becomes a normal way that clergy, staff, and parishioners live the Church's mission and invite others into deeper relationship with Christ and the parish community. The planning and training preceding and following these experiences is between 3-4 hours. The experiences themselves lengthen as the parish leaders advance. These four practicums take place every 4-6 weeks over a six-month period.

Practicum 1 — Community Observation: Team members go out in pairs to everyday “third spaces” such as parks, libraries, coffee shops, and stores for 30 minutes. They choose locations where they can linger and observe ordinary community life, praying for those they encounter and noticing the atmosphere, relationships, patterns, and needs around them. Participants are reminded that feeling nervous or awkward is normal; the first step is simply to become more attentive. They practice seeing the community through the eyes of Christ. Afterwards, the team then reflects on what it noticed, compares community demographics with parish demographics, and considers how an apostolic posture may call the parish to see and serve people differently.

Practicum 2 — Community Survey: Building on observation, participants return in pairs to places where natural conversation with the community can occur, such as a coffee shop, library, park, gym, or bookstore for an hour. Each pair seeks to speak with several people, beginning with ordinary questions and listening with genuine curiosity and compassion. When appropriate, the conversation may move toward a simple question such as, “Is there anything for which I can pray for you today?” Participants are encouraged to invite the Holy Spirit to guide each encounter. The goal is not to recruit, persuade, defend the Church, or conduct a formal questionnaire. Back at the parish, the team identifies themes related to people's strengths, needs, hopes, and experience of faith in daily life, then considers how those insights connect with the parish's mission.

Practicum 3 — Five Cups of Coffee: The focus then turns to people already connected to the parish whom team members may see regularly but do not yet know well. Each person prayerfully identifies five parishioners and invites them to an intentional one-on-one conversation over coffee or in another simple setting. They are reminded not to be discouraged if an invitation is declined or goes unanswered. Participants prepare open-ended questions, listen for the person's story, and are ready to share something of their own faith journey when helpful. They look for natural openings that allow a surface conversation to move toward spiritual questions, prayer, or God's presence in the person's life.

Practicum 4 — Dine with 9: The final practicum uses simple hospitality to create space for deeper relationship. A pastor or parish representative, together with staff or team members, hosts a small gathering with thoughtfully selected guests in a home, rectory, or similarly welcoming setting. The gathering does not need to be elaborate: coffee and bagels, a potluck, dessert, or a bonfire can work well. What matters is creating a natural and comfortable environment where every person feels seen, known, and valued. The pastor or clergy member leads by example by sharing a personal faith story, while staff and volunteers participate as fellow listeners and witnesses. Through attentive listening, meaningful questions, personal stories, and prayer, the conversation can move from everyday life to how God has been present in guests' lives. Thoughtful follow-up helps the relationship continue beyond the meal.