

## CHAPTER 10

### SECTION 3

#### WHAT DO WE SEE HAPPENING? ...TRENDS

If we truly listen to people and look at the trends, we see that indeed there is an urgency that warrants us relooking at the time we take in every parish towards preparing for Sunday. If we look at national statistics, we can see that people are ‘telling us’ why they are often choosing to leave the Catholic Church and we can see that clearly there has been a steady decline in Mass attendance.

- Of course, we have shared the staggering statistics of our diocese losing 1/3 of our Catholics in 40 years.  
We have shared with you before the dramatic decrease of 67% to 38% in our Catholic population.
- Our Mass count, weekend Mass attendance in this Diocese ... numbers are slowly on the increase.  
However, consider that in 2004 we sat over 30,000 on any given weekend and now we sit a little over 23,000. That’s a decrease of nearly 21% in 13 years. And, lest we look to other trends for relief, the general population has actually increased by nearly 13,000 in that same timeframe.
- Right now, the number of parishes who sit less than 500 people at all their weekend Masses is 19 of 38. If we don’t do anything different, by our 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary we expect 22 parishes – that’s over half of the diocese – will sit less than 500 people at all their weekend Masses.
- Right now, the number of parishes who sit less than 300 people at all their weekend Masses is 8 of 38. If we don’t do anything different, by our 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary we expect 14 parishes – that’s 1/3 the diocese – will sit less than 300 people at all their weekend Masses.

While these statistics can be alarming, we have found many parishes across the nation that are successfully engaging and evangelizing people regularly through the Sunday experience, have focused their preparation for Sunday liturgy on 3 key elements:

1. Hospitality
2. Hymns (Liturgical Music)
3. Homily

These parishes have intentionally built in adequate time for preparation and prioritized this preparation within the weekly rhythm of the parish’s activity. These parishes are providing adequate formation of those involved in serving the liturgy in any way. For example: scheduled time for priests and deacons to properly prepare homilies, including time to get helpful feedback from parishioners and to get a good sense of the community’s joys and struggles. It means proper formation for musicians and insisting on adequate preparation and rehearsal time as well as coordination with the priests. It means properly forming hospitality ministers as well as cultivating a spirit of hospitality and awareness of hospitality within the entire parish community.

## **The Disciple Maker Index**

In 2017, every parish in our diocese participated in a parishioner survey called the Disciple Maker Index. This was an assessment tool developed by Catholic Leadership Institute in partnership with Measuring Success that measures the spiritual "health" of a worshiping community in two areas:

1. Individual State of Spirituality - a pastor can see aggregate data as to the level of spirituality of his parishioners.
2. Parish effectiveness - the parish community can assess its effectiveness by measuring how it is living and fulfilling its mission as part of the Catholic Church based on feedback from parishioners.

An assessment of this kind:

- Offers a scientific method for tracking individual spiritual growth.
- Allows each parish to assess how important each foundational ministry is to its members and how effective the parish is in carrying out that ministry and impacting the broader local community.
- Provides invaluable input in the planning process to set priorities and allocate resources in the parish.
- Supplies built-in metrics for a parish to evaluate the effectiveness of their pastoral plan.

## What can we learn from the Disciple Maker Index?

There are many ways we can use the data from this tool to help guide our planning process and gauge need and later growth in our parishes. However, let's look at what in-depth analysis of over 25,000 nation-wide responses from the DMI have consistently revealed, as it relates to SUNDAY.

### I. Parishioners indicate Sunday experience as primary driver as to whether or not they recommend the parish

Analysis of data collected from nation-wide Disciple Maker Index Survey indicates the top factors that impact **parishioner's likelihood to recommend the parish** include:

1. Recommendation of the pastor
2. Offering a vibrant and engaging Sunday Mass
3. Feeling welcome and accepted
4. Preaching that connects to everyday life
5. Helping them recognize how God is working in their life

\*\* If, through the analysis of the data, it is clear that the above 5 areas are the primary things that drive whether or not a person is to recommend the parish to someone, we can see how important the experience of Sunday is to parishioners. And, why it is so important that we put intentional effort into Sunday.

### II. Role of Sunday in forming Disciples

Analysis of DMI data indicates that, in addition to the leadership of the pastor, parishioners grow spiritually by the following 5 indicators:

1. Forming Parishioners as disciples
2. Offering Vibrant and engaging Sunday Mass
3. Making them feel welcomed and accepted
4. Preaching that connects to every day life
5. Helping them recognize how God works in their lives

- This shows us that along with intentional discipleship formation, the SUNDAY Mass experience is the most important factor that will directly impact a person's spiritual growth.
- **Sunday** plays an essential and vital role in **forming disciples of Jesus Christ**.