

St. Francis of Assisi Pastoral Council Meeting

Assisi Room of the Rectory

7:30 pm Sept. 20, 2018

Members in attendance: Fr. John Dillon, Anna Breece, Alicia Church, Charles Giochi, Anton Handono, Mark Harang, Daniel Koscinski, Bernie McGuire, Vincent Price and Travis Tomon

Others people in attendance: Deborah McDonald, Assistant Secretary for Pastoral Ministry and Social Concerns for the Archdiocese of Washington and Melissa Egan, communications coordinator

At its meeting on Sept. 20, the Parish Pastoral Council learned the results of a comprehensive survey that assessed how St. Francis of Assisi Parish meets five key areas of vitality in the areas of Worship, Education, Community, Service and Administration. While the results of the Indicators of Vitality Survey showed that respondents seem overall pleased with the church, its ministries and the parish life, the archdiocesan assistant secretary charged with analyzing the survey results said she was more surprised by what the survey didn't show.

"It's interesting who didn't take the survey," said Deborah McDonald, Assistant Secretary of Pastoral Ministry and Social Concerns for the Archdiocese of Washington. "You have a lot of diversity, but it's not reflected in those that were surveyed. Also interesting is the number of people responding who aren't engaged in ministry. Yet, people feel invested, because they come to liturgy here."

In April 2018, the Pastoral Council launched the Indicators of Vitality Survey to get feedback from Mass attendees so the advisory body to the pastor could better plan for the parish. Three hundred twenty-one people responded to the survey, though, only 230 of them completed every question. All told, that number represented nearly a quarter of St. Francis of Assisi's 1,400 registered parishioners.

In looking at the profile of the typical respondent, more than three-quarters of the respondents were between the ages of 40-79, skewing the sample group to middle-age and older adults. English was overwhelmingly the language spoken in most respondents' homes, at 92 percent. When identifying their ethnicity, 54 percent indicated they were European; 23 percent described themselves as 'Other'; 10 percent indicated they were Asian/Pacific; 8 percent described themselves as Hispanic and 4 percent responded that they were African-American.

McDonald also pointed out that, in response to the question on 'I am active in the following ministries,' 37 percent of people responded, 'None at the present time.' "That's very interesting," she said.

Some highlights of the survey included:

Worship:

- Between 43 and 45 percent rated the church environment, singing as an important part of the Mass, Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults being implemented and involving the entire parish and the overall vitality of the parish as very good or above average.
- 42 percent rated the regular visiting of the sick with the Eucharist and the Anointing of the Sick as extremely good.

- Over 54 percent rated the celebration of feast days and expressions of Catholic spirituality as very good.
- Special concerns included replacement or repair of the sound system; increasing opportunities for parishioners to engage in Adoration; training for Joyful Greeters; increasing the number of people serving as Eucharistic Ministers and having a teaching Mass.

Education:

- 60 percent of respondents rated the Director of Religious Education as very good or above average
- 71 percent rated the Christian formation programs for children, youth and adults as average to very good and above average
- 70 percent rated Youth Ministry as very good and above average, with 10 percent saying it was extremely good
- Special concerns included the need for the special needs community to have better networking opportunities; the need to start a Young Adult Group; and increased communications about adult faith opportunities; small groups and Bible study.

Community:

- New parishioners are welcomed in a warm, meaningful and organized manner.
- Parishioners with disabilities are included in every aspect of parish life/ministry.
- All liturgical roles are open to both men and women.
- Special concerns included increasing formation for adults on the teaching of the church in the areas of divorce, separation and sexual orientation; increasing opportunities for young adults; and increasing engagement of the Hispanic community into the life of the parish.

Service:

- The parish sponsors or supports local food drives, blood banks, etc.
- The parish reaches out to those who are in institutions (nursing homes, hospitals, etc.)
- Parishioners respond generously to appeals for aid to the poor and needy.
- Special concerns included increased opportunities for youth and young adults and increased adult faith formation on the social justice teachings of the Catholic Church and Church documents.

Administration:

- The parish has an active Pastoral and Finance councils which fulfill their responsibilities as outlined in the Archdiocesan Pastoral and Finance Council guidelines.
- The most knowledgeable people are consulted in making decisions in the parish.
- The parish effectively communicates what is happening in the parish using vehicles that are easily accessed and promote interaction and community.
- Special concerns included space for religious education and an elevator a priority and creation of a three- to five-year facilities maintenance plan.

McDonald advised that she believes conducting the Indicators of Vitality survey was good for St. Francis of Assisi Parish. However, she cautioned that consumers of the survey results should remember that the findings offer a lens into the parish and should be considered in that context.

“It’s a snapshot – it’s not a professional survey,” McDonald said. “It’s insight into the life of your parish.”

In other business, the council also discussed the need for a planning meeting to discuss the next steps for the Indicators of Vitality Survey. A meeting that was initially scheduled for Oct. 6 was moved to Oct. 27.

Executive committee member Alicia Church also stated the council’s desire to form an ad-hoc Ministry Fair committee to plan a Ministry Fair, as well as an ad-hoc Safety Committee to address issues, such as where Religious Education students should line up during a fire drill. Council member Daniel Koscinski volunteered to serve on the ad-hoc Ministry Fair Committee. Council members Anton Handono and Vincent Price volunteered to serve on the ad-hoc Safety Committee.

In her report on St. Jude Regional School, liaison Anna Breece reported that the school completed several physical improvements over the summer. She said that the school’s student population is now 263 students.

In his remarks, Fr. John welcomed back former council member Vincent Price, who he reappointed to the council after member David Theis and his family moved to the Philadelphia area over the summer. Fr. John also discussed several important initiatives that impact the church as a whole:

- **Offertory Stewardship Campaign:**
Fr. John reported that the church decided to use the services of Our Sunday Visitor to help staff manage the offertory stewardship campaign. The organization offers several templates and hands-on consultation to enable parish staffs to run effective appeals. Initial marketing peripherals were due to Our Sunday Visitor on Oct. 15; the church’s Commitment Sunday weekend will be Nov. 17 and 18.
- **“Four Courageous Conversations”**
At the time of the September meeting, Fr. John indicated that he was shying away from engaging a facilitated program by Dobie Moser, executive director of Catholic Charities and the Catholic Youth Organization in Cleveland, OH, to discuss the sexual abuse crisis. However, he changed his mind on this in late September, and brought “Four Courageous Conversations” to St. Francis of Assisi Church on Oct. 18. About 40 parishioners attended the session in the Parish Center.

When discussing the need for a parish-wide discussion on the Catholic Church’s sexual abuse crisis, several Pastoral Council members expressed opinions. Member Alicia Church said she thought it would be good to talk about it, given a similar conversation that catechists had at a Catechetical Breakfast this fall. Some Pastoral Council members expressed concerns with addressing the topic in a large group, with member Charles Giochi suggesting that perhaps ministries could discuss the sexual abuse crisis among their members. Council member Bernie McGuire also noted that the church should offer some resources to parishioners if one suspects abuse; Fr. John agreed that staff could offer these resources in the form of a Flocknote or information in the bulletin.

As a last order of business, Fr. John also discussed and handed out copies of the *Catholic Impact*, an archdiocesan publication that tells the great news about the works of the Catholic Church, including area Catholic schools, Catholic University, the Spanish Catholic Center, the Welcome Home Reentry Program, Victory Housing, Providence House and many other institutions.