

Our next installment in the analysis and commentary on our recent liturgical questionnaire turns us to the topic of the greeting and the Sign of Peace. Whereas we have great unity on the previous topics and the topics that are still yet to be evaluated in these pastor's notes, the Sign of Peace seems to be our one area of divergence. The history of the Sign of Peace at Sts. Peter and Paul stems back to the Parish Pastoral Council's recommendation in the fall of 2016 to amplify the connection between parishioners and to offer an extended time of greeting before Mass, in order to make our parish a more welcoming and inviting community. This obviously led to the discussion of the duplication or redundancy of the Sign of Peace during the Mass, which many find very distracting in its contemporary iteration in most parishes. It should be noted that the Sign of Peace is an optional rite in the Missal and Pope Francis even issued a letter in 2014 giving instructions on the Sign of Peace, indicating that at times it is appropriate for it to be omitted. Serendipitously, Bishop Stika, for reasons of health and sanitation during the flu outbreak of spring 2018, mandated that all parishes cease the Sign of Peace during Mass. We complied with this directive and grew accustomed to it, and we never returned to the practice until just this Advent, when some expressed their displeasure. Apparently not everyone had the same appreciation for omitting the Sign of Peace. This is borne out in the statistics.

Greeting and Sign of Peace

Overall, two thirds (67%) of respondents **appreciate having the invitation to greet one another before Mass begins**. The segments who report lower appreciation for the greeting before Mass include the 5:30 Mass, visitors, and those aged 45-59. Only about half of the people in these groups report that they enjoy the greeting before Mass.

Overall, two thirds (67%) of respondents agreed with the statement that they **appreciate the Sign of Peace and are committed to exchanging in a sober manner only with those nearest them**. The segments who agree *most* with this statement included visitors (80%), those aged 45-59 (75%), followed by those who attend the 5:30 Mass (73%). The segments with *less* agreement include those who attend the *Missa Cantata* (45%) and those aged 30-44 (58%). Write-in comments indicated that some agreed with one part of the question but not the other.

When asked if **it is appropriate at the Sign of Peace to greet those other than one's immediate neighbors** (which the rubrics of the liturgy expressly discourage), only 1 out of 5 respondents overall agree. The only segments who agree in greater numbers are visitors (27%) and the youngest and oldest age groups (those under 18 or over 60, at 28%).

About 90% people in most segments disagree that **the Sign of Peace during Mass is an appropriate time for conversation**. This response is in line with what the Church expects. Slightly less disagreement is found among the elderly (76%) and those attending 5:30 Mass (85%).

The three statements that critiqued the Sign of Peace during the Mass generated the greatest divide of all the questions in the survey:

- To the statement, "**Considering the wide abuses of the Sign of Peace during Mass, it is difficult for it to be celebrated in our day in a manner allowed for by the rubrics of the Church,**" overall 46% agree, but only 38% disagree (a difference of only 8%), with no clear majority. The strongest response comes from those attending the 11:30 Mass: 52% agree to this statement and 33% disagree. Segments with greater *disagreement* than agreement on this question include visitors, 9:00 Mass attendees, and the 45-59 age group, but there is still no clear majority opinion.
- When answering whether **the Sign of Peace is distracting**, there is again only an 8% difference between those who disagree and those who agree, with no clear majority. There is more disagreement overall than agreement. The segments having a majority who disagree include visitors (64%), 9:00 Mass attendees (58%), 5:30 Mass attendees (55%), children under 18 (61%), and ages 45-59 (54%).
- Almost an equal number *agree* that they **would prefer to omit the Sign of Peace** as *disagree* (overall 44% agree; 45% disagree). The segments who disagree more with omitting the Sign of Peace are the same ones who disagree that it is a distraction.

The 30 write-in comments in this category (representing about 13% of all comments received) reflect a broad range of opinions to the greeting before Mass and the Sign of Peace during Mass.

Of all the areas of study for this survey, this was the only one that produced for us a split result. We will currently retain the practice of having the greeting before Mass, as it truly is an appropriate time for the extended welcome and is an opportunity for greeting one's neighbors. However, considering the results of this survey, it seems appropriate that we have reintroduced the Sign of Peace. We still need to respect the mind of the Church on this matter in offering the Sign of Peace in a sober manner, as well as acknowledge that half of the parish finds it very distracting.

Sincerely in Christ Jesus,



Rev. J. David Carter, JCL, Pastor and Rector