

Input Session Report

SACRED HEART PARISH

March 30, 2010

Presented by:

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INTRODUCTION

As part of the engagement and stewardship planning process for Sacred Heart, the Core Team recently hosted and facilitated a series of Input Sessions on March 10th and 14th, 2010. A Spanish-speaking session was also included to seek the opinions of our Hispanic parishioners on March 20th. These sessions were designed to invite parishioner input about the parish's strengths, areas of need and opportunity, and ideas for increasing parishioner engagement. A random sampling of parishioners was invited to participate in the sessions that lasted one hour and focused on three key questions:

1. What do you see as present strengths of the parish?
2. What are the greatest needs that exist in the parish?
3. How can we actively involve a greater number of people in parish life?

HIGHLIGHTS OF RESPONSES

In the Input Sessions many of those present had similar responses to the three questions that were posed. This report is designed as a compilation of all of the responses given during the sessions. The following represents a summary of the main themes that surfaced during the sessions:

Strengths

- Music
- Sacred Heart School
- Father Marty's leadership, energy, new programs
- Fall Festival
- Variety of outreach programs and ministries
- Adult Bible Study
- Some positive growth and perception of our youth programs
- Eucharistic adoration
- Facilities

Areas of Need/Opportunity

- Communication improvements
- Youth Minister and staff to continue growth of ministry and engagement of youth
- Additional parish staff and volunteers
- Expand Catholic education
- Outreach to our seasonal community members
- Volunteer and financial acknowledgements
- Consistency in contributions
- Welcome process

Suggestions for Stronger Engagement

- Personal invitations
- Sharing of “good news” at Mass
- Follow-through
- Written profiles of newcomers
- Youth minister
- Invite youth perspective on programs and activities
- Meals with parishioners and community members
- Improve sound system
- Mentors

RESPONSES TO THE QUESTIONS

Note: A number denotes the amount of times a response was given.

1. What do you see as present strengths of the parish?

- School – 6
(well-run, superior education)
- Music – 5
- Father Marty’s leadership of the parish – 4
(energy, ability to pull people in, programs)
- Fall Festival – 4
- Bible Study is well structured. – 4
- Variety of outreach programs – 3
- Children are talking about youth program with each other as a positive. – 3
- Growth of our youth programs since Father Marty’s arrival – 3
- Lots of opportunities to serve – many ministries – 3

- Eucharistic adoration – 2
- The facilities themselves – 2
- Father’s ability to relate to many ages
- Living Christ series
- Good base of volunteers-lots of active participants
- Parish picnic getting stronger
- Teachers and curriculum work well together.
- Content of website and bulletins
- Knights of Columbus
- Catholic Daughters
- Offering of daily Mass in the main part of church rather than side sanctuary
- Mission programs and trips
- Availability of Scrip-dual locations (includes enough of scrip also available)
- Parish staff
- Office
- Getting email is nice.
- Live nativity
- Decorating during various seasons
- Announcements before Mass
- Eucharist ministers come upstairs now-they feel more a part of Mass.
- Stations of the cross seem more available-offered at more times.
- Liking confirmation every week and where the program is headed.
- Likes kids coming up during Mass.
- “Pray for...” in bulletin
- Baptism during service
- Direct deposit for giving
- Family classes (classes for children at the same time as adults), timing of classes – between Masses
- Spanish Mass – gathers the community together – better on Saturday night
- Thursday Mass at nursing home
- Montessori
- Stepping stone to get whole family involved
- Snag middle school kids – something fun to keep them interested
- Positive peer pressure / fun
- We can still think outside of the box.
- Wonderful parishioners
- Dedicated people

- Great Pastors
- When kids are involved we get better turn out.
- "That Man is You" is excellent.
- Sacred Heart has a much better music program than other parishes we've attended.
- We have good teachers and a good principal. The principal knows what she's doing, she comes to meetings knowing in her head what's going on.
- Father spends a lot of time at the school, and the kids really react well to that; he's great for the kids!
- Our kids really like the smaller breakout groups at Generations.
- We get good participation from volunteers for any activity.
- Families are well cared for and comforted in their times of loss (death).
- It's great that the kitchen staff stays on Wednesdays to make another lunch for those of us that attend stations; that is really beyond the call of duty and much appreciated.
- I was absolutely in awe listening to the Denn band during a recent funeral. The music was fantastic.
- The Wednesday nights for the kids are better, since less of the time is spent on "the message" and more time is spent on activities.

Hispanic Session responses:

- Music
- The Mass at 7:00 pm
- The school
- The values of school
- We are all one family.
- The father discipline the kids

2. What are the greatest needs that exist in the parish?

- Communication – 13
(technology, facebook, website improvements, updated information, diversity, e-mails)
- Strong youth director and staff to facilitate with stability, add programs of interest to the kids – 6
(basketball)
- Inviting and engaging new volunteers – 4
- Workload on limited number of staff and volunteers – 3
(too much on Fr. Marty and Sr. Lois)
- Expanding our Catholic education – 3

- Reach out to our seasonal community members – 3
(Kiesler’s campground, Maplewood)
- Thank yous and acknowledgements to all you donate time and funds. – 2
- Financial stability – 2
(consistency in contributions)
- Welcoming process is disjointed and doesn’t follow through. – 2
- More knowledge of what ministries are going on and what they are- could be issued in a weekly email bulletin...especially special activities or collections that may take place during Mass
- Develop and engage uninvolved Catholics and community members.
- Crying room
- Have Sunday school during Mass not at 9.
- Parents cannot be as involved with Mass with small kids. (3-7) - “Children’s time” during Mass to present material at their level (20 minutes)
- Need volunteers to clear snow in middle and keep stairs clear and as ice free as possible.
- Valet parking
- Keep working with confirmation specifically organization and keeping parents informed maybe through a parent liaison.
- Back to a CCD style- liked every week
- Better organization of mission trip set it as a priority farther in advance
- Shorten up the first part of Living Christ to allow more table time.
- Making sure it is still a social place to still have ministry
- Keep engaging high school kids.
- Keep this a place where kids want to come.
- Need a pictorial directory with more info than just picture to help to get to know people.
- Publish a pictorial and written history of the parish from its inception for sale.
- Additional sculptural/paintings to the left and right of the altar
- Are we reaching the nursing home?
- Need stronger voice in community regarding Wednesday and Sunday activities.
- Need to add faith formation.
- Announcements at Spanish Mass
- Parish office at the hub
- Explain the levels of classes so it fits your level of Catholicism.
- Do we have diversity in the activities and ministries? Are we holding our heritage?

- Get back to core Catholic teachings. This is different than bible study.
- Time and planning can be done to help with burn out.
- Written documentation of programs, events and activities on an ongoing basis.
- Emails are terrible. Emails forget information.
- Newsletter has no meat in it. It was educational stuff that didn't give good information.
- Timing of newsletters come during spring planting and fall harvest. Bad timing.
- Staff lack of knowledge or being informed on events / group times or activities etc.
- Needs list for the school or other social concerns
- Announcements at church once a month would be nice to update activities at the school.
- Campbell soup labels, or needs for the school. What are we saving at the school? Hard to get information.
- K-4 well covered for religious education. 5th -8th has stalled.
- Confirmation at an earlier age? 8th grade?
- All they talk about is money. People have drifted away from the parish.
- Celebrate the success of the funds collected.
- Members of the parish that have passed away notified to the parish.
- Prayer shawls given to people
- Tech help for database and website
- Supporting unemployed people and those in need from fires or disasters.
- Advertising / information in the Courier from our church?
- What happens when we go to another church? Educate about rules regarding attending other churches.
- Offer babysitting during Sunday Mass.
- Focus more on serving others to make it more relevant.
- Keeping up with our monthly cost and expenses
- Do a better job getting out to those that aren't in church.
- Kids hated the religion classes because the kids didn't know anyone.
- Need to work on youth to help them transition from home to outside world.
- Getting to know people is really hard.
- Daughter was not included in the parish. (ten years ago)
- We don't know many of our fellow parishioners.
- We need Religious Education teachers who understand the Catholic Faith.
- Need more for young adults after graduation, but needs to be relevant with some theology.

- Why can't we do more in the community outside of Sacred Heart?
- The Wednesday evening gatherings are good, but need to be improved; it seems the numbers are starting to dwindle. It can be very awkward to share in small groups, when you don't know the people at your table.
- There are time conflicts with groups (i.e. stations now conflict with the women's small discussion group on Wednesday).
- There is not much religion offered for the kids from grades 5-10, then we expect them to jump back in and get confirmed.
- We need to fight to get Wednesday nights respected in the community again; we are losing the kids to other (school) activities.
- Look at what we did when Jacob Gleason was killed; there were hundreds of kids here, just to be together.
- We need to involve the kids more in the outdoor summer Mass. It seems it's all done by the adults, when there is so much opportunity to involve the kids.
- We need to find a way to get my grandkids.
- We seem to have lost our kids when we switched from every Wednesday night religious education to the Generations platform once per month.
- We need to incorporate the bible into our religious education for the kids, so they learn what is in it and become interested; they can find what they need from it if they know what's in there.
- Parents need to also receive email communication that the kids are getting, so we know what is going on as well.
- The confirmation students have really had a tough time knowing what's going on, what is expected, what's changed in the schedule, etc. There needs to be a place they can get the information when they need it.

Hispanic Session responses:

- Someone to help with the kids and provide a snack
- Someone to help with choir when the person doing it is not their
- Childcare for those under 6
- A potluck once a month
- Change the Mass time. (take to the community)

3. How can we actively involve a greater number of people in parish life?

- Personal invitations – 5
- Share “good news” at Mass. – 4
(introductions, birthdays, anniversaries)
- Write up of new families to introduce them to the parish – 4
- Follow-through – 3
(example: with what people said they were interested in a ministry or committee)
- Create a strong youth ministry program and having a dynamic director that stays involved with kids through high school. – 3
- Have dinner/breakfast/lunch with outsiders and parishioners. – 2
- Improve the sound system. – 2
- Connect to mentors. – 2
- We need to have input sessions just for the kids. Let them tell us specifically what activities they want to do. – 2
- Explain parts of Mass better.
- Parish is not welcoming. There is no real introduction to parish and people within parish.
- Need connections to town and church.
- Recognizing guests and new people during Mass
- Welcoming Mass
- Make sure kids are not the only connection to get involved-welcome adults.
- Name tags for new members
- Helping hobbies pull in people to activities.
- Help people recognize their gifts. (talent check off sheet)
- Never assume people know what is going on---keep up with information on programs.
- Ideas for what is needed-does the school need a computer?-wish list for parish and school in a prominent place to encourage donations
- More family activities such:
 - Father daughter dance
 - Mother son dance
 - Blessing of the bikes
 - Evening golf tournament
- Food brings people in.
- Find a way to catch people on their way out the door.
- Advance notice
- Establish a routine.
- Find activities for children.

- Welcome packet
- Parent group – support group
- Spanish Bulletin with schedule – website in Spanish
- Participation
- Catch the 18-30 year old group.
- Hispanic youth activities
- Make sure everyone feels that they belong.
- Less is more – keep everyone on the same page.
- Contact realtors for new people to town and network with new people.
- Survey for where you want to help / volunteer
- Do you have the survey data or database information? Do you have an updated database?
- Adopt a youth. Tie it to some of the important activities. First communion.
- Training of youth by adults and teens for fall festival and other activities.
- Get confirmation students involved in the church. Do not assume everyone knows everyone.
- Picture directory
- Who's related to who?
- Get the ushers greeting people.
- Brown and Itron has shifts where people cannot make it to church. Mass times?
- Post Mass to website? Put Mass on YouTube?
- Improve quality of video recording. Get it better quality on the television.
- Find out why people left. Strategic recon work?
- Don't ask about money all the time.
- Name tags would help.
- Pick the teachers and pay them, \$1000/year, so they are more committed.
- Catholic Club concept to go visit other parishes to get outside of community
- Changing the model of how the church operates is very scary.
- ISPD is a great start.
- Better social network for the church
- Maybe we should open up youth activities to other faiths, to not only get our Catholic youth involved, but to make their gatherings more open.
- We had 100+ kids for the ski day. It was something of interest to kids, and they go to intermingle with other kids. It was a huge success.
- Years ago, we had a Halloween event for the kids at our barn. There were over a 100 kids there, and they had a great time.

- People need to know they can be involved without having to be 100% involved. People feel obligated if they say “yes” and then feel guilty or inadequate if they can’t meet the obligation. We can’t expect people to be at every meeting, to do the same job every year (because they said “yes” once). We have to offer single-event commitments for people, so they feel like they contributed, guilt-free.
- Make it a religious party that people are just eager to become involved in. We need to relate to what’s in the bible and not preach it; the message needs to relate to everyday life.
- There should be a way for people to anonymously ask questions about the readings or sermon during the service, which can be answered during the same service.
- If one kid is asked, and they ask a friend or two, pretty soon, you have a whole group of kids.
- Perhaps we should offer different styles of Masses—one traditional, one contemporary, etc. If we had jazzy music at a particular Mass, maybe that would be a Mass the kids would feel drawn to as a group.
- We need to keep the music going all through the summer.
- The parishioners need to be more involved in the music, singing along, clapping, etc.
- We need a more formalized plan to have the youth to actually run a Mass (similar to how grades 1-4 take turns planning the Wednesday school-day Mass); and we need to extend this to planning of dinners, breakfasts, rolls, etc.

General Comments:

- Everyone in the room that had received a letter about the input sessions very much appreciated receiving a call of invitation; none would have been here if they hadn’t been called.

THE NEXT STEPS

This series of Input Sessions is one step among several that Sacred Heart will take in building its level of engagement and plans for the future. The Core Team will review and discern the input gathered at the sessions, and move forward in identifying the major areas of opportunity that continue to surface as needs for the parish. A parish survey will be administered on April 10th – 11th to continue seeking input in specific areas of parish life. In May, the Core Team will move

forward in forming a Parish Planning Team that will work with the needs of our parish family, and develop strategies to improve these areas.

A primary focus of this engagement and planning process is to continually seek open and honest feedback from all members of our parish. The future vision we establish for our parish must come from the input, ideas and recommendations of the people who make up our Sacred Heart community.