

St. Joseph Church

Our Parish Covenant

June, 2011

Introduction, Background, Joe! Study Focus Group Process and Expectations

The brochure entitled "Now Is The Time" is a synopsis of the path followed from when Fr. John Hennessey, our pastor, requested the Parish Pastoral Council to look to and plan for the future of St Joseph Parish. It is a "work in process" summary starting with the identification of the challenges of the future, the selection and implementation of the Growing an Engaged Church process, the Joe! Study, a study of our faith community. The Joe! Study results were integrated through a number of Focus Groups from which Expectations of ourselves and of our parish were discerned, concluding with the planned Covenant signing liturgy to be held on June 5, the celebration of the Feast of the Ascension.

The events leading up to the St Joseph Parish Covenant were initiated some 26 months ago, March of 2009. Fr. John Hennessey invited the Parish Pastoral Council (PPC) to address the future of the parish and create a plan. At that time, the economic situation that has impacted all of us was emerging as a possible threat. The reality of the retirement of our three priests in the coming years became most apparent. Multiple questions were presented:

- How do we prepare for the change in leadership?
- What kind of a Catholic Family of Faith are we and what kind of Family of Faith do we want to be?
- How do we bring better alignment to the many ministries we have today and those of the future?"
- What are our priorities and what financial and human resources do we have or need for the future?

The PPC created a sub-group to address these questions. After much deliberation and consideration of different approaches, it was concluded that paramount to creating the plan for the future, parishioner input was essential and that there needed to be direct and wide participation. The sub-group identified and recommended using the process outlined in the book Growing an Engaged Church by Albert Winsemen. The premise of the book is based on the work of the Gallup organization, which has been doing faith-based research for the past twenty years. A key concept of the book is growing individual parishioner engagement with in the parish. Gallup has created instruments to measure levels of engagement in Catholic and non-Catholic churches. The two primary components within Growing an Engaged Church (GEC) process are: Spiritual Commitment and Member

Engagement. Spiritual Commitment, the "my believing" relates to how an individual lives out his or her faith. Member Engagement, the "my belonging" looks at an individual's sense of belonging in the parish community. The combination of Spiritual Commitment and Member Engagement creates the Spiritual Health of the parish. A significant goal of the GEC process are survey questions which involve the parishioners by asking him/her their opinion on key questions as well as educate parishioners on membership expectations. The overall goal is to survey parishioners and to increase their engagement in the parish and at the same time develop the future direction of the parish.

In October of 2009 parishioners were asked to participate in the Joe! Study. The study measured the Spiritual Health of the parish. Spiritual Health is made up of Member Engagement ("My Belonging") and Spiritual Commitment (My Believing".) The results of the Joe! Study demonstrated that the Grand Mean was greater for Spiritual Commitment than Member Engagement. Gallup reach data had concluded that if a parish can grow engagement, Spiritual Commitment will also increase. There are three levels of parishioner engagement (as defined by Gallup): A. Engaged - an engaged parishioner has a strong emotional attachment to the parish, attends mass regularly, is likely to invite others to parish functions and give generously of their time and treasure; B. Not Engaged - these individuals are less emotionally connected, may attend mass regularly, are not likely to invite others to parish activities, have a minimum amount of volunteerism and provide moderate financial support; C. Actively Disengaged - they may attend mass infrequently (2-2 X per year) or may attend mass regularly but are emotionally absent, inviting others is virtually non-existent and they have no involvement in the parish and tend to be unhappy with the parish. The Joe! Study depicted St. Joseph's as having 24% of parishioners Engaged, 49% Not Engaged and 27% Actively Disengaged. Gallup stated that the opportunity rests in the Not Engaged. Based on the results of the Joe! Study and foundational to the growing engagement in the parish, we first set out to defining expectations of one another and of the parish at large and secondly by a program called Living Your Strengths which was started this past January. Our faith calls each of us to develop our given strengths and talents. A tool within the Living Your Strengths process helps individuals identify their strengths and discern participation in the community or parish ministries through awareness of their strengths. People enjoy what they feel good about and contributing where they can make a difference. Doing what one does best and being involved is a vital part of engagement. The Joe! Study formed the basis for the Focus Groups and from those multiple meetings Expectations were derived. We as a parish via the Joe! Mini Study chose the 5 Expectation of Ourselves and 5 Expectations of Our Parish. Expectations simplify and provide clarity to parishioners as well as direction to all parish ministerial groups and provide for the basis of creating a plan for the future. Our consensus/expectations will be crafted into a covenant that all parishioners will be invited to sign. The covenant can be viewed as a cared agreement between the parish and ourselves as parishioners.

The Focus Group Process and Expectations

“The Growing An Engaged Church” process encourages the use of focus groups as a follow-up to the initial study. A focus group provides parishioners the opportunity to share and discuss together topics of concern and interest. Two Series of Focus Groups were held to further explore the responses provided in the Joe! Study, which was conducted in October 2009. The data from the Joe! Study served as the foundation for the Focus Group questions. The responses from both series were compiled, categorized by themes and provided the framework for the parish wide mini-study.

The first round of Focus Groups addressed the expectations we have of ourselves and each other. There were 15 focus group sessions held and approximately 120 parishioners participated in the discussion. Slightly more women than men participated. A significant majority of those who attended have been members of St. Joseph Parish for over 10 years. 75% of the participants were 40 years old and older. Parishioners were asked 4 questions: What do you do that gives your life meaning? What kinds of things would you like to do with others at St. Joseph Parish? As a parishioner of St. Joseph Parish, what do feel or think is expected of you? In order to grow into a fully vibrant parish, what could be expected of us as parishioners of St. Joseph Parish?

In the second series of Focus Groups, the conversations centered on “our expectations of the parish.” The parish was described as the clergy, the staff, parish leadership, the school, the religious education program, the commissions, and the various ministries. There were 11 focus group sessions held and 103 parishioners participated with slightly more women than men. Roughly three-quarters of those who attended have been members of St. Joseph Parish for more than 10 years and are 50 year old or older. The questions asked were: How does our parish display a commitment to the spiritual growth of the parishioners? As we look to the future, what would you like to see in an ideal parish? What are the top 3 priorities or concerns our parish is currently facing? What are the obstacles to addressing these issues?

The combined responses from both groups served as the foundation for the parish wide mini-study. The focus groups served as one component in the process of establishing expectations of one another and of the parish, both leading to clearer understanding of expectations, increasing parishioner engagement and greater parish unity as we look to the future.