

## Our Journey Together Continues...

March 21, 2010

It was about a year ago that I raised questions with the Pastoral Council about our future. Questions like: how can we reach out to those who are parishioners that we don't see very often? What kind of Catholic Family of Faith are we and what kind of Family of Faith do we want to be? How can we prepare for an inevitable change of leadership? What do we want to look like with fewer full-time priests? How do we integrate the many initiatives that engage us today into our mission? How could limited human and financial resources impact our future? These were some of the questions I raised, fully aware that the Holy Spirit is very active among us and seems to be calling us to discern and create our future.

The Pastoral Council shouldered this challenge and recognized its timeliness. Rather than take it on themselves, they created a Task Force to study the questions and explore possible ways to engage this conversation. The Task Force includes members of the Pastoral Council, the Pastoral Staff and members of the parish-at-large. The Task Force began its work by clarifying its mission and exploring ways to address the future in dialogue with the Pastoral Council, the Pastoral Staff and other interested people from the parish. In the course of their exploration they discovered the book, *Growing an Engaged Church*, learned more about it and recommended the Gallup Organization and their process that is explained in *Growing an Engaged Church*.

After several conversations with Gallup representatives, we engaged Gallup to help us with the process explained in *Growing an Engaged Church*. In consultation with a Gallup representative we prepared to use their instrument that we called the Joe! Study. We began by measuring our current levels of engagement as a Family of Faith. The process of completing the survey itself invited and began engagement. 1,900+ people completed the survey during Sunday liturgies, on-line or through the mail. The Joe! Study results were compiled by Gallup and shared with the Parish at several sessions during November. Al Winseman, who authored *Growing an Engaged Church*, came to present and interpret the Joe! Study results at one of those sessions.

The Task Force began to study and interpret the Joe! Study results in consultation with Chris Brown who is a Gallup representative. The Task Force spent several meetings and several hours engaging the Joe! Study results and charting next steps. Gallup recommended starting at the grassroots by engaging people around expectations, people's expectations of each other and expectations of leadership. Gallup also suggested exploring Strength Finders, a process developed by Al Winseman and others through

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Gallup that helps individuals identify strengths and discern participation and ministry through awareness of their strengths. People enjoy doing what they are good at and contributing where they can make a difference.

Several Focus groups have gathered already and Focus groups are ongoing. Focus groups are basically prayerful listening sessions where people can share and have conversation around expectations. Some learning so far has been that many don't really know what is expected of them beyond the Catholic expectations like Mass on Sunday. These same people would welcome clarification about expectations. People enjoy meeting other parishioners whom they don't know. Through Focus groups we are growing an engaged church. The Task Force hopes to identify several expectations from the participants of the Focus groups and consult with all of us through a “mini-survey.” The goal is to identify four or five expectations that we can commit ourselves to as we learn to engage with one another in new and Spirit-filled ways.

The Task Force is still studying how to engage the Strength Finders process. I did this myself and found it enlightening and helpful. I am reminded that each of us has something to contribute to the whole and the contribution of each of us strengthens all of us. We are not in competition with one another as a Family of Faith. Our strengths are God-given gifts that we have to share with each other.

I hope that starting with the Joe! Study we are building our future with the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Community is one identifying feature of a Catholic Church. I learned through my recent journey through surgery and recovery the importance and value of belonging to a community of faith. *Growing an Engaged Church* is about building and strengthening our Family of Faith. Being more engaged with one another gives us a felt sense that we belong, that we are valued, that what we think is important and that we actively encourage others to join us and be engaged with us. My hope and prayer is that engagement becomes a way of life for us and that the programs and ministries are ways to grow engagement.

I am delighted by the initial interest in and engagement with the process. I am grateful to the Task Force that is Co-Chaired by Roland Catherall and Kathleen O'Connor. I believe that the Holy Spirit is a vital presence in this process as we get underway. *Growing an Engaged Church* is a “work in progress” that calls for patience, trust and discovery. Our future is in God's hands and I trust that God's Spirit will guide us to the best way we can be church well into our future.

I hope you have a good week.

Fr. John Hennessey