

ST. PATRICK'S PARISH, BEDFORD

2017 PARISH LISTENING SESSIONS AND SURVEY

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

SPIRITUAL LIFE

- The mass was the primary focus of most of the feedback in this area. Within that, the topics mentioned most frequently were the message (homily) and music.
- The keyword is *relevance*: both the message and music must be relevant to the people in the pews at each mass. Homilies should relate scripture to the community and offer encouragement to parishioners in their everyday lives.
- Feedback on music included pleas for music that is more accessible to the congregation as well as appreciation for our current musicians. There were frequent requests for a children's choir and/or child-friendly music at the Children's Mass, and for a teen choir.
- Parishioners look to their faith community for spiritual support, guidance, and practical suggestions for applying faith to daily life.
- Existing groups that help do this are very much valued and appreciated, in particular:
 - Men's Ministry
 - Moms & Tots
- Parishioners have asked for other groups for spiritual support and fellowship, including:
 - Women
 - Working mothers
 - Parents with children at home
 - People with special needs
 - Singles
 - Separated and divorced
 - Empty-nesters
 - Seniors
- Ministering to children, teens, and families was frequently cited as needing increased focus, sensitivity and outreach.
- Requests for ways the parish can further support Spiritual Life include:
 - Bible-study groups
 - Retreats: host in-parish retreats; post links to retreat houses
 - Invite guest speakers
- Varied feedback on the Religious Education program ranged from those who are happy with it as it is, to those who see it as too rigid and lacking in compassion for the challenges families face. Suggestions for options to be considered included:
 - Additional class days and make-up class options
 - Family catechesis
 - Monthly and online options

SERVICE & FELLOWSHIP

- Suggestions were provided in these areas:
 - Outreach to our local community
 - Direct Service locally and beyond
 - Communication
 - Fun Fundraising
 - Fellowship for All

- **Outreach** suggestions:
 - Ask our partner-in-faith parish, Sacred Heart in the Bronx, how we may do more to support them directly
 - Attend to the nursing needs of parishioners such as those who are ill and homebound, older adults, and new mothers
 - Visit the homebound
 - Identify ways to get involved with helping the local homeless and immigrants
 - Establish a group for young mothers
 - Offer use of the church meeting room or Cenacle for weekly AA/NA/Al-Anon meetings

- **Direct Service** opportunities that were suggested:
 - Arrange service/mission trips to impoverished areas for the youth of the parish
 - Organize Midnight Runs for youth and/or families
 - Join other local churches to provide services that address community needs
 - Establish a "Journey Through Grief" group
 - Facilitate parishioners serving one another as tutors, mentors, and job coaches
 - Sponsor a Habitat for Humanity event
 - Organize drives to collect coats and other needed items for the poor or homeless
 - Organize lunches where teens may serve seniors
 - Provide meals and/or home-keeping for parishioners who need assistance
 - Collect leftover food from local restaurants to distribute to those in need
 - Make visits to nursing homes
 - Provide rides for parishioners to get to church or parish events

- **Communication** suggestions:
 - Create and publish a parish mission statement
 - Provide a listing of local service opportunities for youth and other parishioners
 - Publish an annual calendar of events so parishioners can plan their participation

- **Fun Fundraisers** are opportunities to provide a service while also building fellowship:
 - Sales: rummage sales, bake sales
 - Cooking for others: chili cook-off contests, pot-luck suppers

- **Fellowship for All** suggestions included:
 - Inexpensive parish events for all ages such as: a St. Patrick's Day celebration in the school gym; other holiday celebrations; pizza and movie nights; daytime gatherings.
 - Revive or revamp Coffee Sunday fellowship after mass.
 - Events for new parishioners to meet other parishioners, such as: barbecues; wine and cheese receptions.

REACHING OUT & WELCOMING

- Common themes in this area included:
 - Many people do not feel truly welcome
 - There is much we could do to be a more welcoming community
 - There is particular concern that younger generations are not engaged in the life of the Church and are leaving

- **Short-term:** suggestions that could be acted upon *immediately* include:
 - Have greeters at the church doors for each mass
 - The celebrant for each mass could thank the congregation for attending and thank the liturgical ministers who served
 - Lectors/Readers should speak more loudly and clearly when reading the announcements
 - Set aside a section in the bulletin each week to include a list of all parish committees with members and contact information
 - Make registering to become a member of the parish easier and more prominent

- **Medium-term:** suggestions that could be implemented *in a matter of months* include:
 - Establish a “New Parishioners Committee” that would focus on reaching out to and engaging anyone who is new to the parish. This committee could:
 - o Organize a program to welcome new members and help orient them to the parish
 - o Run special events to help new members meet other parishioners and to foster developing a relationship with the pastor and other clergy
 - o Help establish a procedure for the parish secretary to notify the committee when someone new registers with the parish
 - Keep the parish website up-to-date.
 - o Find a volunteer to serve as webmaster for the parish website
 - Provide training for ushers and lectors to be more welcoming
 - Recruit parishioners to participate as greeters, ushers, and liturgical ministers

- **Long-term:** suggestions that could be implemented over a longer time frame (**6+ months**):
 - Focus on parishioners who are inactive or who have left the parish to find out why
 - Organize more parish social activities, including a “revamp” of Coffee Sundays
 - Examine the tone of parish communications to ensure that it is warm and welcoming
 - o Communications from the Religious Education program are appreciated for their content and timeliness, but many noted that the tone is often harsh

“EVERYTHING ELSE”

- The “What Else?” section of the survey captured feedback and suggestions in areas not already covered. We call these suggestions “Everything Else.”
- **Pastoral Care**
 - Priests should greet parishioners after daily masses; this is an opportunity to speak with a smaller group of devoted parishioners on their way out of church.
 - When giving the Eucharist to an Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion to bring to the hospitalized or homebound, the priest or deacon could send them forth with a greeting, prayer, or words of comfort to be relayed on behalf of the whole parish.
 - Increase the availability of Anointing of the Sick for those with chronic illnesses.
 - The clergy are encouraged to attend parish and school functions as a way of getting to know parishioners.
- **Communication and Media**
 - Improve parish communication and timeliness of communication.
 - Improve, expand, and update the parish website.
 - Establish a parish “media room” with a lending library.
 - The Pastoral Council should provide avenues for better communication within the parish community.
- **Parish Pastoral Council**
 - Publish and make known via website, bulletin and other means:
 - Role of the Pastoral Council
 - List of current members, their terms, and how to contact them
 - How parishioners may become members
 - Notice of meetings that are open to the parish
 - Members should wear name tags and make a point of introducing themselves and greeting others at masses and parish events.
- **Parish Staff / Operations**
 - “Do more with less”: require staff to have more skills; reach out to parishioners with relevant expertise to volunteer for the parish and use parishioner volunteers instead of hiring staff.
 - Allow parishioners to apply for parish staff positions when they are available. Parish staff should know the parish and its members.
 - Consider long-standing business relationships and support to the parish when engaging service providers.
 - Consult with the Pastoral Council, Finance Council, Carnival Committee, etc. before instituting changes that break with longstanding parish tradition.
- **Other / Miscellaneous**
 - Clergy and EMHCs should use hand sanitizer before distributing Holy Communion.
 - Continue tradition of Mothers’ Day and Fathers’ Day blessings and prayer cards.
 - Become more involved in the Bedford community.
 - Provide extra collection envelopes in the pews for parishioners who forgot them and for visitors.