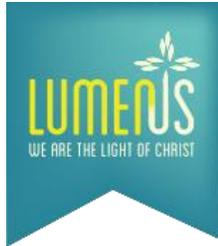


Belonging

“They devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles and to the communal life, to the breaking of the bread and to the prayers ... All who believed were together and had all things in common.” Acts 2:42, 45



In the past, most Catholics joined and attended their local parish as a matter of obligation. Today, a growing number of Catholics actively choose their parish membership and their location for weekend worship based on what a particular parish has to offer their faith journey and how it feeds their personal spiritual needs for liturgy, stewardship and community. We can no longer expect that parish membership and the institutional Church will motivate Mass attendance, stewardship and discipleship. Parishes need to connect individuals to their faith in new ways, to be relevant to their varied gifts and needs, and to make a difference in the world. Connecting, sharing, reaching out - a community of belonging - bring people into parish life and inspire and energize them to live Christ's word in the world.

Areas of Discovery

- When church attendance was counted on two Sundays in October 2014, Thirty-six percent of our parishioners attended Mass, while average attendance throughout the Church has been estimated to be 20-25%.
- Many parishioners have expressed dissatisfaction with our institutional Church.
- Many parishioners have expressed personal satisfaction or dissatisfaction with our liturgy.
- Parents want to engage their children in a spiritual life through liturgy, youth ministry and faith formation. Some perceive sacramental preparation as inconvenient to their over-scheduled lives, and some perceive that faith formation overall is lacking or fails to engage parents and children in a quality way.
- Our school is a gateway to parish involvement. Yet, some school families do not become involved in parish life or leave the parish once their children graduate.
- Parish Sunday giving has increased in the last three years, after several years of no increased giving. There is concern that the conduct of the institutional Church will negatively impact financial giving.
- Our parish does not impose any requirements for membership, but could do so if it chose.
- While our community has emphasized welcoming in the past five years, new members can struggle to connect with other parish members, ministries or activities beyond the initial welcome.

Conversation Starters

- How can we connect to all people through Christ – regardless of age, needs or gifts?
- Should our attempts to connect be focused on particular groups within our parish?
- How can liturgy, faith formation and other ministries contribute to a sense of belonging?
- Is there a way to engage people in their faith that is not tied to the parish building?
- Should serving the school with time, talent and treasure be considered serving the parish?
- How can parishioners be engaged to serve one another, the parish and the greater community within their gifts, and how can the parish serve parishioners through spiritual nourishment, community, and parish ministries and support.
- Should we ask parishioners for a commitment to parish mission as part of membership?