

**Who are we?** The process of developing this Pastoral Plan for St. Stephens involved gathering data, conducting Focus Group gatherings, and conducting surveys. In reviewing and discerning the extensive data and identifying our Core Values, one overarching spirit became clear:

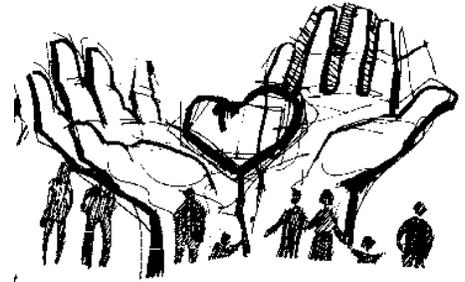
At our very core, we at St. Stephens are a **Faith Family**.

We are a uniquely blessed faith family, formed in the image of God, filled with the Holy Spirit, and united by the saving grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We are a faith family seeking to grow in love and service to God and each other.

We are not alone. We are part of something much bigger, and even more wonderful. We are not confined by blood, by place, by time.

We, the St. Stephens faith family, are an extension of our nuclear families, and seek to provide for the needs of the individual member, the individual family, and the St. Stephens faith family as a whole, in much the same way a nuclear family provides for its individuals as well as for the whole. We also strive to extend our family to others in our community.



### **Why the “family” metaphor works**

Families come in all shapes and sizes, ethnicities, cultures, backgrounds, ages, etc. All these families are united by certain commonalities:

- Each of our members is unique, and independent; yet we are also interdependent and unique as a body. “For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of the body, being many, are one body; so also is Christ.”—1 Cor. 12:12
- Just as the Holy Family is the model for our church, the Holy Family is a model for each of our families
- Each family member is responsible for participating in the family
- The family is responsible for the education, moral development and value system for its members
- Families provide for the spiritual needs of its members and often share one faith
- Any family member’s call to vocation should be respected and encouraged
- Effective, functioning families are founded on good communication, respect, obedience, and most importantly, LOVE.
- Families nurture, encourage, grow, support, work together, and share (time, talent, and treasure) with each other

- Families try to meet the needs of their family members. While each member may not agree, or may have different priorities, the family focuses on hearing all voices and building consensus for the good of the whole.
- “The well-being of the individual person and of both human and Christian society is closely bound up with the healthy state of conjugal and family life.”<sup>1</sup>—

As a faith family, we share these commonalities and in strengthening them, we are drawn together in unity.

### **In Context: The Human Family in God’s Plan**

God instituted the human family and endowed it with its fundamental constitution. Its members are persons equal in dignity. For the common good of its members and of society, the family necessarily has manifold responsibilities, rights, and duties.

“The Christian family constitutes a specific revelation and realization of ecclesial communion, and for this reason it can and should be called a domestic church.<sup>2</sup>” It is a community of faith, hope, and charity; it assumes singular importance in the Church, as is evident in the New Testament.

The Christian family is a communion of persons, a sign and image of the communion of the Father and the Son in the Holy Spirit. In the procreation and education of children, it reflects the Father’s work of creation. It is called to partake of the prayer and sacrifice of Christ. Daily prayer and the reading of the Word of God strengthen it in charity. The Christian family has an evangelizing and missionary task.

The relationships within the family bring an affinity of feelings, affections and interests, arising above all from the members' respect for one another. The family is a privileged community called to achieve a “sharing of thought and common deliberation by the spouses as well as their eager cooperation as parents in the children’s upbringing.”<sup>3</sup>

The Catechism further reveals: The family is the community in which, from childhood, one can learn moral values, begin to honor God, and make good use of freedom. Family life is an initiation into life in society.

“A happy family is but an earlier heaven.”—George Bernard Shaw

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<sup>1</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2250 (GS 47§1).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, 2204

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, 2203–2206.

**What unites us as a Faith Family? Our Core Values!**

With faith family as our core, basic to all our other Core Values, we look to meeting the needs of the individual member, the individual family, and the St. Stephens faith family as a whole. We hope to do that by focusing on the core values identified in this plan.

- WORSHIP and SPIRITUALITY: Families are strengthened and nourished by our worship and devotions.
- WELCOMING and DIVERSITY: We welcome and celebrate all who walk through our doors. We are all part of the Faith family and welcome everyone into our home.
- LAY INVOLVEMENT: Our family flourishes when our members are connected to each other and to our shared goals and vision. Each member is called to participate, to help support the family, and to become further engaged with the other members of the family, increasing his/her sense of family and belonging.
- STEWARDSHIP: God has gifted each family, and each family member with unique and special gifts. These gifts are traditionally viewed in terms of time, talent and treasure. They are meant to be shared with God's greater family, and our faith family. Gifting others through stewardship shows one's love and commitment to the greater family, its well-being and goals, and in turn, gives life to the steward.
- EVANGELISM: Evangelism means sharing the "Good News" to all of humanity. What better place to start than the family!
- OUTREACH: In our own families, we see the pain, the hurt, and the needs of others. In our faith family here within the parish, and in our extended faith family, there are so many other needs. The Catechism teaches that the family should live in such a way that its members learn to care and take responsibility for the young, the old, the sick, the handicapped, and the poor. As it happens, many families are at times incapable of providing this help; therefore, it devolves on others to provide for their needs. We are called by Christ to reach out to serve others, and in doing so, serve Him. It is our responsibility as a church to support these individual needs and the faith family as a whole.
- RELIGIOUS EDUCATION: The family is responsible for educating and developing its members morally and spiritually. The Church and our faith family have further responsibility to educate and encourage our members to grow in knowledge of God and our Catholic faith. We are on this journey to heaven, together.
- PARISH LIFE: Family events strengthen the bonds between its members and offer encouragement. They keep us connected. Our faith family remains connected and supported when ample, diverse opportunities are given for fellowship and fun.
- COMMUNICATIONS: A family without good communications is nothing more than separate individuals.

... of One heart and mind, built into a living temple, built-up in love, unity strengthened in Christ. This Pastoral Plan was developed based on the unique identity of St. Stephen the Martyr Parish as a faith family, with shared Core Values. Focusing on our faith family and its Core Values allows us to strengthen what already unites us.

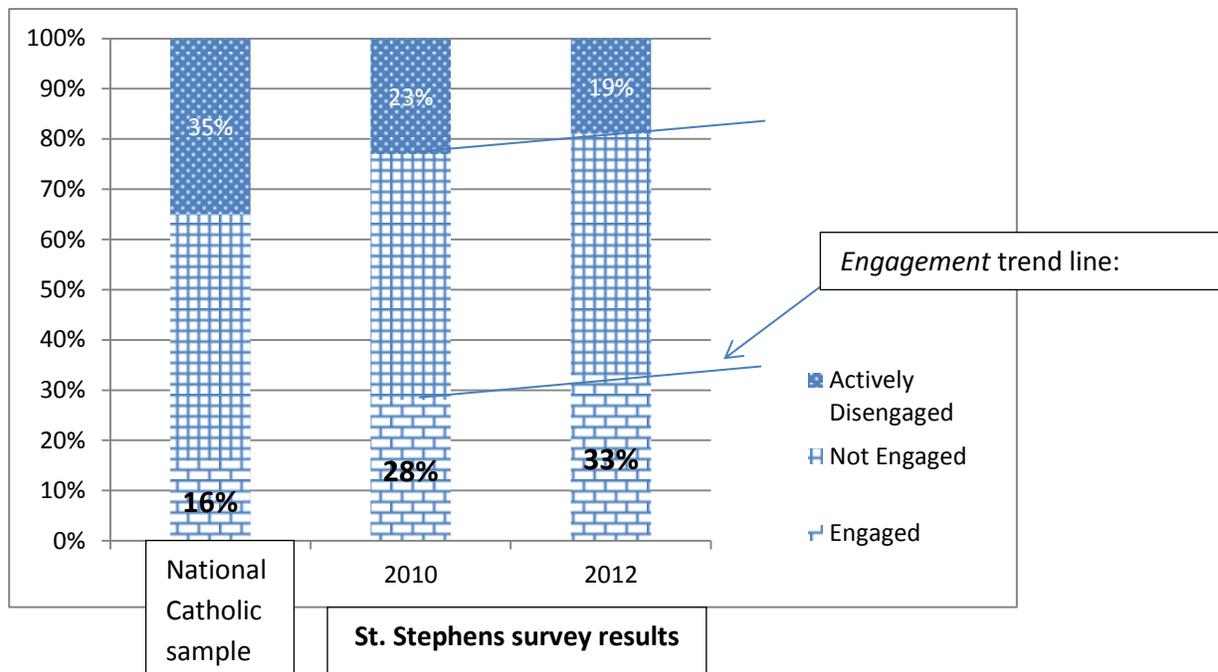
**Relevant Data**

**Parish Engagement: Increasing**

The word “family” speaks a dynamic of unity, people caring for one another, sharing life together. The Christian terms of “fellowship” and *Koinonea* include these and add to the mix the dimension of shared faith and spirituality.

Are we becoming a more united faith family? Are we deepening the ties that unite us? Are we gaining in potential to carry forward the mission of Christ in this time and place?

The Gallup organization has provided us some empirical tools to accurately respond to those questions. As a component in the pastoral planning process, two Gallup ME25 surveys have been administered (May 2010 and March 2012). The chart shown on the next page (along with the notes) provides insights to answer those questions.



What do the Gallup “engagement” numbers mean? For over 70 years, Gallup has been developing instruments that measure the “immeasurable.” Gallup has developed systems that accurately measure

the “soft numbers”—those that include customer and employee engagement and other forms of “intangibles” that are keys to business success.

Several years ago, Gallup confronted the challenge of measuring another “immeasurable”—spiritual engagement. Through its extensive research on the subject, Gallup has designed an instrument, the ME25 Member Engagement Survey, which measures the spiritual health of parishes.

Traditionally, parishes have measured themselves primarily by their attendance, membership, and monetary giving. While these statistics are important, they are outcomes, not causes, of a parish’s spiritual health, and they can be influenced by nonspiritual factors such as demographics and location.

Gallup’s ME25 goes to the heart of an individual’s and a parish’s engagement and spiritual commitment, giving parishes a clear picture of their spiritual health. Such a picture is crucial, for Gallup’s research confirms that spiritual health drives all other factors in parish life, including attendance and financial commitment.

- **Engaged:** These members are loyal and have a strong psychological connection to their parish. They are more spiritually committed, more likely to invite friends, family members, and coworkers to parish events, and to contribute more money and time.
- **Not Engaged:** These members may attend regularly, but they are not psychologically connected to their parish. Their connection to the parish is more social than spiritual. They give moderately but not sacrificially, and they may do a minimal amount of volunteering in the community. They are less likely to invite others and more likely to leave.
- **Actively Disengaged:** These members usually show up only once or twice a year, if at all. They are on the membership rolls, and can tell you what parish they belong to, but may not be able to name the pastor. However, they may also be regular in their attendance. If that’s the case, they are physically present but psychologically absent. They are unhappy with their parish and insist on sharing that unhappiness with just about everyone.
- **National Catholic sample:** This number provides a reference point through reporting responses from Catholic parishes across the country. St. Stephens looks very good against this benchmark. That said, the best of the Catholic parishes started tracking nine years ago, scoring 32% engagement. In the fall of 2012, their engagement rating was 52%.

