



Family #23: St. Stephen the Martyr and St. Anthony

What are our Gifts?

"The community felt welcoming and not judging. I felt like I belonged."

Overwhelmingly, the greatest gifts are the parishioners and priests of St Stephen and St Anthony who are praised for their welcoming and collaborative spirit and fostering a sense of family, charity, community, and being valued.

"I love our priests and appreciate their dedication and love for us." Many pointed to the Inspiring, supportive and accessible clergy and staff as well as the pastoral leadership from Father Ed and Fr. Bryan who encourage participation in ministries and provide opportunities for spiritual growth through faith formation and prayer, in particular Eucharistic Adoration at St Stephen. "I have found that volunteering for various ministries has been fulfilling. It makes you feel more like a part of something. More than just attending Mass."

The most common answer for feeling closer to God involved the great number of opportunities for engagement in community outreach programs. *"The warm feelings I get from my charitable works ... gives me a strong feeling of belonging that I did not have prior to getting involved."*

Cultural, ethnic and generational diversity was mentioned at both parishes but was a particular point of pride at St. Anthony as was the opportunities for education - especially the St. Anthony school. Over all, Parishioners take pride in their priest and parish staff, the variety of ministries, outreach programs and rich liturgical life. Together, St Anthony and St Stephen are seen as a loving, loyal, and prayerful family that embraces its Catholic identity openly and fosters a supportive and loving environment for all.



Detailed Synthesis

1a. How have your experiences in our parish (your experience of our parish's gifts and charisms) brought you closer to God?

Many agreed that the parishioners at St Stephen and St Anthony are welcoming and there is a sense of family, community and mission. A parishioner stated that: "...the "family" feeling and active involvement of the parish is felt strongly." Most agreed that the parish's welcoming community, diversity, and collaborative spirit fosters a sense of belonging and being valued.

"St. Stephens is filled with the Holy Spirit. There are so many people who have inspired me to become closer to God just by observing their example." Adoration, Mass and acts of service have all brought me closer to God."

"The community I share brings me closer to God and our Lord. The people at Saint Anthony's have always been welcoming."

"I love our priests and appreciate their dedication and love for us." Many highlight the inspiring, supportive and accessible clergy and spiritual pastoral leadership from Father Ed and Fr. Bryan whose homilies deepen their faith.

The great number of opportunities for serving the community and church as well as various faith formation activities and Adoration further enrich their relationship with God.

"I have found that volunteering for various ministries has been fulfilling. It makes you feel more like a part of something. More than just attending Mass."

Overall, parishioners express that the combination of prayer, service, fellowship, and strong pastoral leadership has strengthened their faith, spiritual growth, inspired personal transformation, and created a vibrant, faith-filled environment.

1 Welcoming, Accepting Community and Sense of Belonging

Feeling **welcomed, accepted, and not judged** has helped many individuals reconnect with their faith, especially those returning to the Church or new to the area.

"The community felt welcoming and not judging. I felt like I belonged."

"We've found that each of the two parishes has different gifts and benefits that bring us closer to God, especially the perpetual Adoration and the welcoming atmosphere at St. Stephen's."



"I feel like there is a sense of unity and welcoming that make us feel like we are a part of the parish, even though we're fairly new to the community."

2. Spiritual Growth, Deepening Faith, Personal Transformation and Renewal

Many respondents expressed a deeper connection to God and growth in faith through strong prayer life and involvement in the parish. Parishioners describe the **Eucharist/Mass, Confession, and Adoration** as central to their spiritual growth. These experiences provide opportunities for healing, peace, and deeper connection with God.

"The sacrament of confession and the Holy Mass are the most powerful transforming gifts for me."

"Daily Mass at St. Anthony's has enabled me to spend daily time with God."

"Through perpetual adoration, and regular confession."

"Being closer to God through the readily available nature of His sacraments here."

3. Inspiring Priest, Pastoral Leadership and Homilies

The priests' **homilies and pastoral presence** have deeply moved many parishioners, making the Gospel more accessible and relevant to daily life.

"Fr. Bryan and Fr. Chanda's homilies completely touched my heart many times."

"The parish staff that is led by Father Bryan. Kim is amazing...."

"The goodness of the priests has been very obvious. I am more in love with our Savior Jesus Christ because of this."

"Father Bryan...the priests have taught me and encouraged me to grow in my faith."

"Going to mass again after many years being away has been a very good experience. I hear more from the gospel that I use day to day from the teachings. Perhaps I'm a better"

4. Opportunities for Service to the Parish, Community Outreach and Charity

Ministries focused on community and serving others, Engagement in outreach programs such as St. Vincent de Paul, Gabriel program, food bank, Terrific Tuesdays - enrich their relationship with God

5. Faith Formation and Education



Participation in **ministries** (youth and adult), **scripture studies**, and **formation programs** (e.g., VBS, CGS, school activities) helps parishioners learn, share, and grow spiritually. Numerous church programs such as adult education, bible study, ministries, retreats, Knights of Columbus and workshops were all recognized for increase in faith and happiness.

"Being a catechist with our CGS program and meeting with our scripture study group have taught me a lot about the Mass."

6. Diversity

"Our community is constantly enriched and strengthened by the diverse ethnic cultures that worship, instruct each other, and grow toward God together."

"The wonderful programs and outreach that is offered for those in need. Also, the diversity and long history we have in our community."

"We should be proud to be such a diverse, yet cohesive family."

Both parishes had very similar responses but each had a unique gift,

At St Stephen, Father Ed's legacy of fostering deep spiritual life was noted both directly as well as indirectly in referencing the programs he initiated such as Eucharistic processions and in particular the very popular Perpetual Adoration which was cited numerous times.

"Having the Adoration Chapel available at any time of the day to be with Jesus has transformed our faith and brought it to a new level. The dedication of the parishioners to support this Adoration and the profound effect it has on everyone (including the blessings given to the parish itself) is a gift every parish in the archdiocese should be experiencing."

At St Anthony, Education and the school were cited:

"I love the CGS program. The big parish events are always nice ways for the children to have fun and feel united as One Body of Christ."

And while ethnic and cultural diversity at both churches was noted it was a very popular answer for parishioners at St Anthony where the **cultural richness** and **celebration of many traditions and languages** stood out as a core strength and source of pride. Multilingual Masses, feast day celebrations, and cultural representation are frequently mentioned.

1b. What has been the spiritual impact of your participation in our parish?



Participation in parish activities has profoundly impacted parishioners spiritually by deepening their relationship with God through prayer, Mass attendance, and Eucharistic Adoration, while fostering a strong sense of belonging and community. Many have found fulfillment and growth by engaging in various ministries, such as music, teaching, mentoring, social action, and service to the needy, which has helped them live out their faith actively and surrender more fully to God's calling. The parish is seen as a welcoming, peaceful family where friendships and faith are nurtured, encouraging members to grow in holiness, evangelize, and support one another. While some have experienced periods of disconnection, overall, participation has brought spiritual renewal, increased love of neighbor, and a desire to follow Christ more closely.

Spiritual growth and growth in faith was a common answer:

"Participating in parish life has encouraged me and given me the support I need to grow more deeply in the faith."

Also noted was a sense of being spiritually refreshed and having a brightened spirit.

Growth in faith included growth in understanding Catholicism and learning about the church as well as bringing non-believers into the faith:

"My non-Catholic partner who I would say was previously agnostic this year told me he accepts Jesus into his life..."

"A very deep love of God, and knowing so comfortingly that I am deeply loved by Him." Many answers agreed that deeper love and closeness to God was the spiritual impact they realized, feeling the presence of Jesus and experiencing miracles at the Church.

"...the tangible recognition that people on the margins who rely on God tend to have a stronger spirituality. When all you have is God, in a sense you have no choice but to lean on him all the time!"

Helping people on the margins, participating in ministries and serving the church were by far the most common answer but with a variety of programs mentioned:

"I love to serve and St. Stephens has provided me opportunities in Life teen, Eucharistic Minister service and Foreign Missions. This fills my cup."

"As a result of getting plugged in and involved, my faith has been challenged in new ways and I feel like I have grown stronger as a Catholic. Specifically, as a PREPARES volunteer, I have found new ways to grow and encourage others while serving out Christ's mission in our local community."

"The warm feelings I get from my charitable works through my involvement with and the brotherhood of the Knights of Columbus gives me a strong feeling of belonging that I did not have prior to getting involved."

2a. How would you describe, to a newcomer our parish gifts and charisms in one sentence?



The parishioners of St. Stephen the Martyr, Renton, describe their parish gifts and charisms as centered on being a welcoming, inclusive, and vibrant community where everyone is encouraged to participate and share their unique gifts. The parish offers abundant opportunities for prayer, spiritual growth, and service through diverse ministries, outreach programs, and faith formation. Many emphasize the strong presence of the Holy Spirit, a sense of family, and the joy of growing closer to God and one another. Overall, the parish is portrayed as a warm, supportive environment that nurtures faith, fosters connection, and invites newcomers to actively engage and feel at home.

“St. Stephens is a Catholic community that is a diverse and welcoming place for those who want to establish or deepen their relationship with Christ.”

1. Authentic, Welcoming, Inclusive Community

A strong and consistent theme was how **welcoming, caring and non-judgmental** the parish feels. Parishioners deeply appreciate the sense of **belonging, hospitality and warmth** and a feeling of family where relationships are built through groups, fellowship and shared faith.

“St. Anthony’s is friendly, welcoming, not judgmental and feels like home.”

“There is a lot of pride and joy about being a parishioner.”

“The warmth that you always feel when you are with everyone.”

“Our parish gifts include hospitality, generosity, and charity from a non-judgmental group of people who desire to walk alongside one another.”

“I feel like there is a sense of unity and welcoming that make us feel like we are a part of this parish, even though we’re fairly new to the community.”

2. Diversity

The parish’s **ethnic, cultural and generational diversity** stands out as a unique gift and a source of pride, especially during shared liturgies and community celebrations.

“Our community is constantly enriched and strengthened by the diverse ethnic cultures that worship, instruct each other, and grow toward God together.”

“Many cultures come together – united in Christ to serve one another, and to build up the Church.”

“My favorite part about being a parishioner are the multicultural celebrations!”

3. Strong Sacramental Life, Prayer and Spiritual Opportunities



Many responses pointed to opportunities for deepening of faith and nurturing their spiritual lives including Daily Mass, Confession, and other sacramental practices and especially Eucharistic Adoration at St Stephen. These are seen not just as routines, but as **life-giving and transformative experiences**.

"Confessions all the time, daily Mass, and 24/7 Adoration."

"Participating in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, receiving the Eucharist. Seeing others grow in their faith..."

"You can feel the presence of God through your interactions with each and every parishioner here at St. Stephens."

"Welcome home, Jesus is waiting for you here."

"We have daily opportunities to attend Mass and Adoration."

4. Community support, Outreach and Active Parish Life with Opportunities for involvement and encouragement to engage

Along with hospitality, generosity and charity, parishioners recognize and value the wide variety of **ministries, service opportunities, and faith formation programs** available for all ages. There is particular pride in **outreach efforts** and the work of organizations like **St. Vincent de Paul**.

"Our very active St. Vincent de Paul conference. The strong attendance at daily Mass. Children's faith formation with CGS."

"Outreach program – we always are helping the needy."

"Serving God with friends" and "Sharing my faith with others."

"St Stephen the Martyr is a welcoming community full of love and outreach. We have so many offerings in a dynamic community, I think there is something for everyone!"

"St. Stephen the Martyr is a parish blessed with a spirit of serving God by helping and serving others both in our community as well as the wider communities of Washington."

5. Dedicated Clergy and Leadership

The parish clergy are frequently cited as **humble, approachable, and spiritually enriching**. Parishioners express gratitude for their **preaching, presence, and dedication**.

"Having the current Priests, Fr. Dolejsi & Fr. Chanda (sad he'll be leaving) make a big difference..."

"The priests for being approachable to the parishioner."



"My favorite part is being inspired by the priests that say mass here and being able to participate in groups that help me serve God and others in different ways."

6. Commitment to the next generation of Catholics

Support for kids, families, St Anthony's school and kid's mass.

2b. What is your favorite part about being a parishioner?

The answers for this question followed closely to the answers for 2a.

The favorite aspects of being part of the parish include a strong sense of family and community, meaningful relationships developed through small groups and ministries, and active participation in Mass and sacraments such as Eucharist, Adoration, and Confession. Many appreciate the accessibility and openness of clergy, the vibrant faith shared among parishioners, and the variety of liturgical music and programs available. Volunteering and serving in ministries are also frequently mentioned as fulfilling parts of parish life. Overall, the responses reflect a deep appreciation for spiritual growth, fellowship, and active engagement in parish life.

Sense of Community and family; people, friends, relationships, fellow parishioners, family, community were emphasized:

"The openness and sense of community that is here, I believe these are the people I will be praying alongside in heaven, feels like home when I am there, gives me great joy to be there."

"I feel like this is my extended family. Many members greet me by name and ask how I am or what I am doing and even how they can help me in my ministries."

"I like the presence I feel in the church (I think it's beautiful and calming) and not all churches make me feel that way."

24-hour adoration as well the outreach groups, community service and ministries were common answers:

"We appreciate the 24 hours of adoration, the Rosary making group and the Outreach ministries."

"There is a strong sense of community and love of God present in our committees, councils, ministries, and mass."



Father Bryan was mentioned several times for his leadership and his sermons.

2c. What is something our parish should be proud of?

The answers here again followed those in 2a and 2b. This quote is a good summary:

"We have some really good, caring people, who put a lot into their various ministries. One thing to be really proud of is the fact that we have nearly 24 hrs. Adoration every day!! People come from all over the area just for that."

Strong leadership and clergy leading vibrant worship and prayer life, Cultural, ethnic and generational diversity was mentioned at both parishes but was a particular point of pride at St. Anthony. St. Stephen the Martyr parish is widely recognized for its beautiful church and grounds. A welcoming community, worship and prayer life, spiritual growth, faith formation were common answers.

Parishioners take pride in the active participation and faithfulness of volunteers, the variety of ministries and outreach programs serving both the parish and wider community, and the rich liturgical life including daily Mass, frequent confession, and 24/7 Eucharistic Adoration. The parish is also valued for its dynamic worship, music ministry, and opportunities for spiritual growth through faith formation and prayer. Overall, the parish is seen as a loving, loyal, and prayerful family that embraces its Catholic identity openly and fosters a supportive environment for all.

Special attention

"With some Priests, Lectors with accents it is very hard to understand them sometimes and the sound system still is not up to its fullest sound." (Note: I have personally heard this from some of our older parishioners - mjl)

"Our family was deeply hurt by the May 4, 2025 "Words from Fr Bryan" section. We have been parishioners for 26 years and have never felt/read such divisive words from a priest. We would like an apology from Fr Bryan- we look to him to lead our flock of all races. We pray for him daily that God can change his heart and love all parishioners in his parishes."

"Unfortunately, I feel the PIG efforts of streamlining our parishes have had a negative effect on most of us that appreciated SSTM as a vibrant and growing-in-faith community. It continues to be stripped down and is reaching a below standard parish. Parishioners are going elsewhere for their Sacraments-- confession at another parish close by, Mass in another "parish family" besides ours. It has split the Catholic community here at SSTM. I hope someone who actually cares to know how things are truly" going reads this feedback. So, yes, our parish gifts have transformed our faith, but the last year those gifts are slowly and steadily being stripped away. Are you listening to God? Is He at the center point of this corporate move towards bringing us closer to God?"



One respondent noted a significant change in enthusiasm, stating: "Since the change my enthusiasm for St Stephen's, under Fr Bryan, has completely turned around for the better. Our last pastor was too much of a conservative, Latin, music, etc."

"I have deep faith in Jesus. I use to feel home with Christ at our Parish. Now I feel it just place together for a ceremony,"

"PS I know you are asking about the status but I want to say we need to invite St. Anthony to join our ministries and for St Stephne to join St. Anthony ministries. Please don't reinvent the wheel but use what we have in collaboration."

"The older person choir needs help- it's embarrassing because they sound terrible. Also, the front of the church needs help, especially by the organ, all the wires sticking out of the wall the piece if wood leaning against the wall and wires - all the papers etc. please have someone reorganize that area"

'Would like to see a formal family group or even a marriage counseling program."

"It has changed over time. At times, I've felt disconnected to the parish and it's pushed me to incorporate other ways to connect with my spirituality,"