

St. Mary & St. Ann Parish

2024 Visioning Study Summary

In late January 2024, the Parish of St. Mary & St. Ann set out to ask our people to look to our future. To envision what could happen here if we set our minds to something more than we are doing now.

First we explored what is happening around us, and along the way - what could be better, more spiritually enriching, and more giving to our community. We looked at our **worship experiences** and the **spaces** and amenities connected with those events, then our **spiritual development** activities and our **outreach & service** initiatives, and finally our **fellowship** opportunities. After the parish responses were compiled, a group of 17 people representing all walks of our parish, came together for a full day retreat, to review and discuss the responses of the parish.

Together, we realized a lot of things. Let's start with some numbers.

Over the course of two weeks, 103 of roughly 400 weekly attendees of weekend Masses answered the study. That's about 25% of weekly attendees. Seemed like a low number to some at the Retreat Day, and so we pondered why.

We assumed that many people are just fine with the way things are, and so they didn't choose to share their thoughts. Some people just didn't fill out the study, perhaps too busy, some thinking nothing will change, or perhaps any changes wouldn't affect their life in any way.

So, the 25% who did speak for the whole spoke loud and clear. Some spoke with positive enthusiasm, and some spoke with not so positive emphasis, and several shades in between.

In every case, we heard you, and this summary will share the sentiment of those responses. We will also blend the ideas that flowed from the Full Day Visioning Retreat, (held a couple weeks after the Study), where the parish responses were reviewed and discussed.

First we looked at - **Our Liturgies and Worship Experiences.**

- Almost 100% of respondents find our worship experiences to be **meaningful & uplifting**.
 - Eucharist is the top important element, followed by the homilies and the chance to gather together.
- The most important thing people want to see at worship events is **more people**. Followed by a desire for more **reverent quite time** before Mass. And many comments about **music**,
 - Among the music comments - a wider selection of music, hymnals back in the pews, and more vocalists participating.
- Some respondents also would like to see more involvement from **young people**. And some would like to be **challenged more** in their faith life.
- A very large portion of respondents feel we are a "**welcoming & inviting**" community, and feel our worship experiences **help them** on their journey as Catholics and "help strengthen them" for daily trials.

Then we considered - **Our Education & Spiritual Development Programs and Events**

- Roughly half of the respondents indicated **attendance** at some sort of religious **education or spiritual development activity** over the past few years.
- When asked if they didn't attend, what **kept them from attending** -
 - They cited - timing and scheduling issues, or age and/or health issues.

- Several sighted reasons related to “interaction hesitation” with others, being introverted and/or feeling alone.
- A very large portion of respondents agreed that we have many **“worthwhile” programs**,
 - Including - St. Mary School, the RCIA program, Youth programs, the Women’s Day of Reflection, and others.
- When asked what **other opportunities** would they like to see offered, over half of respondents offered up ideas of events or programs including
 - Small group dinners / speakers / Bible study / prayer group / faith sharing / catechesis (formerly referred to as Catholic education), etc.
 - Many asked for similar ideas in a large group setting as well, also including Parish Mission events, or a pilgrimage event.
- Others commented about the desire to return to more “classroom” style **Religious Education** for younger family members.
- And some respondents expressed a desire for small gatherings for those who **are grieving** the loss of a loved one.
- When asked **“who” is in need** of programs or events, the most common response was **“everyone”**.
 - Specifically mentioned - children, teens, young adults, young moms, families, young couples, adults, women, men, seniors, etc.
- More than half of respondents would be **willing to help** with initiatives to provide spiritual development events and/or programs.

Then the focus turned to how we help people -

The Outreach & Service Initiatives we Provide

- About half of respondents indicated **participation** in one or more service projects.
 - Some indicated service or giving through individual channels.

- When asked **“who” benefits** from our efforts, many responded to the suggested responses of “family, community & the home-bound”,
 - But many also offered **“we the providers”** or a version of that sentiment, as those who benefit from service and/or giving.
- When asked what **groups or individuals are in need** of assistance, the list of responses was very long.
 - Responses included - the homeless, people with age and/or health related needs, and families in crisis situations.
- Concern was expressed for **our youth**, in terms of needing spiritual direction and services for personal issues, inclusion and involvement.
- Concern was also expressed for communication **to those in need** of services, to help connect them to various available services.
- And again, well more than half of respondents would be **willing to help** with initiatives to provide programs and/or services to those in need.

Then we looked at - Our Fellowship Opportunities

- A very large portion of respondents **indicated attendance** at many of our fellowship events,
 - Most notably - the Friday fish fry during Lent, Pig Palooza, coffee & donuts / St. Ann pancake breakfasts, and others.
- Almost everyone **indicated helping** at least once with various events.
- As **reasons for attending** fellowship events, a very large portion of respondents agreed with the ideas of -
 - “building community” and “gathering with friends”, many also agreed that “helping with fundraising” was a primary reason.
- When asked what **other type of events** you would like to see, respondents commented on
 - “meal/food related” events, “game or outing” events, and sport, concert or youth events.

- The things that seem to **keep people from attending** fellowship events ranged from -
 - Age and/or health issues, timing or schedule issues, and “interaction hesitation” issues such as feeling alone, shyness or feeling unwelcome.
- In responses to how to make events “**more inviting**”, comments ranged from -
 - Better timing, more communication, events focused on other topics, and a wider group of volunteers.
- When asked “**who**” should other events be **targeted to**, comments included -
 - Seniors, youth, families, adults, women & men.
- And once again, well more than half of respondents would be **willing to help** with initiatives to provide other fellowship opportunities.

And finally - **Our Worship Spaces & Amenities**

- The top issue of the space at the St. Mary location is the **lighting**, both from a need for brighter fixtures, and from the **darkness** of the dark wood beams.
- Both locations voiced a desire to solve **hearing issues**,
 - Among the comments - problems with the sound systems, and with the need for some individuals to hear and understand the spoken word better in the space.
- There were also comments about -
 - How **noise carries** from the entrance hall into the church at St. Mary, and how relatively small **the crucifix** is.
 - At St. Ann, some would like to see the use of **more color**, and perhaps move the images of **Mary & Joseph** to the altar area in some way.
- Both locations also expressed a desire to **tidy up** the entrance areas more.
- Outside - both locations have issues with **sidewalks** and exterior **lighting**, and at St. Mary “fix the darn **parking lot**”.

Results from the full day Visioning Retreat, & the final Study Question

On February 11th, 16 people from our parish, gathered with Fr. Dwight for a full day retreat, to review and discuss the responses from the Visioning Study. Combining the ideas from the retreat day, and comments from the final study question “**what one or two things would you most like to see happen at St. Mary & St. Ann**”, those ideas and comments are presented here.

Worship Experiences

- Number One! - Develop ideas, initiatives and programs to build Mass attendance.
- Among the ideas - Consider altering the Mass schedule to build attendance at remaining Masses.
- Conduct a “Post Card” Campaign to invite & encourage attendance.
- Explore ways to get younger people more involved in Masses.
- Develop ways to encourage more reverence & quiet for those preparing for Mass before we begin.
- Develop ways to help people to be more engaged at Masses.
- Encourage more engagement through music.
 - Among the ideas - Bring back the hymnals, expand our music selections, include more instruments where possible, and involve more vocalists.
- Recruit more greeters, and provide more training for them.
- Explore ways to make St. Ann’s building more accessible during the week.

Education & Spiritual Development

- Develop programs and/or events for small groups.

- Among the ideas - dinners / speakers / Bible study / prayer groups / faith sharing / catechesis, etc.
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- Also - Seasonal Parish Missions, or a pilgrimage event.
- Reconsider our religious education efforts at all levels, from the young to the seniors.
- Address “understanding and acceptance” realities for young and not-so-young people related to social issues.
- Develop series of “Healing” Masses or services.

Outreach & Service Initiatives

- Develop collaboration with existing programs in the community.
- Coordinate efforts with other churches in the community.
- Help identify those in need.
- Develop coordination between those in need and those willing to help.
- Develop a more visible presence to the community, for those in need.
- Develop one-day events for service.

Fellowship Events & Opportunities

- Encourage more participation, both in volunteering and attendance at events.
- Develop other family based, and youth based events.
- Develop regular ongoing events for seniors.
- Develop events targeted to newer parishioners, welcomed by the long established parishioners.
- Establish a “Newcomers & Old Timers” Event to encourage involvement of those new to the parish.
 - Include a Ministry & Service Fair with the event.

Worship Spaces & Amenities

- Explore options to improve our sound systems and hearing assistance capabilities.
- Improve the lighting, and “darkness” issues at St. Mary.
- Improve exterior lighting at both locations.
- Address parking and sidewalk issues at both locations.
- Tidy up the entrance areas and improve signage at both locations.
- Explore ideas to expand or improve imagery (statues, etc.) and decor at both locations.

General Comments and Ideas

- Improve transparency of financial issues, and decision making in the parish.
- Increase communication of events, ongoing issues and welcoming. Perhaps a “newsletter” format, beyond the bulletin.
- Improve efforts to unify activities and worship activities between the two locations of our parish.
- Explore using the parish hall at St. Mary for rental events again.

Moving Forward

Where do we go with all this great information and these enthusiastic possibilities?

We, everyone of us, can do something!

A number of ideas are happening already, or are in the works. But it takes all of us to do something more.

Look at the list of ideas, is there something that strikes you as interesting, or perhaps **you** have a gift to offer in one of those directions? Speak up! Tell someone that you know is a leader in this parish, or tell Fr. Dwight - those people can help direct your interest. In fact, a “partnership” is a great way to help out, you and a friend serving together. Don’t just wait for “someone” to make something happen - make it **you**.

Together, **We** can do more!