

Summary of the St. Jerome Parish Responses to the March 2009 Congregational Life Survey

From the St. Jerome Parish Bulletin of January 17, 2010

RANDOM THOUGHTS Fr. David Blanchfield

As I mentioned last week, I am going to use the next few columns to summarize the results of the U.S. Congregational Life Study that the parish took last spring. 397 individuals filled out the form so we have an excellent sense of what people in pew think. Better still, since 11% of the congregations were Catholic, we have a way to compare ourselves to similar parishes. The respondents were broken down into categories based on size. We are considered a large Church because on any given weekend we have about 960 people in church. If we had attendance of 1,000 or higher we would be considered a mega church.

As I told you last week, the survey identifies 10 strength areas for a congregation. If you scored above the 80% percentile in any area that was rated as a strength for you. We had two strengths: caring for youth and focusing on the community. We had five areas where we were higher than the Catholic average, one where we were the same and four where we were below the Catholic average. So let me summarize the areas where we were both higher and lower.

In the strength area of growing spiritually we were four points higher than the Catholic average. What helped us was that 90% of respondents said the parish met their spiritual needs. That response was very encouraging.

Another area, as I mentioned, was caring for youth, 75% of respondents said they were satisfied with what we do for those under the age of 19. Also highly significant was that 86% said that their children living at home, attended Church. The Catholic average was 74%.

The third area where we were above the Catholic average was in focusing on the community. 43% of the respondents said they are involved in social service or advocacy groups in the community. The Catholic average was 28%. Further 86% said they contribute to charitable organizations outside the parish compared to the Catholic average of 65%. Certainly the survey accurately identifies what we know to be strength about ourselves.

The fourth area where we are above the Catholic average is in empowering leadership. We scored 56% overall while the Catholic average was 39%.

The last area where we were above the Catholic average was looking to the future. We had an overall score of 36% to the Catholic average of 34%. Interestingly when all congregations were included, the average was 41%. So while we are ahead of the average Catholic parish in looking to the future, we are behind the national average. It pleases me that 40% think we have a clear parish direction and are strongly committed to that direction.

More to come next week. You may be surprised, as I was, to hear the areas where we are behind both the Catholic and national averages.

From the St. Jerome Parish Bulletin of January 31, 2010

RANDOM THOUGHTS **Fr. David Blanchfield**

As I mentioned in the last column, the U.S. Congregational Life Survey told us much about the parish. Last time, I listed our strengths. This week let me identify the ways we were below the national or Catholic average. Some of them may surprise you.

The second strength area that the survey identified and that was problematic for us was meaningful worship. The national average was 62% and the Catholic average 58%. We were exactly at the Catholic average.

There were 8 questions under this heading. We were off the mean on five of them. For the question, do you experience joy in worship we came in at 68%. For the question, do you experience awe during worship usually or always, the national average was 33%, the Catholic average 34% and we came in at 23%. On the other hand, for the question, do you experience frustration during worship RARELY, the national average was 72% the Catholic average was 67% and we came in at 77%. For the question do you experience boredom during worship RARELY, the national was 66% and the Catholic average 59%. We came in at the national average and thus 7 points higher than the Catholic average.

The question is: what to make of all this? First, the national average includes Churches with more freedom of worship than does a Catholic parish. On the other hand, we are ahead on lack of both boredom and frustration, but below on joy and a sense of awe. The Pastoral Council has put together an ad hoc committee to look at these questions.