

**REPORT ON THE
ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI PARISH FORUM
HELD ON
OCTOBER 18th, 2009**

Despite one of the nicest Sundays in recent weeks, nearly 30 parishioners turned up to participate in the Parish Forum. Those attending represented a fair cross section of the parish.

The idea of holding a forum came from the Lakeshore Deanery Symposium held in Brighton in the Spring on how to address falling attendance at churches. The process was to first identify the **issues** facing the parish, and then to start suggesting ways in which these issues could be **addressed**.

The Parish Vision (as follows) was used as a guide.

The People of God and St. Francis of Assisi Roman Catholic Church Parish in Newcastle, Ontario, Canada, envision a community of welcoming and hospitality that, through service, education and liturgical celebrations will empower all our Parish Family and Neighbours.

After some open and frank discussion, the following is a summary of the **main issues** brought up.

Liturgy – declining attendance; more focus on the sacraments of initiation (confirmation and first communion)

Education – the need for programs for our youth, young families and those wishing to expand their understanding of our faith.

Welcoming/Hospitality – the need to build a fully embracing community especially welcoming newcomers to the parish; also, the need to pay special attention to the needs of an aging congregation.

Openness – the need to openly address issues facing the church in today's society and their effects on parishioners and our local community as a whole.

Communication – the need for more sharing on, and between, the various ministries. The need to better communicate the following: the financial health of the parish, mass intentions, local family connections of the deceased; also, the need to be open to suggestions for change.

Other - The need to better understand the demographics and needs of our community. The need for people to commit to the roles they take on.

Further discussion highlighted some suggestions which will be reviewed in the weeks to come. Here are just a few of the suggestions:

- Create a ministry of Greeters to welcome people to services.
- Proactively welcome people new to our parish
- Find ways to identify and address issues that are keeping Catholics from attending mass on a regular basis (especially those with young families)
- Find ways to better coordinate the many ministries and communicate all the good things going on to all parishioners (possibly a Pastoral Parish Council?)
- Publish a Parish Organization Chart
- Permanently merge the 9:00 and 11:00 Sunday Masses
- Initiate a Suggestion Box
- Make the Parish Hall available to parishioners (for a reduced fee)

In his summary, Fr. Peter remarked that the issues and suggestions broadly fell into the same two major categories that were raised in the Deanery Symposium in Brighton, namely welcoming and education. There is, perhaps a third – the need to better inform our parishioners of the details of the workings of the parish.

The above is just a summary of what turned out to be a highly successful meeting. We have taken note of all that was discussed. The next task is to translate the needs expressed into initiatives to address them. Some work has already been done on the need to make us better informed about our faith. In addition to the Bible Study group which is to start on November 16th, Helena Lessard announced a four session program called ***We the Parish*** which helps us to look at our parish, and our place in it, in a new light. If that is successful, we hope to follow it with ***Awakening Faith*** and ***Growing Faith*** which address issues critical to those who may have lapsed in their faith and practicing Catholics. “We the Parish” will be run in the fall and the other programs next year.

One final suggestion was that we have more forums in the future. This, more than anything, reflects the feeling that coming together in this way can only be positive for both the parish and those that attended. “Where two or more are gathered in my name...” held true on this occasion and, we pray, for the initiatives that will come out of it. In the meantime, we know that there are more good ideas out there so we are immediately implementing one of the ideas raised. A suggestion box will be placed by the communication centre in the Gathering Room. Please use this method to provide us with your ideas on how we can improve our parish.

Finally, a sincere thank you to those who took time out to participate, and to those who will help implement the many good ideas that were raised.