

The Precious Blood Report

Coming in January: A Measurement of Our Spiritual Health

When we consider ways to help our Church to grow, we typically ask questions like,

- **Why don't more people join our Church?**
- **Why don't they stay?**
- **Why won't they serve?**

Over the last few years, our parish leadership has been asking just those questions. In planning meetings, casual conversations, and diocesan initiatives like *We Walk by Faith*, we have listened, discussed, planned, implemented, and re-planned.

Slowly but surely, we have made progress in coming to an understanding of who we are as a parish community. We have instituted a New Parishioner Orientation, where we outline how

we as a parish will support households in living out their mission as Christian disciples, and what we expect of households in supporting the mission of the Church. More households are now giving proportionally, and participating in parish ministries, and a significant number of our parishioners gather weekly for Sunday Eucharist.

This past October, our parish leadership gathered for a weekend retreat, and considered the questions we have been asking, and what the answers might be. With the assistance of our facilitator, Fr. Bill Hanson, pastor of St. Gerard Majella parish in Port Jefferson Station, New York, we found ourselves wondering if maybe we have been asking the wrong ques-

tions! Maybe we should turn the questions upside down, and instead look at them from a positive point of view:

- **Why do people join our Church?**
- **Why do they stay?**
- **Why do they serve?**

We became convinced that the answers to these questions would tell us more about St. Thérèse and its strengths and potential than would their negative variations.

During the month of January, we will be asking our parishioners about our strengths, and how they relate to our parish mission. Be sure to give your opinion; it counts!

The Precious Blood Test

How can we best accomplish what God has in mind for us? How can we best use the gifts and talents of the people who are part of this parish? These are important questions, and we've been wrestling with them for some time at the Church of St. Thérèse. Our next step is to hear from

you. To this end, in the four weeks of January, we will be conducting a "Precious Blood Test."

In the same way that we visit the doctor annually and get our blood tested, the Precious Blood Test will help us

get a picture of our parish's spiritual health. The success of this effort hinges on the completion of the survey by each one of us who is at least 18 years of age. Everyone's opinions need to be heard.

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The 9 Pillars of Spiritual Health:

- *My faith is involved in every aspect of my life.*
- *Because of my faith, I have meaning and purpose in my life.*
- *My faith gives me inner peace.*
- *I am a person who is spiritually committed.*
- *I spend time in worship or prayer every day.*
- *Because of my faith, I have forgiven people who have hurt me deeply.*
- *My faith has called me to develop my given strengths.*
- *I will take unpopular stands to defend my faith.*
- *I speak words of kindness to those in need of encouragement.*

How does the Precious Blood Test Work?

The survey will be administered by the Gallup Organization, an independent research company known for its understanding of people and their opinions. Although most of us know them for their polling work, they have been listening to people and studying successful organizations for over 40 years. With this, they bring a seasoned capability to assist us in our efforts to gather and understand all of the opinions throughout our parish.

On the weekend of January 5 and 6, 2008, all adults attending Mass will be given the Gallup ME²⁵ to complete. As the name implies, the ME²⁵ is com-



posed of 25 statements, most of which you are asked to rank on a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). A few questions measure demographics, such as how often you attend Mass, or how many hours you spend in service.

The entire survey should take no longer than 5 minutes to complete. For those who wish, the survey will be available online as well. The survey will also be made available at the church throughout the month of January.

Gallup will process and interpret the answers received, and **on Monday, February 25, the entire parish is encouraged to attend a report by Tim Simon of the Gallup Organization, who will help us understand what our Precious Blood Test has revealed about our spiritual health.**

Your opinions will be completely confidential; Gallup will not reveal any individual responses to anyone. After we've received the results back from Gallup, we will use them to start a dialogue about our parish, and how we can be more effective at accomplishing our mission. We all have a stake in the opportunities and challenges that lie ahead.

The Four Relevant Outcomes of Spiritual Health

When Gallup started investigating spiritual health, they discovered that four outcomes are the most accurate and relevant at indicating the spiritual health in a congregation. **The four outcomes that are most relevant indicators of a parish's spiritual health are: Life Satisfaction, Inviting, Serving, and Giving.**

Gallup's research has shown what spiritual leaders have always known: these outcomes are important to the parish's spiritual health. Where we've gotten it wrong, however, is focusing on the *out-*

comes (e.g., annual financial appeals), rather than on the *cause* of these outcomes. Outcomes are the result of causes. In order to affect the outcomes that are indicators of spiritual health, leaders must focus on improving the causes of spiritual health. It does not work the other way around.

Although the ME²⁵ does measure these outcomes, it only does so to better understand how spiritual health leads to Life Satisfaction, Inviting, Serving, and Giving.

The 4 Indicators of Spiritual Health:

- *I am completely satisfied with my life.*
- *In the last month, I have invited someone to participate in my parish.*
- *How many volunteer hours a week do you give to help and serve others in your community?*
- *How much do you give per year to this parish?*

How Can You Prepare for the Precious Blood Test?

Our parish Stewardship Committee is busy preparing for the Precious Blood Test, which will take place in January 2008. Here's how your household can prepare:

Consider how you would respond to each of the 25 statements. Look over the **9 Pillars of Spiritual Health** (pg.1 of this newsletter), the **4 Indicators of Spiritual Health**, (pg. 2), and the **12 Items of Engagement** (pg. 3). How

would you respond to each, on a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree)? Note that the last two Indicators of Spiritual Health require a specific amount. Think about how much you give in these two areas.

Respond to the measurement early.

Each of the responses has to be electronically entered (we need folks to help with this; if you can help with data entry, please contact the parish office). If you

respond early in January, that means less last-minute data entry.

Pray for the success of this initiative.

Our vision is that the Precious Blood Test will help us to identify the strengths of our parish, and build on them to develop strategies for addressing engagement issues. Pray for the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Parish Engagement: Good Soil

The 12 Items of Engagement

- *As a member of my congregation, I know what is expected of me.*
- *In my congregation, my spiritual needs are met.*
- *In my congregation, I regularly have opportunities to do what I do best.*
- *In the last month, I have received recognition or praise from someone in my congregation.*
- *The spiritual leaders in my congregation seem to care about me as a person.*
- *There is someone in my congregation who encourages my spiritual development.*
- *As a member of my congregation, my opinions seem to count.*
- *The mission or purpose of my congregation makes me feel my participation is important.*
- *The other members of my congregation are committed to spiritual growth.*
- *Aside from family members, I have a best friend in my congregation.*
- *In the last six months, someone in my congregation has talked to me about my spiritual growth.*
- *In my congregation, I have opportunities to learn and grow.*

Gallup has discovered that engaged members drive the spiritual health of every parish. Dr. Albert Winseman, author of *Growing an Engaged Church* (2006, Gallup Press), tells us that “the more engaged members there are in your church, the healthier it is. A spiritually healthy church is the good soil that produces fruit in abundance — and engagement is the key.”

Just what is parish engagement? Winseman says that it “describes the degree of belonging an individual has in his or her congregation. But it is deeper than belonging to a ‘club’; engaged members use the language of ‘family’ when they talk about their churches. They want to know they are valued and that they make meaningful contributions to the mission and ministry of their churches — not in terms of dollars and cents, but in contributing their greatest talents to accomplish something bigger than themselves.” At our parish leadership retreat in October, we used similar language, describing the feeling of being “at home” when we walk in the doors of the church, or when we’re with other members of the parish.

Through extensive research and analysis, Gallup has discovered that there are essentially three types of members in every congregation:

Engaged parishioners are loyal and have strong psychological and emotional connections to their church and

parish. They are more spiritually committed, they are more likely to invite friends and others to parish events, and they give more, both financially and in commitment of time.

Not-engaged members may attend regularly, but they do not have strong psychological or emotional connections to the parish. They give moderately but not sacrificially, and they work a minimum number of service hours. They are less likely to invite others, and more likely to leave.

There are two types of

Actively disengaged members. One type shows up only once or twice a year (if at all). They are on the rolls, but often can’t even name the pastor. Another type of Actively Disengaged member, though, may be quite regular in attendance. They are physically present but psychologically hostile. They are unhappy with their church, and insist on sharing their misery with just about everyone.

One of the things that our Precious Blood Test will measure is parishioner engagement. Then, a Gallup consultant will spend two days with parish leadership in a strategic mapping process to develop strategies for addressing engagement issues. Parishes which have used this strategy have discovered that parish engagement actually increases, providing “good soil” for growth!



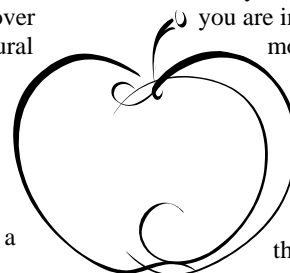
The Power of the Right Fit

One of the strategies we have already begun to employ at St. Thérèse is to help people to discover what they do best. We have decided to use the Clifton StrengthsFinder®, an online assessment that identifies an individual’s five “Signature Themes” of talent. You might have noticed some of our leadership wearing their lanyard name tags, listing their Top Five themes. Mark Hoggard and Megan Malhiot are certified as

“Strengths Coaches,” and are glad to work with folks to understand the language of StrengthsFinder, and to discover how each individual develop their natural talents into strengths — strengths which we hope will be used to their greatest potential in building up God’s kingdom in ministry.

This month, we are holding our first-ever *Discover Your Strengths* retreats, a

four-week small group exercise in self-discovery and spiritual growth. If you are interested in learning more about this strengths-based approach to ministry, contact any member of the Pastoral Council, Stewardship Committee, or the parish staff.





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Mission Statement

We are a Catholic community,
dedicated to making God's kingdom a
reality through evangelization and
teaching, prayer and reflection,
example and outreach.

Isn't Churchless Christianity a Contradiction?

Amazingly, some leaders don't see the decline of the local church as a problem. In fact, they regard churchless Christianity as the next evolutionary step in the Christian faith, and they celebrate this new emphasis on the individual at the expense of the community. They tend to see the local church as just one option among many for living a faithful Christian life — and not an attractive one at that. I think those who espouse and celebrate the supposed irrelevance of the local church are flat-out wrong — and Gallup data back up my claim. Church members tend to be *more* spiritually committed than nonmembers are.

It's important to note that 18% of members of congregations are "fully

spiritually committed" — compared with only 5% of nonmembers. To put it another way, church members are more than *three and a half times as likely* as nonmembers to be fully spiritually committed! This empirical evidence supports the Biblical wisdom found in the letter to the Hebrews: "And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another."

While it is possible for an individual to be spiritually committed without belonging to a congregation, it is difficult. Contrary to the claims of church-

less Christianity, the local church is vital to an individual's spiritual formation. But churches can and must do better. They need to stop *doing church* and start *being church*. This requires a fundamental change in our thinking. I am a firm and enthusiastic believer in the local church, and agree with Bill Hybels whenever he states that "the local church is the hope of the world." The phrase "individual Christian" truly is an oxymoron — the Christian faith is meant to be lived out in community, as Jesus modeled in his life with his disciples. And with all its shortcomings and challenges (it is made up of human beings, after all!), it is still the local church that God has chosen as the vehicle through which Christ is made known to the world.

- Albert Winseman,

from *Growing an Engaged Church*

