

Parish Self-Assessment Report
We Walk By Faith
Church of St. Thérèse
4137 Portsmouth Boulevard
Chesapeake, VA 23321-2127

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I. Introduction

St. Thérèse parish began in the small chapel of the Little Flower School in 1954 on Oregon Avenue in Portsmouth with 285 households. When the 3 local Catholic grade schools combined in 1970 to become Portsmouth Catholic Elementary School, St. Thérèse moved to the Western Branch section of Chesapeake and we dedicated the current church in June of 1972.

This area of Chesapeake borders Portsmouth and Suffolk. The latest Annual Report shows that the parish currently has 765 registered households which total 1,835 Catholics. Seventy-three percent of the parishioners are Caucasian, 10% are Filipino, 5% are African American and 5% are Hispanic. Sixty-three percent of our households have no children under the age of 18 living at home, 32% are married couples with children under 18 at home, and 5% are single parent families.

The We Walk By Faith (WWBF) survey was completed during all of the Masses on the weekend of July 10th and 11th, and then it was available throughout the remainder of the month for those who were not in attendance that weekend. A total of 589 individual surveys were completed. Prior to the survey weekend, reflection sessions were held after all the Masses on the weekend of June 26th and 27th. A total of 44 individuals participated in those sessions. The survey results match closely to our overall demographics with 74% of those completing the survey being Caucasian, almost 12% being Filipino and 6% being African American. Surprisingly, 16.5% of the respondents indicated they were not registered in the parish.

Our parish mission statement is “We are a Catholic community, dedicated to making God’s kingdom a reality through evangelization and teaching, prayer and reflection, example and outreach.”

II. Word

STRENGTHS:

- a. Overall, there is a very positive feeling among St. Thérèse parishioners about the elements of the formation program within the parish. This is evident in both the survey results and the reflection sessions feedback.
- b. The survey results underscore the parish’s belief that the word is being presented in both the Mass and in the formation programs. Of those returning surveys a total of ~96% either agreeing or strongly agreeing that “The Word of God is proclaimed in this parish in a way that helps me to know and love Jesus.”
- c. St. Thérèse parish enjoys a robust and engaging Christian Formation program including children, youth and adults; all which strengthen knowledge and discussion of the teachings of the Catholic faith. Beyond the traditional classroom approach, the parish has embraced and benefitted over the past two years from a robust response to Generations of Faith, an Intergenerational-based Christian Formation program.

- d. There is a general consensus that the parish pastor, staff and ministry leadership strive for excellence in promoting and strengthening formation program components by listening, assessing, evaluating, and implementing parishioner suggestions and feedback.

NEEDS:

- a. An overwhelming number of survey and reflection sessions comments emphasized the need to re-energize the youth component of the St. Thérèse formation program. This recurring observation is perhaps our greatest need. Specific recommendations were discussed in the comments section of the survey and the reflection sessions.
- b. The Generations of Faith program continues to flourish at St. Thérèse. However, there are a minority of parishioners who are struggling to connect with this format. Parish leadership needs to continue to be mindful of how to meet all parishioners' needs. Additionally, parishioners continue to identify ways to enhance the quality of this program. Suggestions include: take home package ideas, sacramental preparation concerns, length of sessions, increase attendance strategies, meeting frequency, etc.
- c. The need for expanded engagement opportunities regarding adult formation is another identified concern. Suggestions include: increase guest speakers, scripture studies, Lenten renewal programs, etc.
- d. Continued emphasis on the need for the St. Thérèse parish to engage with other local faith communities was identified. Although, not an overwhelming finding, it links to the information sharing challenge of ensuring parishioners are informed about these opportunities.

III. Worship

STRENGTHS:

- a. Overall, there is a very positive feeling among St. Thérèse parishioners about worship within the parish. This is evident in both the survey results and the reflection sessions feedback.
- b. The survey underscored that the St Thérèse parish community felt that the liturgies within the parish enhance their worship of God (~96% either agreed or strongly agreed) with ~95% either agreeing or strongly agreeing that the parishioners "as a community actively participate in the celebration of the liturgies."
- c. The Music program continues to be recognized as a key enabler to the parish's worship of God during weekly liturgies.
- d. Physical structure concerns from previous parish feedback opportunities were recognized as being addressed.

NEEDS:

- a. Interest exists in re-visiting and evaluating local St. Thérèse liturgical customs and rules. There needs to be an understanding of what, why and how we 'do things' within the worship space. The value of each of these identified customs and rules needs to be explored. Ongoing liturgical education needs to be a regular part of the parish.
- b. Emphasis on upgrading the church's physical structure accomplished via routine required maintenance, as well as meeting the needs of our handicapped parishioners, needs to continue.
- c. As cited in the "Word Needs" section above, the lack of youth involvement in our parish's worship is an identified challenge.
- d. Although music was recognized as a strength, some suggested that the music selections could be more "upbeat."
- e. As evidenced by the survey responses, we as a parish community need to be more sensitive to cultural and ethnic differences.

IV. Community

STRENGTHS:

- a. Overall, there is a positive feeling among St. Thérèse parishioners about many of the elements of the community life program within the parish. This is evident in both the survey results and the reflection sessions feedback.
- b. ~91% of all survey participants either agreed or strongly agreed that the “parish has an emphasis on assisting the poor, the homebound, elderly and those who are sick.” Many parishioners cite this community outreach as one of the top strengths of the St. Thérèse parish.
- c. The survey underscored that the St. Thérèse parish community felt that parish bulletins and announcements at liturgies are sufficient in providing information about parish activities (~92% either agreed or strongly agreed).
- d. There is a general consensus that the parish demonstrates a good commitment with proper emphasis on welcoming newcomers. Recent changes in the New Parishioner Welcoming program were cited as examples of how parish leadership responds to parishioners’ feedback.

NEEDS:

- a. Active participation of more parishioners volunteering to support St. Thérèse ministries remains a challenge. The “20% doing all the work” paradigm does not lead to an efficient and effective method of meeting the parish’s community support needs.
- b. Although the welcoming nature of the parish was validated as a strength, there was a drop-off when the survey question was re-focused to “emphasis on welcoming ethnic minorities into the parish community” with only ~66% agreeing or strongly agreeing.
- c. Concerns cite that we lack a formal “in-reach” system focused on sick, unemployed and military deployed parishioners’ individual and family needs.
- d. Most agree that St. Thérèse conducts quality “community and fellowship events,” but there is question about the quantity of these activities. Why don’t we conduct more?

V. Service

STRENGTHS:

- a. Overall, there is a positive feeling among St. Thérèse parishioners about many of the elements of the service program within the parish. This is evident in both the survey results and the reflection sessions feedback.
- b. St. Thérèse has a wide range of ministries appealing to multiple constituencies within and outside the parish. Examples of Housing the Homeless, Oasis, providing meals to parishioners in need, Maison Fortuné Orphanage, and the Norton ministry all reinforce a substantial parish outreach commitment to the global community including local, national and international efforts.
- c. There is a general consensus that Justice and Peace activities are integrated into the daily life of our parish. The recognition that societal change is more difficult than direct aid has not deterred, but enhanced the motivation of these ministries.

NEEDS:

- a. Although survey and reflection sessions feedback indicates that parishioners want to live and adhere to a social gospel, it is incumbent upon the St. Thérèse staff and ministry leadership to assist in finding ways to assist parishioners in achieving these expectations.
- b. Survey results indicate that parish support of vocations to the priesthood and religious life could be increased.
- c. As with any volunteer effort the need to be as inclusive as possible remains difficult. Information and recruiting campaigns within the parish continue to draw a smaller level of desired participation despite 30+ active ministries that appeal to a wide range of interests.

VI. Plans for Renewal and Meeting Parish Needs

ONE YEAR:

- a. Energize and incorporate youth involvement within all aspects of the St. Thérèse community.
- b. Actively promote increased participation of parishioners within all parish ministries.
- c. Prepare the parish for the implementation of the Third Edition of the Roman Missal and assess/validate local liturgical customs and rules.
- d. Expand upon existing outreach ministries and explore avenues to increase an awareness and understanding of Catholic social teachings.

FIVE YEARS:

- a. Upgrade the church's physical structure via routine required maintenance, as well as meeting the needs of our handicapped parishioners.
- b. Develop a parish "in-reach" system focused on sick, unemployed and military deployed parishioners' individual and family needs.
- c. Continue to enhance our Intergenerational-based Christian Formation Generations of Faith approach with an eye to foster religious vocations and life (priesthood, etc).
- d. As part of the emerging St. Thérèse welcoming process, keep culture and ethnic sensitivity as well as diversity concerns at the forefront of all parish-planning activities.

VII. Diocesan Support

- a. Coordinate communications and "lessons learned" among parishes and other dioceses and provide guidelines for use of social media communication tools (facebook, twitter, texting, blogs, etc).
- b. Support for youth and young adult ministries.

VIII. Conclusion

The pastor, staff, ministry leadership and parishioners at the Church of St. Thérèse are all committed to achieving the intent of the WWBF initiative. Our WWBF journey is leading us to parish renewal by clearly outlining what we need to do to make Jesus' presence stronger in the four essential Christian ideals: Word, Worship, Community and Service. Continual focus on our identified WWBF one and five year action plans will help facilitate our priority of satisfying St. Thérèse parishioners' faith based needs.