

Article 2 of 6:

Summary of Key Data from the Parish Pastoral Plans Completed and Submitted to the LSPC

William J. Amoriell

Member of Living Stones Planning Committee

In the last issue of the North Country Catholic we provided an historical perspective that led to the establishment of the Living Stones Planning Committee (LSPC). As mentioned, parishes were provided a survey form developed by the Living Stones Planning Committee (LSPC) and asked to complete it, identifying strengths and areas that need further development. The survey listed a number of areas that contribute to the vibrancy of a parish and help determine how well we are meeting the pastoral needs of all parishioners within our boundaries. The sections of the survey that relate most directly to vibrancy and the health of a parish cover two categories: (1) Faith Formation Support Personnel and (2) Faith/Community Formation Programming. The listing below includes specific faith-formation support personnel that were included in the LSPC survey. Following each faith-formation support personnel listed is the percentage of parish groupings that indicated a need for additional support personnel in that area:

<u>Faith Formation Support Personnel</u>	<u>Percentage of Parishes Needing Additional Personnel</u>
Adult Formation	37.9%
Youth Minister	75.9%
Music Minister	51.7%
Vocation Team	69%
Catechists	65.5%
Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion (EMHC)	48.3%
Outreach to Poor	44.8%
Outreach to Unchurched	86.2%

The next category on the LSPC survey asked about faith/community formation programming. The following includes items related to programming, along with the percentage of parish groupings in the diocese that indicated they needed additional programming in that particular area.

<u>Faith/Community Formation Programming</u>	<u>Percentage of Parishes Needing Additional Programming</u>
Adult Formation Programming	41.4%
Youth Ministry Programming	75.9%

Music Ministry	55.2%
Vocations-Related Programming	79.3%
Family Life Programming	41.4%
Bereavement Ministry	20.7%
Hospital Ministry	48.3%
Home Visitation	62.1%
Outreach to Poor	55.2%
Food Pantry	24.1%
Outreach to Unchurched	82.8%
Prison Ministry	34.5%

The above results reveal a daunting task. The summary data, which the parish groupings identified themselves, clearly suggest the areas that parish groupings need to focus on, in order to become more vibrant and to better meet the pastoral needs of all parishioners.

It is critical that parishes begin to develop a long-range plan, if not begun already, for their parish grouping that is tied directly to the needs they have already identified. It is also clear that parishes will not be able to address all areas of need all at once. That is why the areas identified need to be prioritized and then work needs to begin on addressing the top priorities over the next year or two. Once the first set of priorities has been addressed, the next set from the list needs to be addressed for the next year or two, and so on. We are not talking about a quick fix, as there isn't one. This is something that will demand our attention, commitment, patience, and creativity over the next several years, but the benefits that can be reaped from this process can be enormous. It might be valuable to recall the Hemmingway quote mentioned in the last article:

Today is only one day
in all the days that will ever be.
But what will happen in all the other days
that ever come
can depend on what you do today.

Ernest Hemmingway
For Whom the Bells Tolls

There is another quote that is worth including here that is very relevant to our situation. It is a quote taken from The Autocrat of the Breakfast-Table written by Oliver Wendell Homes in 1858: (Holmes's, p. 52)

I find the great thing in this world
is not so much where we stand,
as in what direction we are moving:
To reach the port of heaven,
we must sail sometimes with the wind
and sometimes against it,
--but we must sail,
and not drift, nor lie at anchor.

This can be taken as sound advice for what we will be engaged in over the next few years. We don't have all the answers, but that is no excuse for allowing ourselves to drift or simply lie at anchor--which we may have been doing more than we would like to acknowledge. Also, it could be exceedingly helpful, if two or more sets of parish groupings would decide to work together as a team in addressing some of the areas identified. This could also enable some parishes to save valuable resources, both human and financial.

As parishes work together in developing healthier and more vibrant parishes, some have reached out to the Living Stones Planning Committee for ideas on developing parish vibrancy. Given the breadth and complexity of this topic, we shall discuss parish vibrancy over the next few issues of the North Country Catholic. The areas that we shall look at include:

- Parish Leadership Style
- Parish Communication
- Lay Leadership
- Evangelization--Comprehensive and Strategic Faith Formation
- Engaging Children and Youth in Meaningful Ways
- Music
- Technology
- Hospitality and Socials

Again, we hope that you will find these articles informative and perhaps provocative--providing possible ideas and direction for discussions and plans designed to enhance parish vibrancy and better meet the pastoral needs of all parishioners within our boundaries.

References Cited:

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