

## HOLY CROSS PARISH

154 E. Mt. Airy Avenue  
Philadelphia, PA 19119

Dear Parishioners and Friends,

As we continue to unite and grow Our Parish as a spiritually nourishing, life-giving, forgiving, kind, and understanding community, we reach out to you for insights on how best to get there!

### **About this document**

In the following pages, you will find a collection of questions and responses gathered during the focus group discussions conducted over three weeks during Advent 2017. We are happy to share the findings and are even more eager to get to work pulling together a Plan of Action on how best to address the concerns and improvements raised. In order to have a fruitful, timely and effective roll-out of improvements, we will need your help.

### **Things to consider when reading through this document**

As you read through this document, please ask yourself the following two questions:

1. Under which of the Ministries might this task or action item logically fall? (*Current Holy Cross Church Ministries are listed below*)
2. How might I best use my talents and treasures to contribute to this church-wide initiative of Renewing & Rebuilding our Holy Cross Church?

On behalf of the Rebuild & Renew Committee, we thank you for your contribution, insights and dedication to making our Church Home and Parish Family the best it can be. Stay tuned for opportunities to participate more in the near future!



Faith Formation (RCIA for Adults, CCD for Children)

Fiat Prayer Group

Bible Study (Basic Instruction Before Leaving Earth)

Finance Committee

Food Pantry

Hospitality Weekend Teams

Knights of Columbus

Ladies Guild

Liturgical Ministries (Readers, Eucharistic Ministers, Ushers, Greeters, Alter Servers, And Choir)

Men's Catholic Association

Pastoral Council

Sick and Shut-In (SASI)

Social Justice Committee (SJC)

Young at Heart

Youth Group

# FOCUS GROUP MEETING NOTES

December 2 – December 17, 2017

(9 Groups, over 70 participants)

**WHEN YOU THINK ABOUT HOLY CROSS PARISH, WHAT IS THE FIRST THING THAT COMES TO MIND?**

## ACCESS

- Signage not easily seen (Mass times not clear; sign too small)
- Driveway entrance missed, especially after dark

## FACILITY

- Gorgeous windows (suggested a write-up be done in the bulletin about their history, or reinstate tours of stories told in the stained glass - open to the public)
- Beautiful building
- Beautiful altar
- Architecture impressive/classical/gorgeous (2)
  - \* Welcoming art
- No heat/no AC
- Cold and dark, physically not welcoming
- Height of windows may affect lighting
- Outside lighting at night is poor
- Use tapestries on walls that represent the other two parishes, may feel more welcoming
  - \* Help with insulation/warmth
  - \* Add color/diversity in artwork

## PEOPLE

- Diverse population (2)
  - \* Variety of age groups
  - \* Multi-cultural
- Too much grey hair – younger parishioners needed
  - \* Young families – more at the 9:00 and 11:00
  - \* Welcoming of young families - reinforce that youngsters are going to be wiggly because they are kids [and that is OK]
- Not as many folks going to church
- Number of parishioners seems to have increased over recent years
- Parishioners of different Mass times do not interact
- How to bring people back while also recognizing limited time in families' schedules
- Census tracks in the area are either 70/30 or 30/70 (black/white, rich/poor) – HC is in the middle of the two extremes – need to know the market and what would attract people – need to understand we are different groups – music is one way to share fellowship as one group – some like to think deeply – some like simplicity – define what we want and then do what it takes to get there
- Like being part of a community rich in history & culture

## PROGRAMMING

- Limited activities for single people – parish life can tend to revolve around school/families
- Social activities are needed for the elderly
- Was active in prior years, especially with social activities
- Lutheran choir came in earlier years
- Need for youth programs – how get them off their phones and get their attention

## SCHOOL

- School - mission school, but we don't know anyone.
  - \* Try to recruit from the school
  - \* We have to be welcoming to the school
    - ◇ School could be a feeder if we forge a relationship with them
    - ◇ Have to work at it – meet with principal
    - ◇ Bulletin each week should have information about kids' accomplishments, events
    - ◇ Have kids do a music program a Mass
  - \* There are kids and families looking for faith
    - ◇ Not many children are Catholic – they go to other churches – about 4 or 5 families come to HC
    - ◇ As an Independence Mission School – reaches students across a wide swath of neighborhoods
    - ◇ Church and school are parallel communities – don't intersect much – don't know much about each other – need to forge relationships
    - ◇ Need to market ourselves – throw out seeds
  - \* To know, to love, to serve – that I can love Him and serve Him
    - ◇ Kids should be learning about God so they can serve Him – development of faith and loving knowledge
    - ◇ Some kids come to church, but what do they know? They're deprived of the knowledge of God.
    - ◇ We need to bridge the gap here – between formal religious education and knowledge of God.
  - \* Can the school be a focal point for literacy in the community? We should be proud of it. Raise the profile of this place.

## WELCOMING

- Friendly greeters – very welcoming from the entrance to the center (5)
  - \* Important to welcome people and invite them back
  - \* Before greeters and sign of peace, visitors felt this was a cold, unfeeling place
- Warm, welcoming atmosphere
- Feels like home – cordial and friendly people
- Not that friendly unless you already know people
  - \* How instill here the friendliness felt at St. Therese
- Like what pastor wrote in bulletin about having a vision – mine is diversity and fellowship
  - \* Have 1 day a month when side doors closed so everyone goes out the front door – greets pastor and talks with one another – be a family
- At beginning of Mass, ask if there is anyone new and have parishioners greet them – will be a lot of new people a Christmas
- Have new people fill out a card and follow up with a call to them
- Each of us reach out to someone at Mass and greet them – introduce self and ask their name
- Welcome people to talk prior and after Masses and provide time to do so

- Have felt welcomed since beginning – more welcoming than other parishes - have joined ministries
- In the past when it was more conservative, people came and went – need to break out of this
- Used to know everyone in church and what they needed
- People don't go to different Masses – suggest one weekend a month have only a 10:00 Mass to get a mix of people together – people get in a rut as to who they are comfortable with
- Need to have patience with people – it's a process

## OTHER

- Has potential
- Ecumenically explosive in prior decades
- Disagreed with former leadership
- Not a feeling of spiritually – as observed in people not responding to the music
- Love the music but don't think to applaud – not a performance (we do what we're used to doing)
- Hearing a lot of what we did, not what we do or want to do
- Diverse worship opportunities
- Let's all help to keep church open
  - \* If HC closes, what else is available?

## WHAT DO YOU LIKE BEST ABOUT HOLY CROSS?

## FACILITY

- HC is a beautiful architectural edifice.
- Sound system is on point

## LOCATION

- Close to home

## MINISTRIES

- Music (organ, choir) – we want to hear more of it!
- Liturgy/Sermons (the priests' delivery of the Word)
- Choir (prayer/Christ focused)
- Intentions solicited/concerns [choir members intentionally pray for each other]
- Volunteer ministries rejuvenating/energizing, e.g., SASI/EM
- More and different people are involved in ministries – not the same people all the time
  - \* Everyone has a responsibility – get people to do little things in addition to core people
- One can truly focus on the Service without distractions
- Thoughtful homilies are given

## PEOPLE

- Diversity (age, cultural) (2)
- People (friendly, warm) (3)
  - It's not the building (still sad at closings)
- Congregation's willingness to contribute & bring HC back to where it once was (unity, collaboration with other churches/seminary, and its connection with the Mt Airy community)

- Parish priests (warm/welcoming/friendly/approachable) (3)
  - \* Hard working
  - \* Accommodating (sacraments)
  - \* Priests give us a nugget in homilies – different preaching styles
  - \* Could sometimes wrap up a little sooner
  - \* Express gratitude for people involved in ministries
- Thankful to be in a church with people who are comfortable and accepting of the students I work with

## OTHER

- Visual notifications and reminders of ongoing programs: Advent, Rosary, Exposition, Social Sunday, Confession are helpful.

### WHAT ARE THE AREAS OF OUR PARISH LIFE THAT NEED IMPROVEMENT?

## COMMUNICATION

- Acknowledgement of sacraments received weekly in bulletin and/or from podium
- Better Communication: coordination of events from across the parish and across ministries
- Better connection with the community
- Contributors should be reinstated (florists, restaurants, etc.); more relevant ads in bulletin needed
- How new folks find out about ministry participation
- Very seldom is there stuff in the bulletin about the parish. Have numbers, list of committees.
  - \* Can copy and paste from the website and put in the bulletin.
  - \* Bulletin is difficult to read. Same color. One participant regularly looks at the bulletin, but never noticed that there's a website.
  - \* Look at OMC's bulletin – it's 12 pages, a lot of info. It's not just thrown together. Has pastoral plan update.
- Consider emails. It doesn't cost anything to send them out.
  - \* We need a tech-savvy staff to communicate – send info, invitations, calendar.
  - \* Costs for mailing requests for money, etc. – but email is free once you have it set up.
- Website
  - \* Someone called and asked about the fair districts. All this info should be online. When people go to the website, they'll see everything we have.
  - \* Blog posts - what we did, couple of paragraphs post mortem.
  - \* You need photos as well. (Article re: photos with people)
  - \* Need a point person from each organization. Each point person will then communicate regarding the website.
  - \* OMC uses Flocknotes – look into this.

## EVANGELISM

- Evangelism Ministry (tools and tips for 'How To' share the Word needs to be taught) (2)
- Catholicism needs to focus on serving (expand beyond traditional approach; practical application and guidance needed!)
- Need to be taught how to pray (prepare to pray; become ready to hear and feel the Word); Where & When to pray (an invitation to pray is needed)

- Preparing parishioners on how to respond when asked questions or beliefs challenged (how to evangelize effectively)
- Learning/Teaching the Gospel is a key starting point
- Knowing what you need to know (Gospel, the Word, Jesus)
- Motivation / draw to church & Jesus (how to keep it alive?)
- Presence of Jesus in our lives and that of others needed; how to be present in the encounter (evangelism-ready)
- USCCB.org (daily scripture readings)
- Laudate app
- Guidance needed and habits to be formed
- Reflections to be taught
- Contemplative time and prayer reinforced
- Spreading the Flame!
- Reminders that God is in charge
- Sharing life with one another is the key to feeling like a family – how can we do this?
- People did more things together and brought that spirit into the church

## FACILITY

- Heating (too cold) (3)
- Lighting inside and outside (too dark at night in front of the church and difficult to read inside) (2)
- Consider more fabric
- Signage unclear; fire lane needs to be respected and better marked
- Talking in Choir loft, sacristy, vestibule can be heard during the quiet times during Mass
- Middle door [near ramp] broken, stays ajar
- HVAC
- Bathroom facility is in need of serious cleaning and revamping. We also should have more than one option.
- Update electrical wiring.
- Regulate indoor atmospheric conditions

## MINISTRIES

- Music/Choir: more development needed in this area to have more music (guest singers, small groups/trio, guitarists, choir exchanges)
  - \* Choir Schedule needs to be revisited and published. Choir now alternates, 9 a.m. and 11 a.m.
  - \* Why do we sing? It's praying twice.
  - \* 5 p.m. might be out of the ordinary for someone who's impressed with the Latin chant.
  - \* Why are we not in touch with Settlement Music School? They have many musicians - perhaps someone could step in and help us.
  - \* Folk Mass? Maybe not every week, but it could work once in a while. SMS had folk Mass in the past. Maybe tie with hospitality weekend.
    - The Duffins were responsible for guitar weekend - recently deceased.
- In book, *Four Signs of a Dynamic Catholic* - small percentage of Catholics do most of the work. We need to grow the percentage. So many things to do. The world is so needy.
- Children's choir needed (2)
  - \* It was impressive last year. Hearing children sing is good for the soul.

- Altar servers needed (times TBD)
  - \* training structures
- Children's Liturgy of the Word – offered at least at one Mass
- Saturday, 5pm Mass can be the 'Teenage or Guitar Mass'
- Are we recovering the spirit of liturgical renewal from 50 years ago?
  - \* It's possible to do something new and original when we celebrate the liturgy?
- Use children and teens as Ushers / Greeters / Cantors, etc.
- More relevant message/homily (e.g., 'so much wasted time' – by Fr G)
  - \* Plain-English preaching, with practical application
- Why speak from the floor rather than the ambo? Some like it. Others cannot hear as well.
  - \* Amplification is the issue – how the sound travels throughout the church

## OUTREACH (Internal and External)

- Marketing/Advertising of HC events to community (inside and outside)
- Marketing campaign used as initial draw, but follow-through is needed – this is key!
- Communication/Marketing -- should have a singular theme and message
- Outreach needed: add MALT classes offering historical architecture tour of church; Christmas/Easter events
- Community projects that reach out (outside Holy Cross) into community – blood drive, etc.
- Promotion of church services in community
  - \* Circulars
  - \* West/East Mt. Airy Neighbors
  - \* Interfaith Hospitality
- Environmental stewards “?!?”
  - \* Community events and promotion
- More parishioners needed (2)
- We need to get better and talk about it. Word of mouth is huge.
  - \* Yesterday at Chestnut Hill House Tour, two people brought up Holy Cross.
    - Both involved the school. People we've known.
    - When we walked the street three or four years ago and talked to the business community, half of them thought the school was closed.
- Pictures in the Local. Gun control marches, etc.
  - \* The more that people see us, give feedback, the more they will be likely to become members of those organizations.
  - \* Raise the profile of the institution.
    - Do this through Facebook. That's a way to push info out to many people.
    - If you can update things and keep it fresh, people will go there.
    - How to we capture young families? Facebook is part of that. Things are shared, there's feedback.
- At St. Therese there was involvement with civic associations which was a motivator to do things together – share talents
- Promote inclusion
  - \* Inclusiveness is questionable: need to explicitly say where we stand (We are LGBT welcoming!! -- need to take an inclusive stance)
- Priest to welcome/introduce new people
- At sign of peace, take time to shake hands, make eye contact, break down barriers over time

- Have people wear name tags including church ministry they belong to
- Breakfast brings people together

## PROGRAMMING

- Fellowship during the week ('young folks like tradition!')
- Involving children in May Procession
- Post-Sacrament Support (bereavement support group; Marriage Encounter; etc. - Diocese has curriculum programs for these)
- Children's Programming & Liturgy/Music needed (with appropriate signage and marketing; only 20 minutes for ages 3-12 years) (3)
- Adult Faith Formation (during the week, reading & discussion, practical application, with Evangelism tools; content more important than location) (2)
- Bible study, gathering place needed (overall)
- Contemplative reading suggestions needed (in addition to the Bible)
- Engaging Holy Cross School families into Holy Cross Church
  - \* What we can offer families
  - \* Conversion opportunities
- Use a book club to address issues and questions
- Graces in our life (guidance and reassurance; support groups needed)
- Retreats needed (across the church & also by ministry)
- Meeting place needed for Bible study

### WHAT DREW YOU TO HOLY CROSS?

- Felt comfortable; 'it fit my family'
- It is a work-in-progress we can be a part of and impact'
- Choir/Boy Scouts/Finance Committee
- Small community
- Invited back by a family member
- Unique foundation (diverse structure -- intentional socio-economic / ethnic diversity)
- Comfortable to be different/who you are
- Diversity is key

### WHAT DOES/WOULD ATTRACT FOLKS TO HC?

## MINISTRIES

- Music/Choir (energizing, inspirational, moving) (2)
- Sunday evening Mass – something to consider
- Folk singer on Sunday night as at OMC
- Integrate youth participation for weekend services, i.e., Youth Readers, Youth Greeters, Youth Cantors (Sonya would personally mentor Youth Cantors)
- Length of homilies is a question; some people complain about length. Can you be as effective at 6, 9, 12 minutes?
  - \* Content is crucially important.
  - \* When do people fall asleep?
- It's not just the priest's job to get people in the mood. If we have next week's readings in the bulletin, peo-

ple can come prepared for the message.

## OUTREACH

- Publicize what we do in local newspapers, e.g., Christmas schedule
- Message needs to resonate with younger folks (how it's presented; how to reconcile Catholic doctrine with practical application – a bridge is needed)
- Is our space available to other community events/organizations?

## PROGRAMMING

- Follow-through on programming commitments or promises
- Programming around parishioner's needs and periodic check-ins
- Christian Family Movement (CFM) – small groups family/children network; meet in homes on a rotating basis

## SOCIAL

- Social Sundays (Great event!! - needs to be more accommodating for young children)
- Continue developing and nurturing Social Activities/Trips (Holy Land) Fundraisers, Hymn Sings/Name That Tune, Youth & Adult Talent Shows, Bible Verse Contest, Liturgical Dance Group, Movie Night, Christmas Bazaar/ANYTHING that will bring people together for spiritual enlightenment and a touch of fun.

## TRANSPARENCY

- Financial Transparency & Development (fundraising and sustainability)
- Reporting out of contributions/tithes received and how it was used

### **WHAT STOPPED PEOPLE FROM COMING OVER TO HC?**

- Previous church served as a value point in their lives
- Not getting spiritual needs met
- Need to give new place a chance
- Loss of youth programs
- Older congregation – need to grow younger parishioner-base (2)
- Lack of school engagement; school attracts younger-base
- No offerings for the millennium group (those in their 30's) – social/fellowship events
- How do we bring people back to Holy Cross? (To encourage communication and community)

## ASSESSMENT

- Annual evaluation of how people feel about how we are coming together as a parish
- Look at the numbers at each Mass
  - \* How many come to each and what time should Masses be
- If we have 1800 people, how many come regularly and how many come at least once a year?
  - \* The Catholic Church wants but does not insist we come every Sunday.
- Most people come to church primarily for worship – 90% on Sunday and 10% during the week

## MINISTRIES

- Focus on the liturgy as a celebration of the Eucharist and consequently the other sacraments as well

## OUTREACH

- Reach out to people with personal touch
- Parishioners assigned to a specific block in neighborhood, and responsible to get to know the people on that block (especially the Catholics)
- Invite alumni of school
- Educate current parishioners on how to dialogue and invite new people, especially with attractive social events that are out in the community so to draw people's attention
- Alumni mass
- Visit former parishioners who have stopped coming
- Need to learn how to have conversations with parishioners themselves, before having them with others
- Bring your Friend to Church Day
- Advertise church activities in neighborhood papers
- Robo calls a cheap way to communicate (\$25/month)
- Identify who needs outreach because they are sick
  - \* Ladies Guild has a Sunshine Committee that sends get well and birthday cards

## PROGRAMMING

- Prior attempt of reviving 30+ year old tradition of annual jazz festival
- Fundraising concert (2)
  - \* Organize a jazz/gospel concert and sell tickets
- Have a social and invite people in
- Give everyone a "job"
  - \* Make them feel part of the parish. Make them feel needed.
- Use every opportunity to bring/invite people into the church

### **WOULD YOU BE WILLING TO SERVE AS AN OUTREACH MINISTER?**

- Splintered St. Therese community (some still very hurt/angry)
- Don't live in Mount Airy
- Ministries are already taking place
- Limited time schedule for consistent routine/commitment

### **WHAT DO YOU NEED FROM OUR PARISH AND OUR CHURCH? TO DEEPEN YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD?**

## FACILITY

- Large space, few people ---how to help make space feel more intimate

## MINISTRIES

- Sunday liturgy is what I look for in a parish

## OUTREACH

- Welcoming/aggressive registration process ---new and young families
- Internet website improvement/refresh
  - \* Not user friendly – needs ease of use
  - \* Multiple sites exist – need to eliminate sites that are not controlled by us
  - \* Use students or professional to build/manage

**WHAT THINGS HAVE OTHER PARISHES DONE THAT HOLY CROSS CAN DO TO BE BETTER?**

## PROGRAMMING

- Relevant programming that is welcome ---prayer groups
- Children focused activities
  - \* Easter events; Halloween
  - \* Choir
- Other churches have activities for seniors, e.g., Silver Sneakers, luncheons

## OUTREACH

- Marketing/advertising outside on signs ---of programs/masses
- Enon offers prayer all over city
- Protestants are active and energetic

## STRUCTURE

- Old St Joe's; Consortium of churches working together

## WELCOMING

- Bright/welcoming (St. Ignatius)
- Signage of welcome (permanent/sandwich boards)
  - \* “Fussy babies invited”
  - \* “Welcome home”
- St. Therese hopped. Joyous joining, fun, laughter. Got people going.

**RATE HOLY CROSS ON A SCALE OF 1 TO 5 (1 BEING THE LOWEST, 5 BEING THE HIGHEST)**

- 5-
- 4- welcoming at front door is great
- 5- satisfied with the number of parishioners, and the music (Sonya)
- 3- the feeling in the building is off, but not able to summarize in words
- 2- the smiles are not there, and there is disconnect between church and school (not seeing the kids in church)

## NEXT STEPS

- Collect and categorize and prioritize all comments and recommendations
- Identify ways to act on ideas
- Follow up