

RENEW MY CHURCH - WHAT WE SHARE

Several weeks ago, on November 13, we invited staff members and parishioners from the other four parishes in our *Renew My Church* grouping to gather here in our new meeting room simply to meet one another and to share our feelings about our parishes as well as our hopes for the future.

As I've told you a number of times in the past year, *Renew My Church* is an Archdiocesan program designed to make parishes stronger and to increase our evangelization efforts in the years to come. Parishes are grouped geographically with anywhere from three to six (or even seven) parishes in a grouping, and these groups are "activated" by the program staff and the local Vicar. Even though our group has yet to be "activated" and we have no idea when that will happen, our own Parish Pastoral Council agreed that it would be great idea to invite staff and parishioners to gather informally—sooner rather than later—so that whenever our activation does occur and we are tasked with making what may be some tough decisions, we'll have a better understanding of our parish neighbors and a greater level of comfort in working together for the good of us all.

So, when 66 staff members and parishioners from St. Anne, St. Emeric, Infant Jesus of Prague, St. Lawrence O'Toole and St. Joseph met here last month, the first thing I asked everyone to do was introduce themselves, mention one ministry they were involved in or what their role was on the parish staff, and answer this question: *What do you value/appreciate most about your parish?* The answers to that question were inspiring, encouraging, and frequently repeated by parishioners from all five parishes (+ = number of times this value is mentioned). Here's what those 66 participants said:

- Generosity ++++
- Second home & Center of faith life
- Welcoming ++++++++
- Support one another & Forgiving
- Home +++++
- Close community +++++
- Diversity ++++++
- Ability of parish to adapt ++
- Friendliness of the people +++++
- Staff & volunteer dedication ++
- Humility of the people & Hospitality
- Help and assistance received +++
- Brings out the best in me & Nurturing
- Strength of the people +++
- Loving ++++++++

- Heart of faith & Inclusive
- Sense of family +++++++
- The people +++++
- Deepens my faith ++
- Caring and support +++
- Can-do-spirit +++

The overarching message was clear: we all love our parishes and treasure the gifts our parishes provide. While all of us face challenges ranging from finances to building maintenance to concern for the religious education of our children, we all share the same values, the same faith, and the same hope. This time we spent together on November 13th was truly time well spent. People began arriving a little after 6:00p.m. for the 7:00 start time, laden with food to share; and even after the formal gathering concluded a little after 8:30, the last guests were still hanging around until well after 9:00p.m., talking to new and old friends, and simply enjoying one another's company.

I'm so very grateful to the members of our Parish Pastoral Council who provided hospitality and welcome to our guests from our neighboring parishes, and I'm grateful to all who arrived – and left – with a spirit of openness to one another and to the work that awaits us in the years to come. But before that hard work begins, the hope expressed by everyone was that all five of our parishes can spend more time getting to know one another and working together to ensure that the Good News is faithfully and enthusiastically proclaimed here in the Southland of our Archdiocese.

Fr. Bob