A series of 12 blog posts to help reflect on the *Be Missionary Disciples* Parish Survey Results
**How to Eat an Elephant**

**An Introduction to the Be Missionary Disciples Review and Reflection Process**

by Daphne Daly, Director of the Office of Pastoral Planning

When trying to tackle the Be Missionary Disciples parish survey results, recently received by pastors and pastoral leaders, this riddle comes to mind for three reasons:

1. A lot of attachments were included in the email
2. A lot of information was contained in those attachments
3. The reflection process they entail deals with some pretty weighty topics

This adds up to one large paper elephant. Here, I’m hoping to help you begin to nibble away at it and discover that it’s actually quite edible and digestible. In fact, I hope you’ll realize soon that it’s a rich feast full of good things to help your parish thrive and grow.

**What is Your Parish Being Asked to Do?**

Let’s start from the end product and work backwards: the “Parish Mission Readiness Statement.” This two- to three-page statement should describe your parish’s “mission-readiness.” It should lay out the greatest opportunities and challenges to the personal and pastoral “missionary conversion” of your parishioners and your parish. To produce this, each parish should gather a team of people to pray about and reflect on the survey results. This team should write the statement in light of these conversations and their dialogue with others in and around the parish.

**“Mission readiness”**

Let’s unpack “mission readiness” a bit more. It refers to the degree to which a parish is prepared to take up the core mission of the Body of Christ to "go, and make disciples" (Matthew 28:19). To be “mission ready,” we have to be alive and growing in faith ourselves, personally and as a faith community, and living it out in our daily lives. We have to be ready to share the Gospel with others at...
a moment’s notice, like Philip did when he encountered the Ethiopian on the road (Acts 8:26-38).

“Missionary conversion”

"Missionary conversion" is at the heart of Pope Francis’s exhortation *The Joy of the Gospel (Evangelii Gaudium)*. There he emphasizes that “mere administration” is not enough, and that we need to be “in a permanent state of mission” (*EG* 25). It means reflecting on how and why we do things and discerning whether it is all “suitably channeled for the evangelization of today’s world rather than for [the parish's] self-preservation.” And if it’s not, it means committing ourselves to change and suitably channel what needs to be changed and suitably channeled. This is why it’s truly a missionary conversion. Easy, right?

**Did I Hear Someone Laughing?**

Most of you probably answered: “Wrong!” Growing in faith and sharing it with others has been the most essential and challenging task of the Church since her earliest days. Even a cursory glance at Christ’s apostles' struggles proves that there’s never been an easy solution.

Every generation has to find its own way to reach the people of its time. As Pope Francis says, we must change to remain faithful. What’s crucial is that we engage in this conversation and ask the Holy Spirit to guide us step by step.

This is where the Spirit-led perceptiveness of the pastor, parish leadership, parish staff, and others has to provide the context, narrative, insights, and meaningful connections missing from the raw data.

To aid in this, we’ve created reflection questions that correspond to the survey results. Not every question requires an answer. It’s not a test. Rather, the questions are meant to stimulate and support fruitful reflection and discussion about what the responses tell you (or don’t tell you) about the parish’s "mission readiness."

This post is the first in a series of several that will help you nibble away at this elephant. They will tackle one reflection question at a time, delving more deeply into what the survey results are saying about where your parish is today, and where the Lord might be calling it go tomorrow.

So let's dig in together and savor the feast. One bite at a time.
In the classic 1967 movie, *Guess Who's Coming To Dinner*, a liberal couple's values are challenged when their daughter comes home with her African-American fiancé. It's true, this wouldn't shock us today. In fact, we couldn't be more grateful for the great gift of diversity we have in our Church. However, we have to admit that even today not EVERYONE feels welcome in EVERY parish.

Who sent an RSVP?

With this in mind, the first thing to consider in the recent BE MISSIONARY DISCIPLES survey is: who filled out the survey? Usually, those who take the time to give us feedback are either very engaged or have a concern to express. That's why this survey doesn't give a complete picture of your registered parishioners, but rather a snapshot of how the more active ones see and experience your parish.

So, how can the survey be helpful?

It's actually very helpful to reflect on who did and - more importantly - who did not fill out the survey. For example, you can compare the ages, gender, and ethnicity of the survey respondents to the profile of all of your registered parishioners. This data can be found in the *Parish Data Executive Summary* that pastors recently received. This summary gives a ten-year snapshot of the parish, including changes to the age and ethnic makeup of Mass attendees. This data can also be found in *ParishSOFT* or your recent Mass attendance count. How does the profile of your most engaged parishioners from the survey compare with the profile of your registered parishioners in general? Who's not engaged? Why?

Putting it all in context

Another aspect to consider is how your survey results compare with other parishes in your region. We have data sorted by region, Hispanic, black, families with children under 18 as well as the total Archdiocesan picture of the survey.
results. It could spark insights by comparing some of these subgroups with your parish survey. Naturally, your parish may serve a specific niche that makes it different from these summaries, but put them side by side. Do the results make sense?

If you have an Archbalt email account, you can access the five year profile for each parish in the archdiocese, based on the data collected from their consolidated reports. Log in to MyArch, click on “Location Resources” under the left hand column and then “Parish Profiles” in the center. What does this information tell you about your region?

Who did we forget to invite?

We must always look beyond our parish walls to those who never darken our doorstep. As Archbishop Lori wrote in his pastoral letter, A Light Brightly Visible, "A parish might well attract people from beyond its own ZIP code, but it can never cease to reach out with missionary love to the people in its own ZIP code." (p. 17)

Neighborhoods change. Sometimes an immigrant community is growing, such as Ecuadorian, Filipino, or Nigerian. Sometimes the age or gender distribution is tending one way or another. Sometimes new developments bring an influx of young adults and families. Sometimes neighborhoods are abandoned. The Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) provided a remarkable graphic in one of their blog posts, which indicated a growing ethnic transformation among Catholics, particularly those who make up the next generation of Catholic families. When we view this information, we should be asking ourselves: who is missing from our survey respondents and why? Who is missing from our active parishioners and why? And who should we be reaching out to today so that five years from now they’ll be vibrant, active members of our parish?

Welcoming in Action

Are we inviting and welcoming our greater community? Bishop Madden shared an example of this in one of his weekday homilies. He told the story of Fr. Dennis Grumsey, OFM Conv., pastor of St. Casimir in Canton, who noticed that there was an influx of young adults in his neighborhood who were not in his church on Sundays. He went out to them and asked them why they were not there, to which they replied that the times for Mass did not work with their schedules.

He might have responded that Mass ought to be important enough for them to make the available times work. But he was evangelizing them, which demands meeting them where they’re "Are your registered parishioners representative of the people you see in the local grocery store or shopping mall? No matter where your parish is, there have been changes and trends over the past ten years that are key to an effective evangelization.”
at, not where we'd like them to be. So he started offering a Sunday evening Mass. With this simple change, attendance of young adults at St. Casimir jumped from 50 to 250.

Look around at your community, look at your pews and plan for those who are not with you for your Sunday Masses. None of us should be guessing who is coming to dinner, we should be going out to invite them - all of them.

**The Ants Go Marching:**

**Children’s Faith Formation**

by Abby Kibler, Coordinator of Discipleship Formation

**If we feed them well, the ants will come and so will all their friends, neighbors, and relatives. I think there is a corollary for our catechetical programs. Are we meeting expectations?**

My niece is fascinated with all furry, feathered, or crawling creatures. When I visited last week, ants were the new obsession. Lucky for her, someone had spilled some snacks on the driveway. Lucky for me, certain topics stay in our heads long after we’ve left the office, so the ant-watching turned into a parish reflection. More on that later.

**Gather the facts**

Part of analyzing the parish survey is to look beyond the survey. Pull out your parish stats, and see how many registered families you have with elementary aged children. Now compare that to the number of children involved in your religious education programs. Are there missing kids?

I’m not sitting in your parish leadership team’s meeting right now, but I think I know the answer. Our survey responses probably don’t include the parents of many of those missing children, so part of our task is to fill in the gaps as we evaluate our parish pulse. We have to ask the tough questions: Why aren’t they coming? What will bring them in? How can we make our formation compelling and important enough to be a priority in their lives?

**Parents: Equip, not replace**

In question 13 of the survey, respondents shared how they pass on the Faith to their children and what challenges they face. As a parish community, we have the urgent task of supporting these parents in the faith formation of their children. Support, not replace.
So the first question at our round-table discussion on children’s faith formation should always be about the readiness of parents to teach the Faith, and what we are doing to effectively empower them to evangelize their own children. Empower, not replace. The parish religious education program supports the parents, it does not replace them. Our job is not to do their job. Our job is to help them be better at their job. Equip, not replace.

What that might look like and tips for pulling it off:

- Put on parent formation sessions, perhaps during the children’s classes each week, or at the start of each new unit. (Here’s how a parish in the D.C. area is doing that)
- Send out regular parent communication that goes beyond just logistics and announcements – give them content, tips for living the faith at home, snippets of catechesis. Share resources like The Mass Box to use with their children, or an app for the Year of Mercy for their own faith growth, or a blog post on tips for strengthening family life like these from Dr. Tim Hogan.
- Give parents our best. They probably won’t present the same distracted behaviors as we’ll get from their 3rd graders if we give a boring lesson, but just because they have more self-control doesn’t mean we owe them less effort. Make it count – they’re the most essential members of the team called to evangelize children.
- There are many other ideas that could be listed... here are a few from Leisa Anslinger. Keep brainstorming and discussing with your parish leadership team and come up with what’s best for your parish community.
- Cutting corners only cheapens the outcome. So put in the effort to make it great – it will pay off. Even if it’s smaller improvements each lesson or each unit or each year, develop an end goal with a clear vision of how to achieve that goal, and start taking steps.”

The Empty Chair Dilemma

You have the most spectacular lesson plan and delivery for your religious education class. You should probably record it and post it to YouTube because it’s so awesome that you’re about to be famous. But wait... you’re teaching to an almost empty classroom. Get your YouTube fame if you want, but we are not reaching our objective of evangelizing our parishioners if the chairs are vacant.

"Don’t be afraid of the word “required” – there is always a house project that can keep me from attending an event, so sometimes I need that “mandatory” push to get me out the door. But when the event is meaningful and compelling, I never leave wishing I stayed home to do a project.”
Let's take a look at our parishioners' responses again. What did they say in questions 2 and 27? Do those responses enlighten your understanding of what keeps them away from regular attendance (either to Mass or to religious education)?

Good news and bad news: Rome wasn’t built in a day. They won’t all show up at once, so don’t expect bursting rooms just because you’ve prepared a great program. But the good news is that Rome was built! And it’s magnificent, and people still flock there every year. Most great accomplishments take time. Here a woman shares her own personal dream for religious education — your parish’s goal may or may not resemble hers, but make sure you develop a clear vision for where you want to go.

**What that might look like and tips for pulling it off:**

- At one nearby parish, the DRE upholds a high standard of teaching by requiring that each of her 120 catechists turn in a lesson plan before their class each week.

- Many parishes across the country have moved away from the traditional classroom model and are transitioning to a “flipped classroom” model. If this is of interest to you, call or email me and I can share their resources and methodology.

- Gathered sessions at the beginning of class with all children in your program offers an opportunity for prayer, dynamic presentations of a new theme, or introduction of a service project. Imagine 15 minutes of VBS-level engagement before sending them to their classrooms.

- Articulate a goal first, then decide how your parish reality can most effectively achieve that goal. Don’t try everything suggested by all religious educators everywhere. Be picky and stick to a consistent plan.

- You and your team know your parish the best — what will be most successful? Think big, and be willing to step beyond your past modules if needed.

Back to my niece and the ants. Watching the constant line of ants marching to the pile of food begs the question: “How did they all know about this?” Had it been a pile of browned lettuce, there would be no such line. But it was sugary fruit snacks. The line was not ending.

If we’re feeding them well, the ants will come, and so will all their friends and neighbors and relatives. I think there’s a corollary for our catechetical programs.

**What do our respondents think of our current programs?** Check out question 28, on page 6 of the survey result. Here parishioners gave a level of importance they place on “engaging children’s ministry” and also their level of satisfaction. Are we meeting expectations? (It may be beneficial to also look at the youth survey results, particularly questions 10
and 15.) Perhaps as we work on improving the satisfaction in question #28, we'll start to notice a rise in improvement in question #30 as well. And then you’ll need to make sure you put out extra chairs as the ants come marching two by three by four by...

*How can your parish go beyond the classroom with children’s faith formation?*

**Nothing Else Matters**

by Craig Gould, Director of the Division of Youth and Young Adult Ministry, Campus Ministry

*Scripture testifies to Jesus Christ as the cornerstone of faith. The cornerstone is not the end of the building but without it, nothing can be built*

If Jesus Christ is not the center, nothing else matters. It may sound drastic, but our whole parish survey may come down to Question 21: *Which of the following best describes how you practice your faith and relate to Jesus Christ?*

What is the point of all of our planning, our programs, our ministries, and even relationally-focused pastoral care, if we are not helping people grow in their relationship with Christ in and through the Church? Can anyone in our parishes grow in the true practice of faith if that practice is separated from Jesus Christ and their intimacy with Him? If we take these questions seriously, and the answers our parishioners gave to Question 21, we might:

*Open Meetings by Asking the Question*

What if every meeting started with: "Where are you in your relationship with Jesus Christ?" From gatherings with youth, liturgy practice, parish council, and staff times, could you imagine what would happen if you clearly communicated that our priority is our relationship with Christ by asking this question first? I imagine our communities would come to understand:

- They should be asking themselves (and others) this question.
- Whatever they’re about to engage in, no matter how important, is secondary to that answer.
- God is as interested in what he is doing in them, that what he is doing through them.
Plan with the End in Mind

The End is Jesus Christ. The liturgy is our perfect example of what is the goal when we gather, which is to experience union with Jesus Christ as His Body. Do our programs and events:

- Speak the name of Jesus?
- Proclaim Jesus’ life from the Scriptures?
- Tell the stories of what Jesus is doing right now, in the lives of His people, in our community?

Go Beyond the Gathered

Part of what we are doing as leaders is modeling practices of faith that can be incorporated at home and as individuals. In fact, it’s the vision of all who are specifically called in the name of the Church as both clergy and Lay Ecclesial Ministers to empower and equip the faithful for their apostolic work in the world. So, how do we:

- Demonstrate practices that can be incorporated by people on their own or in their family, such as Lectio Divina, or Liturgy of the Hours?
- Introduce practices that might expand the devotional life of our communities, such as Praying with Icons, or Christ-centered Meditation?

- Allow the sanctification that Jesus is working on in their lives to be the source of their Mission in their places of work, their families, and their schools?

Scripture testifies to Jesus Christ as the Cornerstone of faith. The Cornerstone is not the end of the building, but without it, nothing can be built. Let us build our communities on Jesus Christ and his relationship with us, and may we not rest until not only those in our churches, but all those in our community and our entire world can check the box, that states: Jesus Christ is at the center of all I do.

"Is Jesus Christ at the center of all that you do as a parish?"

Faith Is Not a Smoothie

by Ruth Puls, Director of the Division of Catechetical and Pastoral Formation

We are not a church of “one and done” experiences. A parish that wants parishioners to share faith has to be prepared to always invite people to “the more”
When we experience something wonderful, something life-changing, when we have met someone who has changed our whole world, it is natural that we want to share it. And so it is with our Catholic faith.

Our Department is welcoming four children into the world this year. The first arrived last week. (Congrats Johanna and welcome Andrew Francis Coughlin!) Another of our colleagues will be a mom for the first time and, like all first-time moms, she is checking off that "great list of firsts":

- First time she “knew” she was pregnant.
- First time the morning sickness confirmed it.
- First time she noticed the baby bump.
- First glimpse of the sonogram.
- First kick in the belly.

Moms and dads tell the stories of their children’s birth. It is for many a mystical experience. Often they tell the story of a day that is just like any other day until the baby decides to make his or her way into the world. They talk about labor, they talk about delivery, and then they talk about the first time they saw their baby. I have heard parents who welcomed an infant into their family in a similar progression: the first time they fill out an application, the first time the adoption agency calls, the first time they meet their child, the day it all becomes official. Welcoming an infant or a child into the family is, positively, an incredible, mystical experience.

Like those parents, we also want to talk about our own mystical experience with Jesus Christ. We want to share how God has answered our prayer; we want to invite people to Mass; we want to reach out when we see someone who is hopeless and offer them the very hope that Jesus brought to our lives; we want to reach people who are making life and death decisions and encourage them to see the guidance of the Holy Spirit to choose life. We want so much for people to be in love with God and with the Church...We want, we want, we want!

Here are five points to reflect on how we can reach out more dynamically:

1. **Lead by doing**

   We’ve all been there. We are at a meeting and someone says, “Who is willing to lead prayer?” And everyone looks down, hoping no one will call his or her name. And then someone says (often reluctantly), “I’ll do it,” as if God should be honored that we are
doing something we do not like to do by offering our praise to Him. Wow!

Prayer is the language of our hearts! Stepping out in faith and having as our heart’s desire a willingness to express the language of our hearts does at least two things: it honors God; and it helps other disciples to hear and learn the language of prayer, of love for God.

In addition to prayer, as ministers of the Gospel we want to:

- Take opportunities for our own formation, and share those experiences when we return to the parish
- Live the Gospel message and review the day by asking of each encounter, “Was I Christ to that person?” and “Did I see Christ in that person?”
- Find the opportunities to share Jesus Christ with one another
- Take the time to break open God’s Word with one another

2. **The faith we share isn’t a smoothie**

Pope Francis told young people: “Please, do not put your faith in Jesus Christ in a blender. You can have orange smoothies, apple smoothies, banana smoothies, but please, do not gulp down a ‘faith-shake.’ Faith is a whole; you can’t mix it up in a blender.” *(Rio de Janeiro, 2013)*

How true this is! We are not a church of “one and done” experiences. A parish that wants parishioners to share faith has to be prepared to always invite people to “the more.”

- An unchurched man who participated in the Appalachian Service Project because you knew he had carpentry skills could be invited to Mass with your family.
- A young person who has just attended a great confirmation retreat could be invited to another gathering.
- Someone impacted by a *ChristLife* gathering could be invited to deepen discipleship through small group.
- Couples who prepared for marriage with the parish could be invited to join with other couples who are growing in their understanding of being a Catholic family.
- Parishes should constantly encourage and help support small faith sharing groups.

> "How can we reach out more dynamically to those who have left and those who are searching?"
> - Archbishop Lori, *A Light Brightly Visible*

3. **Ask God to multiply the occasions.**

Look for ways to have disciples (parishioners) share their faith with others. Ask God to open your eyes to ways that we could
invite people to share, and then ask God to multiply the occasions where witnesses would strengthen a parish. Asking a different witness to share faith briefly each night of a parish novena, or having a mom share her faith story in the bulletin for Mother’s Day, or asking a foster parent to witness on the Feast of St. Joseph are all ways that we can make it clear to others that it is not just Father, or just the staff members who have faith. And then, look for occasions as a pastoral staff or council or committee member to share faith and break open God’s Word at your meetings.

4. **Host a gathering on how to share faith, or invite someone from the Department of Evangelization to work with you in doing this.**

“Heart speaks to heart.” Assisting parishioners to share their faith stories, enabling them to see how this is an important part of their discipleship, holding their hands as they step out in faith ... these are all important to our mission. **We would be happy to help.**

5. **Live it!**

There are few compliments greater than, “I want what you have.” Or, “He is just a good example of Christian faith ... I wish I could be like him.”

Everyone quotes Francis (no, not the Pope. The other one...) as saying, “Preach the Gospel at all times and when necessary, use words.” We have to live the faith, but we also need to proclaim Jesus Christ as the Lord of our lives. People are starving spiritually because they do not know how to call upon the name of the Lord. **St. Paul asks**, “How can they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how can they believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone to preach? And how can people preach unless they are sent?”

6. **And our sixth point out of five points is...**

Help people be formed in their faith. Always invite people to the more, as we said in point 2. And the more is this: as the **first letter of St. Peter** tells us, “Always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope but do it with gentleness and reverence, keeping your conscience clear ...”

Provide time for adults to grow in their understanding of faith. Some people (check your survey results) don’t feel comfortable sharing faith because they do not feel they know enough. Help them to learn more! Equip the saints for the work of ministry! Be ready! And help others in your parish be ready as well. Look at survey questions 14-17 and 20, and see how you are doing. Ask:

**Does this resonate with my experience of our parishioners? If we see a large number of people willing to invite, willing to engage and speak about the faith, have we asked them to help us to reach out to others in the community?**
I really enjoy sushi. It is beautiful food art that is at once pleasing to the eye and the palette and never fails to improve my mood.

I wasn’t always a sushi convert as the idea of eating raw fish and seaweed wasn’t really appealing at first. But wise sushi connoisseurs introduced me slowly to the wonders of the sushi experience, beginning with simple, familiar flavors like cucumber and avocado, advancing slowly to the fully cooked California roll, adding in miso soup and wasabi when appropriate, waiting to introduce the raw fishes (salmon, tuna, yellowtail, …) and exotic sea creatures (octopus, sea urchin, abalone, …) until much later.

Mmm... makes my mouth water. Now a sushi connoisseur myself, it never fails that when I go out for sushi with friends or family, I always feel fully fed in body, mind, and spirit as well as more connected to my friends and family who shared the experience.

Mass, too, is an experience that bonds people around a family table and nourishes its participants in body, mind, spirit, and soul. Having been formed as a mass-goer over a lifetime, with the help of many wise mentors who introduced me gradually to its mysteries, I now never fail to be fed by Christ in Word and Sacrament, even if I get distracted or the music or homily don’t speak to me.

How are all NOT fed?

The survey results across the Archdiocese indicate that not everyone who comes to Mass regularly feels spiritually fed. While it is wonderful that four out of five respondents answered that their spiritual needs were being met at their parish (Q31), that leaves one in five respondents who aren’t feeling spiritually fed. Interestingly, most of these people still attend mass at least a couple times a month, some even weekly (Q7). Here are some other related survey stats:
One in six report “spiritual needs not being met here” as a reason they or someone they know might not attend mass at their parish on a given Sunday (Q27)

One in four think “spiritual needs not being met” is a key reason people leave the church (Q19) – does it take one to know one?

One in four don’t feel like a valued member of the parish (Q32)

One in three don’t report being encouraged in their spiritual growth by someone in the parish (Q33).

Don’t forget, these are the figures for those who actually took the survey – how many more people would have said their spiritual needs weren’t being met if we had heard from those who didn’t take the survey? Looking at your own parish responses to these questions, is there an opportunity here to reach some disconnected people already in the pews?

All this seems to pose the question: how is it possible to come to church regularly and not be spiritually fed? Don’t we do so much to make our liturgies vibrant, our community welcoming, and our programs and events diverse and interesting? We work so hard and do so much – how are people missing it?

What’s the focus – our effort or the people?

Perhaps the question should be less about our efforts and more about the people we are trying to reach. For our efforts to bear fruit, they have to reach their target and be received.

Are we targeting the newcomer and the spiritual beginner? Like a sushi menu, is there something for every spiritual level from beginner to advanced?

Have we listened to what they hunger for? Do we know what they are ready to receive? (see the text responses to Q24, Q25 and Q26 on enhancing spiritual life for some starter ideas in your parishioners own words).

Can everyone find a comfortable connection point at some time during Mass, yet still be challenged to go a little deeper? Can everyone find themselves in the homily, from the old to the young, from the local to the immigrant, from the spiritually advanced to the spiritual beginner?

Do we return to the basic kerygma every Sunday to reground the veteran while keeping the Gospel accessible to the beginner?

I can’t help but wonder how I might never have come to enjoy sushi if it weren’t for those wise people who introduced me slowly to its delights, meeting me where I was and accompanying me on a culinary adventure. Would I have come back for a second chance if my first taste was something like sea urchin that would have been so far beyond my ability to appreciate as a newcomer? How many similar spiritual beginners are there in our church communities?
I have to admit that I don’t usually think about the newcomer at Mass and what role I might play in their spiritual journey. But part of the personal missionary transformation Pope Francis and Archbishop Lori have asked all of us to undertake includes making that paradigm shift personally. Maybe this weekend at Mass if I notice a newcomer or a spiritual beginner, I’ll think about a time I was a beginner at something and how I was helped along to become more advanced. I’ll try to be open to the Holy Spirit who might inspire me with a way to help feed that person with something even better than sushi: Jesus Christ, God, Son, and Savior.

We Believe in One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church: Why Every Head Needs a Body
By John Romanowsky, Executive Director of the Department of Evangelization

The question of Sunday Mass attendance is profound. It begs the questions: What does it mean to be Catholic? To be Christian? What is the Church and what does it mean to be a member of the Church?

We just returned from our annual visit to see my wife’s family in Spain. As she does every year, my mother-in-law brought the whole family together for lunch. (By "lunch," I mean a feast lasting an entire Sunday afternoon.) Everyone had already visited with us individually; but make no mistake: they were all obliged to attend.

Why do we do that? Why do we mark significant occasions like visits from faraway relatives with obligatory family gatherings?
After all, if we don't show up, do we suddenly cease being individual members of the family? Nope. But we have lost - or are losing - what it really means to be a member of a family.

The question of Sunday Mass attendance is similar, but even more profound. It begs the questions: what does it mean to be Catholic? To be Christian? What is the Church and what does it mean to be a member of the Church?

The simple answer, of course, is that to be a Christian is to actually be a member of Christ's Body in communion. And by definition, we can't be members of a body in isolation, but only together, in the most profound unity. And we can't do that unless we show up. But how does this happen in the Church? Pope Saint John Paul II puts it well:

"The Body of Christ in the Holy Eucharist sacramentalizes this communion, that is, it is a sign and actually brings about the intimate bonds of communion among all the faithful in the Body of Christ which is the Church (1 Cor 10:16)." (Christifideles Laici, 19)

This is what lies behind the Church's consistent teaching on the obligation to attend Sunday Eucharist: the Catechism clearly states that those who, without good reason, fail in the obligation to attend Sunday Eucharist and other days of obligation are committing "a grave sin" (#2181).

Less than 20 percent of Catholics attend Sunday Eucharist regularly. We're losing something fundamental in our identity as Catholic Christians. This is a matter of belief - that's why "we believe in one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church" is in the Creed. If it's a matter of faith, it's a challenge for evangelization.

Turning to the Parish Survey results, we can see two groups of people, broadly speaking:

1. Those who come regularly, or who would come regularly if they possibly could, and
2. Those who are not coming, and have lost, or are losing, this essential connection between Christian faith and being a member of the Church.

Those Who Need Our Help

It's helpful to simply go down through the list of options in Q. 27 and ask the question: how might we as a parish remove these obstacles? This is especially relevant to three options that scored high across the Archdiocese:

- 34% say they can't attend because they're working or in school; this number jumps to 55% for African American Catholics, and 54% for Hispanic Catholics
• 30% say they can't attend because of health problems or disability; this number goes up to 44% for African Americans, and 32% for Hispanics
• 18% say it's because of divorce or marriage outside the Church (although that number drops to single digits in the African American and Hispanic communities).

These are our brothers and sisters who most likely would like to be with us on Sunday, but cannot and need our help to remove the obstacles, to go out to them, to journey with them and help them find the way back.

**Our Mission Field**

And then there are the members of the family who don't show up because they have better things to do, or because they're not so interested in being part of the family any more:

• 37% say they don't attend because of "sports and other activities"
• 30% because they don't "feel they need to come to church every week," and
• 19% because "church is becoming less relevant in my life"

Considering these daunting numbers, it's helpful to keep in mind that most of our brothers and sisters simply don't get the whole Sunday Mass obligation and grave sin thing. They might think it's faded into the past. Or they might have never even heard tell of it. Many have little, if any, culpability.

That's why the onus is on us to go out to them, and to accompany, invite, and welcome them. If a good society is one that makes it "easier" to be good, then a good parish today is one that makes it "easier" to attend and participate at Sunday Eucharist. Here it's impossible to overemphasize the important of making sure the "three H's" are everything they ought to be:

1. Hospitality
2. Hymns
3. Homilies

We can't compete head-to-head with sports. We can't just confront folks with paragraph #2181 of the Catechism. But we can make changes so that when we go out and invite a brother or sister to Mass, and they accept that invitation, their experience of Sunday Eucharist, and the parish community, will make them want to come back the next Sunday. And the next.
ASK THE MASTER OF THE HARVEST:

EVANGELIZING FOR VOCATIONS
by Father James Sorra, Director of the Office of Vocations

OUR FIRST VOCATION AS CHRISTIANS IS TO HOLINESS – TO RECEIVE THE GREAT LOVE THAT CHRIST HAS FOR US AND TO RETURN IT TO HIM; TO LIVE OUR LIVES GROWING IN A RELATIONSHIP WITH HIM, HIS PEOPLE, AND HIS CHURCH. IN THIS WAY, VOCATIONS PROMOTION CONCERNS ALL OF US – EACH AND EVERY PERSON

When I was considering what to do with my life as a young adult, I had various ideas, some more grounded than others. I wanted to make it big as a rock drummer but my ambition exceeded my chops. (I also had trouble doing fancy stick twirls.) I also had hopes of making big bucks in the business world or in a prestigious career in law. It was in the midst of this search that I began to see that my life was missing something. The options laid out for me just didn’t seem to be fulfilling or meaningful. Sure, such options provided a comfortable income (okay, maybe not the rock drummer option), but would I be happy - truly happy - doing any of these? I began to realize that life meant more than that, that I wanted to do something greater with my life: I wanted to live for someone other than myself.

Often when we think about promoting vocations, we think of the Church adding a “spiritual career option” to the many options available to young people today. We present our promotional vocation efforts as if we want to make sure that young people know that priesthood and religious life are viable career choices. We know we need more priests in our parishes, so we often rack our brains as to how to “sell the priesthood” as an honorable job among many.

I’m not saying that the efforts to portray these vocations as positive choices are not good – they are. But I think vocations promotion in a parish can be so much greater. Our first vocation as Christians is to holiness – to receive the great love that Christ has for us and to return it to Him; to live our lives growing in a relationship with Him, His people, and His Church. In this way, vocations promotion concerns all of us – each and every person. And it concerns not just the question of our specific vocation – to marriage, the consecrated life, the priesthood, or generous single life - but also whether we ourselves have been evangelized so that our love for Christ continues to grow and our response to Him flows out of His generous love for us.
This, to me, is the only way that the specific vocations of the priesthood and consecrated life, or even of marriage, make sense. Why give yourself totally away to another person or to the Church? Why not keep your options indefinitely open? Even further: why give up the beautiful goods of marriage to live a life of celibacy or to consecrate your virginity to God? Why?

Because we were made for love. Radical love. A love that gives itself totally and to the end— as Christ has loved us. This is the only way that we will ever find the happiness we seek or rest for our restless hearts.

Vocations only make sense when we encounter Christ—the incarnation of the Father’s love for us. St. John Paul II said that “The truth is that only in the mystery of the incarnate Word does the mystery of man take on light... [Christ] fully reveals man to himself and makes his supreme calling clear... [man] cannot fully find himself except through a sincere gift of himself.”

We need to begin to see vocations promotion as integral to the work of evangelization— as a way of providing opportunities in our parishes for our young people to encounter Christ and fall in love with Him. In order to do this, I’d like to propose a simple plan for your parish’s vocations efforts:

- **Prayer**

  Pray for the Holy Spirit to reveal God’s great love to you, your family (especially your children), and the people in your parish and, for the courage to follow this Love to the end. Have organized and regular prayer efforts for vocations (e.g. Holy Hours, rosaries, Mass petitions, etc.). Jesus had one "Vocations promotion plan": ask the Master of the harvest to send laborers. He wanted us to PRAY for vocations!

- **Invitation**

  Build a culture of invitation, discernment, and encouragement for vocations to priesthood and to consecrated life. Our catechetical programs, religious education, schools, and youth & young adult ministries, need to be suffused with a focus on the connection between discipleship and vocation. Check out these [free resources](#) the Archdiocese subscribes to for parishes and schools (access Code: BaltimoreVocations320). Also know that the [Office of Vocations](#) is always available to assist you.

- **Accompaniment**

  Form relationships with the young men and women of your parish and accompany them on their journey of faith even as you seek to grow in your own. Connect them with good and holy priests and religious so that they can see the joyful witness of...
these men and women. It is important that they know that they are not alone and are supported by many others. The most recent CARA report on the priestly ordination class of 2016 indicated an average of four people encouraged them in their vocation: 70% were encouraged by a parish priest, 48% by friends, 46% by parishioners, and 42% by mothers.

Any Vocations program that you run should encompass these three aspects and, above all, it should encourage and inspire a deeper encounter with Christ. It is only through this that all our vocations efforts and programs are meaningful. So whether you are one of the 66% of the survey respondents who said your parish is promoting vocations or if you are part of the 26% who didn’t know or 8% who said your parish was not, you can begin to foster a culture of vocations in your families and parishes. Christ is asking for it and it’s not that difficult!

*Do your parish's vocations promotion efforts make it clear that the call to discern and embrace a particular vocation is inseparable from the universal call of all baptized Catholics to discipleship and holiness?*

*When was the last time you personally encouraged a young person to think and pray about becoming a priest or religious?*

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**12 Ways to Be the “Hostess With the Mostess”**

by Daphne Daly, Director of the Office of Pastoral Planning

Evaluating the Parish Facilities Through Our Guests’ Eyes Has Many Parallels to What We Do at Home. If We Stopped to Look at Our Parish Campus This Way, What Would We Find?

Recently, my brother and his family came for an overnight visit that, even though it was short, inevitably brought out my latent desire to be the “hostess with the mostess.” So, just before they arrived, I found myself stocking the bathrooms with clean towels and plenty of toilet paper, as well as randomly touching up paint where someone’s shoe had left a huge scuff mark, and frantically changing out the gross shower curtain liner for a new one.

Despite my efforts, I accept that I’ll never be the next Martha Stewart. Those Pinterest boards are from a fairy-tale wonderland that I’ll never visit. But when guests are expected, I do stop and look around my house through their eyes. I ask myself what they’ll need to feel welcome and comfortable. I try
my best to be the *Hostess with the Mostess* (while keeping the stress to a minimum).

Whether we know it or not, our hospitality skills are also put to the test when guests come to our parish campuses for Sunday Mass, a baptism, or even a Scout meeting. Evaluating the parish facilities through their eyes has many parallels to what we do at home. If we stopped to look at our parish campus this way, what would we find?

Have we considered the needs of our guests above all, and have we created a comfortable, welcoming environment for them, no matter who they are?

While not the only parish survey question that sheds light on this, here I want to focus on Question 42: the size and condition of parish facilities. How do your parishioners perceive the size and condition of the parish campus? If it’s anything like the Archdiocesan-wide results, it would look like this:

- The size of the worship space is pretty good (88% say “just right”) and generally in decent condition (58% say “excellent”)
- Fellowship space and outdoor areas also are a good size (78% and 82% say “just right,” respectively) but maybe could stand a little sprucing up (41% and 43% say “excellent,” respectively)
- Adequate parking could be a challenge (73% say “just right”) and also might need some attention to its condition (36% say “excellent”)

A visitor’s first impression of our parish cannot be underestimated. It could well be the gateway for them to discover or rediscover their faith, or to decide to give your parish a try, or to make it their own, or even just break down preconceptions they have of the Catholic Church as old, tired, and out-of-date.

Have we considered the needs of our guests above all, and have we created a comfortable, welcoming environment for them, no matter who they are?

Loads of behavioral theories and research suggest that aesthetics, simplicity, and order, positively influence people’s choices, behavior, and attitudes. So, once you’re familiar with your own parish responses, take a deeper dive into an evaluation of how your parish campus looks and feels to visitors. I’ve translated twelve “Hostess with the Mostess” tips into questions you might want to ask about how your parish campus is perceived by visitors.

**Put Out the Welcome Mat – Evaluating the Outdoor and Parking Areas**

*Tip #1: Make sure people can find the house easily*

*Translation:* What identifies the parish campus as a Catholic place of worship? Is there clear, identifiable signage for the campus?
**Tip #2: Provide adequate parking and make sure the walkway is clear so that people can get in and out easily**

*Translation:* Is it clear where to park and is parking adequate? Do you mention this on your website with clear directions or a Google map? Is there a plan for handling parking and directing visitors during especially busy times? Are the walkways in good condition and well-lit?

**Tip #3: Make sure the grass is mowed, flower beds are weeded, and seasonal flowers are potted or planted**

*Translation:* Is the beauty of God’s creation celebrated in the natural features of the campus? Does the landscaping and its care make people feel safe and welcome?

**Tip #4: Put out balloons and light the tiki torches so guests know they’ve arrived at the right place**

*Translation:* Does the overall exterior convey a sense of welcome and celebration? Is the campus well-lit at night so visitors especially can find their way in the dark and feel safe?

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**The Quickest Way to the Heart is Through the Stomach – Evaluating the Main Worship Space**

**Tip #5: Make sure everyone is comfortable in the space where all the action takes place**

*Translation:* Is the size of the worship space appropriate for the number of people expected? Will visitors be uncomfortable because they are packed in too tight or, conversely, because they are practically the only ones there?

**Tip #6: Make sure the food and drinks are easy to get to and are positioned to avoid crowding**

*Translation:* Is the circulation into, out of, and around the sanctuary good? Are there bottlenecks in particular places as people enter the building, go up for communion, or move to other areas?

**Tip #7: Light candles, cue the perfect Spotify playlist, and set the table so everything looks beautiful**

*Translation:* Does the worship space reflect reverence for the liturgy and glorify God through music, art, architecture, and other expressions of beauty? Does the worship space respect all those who enter it by being a comfortable, safe, and clean environment?

**Tip #8: Anticipate the basic needs of your visitors**

*Translation:* Are bathrooms clean and accessible? Are accommodations made for those with physical or other limitations, as well as families with small children?
“Getting to Know You, Getting to Know All About You”
– Evaluating the Fellowship Space(s)

Tip #9: **Make sure there are comfortable chairs and soft pillows for guests to ease into**

*Translation:* Are fellowship spaces usable by people of different ages – from infants to the elderly? Are they the kind of environments that encourage people to let their guard down, form friendships, and be the person God created them to be? Lastly, the *Hostess with the Mostess* knows how to maximize hospitality even on a budget. A fresh coat of paint is one of the cheapest ways to refresh a space, and flats of colorful spring annuals can be purchased in bulk for a few dollars at home improvement centers. Even something as inexpensive (or free) as getting volunteers to direct traffic can make a huge difference and practically scream “Welcome! We’re so glad you came!”

Tip #10: **Arrange the room to promote conversation and avoid conflict between activities**

*Translation:* Can large groups gather without feeling cramped? Can small groups gather without feeling swallowed up by the space? Can different groups use spaces at the same time without conflicting with each other?

Tip #11: **Provide places where guests can have some downtime with a book, a drink, and a snack**

*Translation:* Are there spaces where people can engage in quiet conversation or small group discussions? Where does one-on-one pastoral care take place, and is it a peaceful, reassuring environment?

Tip #12: **Make sure all your guests feel comfortable being themselves**

*Translation:* How are you working to make sure your parishioners leave wanting to come back?
A Reflection on Financial Perception and Stewardship

By Bill Baird, Chief Financial Officer

The rich and storied tradition of the Catholic Church has been perpetuated over the centuries by generations of families changing their communities through their gifts of time, talent, and treasure.

The financial health and vitality of your parish is in your hands.

I spent 25 years in the investment business. The thought that I'd one day be sitting here as the CFO of the Archdiocese never entered my head. I also never imagined that despite my previous career success, it would be this job that would demand more of my MBA than any other. "God put me in this job to teach me patience and humility." That's what I tell everyone. There were only two finance guys in Jesus’ life: Matthew was a tax collector and Judas held the purse for the apostles. Patience and humility...

My wife and I have always been faithful and generous donors to our church and other charities. But it wasn't until the capital campaign a few years back that I truly understood the connection between stewardship and the mission and growth of our parish. Our pastor laid out a vision: the goal of the campaign was to invest in a future "empty seat." It was the empty seat that God wanted to provide in our new church for someone who was not yet here. If we made that investment, we'd make that space available. I realized then it wasn't about a building: it was about the disciples we were going to make. Father then told us to ask God what we should give and to prayerfully consider the impact HE was asking us to make.

The rich and storied tradition of the Catholic Church has been perpetuated over the centuries by generations of families changing their communities through their gifts of time, talent, and treasure. It is the foundation of every Catholic community in the Archdiocese. And yet, at its very core, it is about what Christ intended it to be from the very beginning: Disciples intent on fulfilling His call each and every day to bring more people to Him.

I have seen it in action in our parishes on Sunday, when parishioners travel far and wide to add their voices to the chorus at Mass that unites us in communion across the world. I have seen it in the
volunteers preparing meals in their parish communities to be served to the hungry at Our Daily Bread. I have seen it in our neighborhoods where schools and charitable programs are providing a safe and formative environment to prepare our youth for brilliant futures. I have seen this and so much more. At the center of all of this was the parish community, led by a dynamic priest convening dedicated legions of faithful followers to fulfill the great commission given to us so many years ago. We wanted to give to that!

As my wife, Mary and I were considering our gift, she told me the story of the parish priest at Little Flower where she grew up. He was a prolific fundraiser because he was determined in setting the vision for his local church community. It was personal for him and for his parishioners. She recalled her father's story of parishioners asking the pastor what the church needed even when he did not ask them. They were so invested in the growth of their community that they were determined to know and support its needs. They were united with their pastor in understanding the present and securing the future of their parish. Mary said we needed to do the same. Let's trust the vision laid out by our priest: invest the gifts that only God can provide and watch the disciples grow!

Some questions to ask ourselves as our parishes prepare our mission readiness statements and look to become ever more effective centers forming missionary disciples:

1. Do our parishioners truly understand the mission and needs of our parish and the broader Church?
2. Does our giving fulfill a call to use our resources in a way that glorifies God?
3. Does our giving represent a desire to invest the gifts that God has given us?
4. Is the financial condition of the parish transparent to the parishioners?
5. Are the fundraising efforts of the parish widely shared and engaged with enthusiasm and pride? Is it connected to the core mission of the Church to make disciples?
6. Does our plan envision those future disciples and new members of our parish? Are we answering the call to join our pastor in growing the church?

I keep a quote on my desk that reminds me why we do what we do. It is from Fr. Walter Ciszek’s book *He Leadeth Me*:

“Yet in God’s providence, here we are. This was the place he had chosen for us, the situation and the circumstances in which he had placed us. One thing we could do and do daily: we could seek first the kingdom of God and his justice - first of all in our own lives and then in the lives of those around us. From the time of the apostles - twelve simple men, alone and afraid, who had received the commission to go forth into the world to preach the good news of the kingdom - there has been no other way for
the spreading of the kingdom than by the acts and lives of individual Christians striving each day to fulfill the will of God.”

**At the Heart of Worship**

By Ximena DeBroeck, Professor of Sacred Scripture, St. Mary’s Seminary and University

**Worship is about a personal and intimate communion, which transforms and empowers us to be missionary in the community.**

Worship is often at the center of our conversation with family, friends, and co-workers when we discuss spiritual and religious practices. Sociological and psychological studies and recent polls indicate that most people accept the existence of God. However, difficulties arise when talking about ways to relate to God, experience God, know God, or follow God’s call. This is precisely where the topic of worship makes a grand entrance, and how it occupies center place in our musings.

Considering what is at the heart of worship will help us to deepen our conversations on this matter. My personal journey, as someone who was raised in the Catholic faith and who worshiped for many years without a full understanding of the meaning of worship, has influenced my realization that we often miss what is at the heart of worship:

**Communion with God is what is at the heart of worship**

Worship is about a personal and intimate communion that transforms and empowers us to be missionary in the community. We worship personally, but publicly, and so worship is about communion at a personal and communal level. Scripture helps us discern the centrality of this communion. We have been created in God’s image (Gen 1:26-27), in the image of a God who IS communion and DESIRES communion. Thus we are created IN communion and FOR communion.

Furthermore, we are liberated FOR communion. God liberated the Hebrew people who cried out to him. They were given freedom so that they could worship God and thus be in communion with him (Ex 4:23, 7:16; 8:1; 9:1; 10:3 – ‘serve’ instead of ‘worship’ used in some translations). Scripture reveals God inviting people to be in relationship with Him, and it is in worship that people are able to restore the broken communion with God, to experience renewed communion, and also to express the communion present in their hearts. The experience of communion with God guides the disciples towards communion with neighbor, for the sake of the kingdom.

My intention in using a Scriptural lens is dual. Because I teach Scripture, it might appear that I have
a bias. Although there is some truth to that statement, there is another factor influencing my reflection. Archbishop Lori’s Pastoral Letter, “A LIGHT BRIGHTLY VISIBLE” has inspired me also. Speaking about his own journey, the Archbishop states, “Have I allowed the Risen Lord in the power of the Holy Spirit to open my mind “to the understanding of Scripture? (Lk 24:45)” (A LIGHT BRIGHTLY VISIBLE, p 6).

With a scriptural lens, I offer some reflections on the survey. Five of the issues addressed in question #28 are directly connected to the experience of worship at the parish, namely (1) engaging homilies, (2) holy, reverent worship experience, (3) dynamic, lively worship experience, (4) outstanding music, (5) beautiful architecture. The other issues are indirectly connected to worship; they are catalysts for a ‘positive’ worship experience or would be the result of transformative worship.

1. Engaging homilies - 60% of the respondents across the archdiocese indicated that homilies were important, and of those, 45% of them were satisfied. This finding proposes two possible scenarios, either lack of awareness of the relevance of a homily in worship, or recognition of its place, but low expectations for good homilies, and thus diminished importance. Neither scenario is good. The homily has a privileged place of explaining Scripture and opening the hearts of the disciples for encounter and communion, as it was with the disciples on the road to Emmaus.

2. Holy, reverent

3. Dynamic/lively worship experience – 44% of the respondents reported that holy and reverent worship was important, with only 1/3 (36%) satisfaction – almost half (48%) indicated that a dynamic, lively worship was important, yet only 1/3 (36%) were satisfied. These two markers might appear at first contradictory... how can worship be reverent and dynamic, or holy and lively? Not only can it be both, but it should be both. Holy and reverent does not negate dynamic and lively. The reverence comes from our interior disposition: holiness comes from the Spirit who can transform our ordinary lives into holy lives engaged in a dynamic and lively communion with God and neighbor.

4. Outstanding music – was important for a 1/3 (35%) of the respondents, but of those only 1/3 were satisfied with the music. Considering the arguments that are usually voiced about the style of music during liturgies, I am surprised at this finding. Since liturgical music is inspired by Scripture and aims at communicating the biblical message in song, it is also surprising that more people did not consider it important.

5. Beautiful architecture was important for about 1/4 of the respondents and 1/3 (33%) were satisfied.

Question 27 also provides information pertaining to worship. The primary reasons for not attending Mass at the main parish included: sports (37%), work/school (34%); health related issues (30%), no perceived need to attend weekly (29%). Interestingly, only 9% reported poor preaching as a
reason; this is consistent with the low importance given to homilies in question #28.

In conclusion, music, architecture and homilies are relevant to the experience of worship. However, worship will truly be the holy, reverent, dynamic, and lively experience that we are looking for when we realize that at its heart we find communion with God. For example, being conscious of this reality would enable us to prioritize worship over sports.

Although we are nurtured during worship in many ways, Eucharist, God’s Word, homilies, music, and even environment, it is important to be mindful that the assembly – the people God calls to communion - also has a role beyond passive recipients. Communion is about relationship, and relationships are not one-sided, they are reciprocal. This demands that we come to worship prepared to be transformed and knowing what is central to worship.

Realizing that COMMUNION WITH GOD is at the heart of worship can truly transform our experience of worship.

WHY THEY LEAVE, WHY THEY COME BACK

By John Romanowsky, Executive Director of the Department of Evangelization

IF WE WANT TO BECOME EVANGELIZING PARISHES, WE NEED TO REFLECT DEEPLY AND HUMBLY ON WHY OUR SISTERS AND BROTHERS LEAVE AND WHAT HELPS THEM RECONNECT AND COME BACK.

Everyone's faith journey is unique. But I have to confess that in one respect my own journey could not be more average: when I stopped practicing the Catholic faith it was the result of gradually drifting away. My parents took us to Mass every Sunday, we dutifully "got our sacraments," and we attended "Sunday school." But, as I entered young adulthood, none of that stopped me from walking out the door. What's so "average" about this? Over 70 percent of those who leave the Catholic Church also "gradually drift away." It is by far THE number one reason why people leave.

Thanks be to God - literally - I did find my way back. I had a personal conversion - or "reversion" - to Christ and His Church. I discovered as if for the first time all those things I had left
behind. My Catholic faith went from meaning nothing to meaning everything. The story of how this happened has to wait for another day. Blog posts need to be pithy, and it's only one story among thousands. However, one thing is clear:

If we want to become evangelizing parishes, we need to reflect deeply and humbly on why our sisters and brothers leave and what helps them reconnect and come back. Let's consider Q. 19 and 20 that ask these very same questions:

"Why do we think people leave the Church? (Q. 19) And, "How to help people reconnect with the faith?" (Q. 20)

These are both tough questions because in most parishes, when people leave, it largely goes unnoticed. There is no slamming of doors or loud complaints or ultimatums for "change or else." Our sisters and brothers just quietly go from being weekly Mass goers, to biweekly, to maybe monthly, to Christmas and Easter to... never again. Or for some reason they suddenly disappear. But, all too often, no one asks them why. No one tells them they're missed. No one invites them to come back. If we don't know why they leave - where they are at in their faith journey - it's hard to know how best to reconnect them.

So, our question for discernment: What would we have to do as a faith community to turn this around? To move from anonymity to a family of faith where every member is known by name, valued, missed, and invited back? Once we know where someone is in his or her journey, we can try to meet them there.

If the reasons they leave are:

- Disagreement with Church teachings on specific issues (57%)
- The clergy sex-abuse issue (24%)
- Or they no longer believe (15%)

Are we equipped to:

- Pray for them (78%) - how is this encouraged in an intentional way in the parish?
- Be open to their questions about the Church and its teaching (52%) - where and when could these conversations take place? How do we build enough trust for them to voice doubts, disagreements, anger, and disillusionment?
- Share why you remain a committed Catholic (42%) - How do we become comfortable sharing our faith story? Are there regular opportunities to share our faith, to be invited to do so?
- Listen to their pains and concerns and accompany them (40%) - again, where, when, what have we done to earn their trust? Do we communicate clearly that they won't be judged and condemned, but respected and heard and accepted?
If the reasons they leave are:

- Not getting enough out of Mass (40%)
- Gradual loss of interest (37%)
- Dissatisfied with atmosphere in church (27%)
- Spiritual needs not being met (26%)
- Not feeling welcomed (17%)

Are we equipped to:

- Pray for them (78%) - this cannot be overemphasized ...
- Let them know they're missed and always welcome (47%) - how can we let them know if we don't notice they're not there? Can we move from hospitality to strangers, to making an effort to getting to know fellow parishioners by name? Can we invite them to leave contact information?
- Offer a personal invitation to attend Mass with you (40%) This goes a long way. Most people we know don't come back because no one invited them - but when they come back, what will they find? A reminder of why they left in the first place, or a new reason to stay?
- Invite them to parish social events (29%) - social events can be the perfect place to get to know people, build trust, and begin to accompany them.
- Introduce them to your parish friends and/or pastor (20%) - providing meaningful community, making personal connections and, best of all, inviting someone into small circle of faith is often the most effective way to reconnect them with their faith. How can we be intentional about providing these opportunities?

As we reflect on these questions for discernment - and the many other questions prompted by the survey results: let's not forget Pope Francis's exhortation to us all: "Pastoral ministry in a missionary key seeks to abandon the complacent attitude that says: “We have always done it this way”. I invite everyone to be bold and creative in this task of rethinking the goals, structures, style and methods of evangelization in their respective communities" (THE JOY OF THE GOSPEL, 33).

Be Missionary Disciples
Archdiocese of Baltimore