



St. Rita

catholic community

A Letter From Our Pastor

An Insightful Self-Assessment of Our Parish

Late this spring, the parish was asked by the Office of Mission Effectiveness of the Diocese of Dallas to complete a Parish Self-Assessment. All of the parishes of the diocese have been asked to complete a self-assessment instrument by a group designated by the pastor of each parish. I chose to ask our Parish Pastoral Council to do that on behalf of our parish. The self-assessment actually provided us with yet another opportunity to assess the needs of the parish as we continue to build our future as a faith community. This is now our third opportunity in two years for self-reflection as a community, following upon the in-pew parish survey conducted two years ago, and then the listening sessions conducted last spring and in-pew last fall.

The diocese's self-assessment was divided into five major indicators. For each indicator, we were asked to rate the parish's level of participation (none or low, established and recognized, or active and full) in various focus areas. I am pleased to report that there was not a single area on the assessment where the consensus of the Pastoral Council would say there was no or a low level of participation. I would like to share with the



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An Insightful Self-Assessment of Our Parish

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parish some salient features of the Pastoral Council's self-assessment of our life as a parish.

The first indicator of mission effectiveness was the parish as a faith community. This indicator put a focus on welcoming and recognizing the diversity of talents and needs of the people, as well as on distinctive qualities, traditions, and practices of the parish. The Council concluded that our community strives to be inclusive of all cultures and ethnicities. They did feel that we could increase our social justice awareness, especially in the area of intolerance toward other groups. It was their assessment that we need more education and open dialogue in the area of diversity.

The second indicator was the parish as a worshipping and praying community. This indicator focused on weekend liturgies as well as on other worship practices and opportunities for prayer. On this indicator, the Council came to a consensus that the liturgy IS the focus of the community, including preparing for and administering all the Sacraments of the Church. They did cite the need to work on the church's sound system, and expressed a desire that we might be blessed with the services of a third priest assigned to the parish.

The third indicator presented for assessment was the parish as a center of evangelization, faith formation and discipleship. The focal points for this indicator include: evangelization, faith formation (in general), faith formation for children, faith formation for youth, faith formation for adults, and family life experiences. In this category, the Council noted that we have a good young adult program, but that our youth programs need to be invigorated. They also questioned whether the parish is sufficiently meeting the needs of "special needs" members of the parish both from an accommodation and formation/spiritual perspective.

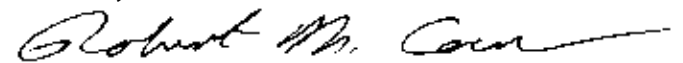
The parish as a community of pastoral outreach and service was the fourth indicator examined. The focus

within that indicator included outreach to parishioners and the local community, and outreach to the nation and the world. The Council felt that the parish has good clergy and lay leadership. It does encourage the parish to do a better job of communicating to the community as a whole. That would involve strengthening the channels of communication utilized – Flocknotes, Facebook, the parish app, and other social media.

Finally, the indicator of the parish as it administers the community focused on sharing leadership responsibility with parishioners, incorporating principles of stewardship, and cooperating with other parishes and with the diocese – for this particular indicator, the Council sought specific input from the administration of the parish. It is felt that St. Rita has come a long way towards being a "team player" with the diocese. On the other hand, the parish administration feels the diocese tends to communicate poorly at times with insufficient appreciation of the realities and challenges of parish life. The parish administration hopes to continue providing appropriate training, compensation and professional expectations of its staff.

The self-assessment process was at first approached with some measure of dread. But in the end, it was seen to be a valuable tool for the parish at this point in the parish's life. Even providing this summary of the Council's work done on the assessment provides me with some focus on areas that need to be tended to and areas that we can celebrate in the life of the parish. What was once perceived as a cross turns out to be a grace – imagine that!

God bless you,



Fr. Bob Coerver

A Look Back on Recent Activities at St. Rita

As the summer season came to a close, there were some wonderful opportunities for fellowship and fun. One such opportunity was when our ministry leaders enjoyed conversation and fellowship at a coffee gathering.



“Do Small Things With Great Love”

On an ordinary day, Mother Teresa received an extraordinary call. While on a train ride to her annual retreat, Mother Teresa felt what she would describe as Jesus’ thirst for souls. Soon, Jesus called her to found the Missionaries of Charity, an order devoted to serving the “poorest of the poor.”

The order formally began on Oct. 7, 1950, and has grown from one woman tending the sick and dying in the streets of Calcutta to over 4,500 religious sisters helping the poor in over 130 countries around the world. Additionally, the order grew to include the Missionaries of Charity Brothers, the Missionaries of Charity Fathers and the Lay Missionaries of Charity.

Though externally, Mother Teresa joyfully and tirelessly served the poor for nearly 50 years, during the majority of this time, she experienced a “dark night of the soul,” an extensive period of not feeling God’s pres-



ence or hearing His voice. Other saints, notably St. John of the Cross, similarly experienced a dark night of the soul. Despite this spiritual struggle, Mother Teresa continued her work joyfully throughout her sickness and until her death on Sept. 5, 1997.

St. Pope John Paul II beatified Mother Teresa in 2003. Fittingly, this year, a pontiff who has underscored the importance of social justice celebrated her canonization. On Sept. 4, 2016, Pope Francis canonized Mother Teresa, the “Saint of the Gutters,” at the Vatican.

A 20th century saint, Mother Teresa — now known as St. Teresa of Calcutta — offers us an example of ceaseless prayer and selfless service. She is a modern model of sainthood that we can emulate in our daily lives starting with how we serve and treat the other members of our family, our faith community and all those with whom we interact on a daily basis.

All Year Round, There's Always Something



St. Rita youth enjoyed many fun activities over the summer.



St. Rita's Youth Ministry gives teens the opportunity to grow in their relationship with God and other young Catholics.

Summer 2016 – 3,000 teens kneeling in prayer before the Blessed Sacrament at the first annual Steubenville Lone Star Conference; friends getting together to go bowling with St. Rita's "Summer in the Son" events; a small group of young women taking time each week to grow in their relationship with the Blessed Mother,

In many different and exciting ways, the youth of St. Rita have been busy this summer, growing in their relationships with the Lord, and each other.

According to Youth Minister Maribel Waldon, relationships with other Catholic young people are often an important part of developing a relationship with God.

In order to facilitate this, each Thursday night, teens had the opportunity to hang out with their peers as part of "Summer with the Son."

"[Catholic friendships] are a huge part of their faith journey, mainly because they're able to have peers who are in the same situations," Maribel says. "They realize that it's a safe environment, they know these are solid people."

Attending the first-ever Steubenville Lone Star Conference gave young people the opportunity to meet new friends and go deeper in their faith together.

"We took a diverse group of young people – some who were already active in our youth group, some rising freshman, and others who weren't part of our youth ministry program," Maribel says. "They wanted to get to know each other, they wanted to spend time together. There really wasn't a stranger among them, and I felt it really enhanced their retreat experience."

Maribel also notes that the experience of seeing so many young people – from around the state and country – profoundly impacted the faith of many of the youth who attended.

"For many of them, it was their first time experiencing something that large, seeing so many young people being

g Happening With St. Rita Youth Ministry

open to what God was calling them to, trying to seek the Lord – that really spoke to them,” she says. “I think it was empowering for them.”

Eight young women from the parish also decided that they wanted to go deeper in their faith and relationship with the Blessed Mother through Marian Consecration.

“They met weekly to pray together and journey together and figure out what being in a relationship with the Blessed Mother means,” Maribel says. “It’s not me saying, ‘You have to do this’ – it’s them saying, ‘This is what I want.’ To see them take ownership was really amazing.”

But the growth that teens in our youth group have experienced certainly won’t end with summer vacation. Weekly youth group meetings will resume on Sunday nights from 6:30 p.m. until 8 p.m. in the new youth room.

Having a space to call their own has done a lot to encourage the youth of the parish to become active in

youth ministry, as they find a “home” in the parish.

“It’s been so great for the teens to have a place of their own, to be able to learn and grow and know that it’s a secure spot that they can come and be together,” Maribel says. “It shows the importance that our community had put on youth ministry in giving us that space. It has been really awesome for them and they’re really grateful for it.”

“One of the things that we try to strive for in youth ministry is to build up young people to be active, faithful Catholic parishioners – whether in this parish, or in college, or even after,” she adds.

“You have to take ownership of your faith – there has to be a moment when you make that decision. We’re here to help you and guide you through high school. There’s going to be times when you struggle in your faith, but we want to be able to give you the tools so you can continue to move forward.” – Maribel Waldon

Maribel encourages young people to get involved in the Youth Ministry program.

“You have to take ownership of your faith – there has to be a moment when you make that decision,” she says. “We’re here to help you and guide you through high school. There’s going to be times when you struggle in your faith, but we want to be able to give you the tools so you can continue to move forward.”

She also invites parishioners to consider serving in youth ministry as an adult volunteer.

“As long as you’re striving to follow the Lord and you want to share that with a young person, that’s what I’m looking for,” Maribel says.

If you would like more information on getting involved with the Youth Ministry program at St. Rita, please contact Maribel Waldon at 972-934-8388 ext. 6507 or mwaldon@stritaparish.net. And be sure to mark your calendar – the Youth Ministry Fall Kick-Off is on Sept. 18 at 6:30 p.m.!

The Importance of Family Prayer

“The family that prays together stays together.”

This famous slogan was coined in 1947 by writer Al Scalpone, and has been frequently referenced ever since. The phrase pinpoints the true power of prayer, and the importance of making family prayer a consistent practice in our lives.

As Christian disciples, we are striving to follow Jesus – to grow in our love of Him and to serve Him through the use of our time, talent and treasure. If we desire to follow in His footsteps, we must first begin by getting to know Him. Spending time with the Lord in prayer forms a foundation on which we can build our lives as Christian disciples, much in the same way that spending time with a girlfriend or boyfriend forms the foundation of a strong relationship.

The Christian family is the first place where children learn to pray. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* calls the family unit “*Ecclesia domestica*,” or “the Domestic Church” (1656). Thus, parents have a responsibility to set an example by taking time for personal prayer every day, and making family prayer a regular practice. This not only sets an example for the children, but also provides them with a faith-filled foundation and brings them closer to the Lord – forming them as grateful stewards of their time.

There are many ways in which a family can pray together. One of the most important times for prayer is before meals, where we thank God for His blessings, and for the food on our family table. Families may also share in the formal prayers of the Church, or perhaps pray a Rosary together every night. We can also thank the Lord aloud, asking Him to answer our prayers and offering Him our daily petitions. One often-suggested method of family prayer is ACTS, where we offer Adoration, Contrition, Thanksgiving, and Supplication. Families may also go to their church and kneel together before the Blessed Sacrament, offering prayers in Christ’s Presence.

These are just several of the many opportunities for families to pray together. Of course, prayer will be influenced by each family’s dynamics and personalities. But no matter how we pray, it is important that we make the time to do so. This will deepen the family’s relationship with the Lord, our commitment as His disciples will be stronger, and we may continually renew and foster our families’ bonds.



PRAYER OF PARENTS:

God, our Father, I thank you for the gift of my children and for the privilege and responsibility of being a parent, for this is my way of holiness.

May I regard each of my children as a sacred pledge of Your love and a beautiful sign of Your confidence in me. Help me to pass on to my children our greatest treasures - faith in Your truths, hope in Your goodness, love in Your name for all. I entrust my children to Your loving care Banish from our home any bitterness or lack of forgiveness. Let us have time, deep concern, and a sense of sacrifice for one another. Teach us never to be ashamed that we are, in name and in fact, a Catholic family striving to live in the way of Jesus, Who is head of our home. Give us Your Holy Spirit to unite us throughout this life and let the circle of our family be unbroken in the Kingdom of Your Son Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Amen.

Inviting Others To Experience the Church Community

As Catholic Christians, we participate in a church that is not only a place for worship, but is also a family. Oftentimes, it is easy to forget this simple truth as we face the modern day challenges – busyness, an emphasis on personal independence, and the idea that we should only look out for ourselves. In contrast to these challenges, our call as Catholic stewards is to be open to receiving others, sharing Christ’s love, and experiencing God’s mercy through the Church and our faith community.

In the words of its mission, the Hispanic Fellowship at St. Rita’s “seeks to reach out to Hispanics and others to welcome them to our parish, hop[ing] to evangelize, minister, and support those who seek the sacraments of the Catholic Church, with an appreciation of the diversity of cultures and languages of all.” In this way, this ministry is designed to combat the secular approach to life, allowing parishioners and guests alike to experience the fullness of a parish family.

“We try to reach out to people to get involved,” says former coordinator Jose Luis Cuevas. “There are so many people who want to get involved, and so many of them don’t have the sacraments. They reach out to us to see what else they can



The Hispanic Fellowship helps our parish remember various Catholic Hispanic traditions. This photo was taken during the procession last year to celebrate Our Lady of Guadalupe on Dec. 12.

do, and we give them the support they need and connect them to the parish for their needs.”

The main way the Hispanic Fellowship reaches out to the community is through a monthly meal, typically held the first Sunday of the month during the school year.

“We encourage people to participate in different ministries [at the meals],” Jose says. “This is just the gate to get to know the new members of the church. We try to sit down with new faces, talk to them, introduce them to other people, and start asking why they are here. We try to understand the people so

we can help them and guide them to the right ministries.”

In preparation for the monthly Sunday meal, the members of the Hispanic Fellowship come together the Saturday before for a meeting. The meetings are a time for prayer as well as organizing volunteers for the various tasks involved from cooking to cleaning to welcoming. The Sunday meal is then offered after each Mass, requiring volunteers from 7 a.m. to 4 p.m.

“On our Sundays, people come to cook, serve, and clean,” Jose says. “We work together as a community and we want to help grow the com-

12521 Inwood Road
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Weekday Masses

Monday-Friday, 5:30 p.m.

Wednesday-Saturday, 8:00 a.m.

Weekend Masses

Saturday, 5:30 p.m.

Sunday, 7:30 a.m., 9:00 a.m., 10:45 a.m.,

12:30 p.m. (Bilingual), 5:30 p.m.

Inviting Others To Experience the Church Community *continued from front cover*

munity and the cultures at St. Rita's. The money raised from the meals is mainly used for the celebration of the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe."

Along with the Sunday meals, the Hispanic Fellowship is involved with a handful of other events in the parish. These range from working together with the Knights of Columbus on their events, to helping other groups in the community who are hosting meals. The Hispanic Fellowship also provides for the celebration of various Hispanic traditions such as celebrating the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe with a procession, Mass and meal, as well as Las Posadas, a reenactment of our Blessed Mother and St. Joseph's search for lodging in Bethlehem.

Through the efforts of the Hispanic Fellowship, the life and culture of St. Rita's is not only passed on, but a true sense of fellowship and community is fostered.



For the Feast of our Lady of Guadalupe, traditional dancers are present to help celebrate the occasion.

Please watch the bulletin for the dates of this year's Sunday meals and other celebrations. If you would like to learn more about this ministry or get involved, please contact Margarita Rodriguez, the Liaison for Spanish-Speaking Parishioners, at the parish office at 972-934-8388, ext. 6515, or mrodriguez@stritchparish.net.