

Sixth Report of Michael Maher to the St. James Evangelization Board on the Topic of Increasing Parish Membership, prepared for the 16 July 2016 Board Meeting: CARA Survey and Archdiocese Survey

In addition to our own parish survey, which we designed, we also chose to participate in two additional surveys. The archdiocesan survey “Renew My Church” was made available in paper and online in April. The CARA (Georgetown University) survey “Cultural Diversity Parish Life” was distributed paper only on May 1 and May 8. These surveys were not specifically designed for our parish, and the return rates were significantly less. Data from these should be viewed in light of the data from our own parish survey, which had 155 returns. The reports from the archdiocese and CARA are separate attachments to this summary.

The archdiocese reported 35 “Renew My Church” surveys returned. Most of these were online; I don’t recall exactly how many we collected as paper, but I think it was only about five or six. As we found in our own parish survey, online skewed higher for White/Euro; only 16% reported being Black/Afro. Also, only 3% reported being born outside the US, while 17% of respondents for our parish survey indicated that they were born outside the US. It also skewed higher for newer members, 31% indicating that they were members of the parish for three years or less. In short, those who responded to the survey were not very representative of the parish as a whole, so we need to be cautious in viewing the results.

The survey reported that 77% of respondents had attended some form of Catholic school (primary, secondary, or college). Priorities in what they want for a parish were engaging homilies, service to the poor, welcoming community, opportunities to be involved, and good liturgy and music. This is consistent with findings from our parish survey, especially for newer members. Notably low were interest in beauty of the architecture and a parish school. This is consistent with our parish survey, and it makes sense; for people for whom those are important, St. James does not meet those needs, and they would likely move on to another parish. In fact, none of the respondents had children in primary school, so many questions on the survey did not receive responses. The survey further indicated that respondents like the parish and recommend it to others. They feel comfortable with their faith, and they are comfortable talking about their faith. Overall, the survey tended to support the results in the parish survey.

The CARA “Cultural Diversity Parish Life” survey was only done by paper. Georgetown reported 65 surveys returned. As with our own parish survey, paper returns skewed higher for Black/Afro respondents (51% versus 44% of the parish survey). Responses for percentage of persons born outside the US, age, being parents, and gender were very similar to our own parish survey. These returns are not perfectly representative of our parish, but the higher rate of return and closer proximity to our Sunday morning reality gives higher confidence in the results for this survey.

The topic of the survey was diversity, and our parish survey showed that this is an element that the parishioners highly value here. Results of this survey indicated that respondents saw the parish and parish staff as welcoming to different races and cultures, including people, and celebrating diversity in the liturgy. This is consistent with the parish survey. They did indicate a desire to see priests of different ethnic backgrounds. A pretty high number (65%) felt a need to understand different backgrounds more, and there was a high interest (70%) in helping immigrants and refugees. A minority (15%) felt marginalized in the parish due to their ethnic identity, and 10% indicated some racial tension in the parish; how low these numbers are is an indication that we are doing pretty well. The respondents indicated a high support for social

justice. Many reported being very active in parish life. They see the music and worship here as distinctly positive. In looking at the responses for an open-ended question on challenges to the parish, concerns about parish growth were very high, with concerns about the worship space coming in second. This last bit of data is interesting. In our parish survey, it was notable that few people indicated interest in the quality of the worship space. I interpreted this to mean that for those for whom that is important, they would move on to another parish. This indicates that, while they might not value physical elements personally, they recognize it as a challenge. This is good, because *it is* a challenge to our parish growth.

Overall, these surveys help to confirm the findings from our parish survey. Diversity, service and justice, fellowship, and good liturgy that celebrates diversity are hallmarks of St. James Parish. The current physical worship space and ministry to children are lacking, and those who are here are fine with that. People recognize that the parish needs to grow.