Introduction

During the past ten months, St. Dominic’s parish has been involved in a process called Parish Assessment and Renewal (PAR). Leaders and staff of our parish have been working with Father Tom Sweetser, S.J. and Sr. Peg Bishop from the Parish Evaluation Project in Milwaukee. This process has included the following:

- written opinion surveys sent to a random sample of 300 parishioners
- opinion surveys sent to parish staff and leaders
- an on-site visit in September which included meetings with parish leaders
- personal interviews with leaders and staff
- a Parish Town Hall Meeting
- an all-day workshop with parish leaders, clergy and staff

Surveys were returned by 80 of those randomly selected to receive a survey as well as 64 key leaders and staff. Fr. Tom and Sr. Peg collected the survey responses and provided a narrative as well as numerical analysis of the results.

Additionally, five self-study teams were given questions to answer regarding the current work and structure of the parish. After considering the reported results of these endeavors, approximately 50 parish leaders and staff met to prioritize the needs of the parish.

Priority of Parish Needs

Based on your feedback from the Random Survey and Self-Study Reports, we’ve prioritized the areas we’d want to address first:

- Help foster the desire for St. Dominic’s to become the spiritual home of our people.
- Promote a greater sense of stewardship among the laity, encouraging parishioners to get involved by giving of their time, talent, and/or resources.
- Be more proactive in creating a “welcoming atmosphere” at our liturgies and other parish functions.
- Create more opportunities for adult faith formation.
- Improve the way the parish is organized, better integrating groups and ministries.
- Improve communications so that parishioners know what’s going on at St. Dominic’s.
- Place greater focus on children’s religious education/formation.
- Improve and expand the parish facility so there are more places for people to gather.
- Create more opportunities for socializing so that people can enjoy each other’s company.
- Provide more Christian service opportunities as an outlet for people’s volunteering.
Town Hall Meeting

Over 100 people attended the Town Hall gathering held on Sunday, September 16th in the parish hall. Participants were asked to list things we should keep as a parish, things we should let go of, and things we should start doing in the future. Here is a sample of the more frequently mentioned responses.

Participants said that we need to keep: adult education; outreach to hungry and homeless; RCIA: variety of Masses and music and liturgies; strong music program at high quality; Children’s Liturgy of the Word at 9:30 am; Sunday Mass: Mass in Spanish; Eucharistic Ministers for homebound and hospitals; parish community events.

Participants said we need to let go of: cell phones at Mass; cliques; gossip; office politics.

Participants said we need to develop: Daycare during Mass, a cry room; inclusion of Hispanic Community: small faith groups and small communities; on-going Bible Study groups; Over 40 Group; parish assemblies; expanded CCD Program; better coordination and networking among leaders and ministries; a parish online forum.

Summary of Leadership Team Workshop:

New Parish Structure

After reviewing the priorities identified at the first leadership workshop and analyzing the findings from the Town Hall meeting as well as from personal interviews conducted by Fr. Tom and Sr. Peg, the PAR leadership team met again on September 22nd for a full day of work. In order to deal with many of the issues that were identified regarding leadership, decision-making and communication, a new structure of leadership was agreed upon.

How the New Structure Works

The new structure connects lay leaders, staff, and the pastor in a collaborative model of partnership and shared decision making and leadership. Five new commissions have been established: Spiritual Life; Formation; Community Life; Outreach; and Administration. New parish commissions structure operates like interconnected spheres of activity in a collaborative partnership with Pastoral Council and Parish staff.

How the New Structure Works (cont.)

Implicit in and essential to the success of our new structure is the agreement that decision-making will occur at the appropriate level for the decisions being made. Decision-makers are to use the CDI method of decision-making: Consult with those affected; Decide; and then inform those affected of the decision. Using the CDI process will foster greater trust and ownership among the parish staff, leaders and the people of the parish as a whole.

Leadership Night

The five Commissions along with the Parish Pastoral Council agreed to meet monthly on a single evening designated as Leadership Night. This eliminates the need for multiple meetings. The entire group meets together for a gathering prayer; the Commissions then would convene separately for an hour. The entire group then will reconvene and receive brief reports on each Commission’s work and decisions. Following this report, the members of the Commissions have an opportunity to socialize and discuss the night’s progress while the Parish Pastoral Council convenes separately for an additional hour. The first Leadership Night was held on October 8th. Future meetings will be held on the First Monday of the month.

The Parish Pastoral Council will provide a report in the bulletin from each Leadership Night shortly after it takes place.

How This is Different

In the past, the Parish Pastoral Council was an advisory body to the Pastor and Council members were selected from nominations provided by the entire parish. Our new council now includes two members from each Commission, and as mentioned, will assist the pastor in setting the vision and direction for the parish as a whole.

Previously, many of the functions of the new Commissions were led and carried out by staff persons. Our new structure will help balance the workload of the parish staff and provide increased input from the parishioners. The commission model also provides a consistent link between parishioners, ministries and parish leadership that was previously lacking.

Next Steps

Fr. Tom Sweetser and Sr. Peg Bishop will return in March 2008 to check on our parish progress. In the meantime, please feel free to contact a Commission Chair or Parish Pastoral Council Member to get involved. St. Dominic is blessed with an abundance of generous and talented people. May we continue to share these blessings with one another and create a vision for the future using the 4 P’s: …

...PATIENCE, PARTICIPATION, POSITIVE ATTITUDE AND PRAYER.