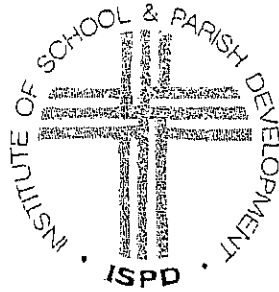


**Strategies to  
Welcome, Engage  
and Affirm**



# INSTITUTE OF SCHOOL AND PARISH DEVELOPMENT

## *Strategies to Welcome, Engage and Affirm Your Parishioners*

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### 1. Pastor Breakfast and Dinner Meetings

- These meetings can be held casually with the Pastor and several parishioners that he wants to target, and get to know better. The small group setting allows for personal conversation and meaningful connections.
- These can be held periodically throughout the year -- monthly.

### 2. New Parishioner Home Visits

- Personal home visits are scheduled with each new member who joins the parish. The visits may be made by the Pastor, Associate Clergy, Deacons or members of a welcoming committee.
- Visits should be scheduled within the first month that the parishioner registers.
- These visits allow a personal welcome and connection with new members, and provide a great opportunity to discuss needs, hobbies and interests.

### 3. Neighborhood Communities

- Parish is geographically divided into neighborhood sections. 1-2 volunteers are recruited to serve as Neighborhood Captains in each area.
- Neighborhood Captains would be responsible for the following:
  - Notifying the parish office of any special needs for parishioners in the neighborhood (illness, prayers, communion, deaths, births, etc.)
  - Periodically organizing neighborhood get-togethers and socials
  - Communicating important parish news to neighborhood members

4. **Weekly Parishioner/Family Highlight**
  - Promote 3-5 parishioners/families each week through the parish bulletin and website.
  - They could also be included in a parish receiving line. (see #12)
  - This strategy recognizes 150-250 parishioners/families each year, and allows them to be recognized, and more people to know each other.
  - Be sure to include biographical information, all family members names and ages, special interests, ministry involvement, hobbies, etc.
  
5. **Parish Picnic**
  - This annual event is a great opportunity to socialize as a parish family and build community.
  - Parishioners should be invited via the bulletin, announcements at Mass, flyers, mailings and especially personally via the Telephone Outreach Network. (see #7)
  
6. **Small Church Communities**
  - These groups usually center around religious education and personal sharing. They allow for the building of community and nurturing of faith.
  - Often, these groups are organized around particular peer groups. i.e. young couples, singles, empty nesters, retirees etc.
  
7. **Telephone Outreach Network**
  - This strategy is perfect for personal outreach and communicating important parish information.
  - Volunteers are organized and trained.
  - Each volunteer caller would be responsible for contacting 10-15 members of the parish whenever the network is activated.
  - The network can be activated at any time, but here are some suggestions:
    - ❖ To extend personal invitations to parish functions (parish picnic, Holy Week activities, Parish Mission, etc.)
    - ❖ To communicate a message from the pastor
    - ❖ To check-in with parishioners and ask if they have any needs the parish can meet
    - ❖ To conduct various surveys
  
8. **Coffee and Donut Social**
  - These socials are the standard at many parishes.
  - Make your coffee and donut social interesting by offering a short speaker or playing games.

- Consider giving away door prizes or introducing an icebreaker activity to encourage parishioners to meet new people.
9. Mailboxes at Church
    - This is a unique concept where each parishioner has a mailbox, just like a post office, at church.
  10. Parish Telephone and E-mail Directory
    - Publishing a parish telephone/e-mail directory on an annual basis is a key communication vehicle.
  11. Nametag Sunday
    - This strategy invites all parishioners to wear nametags one weekend per month at all Masses.
    - Nametags and pens are provided by the parish at entrances to church.
    - This allows for people to get to know each other in a more personal manner.
  12. Receiving Line
    - Invite new parishioners to participate in a receiving line after Masses.
    - Highlighted parishioners could also participate in the receiving line. (see #4)
    - Attendees proceed through the line after Mass, and get the chance to personally meet fellow members of the parish.
  13. Pastor Phone Calls
    - The Pastor calls each newly registered parishioner personally, within two weeks of their joining the parish.
    - Hearing from the spiritual leader of the parish says "You're important to us – we care about you!"
  14. New Parishioner Dinner
    - Held once each quarter, these dinners provide a small group setting for the Pastor, Associate clergy, Deacons and parish staff to get to know new members of the parish.
    - All members who join the parish in a three month period would be invited to that quarter's dinner.
    - Staff and key leaders are present to share the history, mission and vision of the parish.

## 15. Thank-A-Thon

- A take-off from the typical Phone-A-Thon, the Thank-A-Thon involves the Telephone Outreach Network (see #7) calling parish volunteers once each year to thank them for their dedication and service to the parish.

## 16. Seeking Input

- A great way to engage members of the parish is to invite them to give their input and opinions on important parish issues, needs, and decisions.
- Some methods include:
  - ❖ Input Sessions – one hour sessions that are facilitated, and focus on three questions:
    - 1) *What are our parish's strengths?*
    - 2) *What areas of our parish need improvement?*
    - 3) *What is your personal vision for the future of our parish?*
  - ❖ Surveys – either conducted over the telephone, or during Mass
  - ❖ Face-to-face interviews
  - ❖ Parish Assemblies/Town Hall Meetings
  - ❖ Planning Sessions
  - ❖ Ministry and process evaluation

## 17. Welcome Packets

- This strategy introduces the parish to new parishioners. The packet should contain information about parish history, mission, ministries, key contact information, website etc.
- New parishioners in turn, prepare a welcome packet on themselves or their family. These packets are displayed in church for several weeks for members to learn about them.

## 18. Partner Parishioners

- New parishioners are paired with veteran members of the parish who would welcome them, make periodic personal contacts, and answer any questions about the parish. – *a supportive Buddy System.*

## 20. Volunteer Appreciation Event

- Organizing an annual volunteer appreciation event is key to affirming those members of the parish who dedicate their time and gifts to the parish community. This event could include awards and fun recognition.

## 21. Monthly Ministry Highlight

- Once each month, have a brief presentation at Mass that highlights a particular ministry in the parish.
- This strategy enables everyone in attendance to learn more about what the parish has to offer, and how to become involved in the future.

## 22. Bulletin Appreciation

- Via the parish bulletin, regularly thank and recognize volunteers for their service and commitment to the parish community.

## 23. Time and Talent Survey

- Can be conducted at Masses or through the Telephone Outreach Network.
- The survey should seek to identify parishioners' individual gifts, talents, professional expertise and interests.
- Data entered into Parish database
- Utilized to Invite and Involve parishioners in ministry.
- A compliment to the Stewardship of Ministry process.

## 24. Time and Talent Database

- All data collected in the Time and Talent Survey (see #23) should be entered into an organized database format.
- The key to engaging parishioners in putting this database to use.
- Constantly refer to the database to match parish activities and ministry opportunities with parishioner interests and talents. Inviting people to do what they do best is vital to a successful development effort.

## 25. Personal Thank-You Notes

- The Parish Council and parish staff can play a key role in affirming parishioners by taking on the task of periodically writing personal thank-you notes.
- Notes should go out to key volunteers, ministry leaders, catechists etc.

## 26. Parishioner Testimonials

- Once each quarter, invite select parishioners to offer their insights about being involved in parish activities and ministries.
- They can express how their involvement has enriched their spiritual lives and invite others in the parish to become more involved.
- A key strategy in the Total Stewardship Process

## 27. Greeting Card Ministry

- Form a Greeting Card Ministry in your parish. This ministry consists of volunteers who correspond with parishioners in need via greeting cards on a regular basis.
  - This ministry can provide outreach and support to the bereaved, shut-ins, divorced, elderly etc.
28. Bring-A-Friend Weekend
- Periodically, designate a "Bring-A-Friend" weekend for the parish.
  - The idea is for regular attendees to personally invite another member of the parish (who may not regularly attend) to join them for Mass and a social afterward.
29. Sharing "Good News" at Mass
- At the end of each Mass, before the final blessing, the priest spends 3-4 minutes inviting members of the congregation to share "good news" such as birthdays, anniversaries, births, promotions etc., with the church.
30. Parish Outing Event
- Organizing parish outings such as golf, museum trips, tours, caroling etc. can be a great way to promote community.
31. Adult Athletic Teams
- Many parishes have thriving sports programs for their youth – why not organize something for the adults to promote community and involvement?
32. Bible Study Groups
- Offering Bible Study groups during various times of the week and day are a great way to invite participation from parish members, and offer spiritual nourishment.
33. Adult Supper Club
- Twice each year, organize an Adult Supper Club, where the parish provides the main course, and attendees provide hors d'oeuvres and desserts.
  - Consider providing babysitting for those parents with young children.
34. Parish Movie Night

- Periodically offer a parish Movie Night where the parish provides popcorn and drinks – a great way for parishioners to socialize and get to know one another.

### 35. Tours of the Parish

- Organize periodic tours of the parish campus for new parishioners.
- This is a great way to introduce new members to the various parish facilities, and ensure they are comfortable in their new surroundings.

### 36. Outreach to Fallen-Away Catholics

- With 30% or more families of the parish "*Actively Disengaged*," this ministry seeks to proactively involve this critical group. Activities and services are designed to identify families, communicate issues, sustain dialogue and personal invitations to be reactivated into parish life.

### 37. The Total Stewardship Process

- A comprehensive parish process that focuses on *Stewardship As a Way of Life*. Components include:
  - ❖ Three Phases: Prayer, Offering, Ministry
  - ❖ Each phase: 4-6 Weeks
  - ❖ Bulletin Articles, Pulpit Talks, Testimonials, Personal Letters, Commitment Weekends, Thank-you notes, follow-up.
  - ❖ Annual Sign-Up/Renewal
  - ❖ Consistent Timeline and Materials
  - ❖ Managed by Stewardship Committee
  - ❖ Requires leadership and organization
  - ❖ Follow-up is PARAMOUNT.
  - ❖ Opportunity to consistently educate and inform
  - ❖ Recognized by the *National Catholic Stewardship Council*

### 38. "Ministry On Tap" Process

- Designed to minister to the needs of young adults in a social environment, pastors, deacons and parish leaders conduct open discussions on church and spirituality issues.

### 39. Faith Seminars

- Ongoing workshops open to all parish members that address key church and faith concerns.

### 40. Parish Communication Ministry



- Coordinated by Communications Commission
- Key Strategies:
  - ❖ Accurate, responsive database
  - ❖ Advertising
  - ❖ Parish Newsletter
  - ❖ Parish Annual Reports
  - ❖ Mass Presentations
  - ❖ Community Open House
  - ❖ Parish Annual Meeting
    - Parish Membership
    - Financial Report
    - Ministry Update
    - Review of Goals and Accomplishments
    - Ministry Planning Process -- *Input*
    - Recognition of Volunteers
  - ❖ Surveys
  - ❖ Input Sessions
  - ❖ Interviews
  - ❖ E-mail Updates
  - ❖ Interactive Website
  - ❖ Pastor Dinners
  - ❖ Pastors Personal Invitations
  - ❖ Parish Picnics & Socials
  - ❖ Long-Range Planning Convocation
  - ❖ Neighborhood Meetings
  - ❖ Ministry Fair
  - ❖ Welcoming Packet
  - ❖ Media Guide
  - ❖ Business Partnership Process
  - ❖ Parish Video
  - ❖ Segmented Mailings
  - ❖ Press Releases
  - ❖ Posting of Mission & Vision Statements
  - ❖ Parish Directory
  - ❖ Posting of Mission & Vision Statements
  - ❖ Pictures of New Families in Church
  - ❖ Campus Signage
  - ❖ Displays illustrating Parish Activities
  - ❖ Parish Calendar