

PARTICIPATION AND MISSION

Parishioners do not feel that they are specifically equipped and empowered to go on mission for Jesus. People understand that in our increasingly secular world, religious ideas and values are less welcome than before. People are not reluctant to take Christ into society and the workplace, but they feel a need for training and formation. More Bible study would be helpful, as would more retreats. Adult education could be strengthened. Homilies that relate the readings to the contemporary world would be helpful. Attention to how Catholic teaching applies to current problems would be welcome. In general people are not sure what role(s) belong to the clergy and to the laity.

There is a widespread sense that the laity are not accorded any responsibility. It was noted with some regret that the shift from a Parish Council to a Pastoral Council model stripped the capacity of lay leaders to vote, make decisions, and take action. The hierarchical and clerical structure of the church leaves the laity feeling left out. The relatively poor attendance at Synod sessions may reflect a lack of interest rooted in a feeling that the laity will not be heard and nothing will change.

Identifying opportunities for leadership is complicated in an organization structured as the Catholic Church is. When the leaders of various ministries made announcements they were visible and identifiable as leaders. Extremely brief announcements read almost apologetically by the celebrant do not speak of leadership (and suggest that whatever is being announced is not really important). Parishioners should hear from time to time from the lay leaders of various ministries. It was noted that most parishioners are unfamiliar with the office staff and do not know their areas of responsibility (which, in turn, causes problems for the staff). Many attendees at listening sessions lamented the abandonment of the occasional witness talks which were seen as aids to faith and identifiers of leadership. Ministry fairs served several useful purposes. They acquainted parishioners with the range of ministry opportunities in the parish. They put the leaders of ministry front and center. And they recruited new participants in the ministries. Everyone agrees we need more volunteers but what, exactly, are they to be asked to do? And will they be valued? The parish has leaders in, to cite just a few examples, Cursillo, St. Vincent de Paul, Knights of Columbus. Parishioners do not know who these leaders are, what they do, and why. Members of the assembly used to offer "Prayers of the Faithful" which identified specific

people as having particular interests and concerns. The key point is for more lay leaders to appear visibly and frequently before the assembly.

Our priests are dedicated but severely overworked. Our parish has an amazing array of knowledge and talent and energy. We must find ways to crack open ancient structures to empower the laity to employ their skills on behalf of the church.