

**Father David presents our
Pastoral Plan: “Breathing New Life into the Church”**

Since the summer of 2007, a five-year pastoral plan has been in development through a series of stages. The first stage was acquiring the feedback of parishioners as part of a needs assessment. You may recall when people took their portraits for the pictorial directory in the fall of 2007, there was a questionnaire they were asked to fill out regarding what they liked about the parish and what would enhance their experience of SOC. We received 906 responses, which equated to 26% of our parish households. The data showed that people liked our sense of community, our prayerful liturgies, our varied ministries and organizations, our commitment to outreach, etc. People also expressed a desire for more social, faith formation and spiritual opportunities. This data was shared with both the Pastoral Leadership Council and the staff. Efforts were made to address some of these desires immediately. Socially, the result was the Guadalupe Fiesta last December 12, 2008 the dinner/dance on September 5, 2008 and coffee & donuts after Mass (we hope to do more once the Spirit Center is renovated and next summer now that we have the ability to cover our south patio entrance). In addition, we were fortunate to have the Knights of Columbus fish fries here during Lent. With faith formation, Small Church Communities began to host frequent S.O.N. evenings (Spiritual-One-Nighters) with a variety of formats and speakers, which typically attract over 100 people each session. FAMILIA was also formed for families and has been well received. In addition, we are particularly blessed to have our Small Church Communities, which encompass over 800 people!!! Spiritually, the Knights of Columbus held a day of recollection this past Lent during March, 2008, and Fr. Terry Ryan gave a wonderful parish mission also in March, 2008 averaging nearly 400 people daily.

The second stage occurred on May 7, 2008 when the staff went away for a Staff Development Day. At that time the staff categorized the data from the questionnaire and later shared it with their leadership teams for their input. On July 2, the staff gathered to process that input in order to identify key components for the pastoral plan. The staff met again on August 6 and wrote goals and objectives for the plan. As well they selected a theme, “Breathing New Life into the Church.”

The notion of “breathing” calls to mind the Holy Spirit. In John’s gospel in his first appearance to the apostles after his resurrection, Jesus “breathed” on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit.” Our parish is named Spirit of Christ and there has been a long standing tradition for our community to bring the Spirit of Christ to others through the sharing of our faith and love. “New life” does not imply that there is anything wrong with the “old” – our SOC traditions, identity and mission. Rather, we are committing to keeping the legacy of our founding parishioners fresh, vibrant and responsive to the changing needs of our times. “Into the Church” means we celebrate our unity with the larger Church but we also want to have a positive influence on our Church through our unique witness and charisms.

The third stage took place on September 13, 2008 when the staff met with all the various leadership teams in the parish. Every ministry and organization was invited to participate, and the new pastoral plan was formally presented to them. It consists of five general goals and thirty objectives. Each ministry or organization was then asked to select one or two objectives that they would focus on during the next year. The objectives are purposely kept general to encourage creativity and adaptation.

From now on each spring, the leadership teams will gather to select their new set of objectives for the coming year and each summer they will present to the parish what they accomplished during the past year. The Pastoral Plan and the particular objectives that were selected for this year are posted on our parish web site, www.spiritofchrist.org. If you do not have internet access, you may call the parish office for a copy of the plan.

There are multiple benefits to this plan. First, it communicates clearly our identity and focused mission so that parishioners have a common understanding of who we are and what we are about, of our values and commitments, etc. Second, the plan promotes unity because we have a common vision that we are striving to realize mutually. In addition, this plan encourages networking. One or more ministries may choose to work together on a particular objective. Third, this plan can invite and encourage greater involvement and participation in our ministries and organizations. Fourth, the sharing of our work allows for the affirmation of our efforts and helps us appreciate what others do in their ministries. Finally, this plan – particularly with its public reporting – ensures accountability. Parishioners will know what is happening: if commitments are kept and if objectives are achieved. I believe that the trust you have placed in us to be good stewards of your contributions requires this type of accountability.

Finally, the Pastoral Plan was presented to the parish at a town hall meeting on October 21, 2008 and was well received. Now we are in the process of discerning how best to report the results of achievement each year to the parish, and we will keep you informed on that component.

I would like to thank the following people for their contributions to this pastoral plan: the dedicated men and women who form our various leadership teams, the many volunteers who will carry out this plan's objective, the best staff of any parish anywhere, and Deacon Don St. Louis who led us through an excellent process to write this plan.

It is my delight to present this five-year plan to the parish with confidence in its “breathing new life into the Church.”