



# A LOCAL ASSESSMENT FOR **PARISH EVANGELIZATION**

## **Overview: Why should a parish or cluster assess for evangelization?**

We are called to be evangelizing parishes, outposts of the Great Commission to make disciples of all nations. That begins in our families and local communities! But every community is different, and parishes need to assess the needs of their local communities. Yes, we all need God. But how we propose God and a relationship with Jesus Christ in his Church should be shaped by who we are trying to reach...not to change God but to offer the goodness of God in people's particular needs.

How? First, pray. Pray very deliberately that the Holy Spirit will lead you in assessing your parish and its surrounding community for evangelization. Perhaps ask the Lord to lead you to see what needs to be seen in this assessment.

Then, begin assessing the reality of your outpost and how it serves the geographic community in which it lives. Good data helps create good evangelizing parishes.

Basically, there are two things you want to assess:

- **The level of discipleship within your parish walls**, because discipleship fuels evangelization. It is much easier to assess how many people are attending the parish and engaged in current ministries and apostolates, and that is certainly not without value. But it is not necessarily discipleship. By *discipleship*, we mean people who are intentionally seeking to grow spiritually in their life in Christ, and have an obvious willingness to share that desire with others.
- **The level of spiritual and material need outside your parish walls**, to better know how to serve and propose Jesus Christ.

There are three tasks within this research exercise:

1. Crunch attendance and registration numbers
2. Survey the discipleship level in your parish

3. Assess spiritual and material needs in the greater community.

This exercise is an extension of the book *101 Ways to Evangelize* by Susan Windley-Daoust.

## **What you'll need**

You'll need the following for your assessment team:

- 6–10 people, ideally including the pastor, select staff, and invested parishioners. Invite people who have the correct skill sets for this work: one person good at math and detail work, another at interviewing and listening, etc.
- A facilitator; ideally this is an outsider to the group. However, it could be an insider who understands the process and keeps it going. The facilitator should want to get the best data possible, even if the results contain bad news. This person will also be involved in assembling the final report for distribution.
- A designated notetaker who will help the facilitator assemble the concluding report.
- A translator (for bilingual parishes).

**Time:** Expect this process to take one to two months.

## **Process: The three tasks**

### **I. Crunch attendance numbers.**

These are not the discipleship assessment numbers. But you need these attendance numbers to properly compare the level of discipleship to the level of attendance.

1. Count registered households as of today. If you can, compare it to registered households 10 years ago.
2. Look at your most recent October counts, and for the last 10 years. Calculate a current percentage of those attending vs. those registered.

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3. Do the same number crunching (today versus 10 years ago) for Baptisms, First Communions, Confirmations, marriages, and vocations to the religious life.
4. List all the ministries you have (except a school). For example, faith formation numbers, youth ministry numbers, Bible studies, involvement in a parish-based social ministry. Again, compare numbers.
5. If there is a parish school: How many students are registered members of the parish? How many students are from families that are active members of the parish? How many employees at the school are active members of the parish?

Keep in mind that you are just gathering numbers. There are good arguments to be made that a Catholic school's mission is to the wider community. But the numbers will be important in getting a clear picture of the school's role in the mission of the parish.

## II. Discipleship within the parish survey.

How do you assess discipleship in a parish? You need to start by asking questions—and gathering answers—in a way that guides you in assessing where people in the parish need to grow. Sherry Weddell (*Forming Intentional Disciples*) has heard for years from parishes all over the country that perhaps 5% of those attending Mass on a weekly basis identify as “intentional disciples.” But in parishes that have 30% intentional disciples, the change in culture, fruit, outreach, and community contentment is radically improved. We want to help parishes move from 5% intentional discipleship toward 30%. It helps when you anonymously ask questions like this:

- How often do you pray in a week (outside of Mass and a before-meals prayer)?
- How many minutes do you pray in a typical day?
- How deep is your prayer time with God?
- Would you say your prayer life has gotten deeper in the past 10 years?
- How often do you talk about your faith life with another person?

- How comfortable are you inviting people to Mass or a church event?

There are many different ways to do this discipleship assessment. You can choose which one fits your needs and pocketbook (some are free):

- CARA parish planning surveys (by the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate, Georgetown University).
- The Disciple Maker Index (by the Catholic Leadership Institute).
- M3 Ministries has a cultural snapshot survey, best done in a focus group or a set of focus groups.
- State of the Church survey tools (from Barna Research, powered by Gloop).
- DIY Google Forms with the questions listed on the survey template at the end of this resource. Google will collate results for you.
- Or use a paper survey; see the template at the end of this instruction.

However you choose to gather this data, it is critical to get as wide a sampling as you can. Giving time after Mass is appropriate, as well as multiple emails with links, etc.

## III. Assessing spiritual and material needs outside the church walls

First, find out what your geographical boundary is. Canon law names the parish as responsible for the spiritual life of *everyone* within its boundaries.

You think you know your town. You may be surprised. Find current statistics that have to do with economics, where people work, unemployment, married or single, and age. The 2020 census information will be available in early 2021. Look for that.

You can also look up census data for your area at the U.S. Census Bureau's website; search for “U.S. Census Quick Facts.”

Your state may also provide valuable local data; do a Internet search for the name of your city or county and the word “statistics” or “data.”

Finally, you can also find much useful data, includ-

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ing household income, the percentage of millennials, and people per household, broken down by United States Postal Service mail routes. Search for the Every Door Direct Mail tool at the USPS website ([eddm.usps.com](http://eddm.usps.com)).

Now that your appetite is whetted for the hunt of good data, let's add in the human element by conducting targeted interviews. Options:

- Find and interview the principals of the local schools. They will likely have statistics they can share with you if you ask about their students: how many qualify for free/reduced lunch, how many have one-parent households, how many speak English at home, etc. But be sure to ask other questions: What do their students most struggle with? What most concerns them? What do they think youth need in this community? Do different groups of young people need different things, and if so, what? If you pose these questions in the interest of serving the greater community, and share you are seeking as church how to do that, they will likely be very willing to talk. Talk to both public and Catholic school principals.
- Talk to any major employer in the community. Begin with the head of Human Resources about the struggles they are aware of with employees. If HR doesn't want to talk, ask them who you can talk to. Make it in person if you can.
- Is there an under-represented community in your town? Look for a representative and talk to them. Ask the same questions. In fact, see if you can talk to many of them, focus-group style. Under-represented populations deserve to be heard.
- Talk to the millennials. You may have to think creatively about where to gather a focus group of millennials in your town, but do it... and not just the ones who are in your church (although by all means, reach out and have that conversation too. In fact, they should *lead* the conversation with millennials in town).
- Get creative: consider having a booth at the county fair or a local festival. You can have information about the parish (please do!) but perhaps the point would be to ask passersby

to "take a quick survey about challenges in our town and get a prize" (holy cards? cookies? etc.) and then invite everyone there to pray for the needs of the town at a candlelight service in your parish—give them that flyer, and tell them to come by in two days. And, of course, *pray for the needs of the town*.

- Finally, lower the boom: go door to door to get to know neighbors. People are understandably going to be hesitant to share out personal information door to door. However, you can simply go by and introduce yourselves as parishioners of the local Catholic church, and leave information on an event happening at your church with a contact number and email. See the item above (praying for the town)...perhaps close by asking them what the Church can pray for in terms of their personal needs or the town's needs. If it is going well, you can ask for a follow up phone call. And if not, smile and say have a good day. The purpose of door to door is not so much data as much as it is meeting your neighbors, and putting flesh on you as a local church.

If you spend time doing these things, you will have a candid, fairly accurate snapshot of the preparation of your parish to do outreach to those who need it in your community, and know what to tackle first.

Most parishes think too small when they think about vision. Resist small. Now is the time to dream God's own dreams for humanity, and those dreams are as big as God himself. If this parish were radically open to the gifts of the Holy Spirit, what would that look like? Name that reality in concrete, specific terms.

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# DISCIPLESHIP SURVEY

This survey is anonymous. Please be honest! We want to know how to best serve and support you.

Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Male  Female

1. Are you married?  Yes  No

2. Do you have children?  Yes  No

3. How often do you attend Mass?

- Daily
- Weekly
- Monthly
- Once or twice a year

4. How often do you go to confession?

- Weekly
- Monthly
- Several times a year
- Once a year
- Rarely
- Never

5. How often do you pray in a week (outside of Mass and before meals)?

- Daily
- Several times a week
- Once a week
- Rarely

6. How many minutes do you pray in a typical day? Weekly

- 60+ minutes
- 30 minutes
- 15 minutes
- a few minutes
- never

7. How deep is your prayer time with God?

- Often deep
- Sometimes deep
- Mostly routine
- Always routine
- I don't pray

8. Would you say your prayer life has gotten deeper in the past 10 years? Rate on a scale of 1 to 5 (1=no, 5=yes).

1  2  3  4  5

9. How often do you talk about your faith life with another person?

- Daily
- Weekly
- Monthly
- Rarely
- Never

10. How comfortable are you inviting people to Mass or a church event? (1=not comfortable, 5=very comfortable)

1  2  3  4  5

11. Have you considered how God is asking you serve others in the past 10 years?

Yes  No

12. If you are a parent, do you share your personal faith with your child outside of bringing him/her to Mass?

Yes  No  N/A

13. Circle the ways of prayer you know how to pray and at least occasionally do:

- basic prayers (Our Father, Hail Mary, etc.)
- conversational prayer
- the Rosary
- lectio divina (prayerful Scripture reading)
- Liturgy of the Hours
- Ignatian prayer
- other: \_\_\_\_\_