

Summary of Listening Sessions Across the Diocese

Input for a Diocesan Pastoral Plan

The Diocese of Bridgeport



May 2006

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Background and Context

- In preparation for the development and release of a Pastoral Plan in 2006, Bishop Lori asked the Diocese's Office for Christian Formation to gather input to serve as a foundation for the plan.
 - A Pastoral Plan, as outlined in the National Directory for Catechesis, will focus on the needs identified by the parishes so that the Diocese can commit resources, effort and initiatives to work with parishes in fulfilling the mission of the Church.
- With this input, the Bishop will develop the Pastoral Plan which will guide the Diocese on how to enable parishes to accomplish their mission through delivery of catechesis and evangelization services through all ministries.
- This document serves as a reference that summarizes the key findings from the sessions and surveys.
 - Key points from the listening sessions and surveys are summarized here, supported by representative verbatim comments.

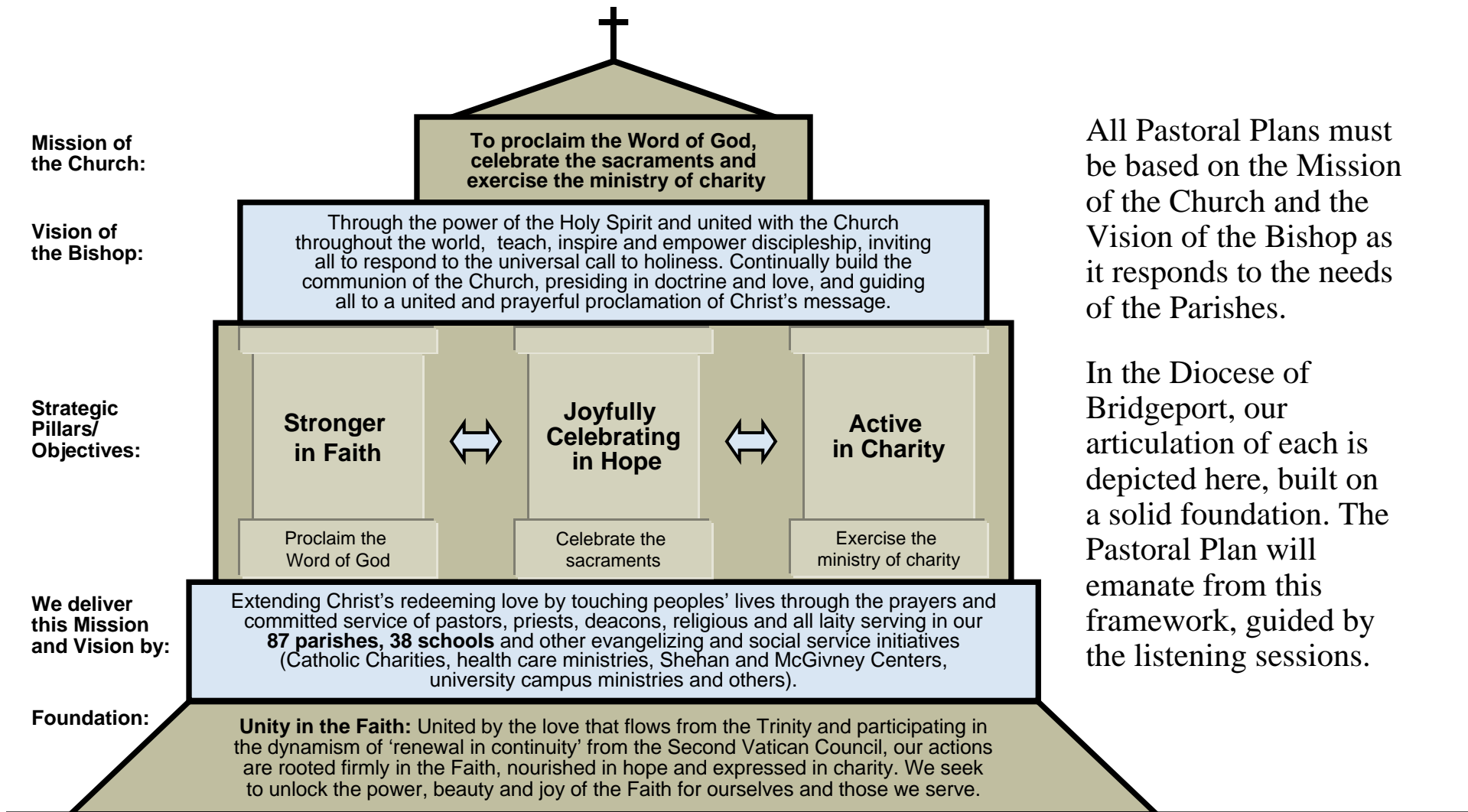
Approach

- Four listening sessions were held throughout the Diocese as detailed below. Priests, deacons, religious, school representatives and laity participated in these sessions. In addition, surveys were sent in advance, involving the participation of the parish and school communities.
 - **There was strong participation in the sessions.** Input from all 5 vicariates in the Diocese was solicited, representing 75 of the 87 parishes (86%) and a solid representation of the schools.
 - In addition, a total of 117 surveys were returned

Date	Vicariates	Location	# of People Participating During Listening Sessions	# of Participating Parishes/Schools	# of Surveys from Parishes/Schools
Feb. 21	N.A.	Diocesan Pastoral Council*	Total: 14	N.A.	8
Mar. 29	I and II	St. Luke, Westport	Total: 34 { 28 Laity 5 Priests 1 Deacon	27 parishes out of a total of 34	16
Apr. 3	III and IV	St. Stephen, Trumbull	Total: 65 { 32 Laity 24 Priests 6 Deacons 3 Religious	32 parishes out of a total of 37	28
April 4	V	Inn in Newtown	Total: 32 { 16 Laity 12 Priests 2 Deacons 2 Religious	15 parishes out of a total of 16	18
	All Vicariates	Schools	Included in above	5 high schools 18 elem. schools out of a total of 33	47
TOTAL			145 Participants	74 parishes out of a total of 87 23 schools out of a total of 38	117

* The Diocesan Pastoral Council is a consultative body comprised of laity that helps the Bishop discern pastoral issues.

Overview: Vision and Framework for the Diocese



All Pastoral Plans must be based on the Mission of the Church and the Vision of the Bishop as it responds to the needs of the Parishes.

In the Diocese of Bridgeport, our articulation of each is depicted here, built on a solid foundation. The Pastoral Plan will emanate from this framework, guided by the listening sessions.



Feedback throughout the Diocese

Summary of Findings: Parishes

Religious Education (K-8)

BEST PRACTICES	CHALLENGES	SUGGESTIONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At Family Mass, children do the readings and serve. The focus is on the children and the families • Children’s Masses and children’s choir • Town offers free public transportation for children to attend Religious Ed. Classes • Children visit the Church frequently • Require family attendance at mass for all students in Religious Education • Enrollment ceremony for second graders and parents • Sunday Religious Ed. Class are held, promoting better attendance at Mass by children and parents • Parents’ pre-sacramental program, re-educating parents in our faith • Flexible schedule of programs within Religious Ed. during week as well as Sundays. Morning parents’ breakfast • Pre-school programs—vacation bible school, prayer pals, etc. • Program “Catechesis of the Good Shepherd” • Deacon from neighboring parish teaches children in assembly format • Training of catechists • Work, play, pray program along with scripture study-family catechesis • Multigenerational Development and whole catechesis community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of parental involvement in Religious Education • Religious Education competes with sports and other social activities • Getting those receiving sacraments to come back after First Communion and Confirmation • Several families do not attend Mass • Improve image of Catholic Church in the Diocese • Diversity of student body-ethnic, religious, social, economic, levels of knowledge • High cost of tuition • Lack of retreat centers and resource centers • Student apathy • Shortage of qualified DRE’s and Catechists • Need training for teachers and Catechists 	<p>Encourage adults to share their faith; offer them formation while the children are attending classes <i>“Use First Penance and First Holy Communion to instruct parents”</i> <i>“Talk about the role of parents in faith life of the children from the pulpit”</i> <i>“Parent discussion group once a month, while children are in classes or even require parent participation”</i></p> <p>Teach family-intergenerational education and whole community catechesis <i>“Family issues openly expressed on a Pastoral Level”</i> <i>“Engage the whole person, the whole community catechesis and facilitate deep spiritual growth that will bring about spiritual reawakening”</i></p> <p>Educate and support parents beyond Sacramental program <i>“Offer basic courses in theology that are parent- friendly”</i> <i>“Offer courses that explore critical thinking and moral decision- making”</i></p> <p>Have Students participate in mentoring programs</p> <p>More frequent parent/child/teacher gatherings, making suggestions on how to help their child understand their Faith <i>“Arrange ‘peer matching’ among parents to help disconnected parents ‘come back’”</i> <i>“Have a session each year where the parent is asked to attend a grade level class at which one of the priests is the instructor”</i> <i>“Send report cards with explanations”</i></p> <p>Involve families in Q and A sessions on Faith <i>“Include Sunday homily in the Religious Education process: prepare questions for families to discuss at home: What did you hear? Learn? And will try to put into practice?”</i></p> <p>Emphasis on family as “little church” <i>“Focus on parents as ‘first teachers’”</i></p> <p>Develop Diocesan K-12 map to inform parents on what they are learning <i>“Keeping the parents informed about what the children are learning”</i></p> <p>Encourage family participation in the life of the church (Stations of the Cross, family liturgies, community service programs, etc.) <i>“Through an organized plan for re-evangelization, promote personal relationship with Our Lord”</i></p> <p>Organize activities to promote volunteer catechists <i>“Share how rewarding it is to be a catechist at Masses and invite to a coffee and open house for potential volunteers”</i> <i>“The volunteer catechists work hard but also receive free tuition”</i></p> <p>Training for Catechists <i>“Diocese produce evangelization tools through email or DVD, with on-line courses that require questions and answers”</i> <i>“Give more classroom training to catechists”</i> <i>“Retreat days for catechists to deepen their faith and increase their knowledge”</i></p> <p>Traveling teams of best priests, teachers and nuns that can reach children of all ages</p> <p>Reach out to public schools, teach religious education to the children at the elementary schools</p> <p>Condensed programs for extra summer Religious Education Programs</p> <p>In parishes with very few children, combine Religious Education for parishes in the same town.</p>

Youth Ministry

BEST PRACTICES	CHALLENGES	SUGGESTIONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Service projects and mission opportunities • Strong Youth Group centered in prayer and outreach • Groups growing in reach and numbers • Catechists of the Good Shepherd for Junior High Groups • Teen Masses Sunday Evenings • Programs for teens using music and meals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficult to attract teens and have them commit • Kids are “lost” after Confirmation • Teens lack a personal relationship with Jesus • Little support from parents and volunteers to support programs for youth • Formation of Youth Leaders • Offer proper catechetical materials • Outreach and integration of multicultural youth • Complicated legal liability and need of many chaperones 	<p>Full-time paid youth ministers who have capability of inspiring youth</p> <p><i>“Foster personal connection between the teens”</i></p> <p><i>“Develop a long range strategic plan for the program”</i></p> <p><i>“Offer programs that are fun but also educate and focus on spirituality”</i></p> <p><i>“A Youth Minister who loves the Church and is excited about his/her faith and can inspire youth”</i></p> <p>Involve them in something that keeps them interested—such as community service, liturgy, mentoring kids in catechism.</p> <p><i>“Offer new programs with a spiritual dimension for young people to get involved: Religious Ed classes for High School Students, Lector opportunities, Choir...”</i></p> <p><i>“Liven up liturgies with contemporary music”</i></p> <p><i>“Encourage more positive interactions between clergy and youth”</i></p> <p>Greater involvement of the Parish with Youth Ministry and inspire a sense of mission</p> <p><i>“Invite families to work on projects with youth”</i></p> <p><i>“Establish a ‘Board’ of parents to assist Youth Minister”</i></p> <p><i>“Offer more hands-on mission opportunities for high school students”</i></p> <p><i>“Develop youth as missionaries”</i></p> <p>Junior High Ministry and Youth Ministry, High school mentoring program for Middle School</p> <p><i>“Start a Junior High group with 6th, 7th and 8th grades to get youth involved earlier”</i></p> <p><i>“More involvement of former elementary parish School students in their High Schools”</i></p> <p>Strengthen catechetical office of Youth Ministry and Diocesan -wide youth gatherings</p> <p><i>“Develop a Diocesan plan for youth ministry that involves teens in their own parishes”</i></p> <p><i>“Day of Reflection/Retreat offered by the Diocese to the Youth”</i></p> <p><i>“Youth programs supported by the Diocese, especially training”</i></p> <p><i>“Invite successful diocesan or other parish young leaders to form our parish leader team”</i></p> <p><i>“Diocesan and Parish support for the creation of youth ministry programs in Parishes that are starting this Ministry”</i></p> <p><i>“Pool resources within Diocesan framework for speakers and retreat directors”</i></p> <p><i>“Monthly or bi-monthly vicariate youth ministry meetings”</i></p> <p>Connect academics & the ivory tower with taking their faith into the world</p> <p><i>“Get more youth to see that their spiritual formation is as important as their academic and social activities”</i></p> <p><i>“Offer Religious Ed classes for High School Students – post confirmation”</i></p> <p>Empower teens, give them ownership, form them in the Faith</p> <p><i>“Continue to evangelize within the group, have teens pull together”</i></p> <p><i>“Help teens to evangelize, offer them Teen Bible Study”</i></p> <p>Offer more means to communicate with youth and parents</p> <p><i>“Information on the diocesan website for parents on how to deal with youth issues”</i></p> <p><i>“Utilize different forms of communication to reach them: Radio/ Television/Internet”</i></p> <p><i>“Youth newsletter and website”</i></p> <p>Need more Campus Youth Ministers</p> <p>Create “Core” groups similar to Young Adult Ministry</p> <p>Share youth activities with other parishes, create a Town Youth Ministry Program</p>

Young Adult Ministry

BEST PRACTICES	CHALLENGES	SUGGESTIONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Theology on Tap • Pro-Life courses • Retreats • University Campus Ministry: prayer, outreach and service 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attracting Young Adults • Find out what they need and want • Socio-economic issues • Getting them involved on a regular basis 	<p>Diocesan assistance in formulating ideas and programs</p> <p>Team up with other neighboring parishes</p> <p><i>“Work with other Churches in town”</i></p> <p>Enlist Youth Group graduates</p> <p>Encourage young families to worship together and form groups</p> <p>Bible studies and service opportunities</p> <p>Retreats for singles and also include those focusing on young married life</p> <p>Train a core group that will then be “leaven” for the Ministry.</p>

Adult Education

BEST PRACTICES	CHALLENGES	SUGGESTIONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seminars on Church history • Morning and evening bible studies • Little Rock Bible Study works well in some parishes • CRHP (Christ Renews His Parish) • Days of reflection for mothers and fathers • Men's and Women's prayer groups • Retreats • Night courses for adult formation • 3 to 4 weeks short courses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of Adult education/Attracting Adults • Make people aware that it is a life-long process • Reaching adults who had little or no catechesis when they were growing up and now are parents • Conveying the importance of the Church's magisterium today • Finding out the best scheduling: evening vs weekends 	<p>Identify what adults want—what are they looking for? <i>"Survey the needs"</i> <i>"We need to develop a better understanding of what the average parishioner understands about their faith, and what he or she sees as necessary to grow in their faith. With this information the Parish can tailor programs to address these needs."</i> <i>"Break down barriers to people wanting to return to the church"</i></p> <p>Have programs at a local community and vicariate level <i>"Make diocesan programs available to all the five vicariate areas"</i> <i>"Schedule hot-topic talks with 'experts' like Theology on Tap does"</i></p> <p>Identify a leader at the Parish Level and assure funding for the programs Organize talks for special liturgical times such as: Lent/Advent/Pentecost and other important topics of our faith. <i>"Offer spiritually enriching talks"</i> <i>"Offer mini courses on Eucharist, Reconciliation, our people need to be fed 'spiritually'"</i></p> <p>Have programs that are shorter in duration (no more than 4 weeks/program) <i>"Adult programming-short term- with catechesis and faith-sharing model"</i> <i>"We find serial events are not very popular after three or four weeks. Short-term commitments are most appealing."</i> <i>"Find interesting topics and have open discussion groups with innovative presentation technology"</i> <i>"Refresher courses on "core" of Catholicism and the Catechism of the Catholic Church"</i></p> <p>Find great speakers and share them. <i>"Seek diocesan coordination by vicariate to get speakers and organize cross- parish events"</i></p> <p>Provide different resources such as books, DVDs, CDs, home study tapes, Diocesan Resource Center and on-line training <i>"Diocesan web-based computer instruction"</i> <i>"Greater communication of existing programs from the diocese to the parishioners"</i> <i>"Communicate events through personal invitation, not just bulletin announcements, use phone calls, emails, etc."</i></p> <p>Offer Bible Studies at the Parishes, train people to do this <i>"Continue Scripture Study groups"</i></p> <p>Use Sacred Heart and Fairfield University to expand programs and create new ones.</p> <p>Develop models for Adult Education and formation <i>"Vicariate coordinator to establish a Sept-May curriculum to be presented in various parishes"</i> <i>"Every parishioner should feel part of the larger Parish wide community, but also have options and be welcomed in smaller communities"</i> <i>"Create learning centers in parishes"</i></p> <p>Overcome practical obstacles that would impede people from participating <i>"Offer babysitting, organize formation courses while kids are in Religious Ed"</i> <i>"Schedule more programs at night"</i> <i>"Vary schedules to offer times at both ends of the week"</i></p> <p>Organize Adult retreats, (Parish and Diocesan level) and have Instructional Masses <i>"Homilies could be more instructional in matters of our faith"</i> <i>"Foster adult faith experiences"</i></p> <p>Create a list of people qualified to give retreats both locally and Diocesan <i>"Assessing resources (local and diocesan)"</i></p> <p>"Spiritual Adoption" of lapsed Catholics to bring them back to the faith</p> <p>Small communities of faith <i>"Programs where multiple couples gather over dinner and share their faith journey".</i></p>

RCIA

BEST PRACTICES	CHALLENGES	SUGGESTIONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good resources offered for their preparation: ACM (Association for Catechumenal Ministry) • Priests involved in the preparation • Dedicated leaders who are knowledgeable and well-prepared • Active recruitment of team members • Welcoming environment of the Parish • RCIA in both English and Spanish • High School RCIA program separate from adults 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifying and reaching out to “fallen away” Catholics • How to evangelize outside the Parish--not many candidates are coming forward • Having graduates remain Catholic-how do we keep them? • Being able to prepare a multicultural community • Finding guest speakers covering the materials in a limited time • Having volunteers who want to transmit their faith 	<p>Publicize that all are welcome and do it from the pulpit too <i>“Greater involvement needed from the Pastors with the candidates”</i> <i>“Remove the embarrassment of adults of learning at an advanced stage”</i> <i>“Publicize with flyers, advertising RCIA”</i></p> <p>Form a “Catholic Coming Ministry” or a “Missing in Action” team and start a campaign to share the faith that goes beyond the Parish boundaries <i>“Ask parishioners if they are willing to help spread the Good News as the Apostles did”</i> <i>“More community or ecumenical events recruitment-word of mouth, newspaper, bulletin”</i> <i>“Have lay people involved in the recruiting from other places as well, besides the Parish”</i></p> <p>Using past participants in the program as a source of encouragement to new participants <i>“Class from year before could return and assist the new group”</i> <i>“Not merely passing doctrine but a focus on a personal and profound encounter with Our Savior”</i></p> <p>More welcoming to the neophytes and follow up after mystagogia <i>“Publish the names of catechumens and candidates so that parishioners pray for them”</i> <i>“Greater continual contact afterwards”</i> <i>“Foster Faith groups so members can get inspiration from others and persevere”</i></p> <p>Develop a program with a good director and Catechist in a Town or Vicariate <i>“For parishes with few candidates, offer preparation at a vicariate or town level”</i> <i>“Have a longer program of 2 years”</i> <i>“Starting classes earlier when Easter is early”</i></p> <p>Diocese should offer more support <i>“It would be good to share success stories of other parishes”</i> <i>“Organize workshops to teach people how to invite people to the RCIA process”</i> <i>“Diocesan personnel available for assistance and support for new teams”</i></p>

Ministry for the Family

BEST PRACTICES	CHALLENGES	SUGGESTIONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family Mass, with a committee that makes the Mass meaningful for families • Making personal contact with parishioners, especially new members and welcoming kits for new families • Marriage Encounter • Family Movie Night, and Mother's and Father's social nights • Ministry and Parish Fairs promotes community and helps different cultures to learn about each other • Prayer lines and Mother prayer groups for their children • Family Picnics and Family Days are very successful • Memorial Masses • Diversified programs and Childcare during services • Sports 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How to involve the families in the life of the Parish and make time to build community • Parents don't have strong grounding in their faith • Going beyond the social events--putting the Catholic faith into the home • To make Catholicism a way of life • Family Mass attendance low • Difficult schedules • Lack guidance in how to bring up their children and how to relate to their spouses in long term commitments • Broken families (divorce, alcohol or drug abuse) • Lack of space in church facilities 	<p>Create a Family Life Ministry Team in the Parish and organize welcoming events for families <i>"Parents Mass for newly baptized children and welcome Mass for new parishioners"</i> <i>"Organize a sporting event like soccer to involve the family to participate together"</i> <i>"Reach out to families 'where they are at', and then invite them to a more committed Christian Life".</i></p> <p>Encourage parents to teach children the Faith in the home <i>"Develop more activities to involve families to integrate religion and life"</i> <i>"Speak out more often about the importance of Family Time"</i> <i>"Educate parents on how to motivate the youth to continue participating in the life of the Church after confirmation"</i></p> <p>Shared liturgies—children's masses and family masses <i>"Involve children in special events (Stations of the Cross, Christmas play, etc.)"</i> <i>"Teaching masses for families"</i></p> <p>Offer events/ speakers for couples that target family issues that many deal with. <i>"Emphasize the importance of husband and wife communication"</i> <i>"Strive to make Church top priority"</i></p> <p>Companion couples—couples new in parish are paired up with couples who have been a part of the parish for a long time. <i>"Formally training married couples to assist as mentors for other married couples: especially in areas of relationship, parenting and spirituality"</i></p> <p>Foster Family Spirituality: Retreats, Rosaries and other prayers <i>"Consider Saturday Morning retreats (2 hours)"</i> <i>"Offer Family retreats and Family mini- prayer day"</i> <i>"Encourage to build family prayer life"</i></p> <p>Opportunities for family life in the Parish beyond Mass <i>"Family friendly activities, both social and spiritual (Dinners)"</i></p> <p>Diocesan support and coordination to supplement local parish initiatives <i>"Links on Diocesan web-site for help"</i> <i>"Have a big diocesan event to draw families in—a big fun day"</i> <i>"Sharing of success stories with other parishes would help"</i></p> <p>Involve families in outreach: offer opportunities for service and social learning</p>

Respect Life

BEST PRACTICES	CHALLENGES	SUGGESTIONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monthly Pro-Life Mass • Young Adult Pro-Life retreat • Participation in the March for Life and Catholic Concerns Day • Parish advocacy: people becoming spokespersons for the Parish 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Culture of death”: aggressive media that continuously challenges Church’s Teachings on respect for life • Communicating to the Parish what the Pro-Life issues entail • Significant number of parishioners are “on the fence” regarding the Catholic teachings on Sacredness of Life • Motivating people to become actively involved and advocate publicly • Ignorance of life issues, need to strengthen advocacy network • Perception of Church as “hard-line politics” 	<p>Publicize Pro-Life view in a clear and inviting manner</p> <p><i>“Foster programs celebrating the whole spectrum of life, from conception to natural death.”</i></p> <p><i>“The Church must articulate teachings on all family life issues with courage and clarity”</i></p> <p>Offer education on Pro-Life issues and facts</p> <p><i>“Education of the Catholic teachings on these issues; too many people do not really understand the realities of abortion, euthanasia, and others”</i></p> <p><i>“Promote greater awareness, concern and action”</i></p> <p>Prayer Opportunities</p> <p><i>“Prayer and reflection on: What does the Church say of the sacredness of life and what does the present culture say”</i></p> <p><i>“Public recitation of the rosary for pro-life issues”</i></p> <p>Promote “Respect Life” Sunday Mass, pro-life march and more homilies centering on respect for all life.</p> <p><i>“Promote the sanctity of all aspects of life with help from the diocesan office”</i></p> <p>A vibrant and active Youth Group that promotes a culture of life.</p> <p><i>“Periodic programs that address pro-life themes in a way that grabs their attention”</i></p> <p>Offer the message age appropriately to children, youth and young adults</p> <p><i>“Even start the education processes in religious ed. programs”</i></p> <p>Promote chastity for adolescents</p> <p><i>“Adolescents have to respect their own bodies”</i></p> <p>Diocesan Support for this Ministry</p> <p><i>“Diocesan- prepared colorful bulletin inserts to showing the fullness of life”</i></p> <p><i>“Diocese coordinate and facilitate information on which Pro-Life teams are successful, and ask them to help form new teams in parishes”</i></p>

Formation of Teachers, Catechists, Catechetical Leaders

BEST PRACTICES	CHALLENGES	SUGGESTIONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Saint Cyril Program • Access to EPS (Education, Parish, Service) courses • Catechetical Leaders of the Diocese of Bridgeport (CLDB) in-services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need more qualified and knowledgeable teachers, catechists & catechetical leaders • No formal training required • Provide speakers with expertise and catechesis training for teachers • Time constraints for volunteers to attend training offered by the diocese. They have a minimal amount of free time. • Some catechists need to deepen their faith and doctrine • Maintaining high standards of preparation in the values, traditions and rites of the Catholic faith 	<p>Continue and enhance the programs that are offered: St. Cyril and EPS <i>“St Cyril program is strong but all catechists should attend at least for updating or renewal on a rotating basis. For example, teach about Pope Benedict’s Encyclical”</i> <i>“Offer more programs in addition to St. Cyril”</i></p> <p>Greater accessibility to St. Cyril program <i>“Offer courses during the day and in the evening”.</i> <i>“Provide programs on local level at times that are conducive to attendance”</i></p> <p>Provide an organized orientation for potential catechists and formal training <i>“Provide an entry level training for Catechetical leaders and catechists offered by the Diocese regionally”</i></p> <p>Training for Catechists <i>“Training in educational techniques and classroom management”</i> <i>“Offer training at our own Parish”</i> <i>“Quarterly workshops in parish by staff and others”</i> <i>“Have regular classes for new teachers and refresher classes for current teachers”</i> <i>“Do religion “updates” periodically”. “Give mini courses”</i> <i>“Have substitutes cover classes so workshops can be given during class time”</i></p> <p>Ensure that teachers are well-formed in the Faith and living the Faith <i>“Create workshops on specific topics for ongoing formation on various themes such as moral theology, Catholic tradition, the Mass”</i> <i>“Teach BASIC principles of our Catholic faith”</i> <i>“Catechist retreats”</i> <i>“Gathering for spiritual renewal support and growth in the faith”</i> <i>“A signed Catechist Contract enumerating the rules that must be followed (adherence to curriculum, attendance at weekly Mass and others)”</i></p> <p>Offer resources for Catechists <i>“Online training for catechists”</i> <i>“Develop library resource for Catechists”</i></p> <p>Enhance communications <i>“Provide a vehicle often so that DRE’s, Catechists, Deacons and Priests can come together around a common topic (staff meetings regularly)”</i> <i>“To brainstorm ways of building a community among dedicated teachers in order to help recruit more teachers”</i> <i>“Teachers sharing of grade- level ideas. Have a large bulletin board to post samples by grade and worksheets to copy”</i> <i>“Hold workshops as ways for teachers to share new ideas”</i></p> <p>Motivate catechists to participate fully in the sacramental life of the Church <i>“Recognition of catechists for their work e.g. Catechetical Sunday with Mass followed by a reception”</i></p>

Ministry with Immigrants

BEST PRACTICES	CHALLENGES	SUGGESTIONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Masses in different languages • Ministry for Immigrants • Liturgies and devotions from the diverse cultural traditions • Maintain balance of different ethnic communities • Different groups take turns preparing meals—hot dogs & hamburgers, next an ethnic meal. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Changing demographics-- people from different ethnic groups have different challenges • Language barriers • Many are taken to Pentecostal Churches by aggressive evangelists: we need to be present to give them assistance within the Catholic Church 	<p>Create programs to bridge the gaps and embrace diversity</p> <p><i>“Assistance/training to help immigrants move forward to be integrated into the American culture”</i></p> <p><i>“Ideas being formulated to hold an ethnic food and music festival so parishioners can share their heritage”</i></p> <p><i>“Emphasizing similarities among cultures”</i></p> <p><i>“Build community within parishes”</i></p> <p>Recruiting bi-lingual volunteers</p> <p>Priests available who are bi-tri-lingual and encourage English-only speaking priests to understand and reach out to the multicultural communities in their parish</p> <p>Help immigrants in their needs</p> <p><i>“Form a group to assist immigrants with their special needs”</i></p> <p><i>“Organize a committee designated solely towards ministry with immigrants, to help them integrate and become legalized, etc.”</i></p> <p><i>“Referrals to English as Second Language offering in the community”</i></p> <p><i>“English language classes and American culture classes”</i></p> <p><i>“Provide immigrants with knowledge of where to go for help”</i></p> <p>Have different musical programs</p> <p>Liturgical events like Eucharistic Processions, intercultural prayer groups and Masses.</p>

Ministry with People with Disabilities

BEST PRACTICES	CHALLENGES	SUGGESTIONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have a wonderful program called “Hands of Jesus” and Senior rides for people in nursing homes • Programs for Down’s Syndrome children for First Communion and Confirmation • Religious Ed tied in with the homebound – send prayer cards and letters, visits 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need to reach out so that they feel a sense of inclusiveness in the parish family • There is a lack of Religious Education for special needs children • Building without facilities for disabled • Bring our disabled more into the life of the Church • Identifying people with disabilities • Making Mass activities more accessible 	<p>Diocese should re-establish ministry for special needs <i>“Give parishes information as to what is available and where”</i> <i>“A Diocesan/Vicariate sponsored program at a barrier-free parish”</i> <i>“Special education coordination at the diocese to help with material, catechist training etc.”</i> <i>“Each vicariate to have a Special Ed. Representative”</i></p> <p>Diocese needs a program with professional catechists trained to deal with special needs children <i>“Publicly acknowledge availability of sacraments to disabled persons”</i></p> <p>Make facility disabled-friendly <i>“Capital campaigns to provide accessibility to all parishes”</i></p> <p>Pastoral care coordinator of activities for disabled <i>“Assign a parishioner to investigate needs and people to whom we should be ministering”</i> <i>“Hold healing Masses once or twice annually”</i> <i>“Outreach to nursing homes eg. Confirmation candidates “adopt a sick person”</i> <i>“Develop one- to- one ministries”</i> <i>“Pastoral team involvement with youth groups”</i></p> <p>Have a Ministry set up to assist with the transportation to Mass for the disabled</p>

Involvement of Parishioners in Social Services

BEST PRACTICES	CHALLENGES	SUGGESTIONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preparing monthly meals for several institutions as well as clothing drives and helping nursing homes • Good press in the <u>Fairfield County Catholic</u> on Catholic Charities • Fundraising for Katrina victims • Financing of sister Parishes and kids in Bridgeport, USA and developing countries • Outreach trips to developing countries and areas in need in the USA • Knights of Columbus do heavy seasonal work for elderly and infirmed • Catholic Social Teachings provided by CAPP, (Centesimus Annus Pro Pontifice) • Prison ministry • Service hours for elementary and high school students • Saint Vincent de Paul and Malta House charitable activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recruiting and retaining volunteers • Parishioners are unaware of the great good being done by Catholic Charities • Parish location—may not be able to get parishioners to come out at certain times or in certain areas • Some want to help but do not know how • Under –utilization of laity: promoting their gifts • Other activities competing for their time, many Catholics lethargic and disinterested • Defining priorities for help since there are so many needs • Showing the needs beyond our town borders, especially to children • Creating time in parishioners’ over -crowded schedules • Getting people to volunteer outside of their immediate community • To institute more programs especially for young and at-home mothers 	<p>Promote the importance of stewardship regarding time, talent and treasure</p> <p><i>“Ask people to recognize who they are and how they can be of service to their parish and community”</i></p> <p><i>“Be aware of the talents in our own community and set up volunteer program for pro bono “professional” work”</i></p> <p><i>“Show how each person can make a definite difference”</i></p> <p><i>“Parish can have a list of those volunteering their talents to the aged and poor: carpenters, plumbers, lawyers, etc”</i></p> <p><i>“Have those who have been involved to “tell their story” in order to attract others”</i></p> <p>Identifying and communicating specific ways parishioners can get involved in Catholic Charities (not just financially)</p> <p><i>“Spreading the awareness of the tremendous good that Catholic Charities does”</i></p> <p><i>“Inviting Catholic Charities to come and address the Parish periodically about its ongoing activities, inform the parishioners as to the programs available”</i></p> <p><i>“Get annual report out to everyone in the Diocese, Catholics and non Catholics, it is a great success story”</i></p> <p><i>“Catholic Charities needs to communicate the programs/services they offer more often”</i></p> <p><i>“Catholic Charities could publish a list of projects that parishes can take part in”</i></p> <p>Offer more opportunities for parishioners to outreach and serve the needy</p> <p><i>“Educate and encourage people to take a risk and to serve the needy”</i></p> <p><i>“We have multiple uses for outreach facilities—we have soup kitchens, and we have land that could be used to grow food—involve parishioners in planting, etc.”</i></p> <p><i>“Let them know –they can help”</i></p> <p><i>“Getting more people to volunteer through better parish communications within the community: special flyers, e-mail and others”</i></p> <p>Organize a Social Concerns Committee at the Parish to educate parishioners and help them become active advocates</p> <p><i>“Have a Help Hot Line at the Parish and the Diocesan Level, to give information on “where to get help””</i></p> <p><i>“The Catholic Social Teachings should be brought to light, educate parishioners so that they understand how important it is”</i></p> <p><i>“Ongoing discussions on the “merciful spirit” and its effect on the poor and underserved”</i></p> <p><i>“Educate leaders to call others in the parish and invite them to become involved in outreach”</i></p> <p>Offer support for Parishioners in need</p> <p><i>“Offer assistance to parishioners going through divorce, or grieving for loss of parent, spouse, child, or dealing with a chronic illness”</i></p> <p><i>“Provide access to a Catholic Counselor”</i></p> <p><i>“Parishioners are more inclined to be active when they see a parish helping its own parishioners”</i></p> <p>Increase the number of missionary visits</p> <p>Incorporate charitable works in Religious Education programs for children</p>

Preparation for Baptism

BEST PRACTICES	CHALLENGES	SUGGESTIONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pre-Baptism instruction by priest and DRE 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not enough time for Catechesis • Attendance is low • Parents don't get involved • Keeping families connected with the Church after the Baptism of their child 	<p>Develop a program for parents <i>"Provide Catholic parenting program"</i> <i>"More formal preparation for parents and godparents before the Baptism"</i> <i>"Develop a program where young families minister to other young families"</i></p> <p>Longer period of preparation and more in advance of actual Baptism</p> <p>Reach out to young couples <i>"Make first time parents aware through pulpit and bulletin announcements"</i> <i>"Maintain welcoming atmosphere"</i> <i>"Motivate young couples to participate in the Liturgy and Parish life"</i> <i>"Engage young parents before they have children and emphasize the need of proper education and commitment"</i></p> <p>Better audio visual material to assist people preparing the parents</p> <p>Masses for newly baptized</p> <p>Follow-up after sacrament <i>"Hold parenting events"</i> <i>"Send a letter each year on the anniversary of the Baptism as a reminder to the parents"</i> <i>"Send appropriate literature quarterly or semi annually"</i> <i>"Twice a year have a special Mass for the newly Baptized and reception"</i></p>

Preparation for Reconciliation and Participation in the Sacrament

BEST PRACTICES	CHALLENGES	SUGGESTIONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preparation that includes children and parents in all aspects of the preparation • Penance program for parents • Providing time on Sunday morning for the sacrament of Reconciliation in addition to Saturday afternoon • Daily confession schedule (before Mass) • Workshop presentation to parents on the sacrament of Reconciliation have brought many families to the sacrament 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Qualified teachers • Low participation in the sacraments • Lack of adult participation in the sacrament-- "Parents should lead by example" 	<p>Guidelines from the diocese beyond the liturgy <i>"Better material available for reflection and education"</i></p> <p>Meetings for Sacramental Coordinators</p> <p>Continue Catechesis and adult formation <i>"Offer special catechesis on the sacrament every year"</i> <i>"More adult formation to get greater commitment from parents"</i></p> <p>Have opportunities to participate in the sacrament as part of Religious Education program (at least during Lent) <i>"Offer Sacrament to parents while children are attending classes"</i></p> <p>Have a special service for parents and child <i>"Structure first penance service to encourage parents to receive the sacrament themselves"</i></p> <p>Continue partnership with parents- encourage reinforcement of parish formation program at home <i>"Hold workshops with parents"</i> <i>"Programs to involve Parents and Children"</i> <i>"Have parents attend classes on the Sacrament"</i></p> <p>Communal penance services</p> <p>Mandatory Sunday Mass attendance</p> <p>Inviting children and parents to special Family Reconciliation Service (6 weeks after 1st reconciliation)</p>

Preparation for the First Communion and Participation in the Eucharist

BEST PRACTICES	CHALLENGES	SUGGESTIONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vibrant participation in the Eucharist • Family Mass Committee and Family Mass • Participation of children in the Mass (readings) and previous practice • Sunday evening Mass • Instructional Masses • Good homilies • Music Program • Perpetual Adoration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adults-Divorced/Not married • Understand the nature of the Sacrament • Is difficult to find volunteers 	<p>Diocesan guidelines are required</p> <p>Meetings for Sacramental Coordinators throughout the diocese</p> <p>An instructional Mass for adults and children <i>“Educate in the real presence and importance of the Eucharist in their lives”</i></p> <p>Programs to involve parents and children <i>“Ongoing family Masses”</i></p> <p>More children’s Masses <i>“Children’s liturgy bring young families to Mass”</i></p> <p>Increase hospitality after Mass</p> <p>Provide Catholic parenting program <i>“Continue partnership with parents; encourage reinforcement of parish formation program at home”</i> <i>“Provide step-by-step guidance, involve parents in the entire “journey””</i> <i>“Meet parents before the sacrament”</i> <i>“Guest speakers at parents meetings”</i> <i>“Hold workshops with parents”</i> <i>“Have the parents attend (mandatory) some of the classes”</i></p> <p>Continue Catechesis and adult formation</p> <p>Divide children into small groups for the actual celebration so that atmosphere can remain prayerful</p>

Preparation for Confirmation

BEST PRACTICES	CHALLENGES	SUGGESTIONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confirmation retreat with Sean Forest • Mary Ronan guest lecture on “Making Good Life Choices as Teenagers” • Committed adult leaders as Confirmation teachers • Broader service options 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When to have Confirmation • Finding volunteer teachers for that grade is difficult • Short formation period, disinterest • Lack of parents’ involvement • Retaining adolescent participation after the Sacrament 	<p>Diocesan guidelines should be reviewed</p> <p>Review the Confirmation age <i>“Move confirmation to an earlier age”</i> <i>“Move confirmation to an older age”</i> <i>“Adopt RCIA model and have it at a time when they really desire to be a Catholic”</i></p> <p>Increase the number or length of class sessions</p> <p>Mandatory Sunday Mass attendance and hold special “rites” for candidates throughout the year</p> <p>Hold workshops with parents <i>“Continue Catechesis, adult formation and parental catechesis”</i> <i>“Have the parents attend (mandatory) some of the classes”</i> <i>“A parental wake- up call”</i></p> <p>Cultivating strong youth minister program and Youth Involvement in the Parish Life <i>“Incorporate sponsor as mentor in formation process”</i> <i>“Youth minister should work with Confirmands and encourage them to participate”</i></p> <p>Continue family service projects <i>“Opportunities for group community service”</i></p> <p>Guest speakers on relevant topics like morality and organized Bible studies</p> <p>Retreat <i>“Update retreat leaders list from Diocese of Bridgeport”</i> <i>“Join others group retreats if needed”</i></p>

Preparation for Marriage

BEST PRACTICES	CHALLENGES	SUGGESTIONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Priest very involved and experienced in the preparation • Young couple on the team, candidates relate to the topics presented • Mentor-couple practice • Pre-Cana program in whole day, group retreat format • Good new material being offered: “God’s Plan for a Joy-Filled Marriage” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is too little time required for them to prepare well • Less young people are interested in getting married • Need greater involvement at parish level • Dealing with couples who are already living together • Dealing with mixed marriages or previous marriages • Help couples to learn how to communicate when problems arise 	<p>Expand the time of preparation required <i>“It should be more detailed and more intense, integrating sound and practical information, covering family situational problems, budgets and sexual life”</i> <i>“Longer preparation time is required before the ceremony”</i></p> <p>Updated formation with content relevant to the present culture <i>“Offer a sound catechesis on the vocation of marriage and the Sacrament they are about to receive”</i> <i>“Present issues that are relevant to couples being married in today’s society, preparing them for today’s challenges”</i> <i>“Use this opportunity to teach basic catechesis”</i></p> <p>Follow –up needed after the marriage <i>“Follow-up with couples after the marriage for feedback and additional questions”</i> <i>“Parish Marriage enrichment programs are required. Deepen on the significance of their life-long commitment”</i></p> <p>Offer 2 retreats a year for those in marriage preparation <i>“Spring and Fall retreats should be offered”</i> <i>“Energize the couple to be involved in the Parish Community before and after the celebration”</i> <i>“Offer opportunities for couples to deepen their spiritual lives”</i></p> <p>Have more information on Natural Family Planning <i>“Promote the true nature of marriage and NFP”</i> <i>“Contraception lies should be clearly exposed”</i> <i>“Use this as an opportunity to talk about and heal past issues in their lives (e.g. abortion)”</i></p>

Vocations — *How can the Parish better cooperate in the promotion of vocations to the Priesthood, Consecrated Life and discipleship of married life?*

BEST PRACTICES	CHALLENGES	SUGGESTIONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prayers for Vocations at daily masses • Holy hours sponsored by the Office for Vocations • Good advertising, posters and materials available • Gatherings and retreats for youth • Seminarians working at the Parish for the past years have been a great witness to the youth 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promoting Vocations to Priesthood in this secular society and overcoming hostile media • Transmitting to youth that they can lead fulfilling lives celibately in the service to others • Encourage youth to consider all options of vocations, keeping an open mind • Identifying those who might have a vocation and providing encouragement and guidance • Importance of executing and planning along with promoting • Little exposure of youth to the lifestyle of Priests and religious, make it a closer reality to their lives • Understanding the basis of all vocations is discipleship –inform about all the “vocations”: diaconate, 3rd order, married life • Parental encouragement 	<p>Prayers and Masses for vocations <i>“Dedicating one Sunday each month to praying for vocations”</i> <i>“Continue to keep this intention in prayer in the parish community”</i></p> <p>Identify and encourage potential candidates <i>“Organize a one-on –one relationship”</i> <i>“Recognition of those choosing to explore/decide upon a vocation”</i> <i>“Exposing our youth to a mentoring program with joyful faith-filled seminarians, priests and religious”</i></p> <p>The program has to be an integral part of the Parish’s Mission and Vision <i>“Create a Parish team for prayer and speakers and a liaison to the Office of Vocations”</i> <i>“Each priest, deacon, DRE and teacher should be committed and informed about the diocesan program for vocations”.</i> <i>“Establish in the Parish vocational guidance resources”</i></p> <p>Educate people on what it takes to be a priest, deacon or a sister <i>“At Religious Education classes, talk about “A day in the life of...”</i> <i>“During homilies educate on the vocation and the calling”</i></p> <p>More seminarians present in Parishes <i>“Bring the young men around more often from St. John Fisher”</i> <i>“Guest speaker once a year at Youth group meeting”</i> <i>“Reaching young people to deliver the message of vocation”</i></p> <p>More participation of Youth at Masses and Parish Life <i>“Develop effective youth ministry in all parishes with training for youth minister available”</i> <i>“Altar servers should be asked to serve thru high school”</i> <i>“Encourage teens to be lectors and participate in the Parishes’ activities”</i> <i>“Greater youth involvement in Church life, especially sacraments and outreach”</i></p> <p>More presence of priests and religious in schools and universities <i>“Need to provide encouragement at a young age”</i> <i>“To address more directly students at Catholic schools and High Schools on this subject”</i> <i>“Reach out to the students in the Universities present in the Diocese”</i></p> <p>Broader Vocation Promotion, including married life and consecrated life <i>“Encouraging Laity to increase awareness of the baptismal call”</i> <i>“More effort should be made to promote good lay leadership, committed to the gospel”</i></p> <p>Promoting Diocesan Vocation events and initiatives <i>“Websites: build the existing resources into the Parish’s websites too”</i> <i>“Organize retreats for different age groups with seminarians, priests and religious”</i> <i>“Prepare bulletin inserts for the parishes”</i> <i>“Have a diocesan team speaking at the parishes masses”</i></p> <p>Encourage parents to encourage their children <i>“Expand the PAVE (Parents Are Vocation Encouragers) program”</i> <i>“Also encourage grandparents to promote vocations with their grandchildren”</i></p>



Other Best Practices Feedback

HOSPITALITY/WELCOMING

- Coffee and...after all programs and meetings
- Restaurant after Mass to form community
- Regular handwritten notes from Pastor to families on significant events
- Community spirit encouraged by social events conducted throughout the year as bake sales, Annual Beans and Macaroni Supper, Bazaar, etc.
- Italian Festival
- Chocolate Festival
- Personal invitations to events

PRAYER/SPIRITUALITY

- Adoration Chapel and Perpetual Adoration of the Eucharist
- Centrality of Eucharist /1st Friday adoration/Vibrant participation in the Eucharist
- Book Club—spiritual in nature-come together and share—promotes spirituality
- Prayer after Mass of 3 Hail Mary's (for themselves, a person in parish and someone else)
- Confessions available every day
- Prayer services and full liturgical atmosphere and Feast for the Saints' Parish name
- Begin each morning with prayer, during classes and at end of day
- Novenas, Crowning of Mary, Stations of the Cross
- Prayer before and after Mass, rosaries
- Weekly prayer groups meetings
- Posadas celebration in Christmas
- Prayer cards
- Bereavement Masses
- Good liturgical practices (good homilies, music)



Other Best Practices Feedback

STRONG COMMITTEES/STEWARDSHIP COMMUNITIES

- Council on evangelization, liturgy committees, pastoral council, pastoral hospitality, parish awareness programs, youth ministry
- Committees beginning and ending in prayer--making it more spiritual
- Encourage giving of time, talent and treasure—return a portion back to the Lord
- Involve many members in parish ministries through strong leadership and vision
- Ministry development
- Cross-fertilization programs-all communities within parish work together
- Dedicated, committed volunteers and staff
- Strong senior adult involvement (prime-timer program)
- Active parish council
- Stewardship Sundays

EVANGELIZATION

- Celebrating cultures and evangelizing through programs
- Smalls communities of faith (Cursillo, Charismatic groups, etc)
- Individual outreach to people that may have questions of faith
- School of evangelization--people attend and go forth out into the community
- Different associations: women, men, widow, senior citizen group
- Bible Studies
- Active Lady's Guild
- Knights of Columbus
- Mom's group
- Legion of Mary



Feedback throughout the Diocese

Summary of Findings: Schools

Religion Classes: *for a better teaching of the Faith*

BEST PRACTICES	CHALLENGES	SUGGESTIONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Priest meeting with students often and answering questions about religious doctrine • Meaningful classes taught • Multi-media resources for religion lessons 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trained and faith-filled teachers • Make teaching relate to today's world • Difficulty of working with students of different faiths • Better grounding in the faith by instructors • Develop an understanding and reverence for Scripture • Lack of supplemental resources • Limited time in the schedule • Quality materials are needed, especially for Middle School 	<p>Religion teaching must help students relate it to today's world <i>"More "real life" witnesses talks and presentations"</i> <i>"Adequate and in-depth preparation for class, less lecture and more discussion and diversified presentations"</i></p> <p>Teachers must be the ones who live their Faith <i>"Sharing the religious practices with other teachers from the Diocese"</i> <i>"Organize retreats for the teachers and workshops to develop spirituality within our teachers"</i></p> <p>Ensure that the teachers have a broad understanding of theology and methodology <i>"Offer professional development to the teachers"</i> <i>"The History of Catholicism, and enrichment programs should be taught"</i></p> <p>Lectures on "Hands-on" approach offered by the Diocese</p> <p>Lessons need to be reinforced at home</p>

Parish Life: *for an increased participation of students and parents in the life of the Parish*

BEST PRACTICES	CHALLENGES	SUGGESTIONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students and parents are very active in the Parish's' life • Very good relationship with Pastor and DRE • Pastor is creating programs for children to get the students involved with the Parish • Annual School/Parish picnic 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of parental participation; they do not encourage going to Church • More comprehensive campus ministry program • Many students are not Catholic and many do not belong to the Parish were the school is located • Multiple languages • Information and Encouragement 	<p>Religious education for adults and provide workshops for parents <i>"Many parents have not received religious education since Confirmation or High School"</i></p> <p>Programming for the whole family <i>"Extend invitation to parish activities to all families in the school community"</i> <i>"Family Rosary and participation at the Sunday Liturgy"</i> <i>"Goal: Total Human Formation= Parents + School+Church"</i></p> <p>Encourage the children to bring their parents to Mass <i>"Encourage parent/student participation in several activities: prayer and service projects"</i></p> <p>Welcome younger families into the Parish Community</p> <p>Organize more social activities for Parents to participate in the Parish Life <i>"Host a family movie night, the movie can highlight an interesting teaching and discussion may follow"</i></p> <p>Form Committees that could focus on these type of activities to foster more interaction and interest with the Parish</p> <p>Better communication of the Parish activities in the School's newsletter</p> <p>Catholic Youth groups are needed for pre-teens and teens</p> <p>Speaking from the pulpit about the importance of Catholic education</p>

Spirituality: for an intense Sacramental Life and the development of a deep spiritual dimension of the student

BEST PRACTICES	CHALLENGES	SUGGESTIONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Several liturgies (4-5 yearly) and periodic Class liturgies • Class retreat every year • Rosary weekly and adoration of the Blessed Sacrament weekly, stations of the cross in Lent • Crowning of the Blessed Mother, full school participation • Weekly or monthly morning Mass for students and First Friday Mass • Reconciliation services through all the religion classes in Advent and Lent • All Saints day Program • Liturgy committee, and preparation of full participation in Liturgical celebrations monthly • Parents organized a Spiritual Enrichment committee that meets monthly to plan activities for the School • Students compose letters to Jesus, at least 3 times a year • Anniversary wishes and spiritual bouquet to the Pope each year 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus is too much on teachings of Jesus and the Bible rather than encouraging a deeper spiritual life • Students lack participation in liturgy at parish level and lack understanding on the importance of their spiritual life • Need for a more intense “campus ministry” • Lack of trained personnel and funding • Lack of knowledge of students about what happens at Mass • Lack of respectful behavior in the Church 	<p>Create a pastoral ministry team and have a full-time spiritual director Offer more community prayer opportunities and for confession <i>“Have first Friday Masses”</i> <i>“Student- led prayer and allow more time for contemplation and prayer”</i> <i>“Regularly scheduled school class liturgies and better educate students on what they mean”</i> <i>“Say grace before lunch together”</i> <i>“Organize acts of popular piety”</i> <i>“Offer a youth Mass”</i></p> <p>Create more retreat opportunities Have more visits from priests, deacons, and religious to the schools <i>“Include the clergy in sharing the faith with the students in the classrooms”</i></p> <p>Create opportunities for personal prayer <i>“Time for meditation and give emphasis to personal prayer”</i> <i>“Offer booklets for family practices: eg. Lent, Easter, etc.”</i></p> <p>Have the opportunity for Confession available more often <i>“Seasonal reconciliation service”</i></p> <p>Organize religious field trips Raise the age of reviewing sacraments, especially Confirmation (age 15) Children’s Masses in Parishes</p>

Service: to foster a greater spirit of service and outreach to the needy in the community

BEST PRACTICES	CHALLENGES	SUGGESTIONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outreach service project required for all Freshmen • Social Justice and Catholic Social Teachings are part of religion curriculum • Several service groups exist • Service organization “The St. Theresa’s Miracle Workers” K-8 students outreach to the needy • Monetary collection for disaster victims • Special projects such as “Buy-a-smile” helps fund surgeries in the developing countries • Sister school is supported by students of 6th to 8th grade 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunities for group outreach are limited; they lack meaningful community service experiences • Recognize Christian responsibility to reach out to needy • Transportation constraints • To encourage parents to be more involved • Lack of focus in this area 	<p>Organize group opportunities for outreach <i>“Help students overcome prejudice and offer them opportunities of field trips for service work”</i> <i>“Visit nursing homes”</i> <i>“Create gardens run by students/parents for Merton House, etc”</i> <i>“Create projects with local charities who would be willing to supervise students”</i></p> <p>Encourage parents to participate with the children in community projects</p> <p>Require service projects over 4 years</p> <p>Develop joint projects between schools</p> <p>Foster generosity and stewardship towards the needy <i>“Have food banks and donation centers in the schools”</i></p> <p>School could be connected to an outreach center</p> <p>Reward those who volunteer their time with tuition assistance</p> <p>Begin community service at 4th grade</p> <p>Organize monthly outreach projects for each grade</p>

Faith Knowledge: *to enhance the knowledge of the teachers in the religion department*

BEST PRACTICES	CHALLENGES	SUGGESTIONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers are encouraged to attend theological conferences and workshops • The St. Cyril Program is good for imparting knowledge 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time and funding constraints, limited time available for ongoing religious development • Lack of trained personnel • Lack of professional development • There is need for practical workshops to apply the knowledge • Professional development offered by the Diocese has not been fully taken advantage of 	<p>Require staff to complete the St. Cyril program within specified timeframe as part of the contract with the teacher</p> <p>Update classes in the field of theology and spiritual workshops <i>“Utilize professors from Sacred Heart Univ. and Fairfield Univ. for in-service workshops”</i></p> <p>Sponsor programs at local universities <i>“Connect with existing programs at local Universities (Sacred Heart, Fairfield, Fordham, Yale)”</i></p> <p>Facilitate the possibilities for faculty to have an ongoing formation process <i>“Make resources and material available”</i> <i>“Offer programs on line or offered during the summer”</i> <i>“Create better tuition enhancements and incentives for continuous education”</i></p> <p>Share resources by meeting with other teachers in others schools</p> <p>Diocese establish a traveling Religion Teacher/Speaker Team to provide enrichment and continuity in teaching</p> <p>Offer top quality speakers/instructors in all areas <i>“Continuing Education for all volunteers”</i> <i>“Cluster schools be responsible for sponsoring professional development”</i> <i>“Plan more workshops for teachers to participate in”</i></p> <p>Use of Virtual Classroom online <i>“Provide programs that can be done online and over the summer”</i> <i>“On line teaching tools for use by school religion teachers”</i> <i>“Website that will answer FAQ from teachers about their faith”</i></p>

Catholic Identity: *to affirm it in all the academic fields*

BEST PRACTICES	CHALLENGES	SUGGESTIONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At the entrance of the school, there is a religious statue and poster announcing that Christ is the reason for the school • Daily prayer within each classroom • Daily school-wide prayer • Daily staff morning prayer, building a spiritual community • Moral discussions are held in upper grades • Once a week, the school community gathers and offers preparation for the Sunday Liturgy • Chapel in the School • Bulletin boards based on “Virtues of the Month” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimum presence of Catholic teaching in other academic fields • Motivate teachers to “get on board” on this endeavor • Lack of opportunities for faculty & students to identify themselves as members of a Catholic Community • Finding ways to do this since the texts are not written with religion in mind • Present the Catholic view point of any subject, controversial or not • Administrators must be strong Catholic leaders, then the teachers will follow 	<p>Provide ideas from teachers as to how this can be accomplished in their disciplines</p> <p><i>“The beauty of God’s creation could be discussed in Science, reports on the Saints could be assigned in English, the Social Teachings of the Church could be related to the Social Studies classes”</i></p> <p><i>“Provide more insight of what is happening in the world and how it relates from a Catholic view point to what they are learning”</i></p> <p><i>“Church history and its impact on the world should be taught, as well as the influence over the arts and music”</i></p> <p>Offer more than 1 retreat a year for the staff</p> <p>Present as role models people and authors who have witnessed their Catholic identity in their public and personal life</p> <p>Have a full-time spiritual director who does not have to teach, overseeing the Catholic identity throughout the School.</p> <p><i>“Reinforce whenever possible the Catholic identity”</i></p> <p><i>“Emphasize what Catholic Schools teach is good in itself and has value beyond utilitarian purposes”</i></p> <p>Provide more opportunities for our schools to be seen in the newspaper</p> <p>During the interview process, this must be a strong criteria before hiring a teacher</p> <p>More respect for religion in our schools</p> <p><i>“Carry the values of our faith throughout the curriculum”</i></p>

Vocations: *How can the School better cooperate in the promotion of vocations to the Priesthood, Consecrated Life and discipleship in the married life?*

BEST PRACTICES	CHALLENGES	SUGGESTIONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vocational fairs • Priest is the religion teacher for 8th grade • Priests teach some classes and are present in the school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited exposure to someone who comes to talk to them about vocations • Young adults are not aware of what priests are and do • Materialism and consumerism amongst students and societal pressure towards self-indulgence • Lack of experience with religious women 	<p>Present priesthood and religious life as heroic and vital <i>“Religious literature on the lives of Saints”</i></p> <p>More exposure to Priests and Religious <i>“Have nuns, priests, etc come and discuss what they do”</i> <i>“Witness of seminarians or novices”</i></p> <p>Organize more initiatives to promote vocations <i>“Visit to Saint John Fisher Seminary, to see how life is lived”</i> <i>“Have a vocational awareness week or a Vocation day with speakers”</i> <i>“Hang posters about vocation and calling”</i> <i>“Continue the Mass for vocations in the Fall”</i></p> <p>Organize a youth rally at a Diocesan level <i>“Diocesan-wide youth rally to experience liturgical life of the Church & create a sense of belonging”</i></p> <p>Increase prayer for vocational discernment <i>“School wide prayer for vocations”</i></p> <p>Education and courses that will help students in vocational discernment <i>“Emphasis on Gospel as roadmap to fulfilling lives”</i> <i>“Stress servant leadership from 9th to 12th grade”</i> <i>“Start courses that deal with morals and values at an early age”</i> <i>“Offer Religious literature, including the lives of Saints”</i> <i>“Jr High abstinence of sex until marriage”</i> <i>“Provide teaching on chastity, which is tied into the sacrament of marriage”</i></p> <p>Encourage families to speak well of religious life</p>

Fluid Communication between the Pastor and the School (K-8)

BEST PRACTICES	CHALLENGES	SUGGESTIONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Excellent communication between Pastor and school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Availability of the Pastor or the Priest • Need to improve communication between Pastor and Faculty 	<p>Principal should attend the Parish Advisory Meetings</p> <p>Pastor and Principal should meet on a regular basis</p> <p>The Pastor could address the student body with proposals for spiritual growth <i>“Plan liturgies with the parish priests”</i></p> <p>Parishes with schools should have a second priest who works well with children <i>“Have debates and discussions with the priests during religion classes”</i></p> <p>Pastor should be invited on a regular basis to visit classrooms <i>“The Pastor should be invited to the Schools functions”</i></p> <p><i>“Equip each classroom with a shoebox full of “questions for a priest” so that at any time a priest may drop by and answer”</i></p>

Campus Ministry: *for an active Campus Ministry*

BEST PRACTICES	CHALLENGES	SUGGESTIONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Senior citizen prom • Class retreats • Crusaders for life: student organization committed to prayers, services, and respect for life • Campus ministry committee • Pen Pal program, pairing students of older with younger grades to promote mentoring, friendship, respect and responsibility and community service 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No support staff to help organize events • Lack of full-time campus ministers 	<p>Plan creative activities that appeal to students <i>“Have Prayer and service groups”</i></p> <p>Organize a campus ministry committee with students, teachers and the campus minister</p> <p>Work on common projects with Universities and Parishes <i>“College students could assist high schools as a special ministry”</i> <i>“Organize events with Parish Youth Ministers”</i></p> <p>Seasonal activities for Lent/Advent/Easter</p> <p>Schools can work together on projects so that students get the opportunity to work with grade-level peers from other schools in the diocese</p> <p>Introduce a Campus Minister for the Elementary Schools</p> <p>Offer the opportunity for spiritual guidance to the students</p>