

# Findings of the 2023 Parish Sharing Sessions



**St. Margaret Mary Catholic Church  
Winter Park, Florida  
2024 Final Report**

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## Introduction

The following document is an initiative of the Pastoral Council of St. Margaret Mary Church in Winter Park, FL, to help the parish move forward as a faith-filled and active community, led by the Holy Spirit. The effort is a continuation of prior parish planning processes that occurred in recent years. Since 2009, two different parish planning efforts have been conducted, each building on the strengths already existing in the parish.

This planning process differed somewhat from prior experiences, in the sense that the prior processes were conducted first through parish surveys and then through small group committee work to formulate the final goals and objectives. In contrast, the intent of the current process was to bring parishioners together to meet face to face so they could first share their experience of the parish, and then through prayer and discussion arrive at recommendations to enrich parish life. Giving the parishioners this important experience of “being Church,” engaged in the experience of promoting community growth, was an important dimension of the current process.

The results of this current process show deep appreciation for the direction and activities of the parish and a desire to continue the experience of small group sharing. The participants describe the current picture of the parish in very positive terms, and the recommendations primarily show a desire to expand or improve already existing practices. The intent is to keep this process alive so that parishioners will continue to be aware of how the parish can grow in its fidelity to Christ’s presence and call to discipleship.

## Process

The process for this parish planning experience was based on parishioners coming together in small groups to prayerfully reflect on and respond to two questions: As a parish, what are we doing well? As a parish, what can we do better, and how do we do that?

Approximately 260 SMM parishioners gathered for one or more of four Sharing Sessions in early November 2023 to respond to the two pertinent questions. The parishioners gathered at tables of 6 people each, including a facilitator and notetaker. Each Sharing Session, which lasted an hour and half, was framed within times of prayer to the Holy Spirit for guidance. The sessions were concluded by having each table leader share with the larger group the main elements of the table discussion.

The written notes of all the table discussions were compiled and organized into topics. The content about each question was also sorted into themes with the aid of an online AI program (ChatGPT). ChatGPT was used to help identify main themes and

recommended suggestions in the data from the parishioners' sharing. Frequency of occurrence of various suggestions was factored in the identifying the priorities in this report. The following observations and recommendations come from assembling the notes into an order that makes them more practical for seeing consistent themes and specific suggestions for growth.

In addition, follow-up sessions were provided a few weeks later to explore more fully the three most frequently cited themes that surfaced in the initial sessions: welcome and inclusivity, engagement and ministry.

The comments from participating parishioners showed a deep appreciation for the rich experience of faith, community and service that SMM parish already demonstrates. The gratitude was consistent throughout. The discussion for moving forward was clearly based on the solid and life-giving community experience that was already in place.

### **A Comment for the reader**

When you are reading this document, consider it to be a living document that continues to develop and grow as the parish lives it out. If you are a St. Margaret Mary parishioner, consider yourself to already have a connection to the observations and suggestions listed here, or more accurately, you have a relationship to those who expressed these comments as well as those who are responding to them with you. You are part of the community and part of the conversation. As you read, you might ask yourself the question: What can I do to help bring about the goals and activities that are mentioned here? If you have a differing viewpoint from the comments, ask yourself: What kind of dialogue or discussion can I enter into so that we can all move forward together? We are a community formed and guided by Christ's Spirit. Even our differences are an opportunity to open ourselves to follow the Spirit more closely.

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### **Synthesis Results**

The Sharing Sessions responses reflect a profound connection to the vision statement which arose from the most recent planning process and remains as our current parish vision statement:

***“Called by the Holy Spirit to become the Body of Christ and transformed by our active and prayerful participation in the Eucharist, we envision a parish which embraces Christ’s call to discipleship as we go forth to serve.”***

The parishioners' insights portray a community that strives to embody the transformative power of active and prayerful participation in the Eucharist and reflect our commitment to discipleship, emphasizing both our strengths and areas for improvement. The synthesis shows that as a parish, we see ourselves journeying together guided by the

Holy Spirit, striving to create a parish where every member feels called to serve, fostering a community that mirrors the teachings of Christ and embraces the spirit of discipleship.

Recommendations that came out of our sharing process emphasize inclusivity, engagement with diverse communities, and personalized outreach, underscoring a shared commitment to discipleship and serving. Additionally, the emphasis on adult and youth catechesis and formation, access to information about participation in ministries, and community building aligns with the vision of a parish striving to live out Christ's teachings. All of these recommendations recognize the centrality of the Eucharist in parish life. Valuable suggestions for improvement also included more intentional welcoming of newcomers, more widespread engagement of parishioners and more accessible information on the extensive availability of parish ministries. More detailed suggestions are included in the sections that follow.

## **Continuity with our 2019 Parish Plan**

Our most recent parish plan focused on several goals related to each of three priorities:

- **Spiritual growth** is the lifelong process of developing a relationship with god and becoming more christlike through prayer study and reflection as we journey towards holiness and transformation of heart;
- **Engagement** meets people where they are in order to enhance and deepen their faith by drawing them closer to God through increased interest, presence and participation in the church community; and
- **Formation of youth** focuses on fostering the personal and spiritual growth of young people, empowering them to live as disciples of Jesus Christ in today's world in order that they may participate fully in the life, mission and work of the Catholic faith community.

The current findings affirm the relevance and importance of the three parish priorities identified in the last parish plan. The sharing sessions continued to emphasize an ongoing commitment to spiritual growth, active engagement within the community, and the formation of individuals, including youth, to fully participate in the life and mission of the Catholic faith community. The proposed initiatives and priorities from parishioners provide valuable insights for shaping and enhancing the parish plan to better meet the spiritual needs of the community. The commitment to adaptability and continuous improvement resonates with the dynamic nature of spiritual growth, engagement, and youth formation.

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In the rich tapestry of parishioner insights, a vibrant portrait of the parish emerges that resonates with our vision statement. Three overarching themes that surfaced in the sharing session demonstrate a community that values a commitment to inclusivity, a dynamic and action-oriented approach, and an atmosphere of warmth and welcome. Emphasis on serving others, both locally and globally, reflects our commitment to embracing Christ's call to discipleship.

Co-Responsibility	
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Co-responsibility is a fundamental concept in our church that emphasizes the active involvement of every parishioner in fostering a vibrant and welcoming community. Personal responsibility, particularly through personal invitations, is highlighted as a crucial aspect that transcends age and formal leadership positions. The idea is to encourage a culture of reaching out to others, extending invitations to attend events or join ministries. This involves ministers actively inviting individuals to shadow their ministries, offering insights into the commitments and rewards involved. The overarching goal is to create a more engaged and connected parish community, with an

emphasis on personal accountability. Co-responsibility is viewed as a collective effort to fill the pews, not solely the responsibility of the priest and staff. The importance of building relationships within the parish is underscored, encouraging members to learn each other's names, welcome newcomers, and create a sense of community during Mass. The concept of co-responsibility is presented as a call to action for all individuals to actively contribute to the parish's ministries, programs, and events, ultimately enriching the overall community experience.

## **Welcome & Inclusivity**

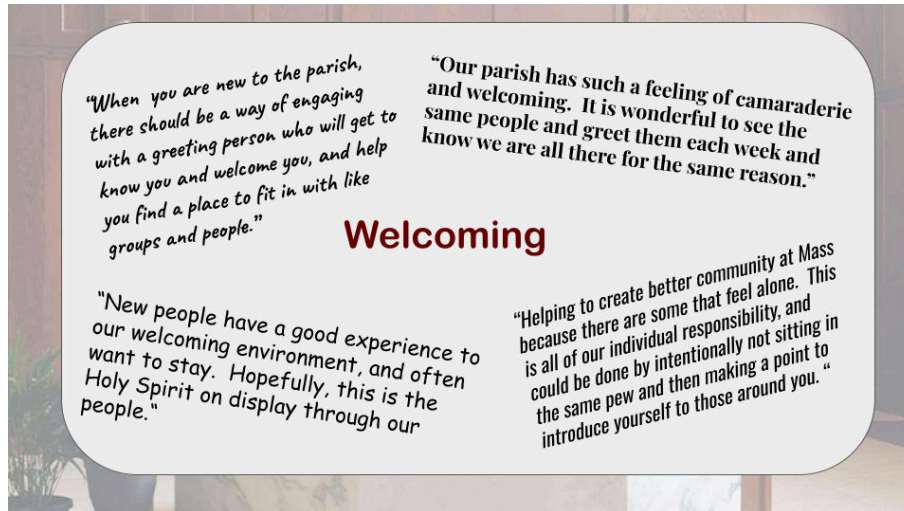
Our parish community fosters a warm and welcoming environment, creating a sense of belonging that one parishioner described as "feeling like home." The welcome reception for new members, though paused during the pandemic, was a valued initiative, as it provided a space for newcomers to connect and integrate. The camaraderie among parishioners, and the dedication of many parishioners to make others feel loved and supported enhance the overall sense of community.

While our community has achieved much in creating a welcoming atmosphere, there are areas where improvement is desired. First and foremost is implementing a systematic approach to bringing new members onboard. Recommendations include welcome receptions, phone calls from a welcoming committee member Newcome Mingle, a "Welcome Wagon Ministry" to actively engage with new parishioners. Encouraging the use of name tags, particularly during Mass, could make it easier for individuals to reach out to one another. Acknowledging and welcoming visitors more explicitly, perhaps through designated announcements during Mass, can also be helpful.

Moreover, efforts should be made to ensure that the parish is accessible and inviting for all people, including single parents, divorced individuals, or members of the LGBTQ+ community.

Our parish community has built a strong foundation as a welcoming and supportive environment. By addressing the highlighted areas for improvement, such as systematic pathways to involvement, explicit visitor acknowledgment, and increased inclusivity efforts, we can continue to enhance our community's warmth and hospitality, ensuring that everyone feels not only welcomed but truly embraced by our parish family.





### Key Recommendations:

1. Implement a systematic welcoming process for new members, including welcome receptions and phone calls from welcoming committee members.
2. Encourage the use of name tags, particularly during Mass, to facilitate interpersonal connections.
3. Explicitly acknowledge and welcome visitors during Mass through designated announcements.
4. Establish a welcoming and supportive environment for all people, such as single parents, divorced individuals, or LGBTQ+ community members.
5. Reinstate social events for new parishioners and consider restarting the Newcomer Mingles.
6. Ensure inclusivity through intentional language in liturgy and communications.
7. Foster intentional outreach to those who may feel alone during Mass through greeters, welcoming tables, or talks.
8. Consider a "Welcoming Ministry" to plan and implement outreach to new attendees and parishioners at Mass.
9. Reinstate the practice of personally inviting parishioners to Mass, ministries, and programs.
10. Promote a welcoming and responsive atmosphere at all points, from inquiries at the front desk, to follow-up responses to calls/emails regarding information on ministries or volunteering.
11. Address concerns about locking doors during masses.

### Engagement & Fellowship

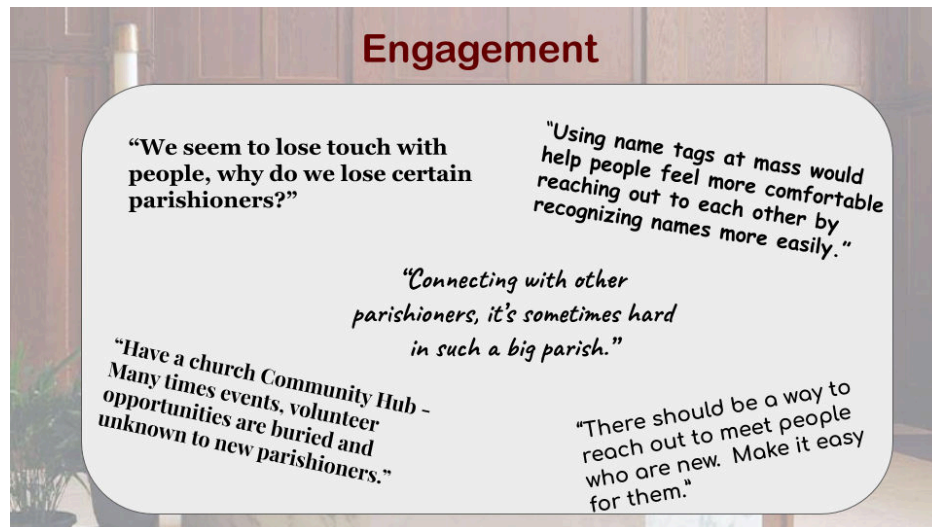
The feedback suggests that the parish has several positive aspects contributing to a welcoming and connected community. The personal touch, warmth, and sense of



community are consistently highlighted. However, there are areas where opportunities for fellowship can be improved, especially given the challenges posed by the parish's size and diverse demographics. While the parish already demonstrates a strong sense of community and hospitality, there is room for improvement in targeted outreach, personal connections, and the creation of smaller, more intimate fellowship opportunities. By implementing these strategies, the parish can further enhance fellowship and strengthen connections among its diverse members.

### Areas for Improvement:

- Increased Personal Outreach
- Mitigating Anonymity in a Large Parish
- Regular gatherings for fostering deeper connections among parishioners
- Addressing specific demographic needs
- Creating Small Community Opportunities (Neighbor to Neighbor)



### Key Recommendations:

1. Name Tag Initiative:
  - a. Implement the use of name tags during Mass on a regular basis, promoting familiarity and connection.
  - b. Rotate name tag usage monthly to provide opportunities for learning and remembering names.
2. Monthly Meet-and-Greet Sessions:
  - a. Organize monthly meet-and-greet sessions, perhaps over coffee and light snacks, to facilitate interactions, especially for new parishioners.
  - b. Encourage parish leaders to emphasize the importance of hospitality and welcoming in creating a friendlier atmosphere.
3. Neighborhood Events/Fellowship:
  - a. Revive or create neighborhood-based events, connecting parishioners through shared geographical areas. Some suggested reintroducing a "Neighborhood Apostolate" program to foster local connections and a sense of community.

4. Fellowship Committee and Program:
  - a. Establish a fellowship committee with the aim of developing 2-3 fellowship functions per year.
  - b. Encourage parishioners to join fellowship programs, providing diverse opportunities for connection and engagement.
5. Enhancing Outreach to Specific Groups:
  - a. Address the perceived lack of participation in the 30-45 age group by creating targeted initiatives to draw them into church activities.
  - b. Recognize the challenges faced by couples without children or those not fitting the usual family description.
  - c. Consider intergenerational meetings to share wisdom and history, promoting a sense of belonging among different age groups.

## Ministry

The topic of 'ministry' in general was prominent and the sharing about ministry focused largely on ministry in general as a parish priority as well as comments about specific ministries falling under three categories - parishioner care or formation, outreach and community survival, and ministries at the service of liturgy.

### General Ministry

Parishioners highlighted several strengths in our ministry approach. People expressed appreciation for the parish's inclusivity and openness to diverse ministries, allowing everyone to participate based on their interests and talents. What one person called a "mind-blowing" number of ministries ensures that there is something for everyone, fostering a dynamic and engaged parish.

Areas for improvement have been identified. The most frequently mentioned concerns revolve around communication and volunteer engagement. Parishioners express dissatisfaction with the lack of follow-up for volunteers who sign up, emphasizing the need for more effective communication within ministries. There is a call for increased efforts to encourage younger participation and leadership in ministries. People are looking for platforms to spotlight and advertise different ministries, creating awareness and inviting more participation.

### What We Do Well

- Diverse Ministries:
- Engagement and Outreach:
- Youth and Family Involvement:

## Ministries

*"We are open to different ministries so that everyone can participate in what interests them. If we don't have something, then we're willing to let them start something new. People can do something as small as just washing linens to chair a ministry."*

*"Despite the 'mind-blowing' number of existing ministries, there is a lack of communication between them -the right hand doesn't often know what the left-hand is doing; and new parishioners often do not know what ministries exist....so...."*

*"More than one person said that they signed up when they joined the parish to participate in things and were never contacted and another said she joined one group for a session or two and nobody talked to her, with the exception of one person."*

*"ROBUST MINISTRIES ARE MANY AND VARIED, SOMETHING TO ENGAGE ALL AGES AND INTERESTS OF VOLUNTEERS, COULD BE INVOLVED IN OUTREACH TO THE LOCAL COMMUNITY PLUS MISSIONS TO OTHER COUNTRIES, ADVOCACY AND/OR ASSISTING WITHIN THE CHURCH."*

### Key Recommendations:

1. Communication and Follow-up
  - a. Implement a systematic follow-up process for volunteers who sign up, ensuring that they are contacted promptly.
  - b. Develop a streamlined volunteer inquiry and navigation system to help connect potential volunteers with ministries matching their interests.
  - c. Spotlight one ministry each week or month, through the bulletin, slides before mass, courtyard tables, or speaker or short video at the end of mass, etc.
2. Develop strategies to encourage youth and younger parishioners to participate in ministries,
  - a. Include liturgical roles and leadership roles ensuring their involvement is recognized and valued. ("ministry of spiritual empowerment")
3. Ministry Fair Enhancement
  - a. Make the annual Ministry Fair a more prominent and regular event, perhaps multiple times a year, to showcase various ministries and encourage participation.
  - b. Ensure thorough follow-up after Ministry Fairs to connect interested individuals with their chosen ministries.
4. Improved Collaboration Between Ministries
  - a. Foster better communication and collaboration between ministries to prevent silos and enhance the effectiveness of collective efforts.
  - b. Develop a directory of ministry leads & contact information.
5. Centralized Ministry Directory
  - a. Develop and maintain a centralized directory of parish ministries with clear contact information, fostering better communication and coordination among different ministries.

By addressing these recommendations, the parish can build upon its existing strengths while strategically addressing the highlighted areas for improvement in ministry management and community engagement.

### **Parishioner Care Ministries**

The presence of various ministries within a parish is crucial for meeting the diverse needs of the congregation and fostering a sense of community. It reflects the commitment of the parish to care for individuals in different stages of life and facing various challenges. The existing ministries in our parish demonstrate a commendable effort to address a wide range of needs, from spiritual and emotional support to practical assistance. Specific ministries, such as the Eucharistic ministry to the sick, senior, writing, and young adult groups, marriage preparation and counseling, and programs like Chicken Soup Ministry, St. Anne's Ministry, and the Elizabeth Ministry contribute significantly to our parish life. The emphasis on continuous support throughout the marriage process and the presence of various support groups show a holistic approach to addressing the needs of parishioners.

There are areas identified for improvement and expansion. The suggestions provided, such as enhancing support for surviving spouses, expanding ministries for widows, developing structured grief programs, and creating a funeral and bereavement ministry, demonstrate a commitment to addressing the specific needs of those facing loss. Expanding support for caregivers, creating ministries for specific age groups, such as middle-aged parishioners and empty nesters, and offering more targeted outreach to single mothers, young adults, and former students, further emphasize the desire to meet the unique needs of diverse demographics within the parish. Additionally, the call for ministries focused on addiction and recovery, special needs individuals, and a fasting ministry indicates a recognition of the importance of addressing spiritual and health-related concerns. Outreach to those hospitalized and follow-up support for church members in times of need also demonstrates a pastoral commitment to the well-being of the congregation.

There is a collective awareness of areas that can be enhanced and expanded. By addressing these suggestions, the parish can become an even more inclusive and supportive community, meeting the diverse needs of our members at various stages of life and circumstances. Our parish addresses a wide diversity of potential or existing ministries, covering spiritual, emotional, and practical support for parishioners in various life situations. Reflections from the sharing sessions indicate a desire to enhance and expand these offerings.

### **Key Recommendations (in addition to those listed under General Ministry)**

1. Enhanced Support Groups & related services (Widows/widowers; Caregivers; Disabilities)
2. Structured Follow-up for Hospitalized or homebound members

3. Ensuring that those who are ministering are provided adequate resources and support through group meetings, reflection, & prayer opportunities
4. Enhanced ministry offerings for specific populations (seniors; single parents; divorced)

## **Christian Service and Outreach**

The data from our parish sharing sessions reflect a remarkable commitment to service and outreach. The comments highlighted many successes as well as areas for improvement in service and outreach efforts. The diversity of ministries is impressive. They include large-scale parish based projects such as the rummage sale and the Thanksgiving and Christmas stores as well as one-to-one ministries such as Chicken Soup and Purls and Prayers that enable parishioners to serve one another. Our ministries also extend to active engagement in local outreach such as the Lazarus Ministry, Family Promise, and the Coalition for the Homeless. They include global initiatives, such as the Haiti Ministry and KUDU in Uganda. Additionally, parishioners have strong connections to outside organizations which provide ministry opportunities. Examples include Kairos, I-Dignity, Farmworker Association, Hope CommUnity Center, and local pregnancy support service agencies (and more). These connections are strengthened through our grant program, Lenten almsgiving and opportunities for agencies to share information at parish events. Sharing session groups identified the value of social justice and advocacy opportunities. Youth involvement is encouraged and there's an emphasis on volunteerism, with parishioners expressing fulfillment and purpose in their service.

However, there are also identified areas for enhancement and growth. Suggestions focus on continuing to explore local outreach opportunities, improving communication about service projects and financial needs, and integrating Catholic social teaching more deeply into parish life. Additionally, there's a call for better coordination among ministries, clearer communication about volunteer commitments, and increased efforts to engage younger parishioners in leadership roles. By addressing these recommendations, our parish can further strengthen its impact, inclusivity, and effectiveness in serving both its local community and broader social justice goals.

### **Key Recommendations**

1. Maintain the strong parish commitment to service and outreach while exploring new needs and assessing new opportunities for service.
  - As opportunities arise, enhance outreach efforts through existing programs and by supporting particular initiatives emerging among our parishioners. For example, mention was made of mentoring disadvantaged youth and addressing local hunger.
  - Regularly highlight opportunities in the local community that offer opportunities for our parishioners to serve.

**2. Improve Communication and Integration:**

- Provide clearer communication about the impact of service projects and financial needs, such as through regular updates on the number of individuals served and funds raised.
- Integrate Catholic Social Teaching more deeply into parish life by incorporating it into catechesis, liturgy, and community events.
- Strengthen collaboration and coordination among ministries and staff to streamline efforts and avoid duplication of services.

**3. Engage and empower parishioners as active volunteers:**

- Foster a welcoming environment for volunteers by improving communication about volunteer opportunities, expectations and tasks.
- Promote ministry awareness and involvement through regular spotlighting of ministries, personal invitations to parishioners to participate and responding promptly to parishioner inquiries about volunteering.
- Encourage younger parishioner participation in leadership roles within ministries and outreach initiatives.

## **Faith Formation: Catechesis, Spirituality and Devotion**

### **Adult Faith Formation**

Our parish is actively engaged in a variety of faith formation, catechesis, and spiritual activities. The parish exhibits a diverse and comprehensive approach to fostering spiritual growth and education, offering a wide range of options to accommodate individuals at different stages of their faith journey. Notably, Bible studies, including Men's, Women's, and other small groups received widespread affirmation. The RCIA program is well-received for its thought-provoking content, including the use of videos. Additionally, the parish organizes diverse events such as pilgrimages, Cursillo, Kairos, and Life in the Eucharist retreats that contribute to a spiritually enriching environment. The emphasis on adult formation is recognized as robust, helping parishioners feel invested in their church community.

Parishioners offered valuable insights into adult catechesis, formation, and spirituality, highlighting several themes and offering suggestions for improvement. There's a widespread call for an even more comprehensive adult faith formation program. Some ideas include refresher sessions on fundamental Catholic teachings, education on the Catechism, and a deeper understanding of the Mass. Participants emphasize the need for clear communication about existing and new opportunities for adult education. Second, in the sharing sessions, parishioners expressed a sense that there is value in

offering sessions that require different levels of participation, for example, an in-depth scripture or theological study might be offered as well as other less formal Bible study or faith sharing groups. Third, facilitating the integration and comfortable use of technology for elder parishioners was suggested. Exploration of contemporary issues in light of Catholic Social Teaching is recommended (some specific suggestions include mental health awareness and LGBT topics). Finally, the theme of fostering a deeper devotion to Mary and other saints, such as St. Margaret Mary, emerges in the feedback.

## **Recommendations**

1. More Educational Events, speakers, seminars:
2. Comprehensive Catholic Social Teaching integrated across catechesis, liturgy, and community life.
3. Enhanced Adult Faith Formation for all adult members
  - a. Expand offerings to cover topics such as the Catechism, Church history, and the foundations of faith.
  - b. Offer refresher sessions on Catholic Church practices and etiquette.
  - c. Create transformative disciples through adult catechesis, moving beyond surface-level understanding.
  - d. Topics for specific groups (men's women's, seniors, etc.)
  - e. Awareness of Current Issues: Address contemporary issues and provide education on the Church's teachings on topics like mental health, suicide awareness, and LGBT issues.
4. Community Building (e.g. Catholic learning communities)
  - a. Establish monthly gatherings for deeper reflection on homilies and Mass to foster community.
5. Eucharistic Understanding:
  - a. Educate and demonstrate the presence of God in the Eucharist through programs like Life in the Eucharist retreat.
6. Provide formation and prayer opportunities for Centering Prayer, Ignatian Prayer and other forms of regular prayer
7. Emphasis on Mary and St. Margaret Mary: Parishioners express a desire for more education and promotion of devotion to Mary and St. Margaret Mary.
8. Access & Communication:
  - a. Better communication about faith formation opportunities, including existing and new programs, is recommended.
  - b. Accessing technology based faith formation resources for elders and others

### **Children's Faith Formation**

The parishioners commend the church's efforts in nurturing the faith of children through various initiatives. The Liturgy of the Word for Children during the Sunday Mass at 9:30 am is highlighted as a successful practice, emphasizing the importance of involving children in the church community. Parishioners appreciate the provision of babysitting,



faith formation and sacramental preparation classes, for both children and their parents, emphasizing the value of faith development. Additionally, the involvement of children in outreach activities, such as packing backpacks for the homeless, is acknowledged as a positive aspect.

Areas identified for improvement include additional programs for children, and increased outreach efforts to counteract negative social influences. The need for additional Sunday school programs, the revival of specific programs like "Just Girls," and activities catering to children who have made communion but not confirmation (10/11 years old) are emphasized. There's a call to foster a relationship between families of school students and those in faith formation. There were a number of unique comments offered about specific ideas affecting children (such as offering day care, formation for toddlers, etc). Providing healthy food options at events targeting children was suggested. Additionally, parishioners seek more direct and bold discussions on challenging topics relevant to raising children in today's world

### **Recommendations:**

1. Enhance music experiences during sacrament formation.
2. Expand children's programs and outreach efforts.
3. Reinstate the "Just Girls" program and create activities for pre-confirmation age groups.
4. Address the division between families of school students and faith formation attendees.
5. Provide healthier food options at events targeting children.
6. Facilitate direct and bold discussions on challenging topics relevant to raising children.
7. Provide accessible links on Catholic teachings for young families and adults.
8. Expanded age groups for Faith Formation: There's a call for education beyond elementary school, expanding Sunday school for various age groups, and incorporating more prayer and life workshops.

### **Youth & Young Adult Faith Formation**

#### **Youth/Young Adults**

Parishioners provided valuable input on the state of youth and young adult engagement within the church community. Many express satisfaction with the youth group's substantial numbers and commend the efforts in organizing engaging activities. The growth of the SMM teen ministry is acknowledged as a positive trend, with connections established with educational institutions like UCF and Rollins. The foundation provided for young people is praised for fostering church involvement, offering a social outlet, and facilitating parent relationships and support

Suggestions for improvement include the need to actively invite younger individuals to ministries and create positive, warm interactions to recognize their participation in Mass. Additionally, there's a call to focus on youth activities and enhance outreach efforts to maintain the interest of high schoolers and middle schoolers in the faith. Adult support for youth ministry, particularly in the form of volunteers, is deemed essential. The top five themes from the data set are:

1. Youth Group Success: Positive feedback on the youth group's good numbers and engaging activities.
2. Connection with Educational Institutions: Recognition of connections with UCF and Rollins for youth and young adult engagement.
3. Improvement Suggestions: A strong emphasis on the need for active outreach, better communication, and more activities to keep the younger generation involved.
4. Adult Involvement and Support: Concerns about the need for more adult volunteers and support in various youth and young adult initiatives.
5. Retention of Young Adults: Discussions around how to keep young adults engaged after high school, through college, and into their own family life, including the need for targeted outreach and relevant programs.
6. Expanded age groups for Faith Formation: There's a call for education beyond elementary school, expanding Sunday school for various age groups, and incorporating more prayer and life workshops.

## **Family Life Ministries**

In the comments regarding family life ministries in the parish, there are several positive aspects highlighted. Firstly, there's recognition of existing engagement and support for family units within the community, with programs such as marriage ministry, senior activities, and gatherings for young families. The importance of providing support for various stages of family life, from newlyweds to empty nesters, is acknowledged. Additionally, efforts to address specific needs, like offering ministries for single mothers and creating spaces for dialogue on modern family issues, reflect a commitment to inclusivity and relevance in addressing the diverse dynamics of family life within the parish. Programs like FOCUS for engaged couples and the Elizabeth Ministry for families are examples that are viewed favorably. These initiatives demonstrate a proactive approach to fostering strong familial bonds and offering resources to navigate challenges.

There are suggestions about how the parish can enhance its family life ministries. The comments emphasize a need for greater outreach and inclusivity, particularly for young adults and single parents who may feel underserved or disconnected from existing programs. Suggestions for expanding support networks, providing more accessible

meeting times, and offering childcare during events underscore the importance of flexibility and inclusivity in engaging diverse family demographics. Additionally, there's a call for more structured follow-up and ongoing support for couples after marriage, indicating a desire for sustained care throughout various stages of family life. Overall, while the parish demonstrates a commitment to supporting families, there's room for improvement in broadening outreach, enhancing accessibility, and ensuring continued support beyond specific life events like marriage.

## **Pastoral Care Ministries**

While specific details regarding pastoral care for caregivers, hospitalized parishioners, homebound, widows, and widowers are limited to a few explicit statements in the data for what we do well, pervasive themes of compassion, inclusivity, and support within the parish community suggest a robust framework for pastoral care and support for individuals facing various life circumstances.

Feedback and suggestions related to pastoral care include increasing bereavement support like structured programs and support groups for widows and widowers, providing resources for grieving individuals, and exploring ways to expand support beyond the initial funeral services.

There is a call for increased outreach to parishioners who are hospitalized or homebound, ensuring they receive spiritual and emotional support during difficult times. Suggestions include organizing visits from parish volunteers, offering resources for caregivers, and providing assistance to those in need.

There was also a desire among parishioners involved in pastoral care ministries to have more opportunities for sharing, support or training for themselves. Overall, the feedback highlights the importance of providing comprehensive pastoral care that addresses the diverse needs of parishioners and fosters a sense of belonging, support, and spiritual growth within the church community.

## **Liturgy, Worship & Music**

The parish excels with its focus on Eucharist and our liturgies contribute to a rich and meaningful worship experience. The commitment and dedication of our volunteers

stand out, showcasing a well-organized liturgy volunteers' program. Our Sunday celebration of Eucharist is a celebration of faith and parish involvement. Many sharing session participants expressed an awareness of a cohesive integration of music, readings, liturgical themes and art and environment. The variety of celebrations of liturgy in our parish reach across different stages of life, including families, children, and older parishioners. The inclusion of children in various aspects of liturgy, such as the Liturgy of the Word for Children at the 9:30 am Sunday Mass, underscores the parish's commitment to nurturing the faith of the younger generation. The vibrant community engagement and the welcoming atmosphere facilitated by greeters contribute to an overall positive liturgical environment. Additionally, the parish's use of technology to aid participation and the thoughtful planning of special liturgical events, reflect a commitment to excellence in fostering a spiritually enriching worship experience for all parishioners.

To enhance our liturgical experience, several areas are identified for improvement. For example, are there ways to increase active participation and engagement among parishioners in both the liturgy and the music? Education on the Eucharist and the various parts of the Mass could be expanded, perhaps utilizing technology to provide spiritual information before Mass.

Other suggestions include resuming use of an offertory basket or a symbolic presentation of food pantry items to provide a concrete experience of giving for children. Additionally, a concerted effort should be made to communicate more effectively about parish opportunities for involvement, particularly by highlighting ministries at the end of Mass. There were comments about the importance of a reverent atmosphere before and during mass. One parishioner commented on the difficulty of finding balance in creating a quiet, prayerful atmosphere before mass and of the desire to welcome newcomers.

## **Recommendations**

### **Increased Participation:**

- Encourage more involvement in liturgy and music.
- Create ministries for special needs individuals.

### **Education on the Eucharist/Mass:**

- Provide more education on different parts of the Mass.
- Use screens for spiritual information before Mass.

### **Communication and Outreach:**

- Improve communication about parish offerings.
- Address concerns about taking the blood at communion due to COVID.

### **Inclusivity and Reverence:**

- Encourage more involvement in liturgical processions.
- Improve hearing comprehension during Mass.
- Address issues of inappropriate dress and cell phone use.

### **Youth and Technology Engagement:**

- Invite young people to get involved in liturgical ministries.
  - Increase the use of technology and social media awareness.
- Homilies and Ministry Highlights:
- Address issues affecting the younger generation in homilies.
  - Include ministry highlights during homilies.
- Music Engagement:
- Encourage more parishioners to sing at Mass.
  - Increase participation in liturgical music.
- Reverence and Mass Etiquette:
- Conduct a series on Mass practices for reverence.
  - Address issues like inappropriate dress and disrespectful behavior.
- Adoration and Sacraments (Continued):
- Reinforce the importance of the Eucharist. More Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament
  - Offer more opportunities for confession and adoration.
- Interfaith Considerations:
- Address inconsistencies in marriage rules for interfaith couples.
  - Provide understanding of diocesan rules on interfaith marriages.
- Community Building:
- Foster a more welcoming environment for newcomers.
  - Encourage interaction among parishioners before Mass.
- Continuous Education:
- Improve adult education and catechesis.
  - Enhance conflict resolution skills within the church.
- Safety and Security:
- Ensure safety measures for ushers and parishioners.
  - Evaluate the placement of the tabernacle for better visibility.
- Cultural and Community Events:
- Host regular cultural events to enhance community engagement

## **Communications & Technology**

The parish excels in offering a multi-faceted approach to communication, including detailed bulletins, emails, and an informative website, ensuring that information is accessible and timely, keeping the congregation well-informed about various events and ministries. It fosters robust communication, facilitating a vibrant community spirit anchored by diverse ministries and inviting active participation. The parish offers access and encourages individual use of a variety of internet resources for personal study. While there are numerous channels of effective communication, the feedback also provided suggestions about improvements in communication, including the difficult task of trying to effectively reach a broader range of parishioners.

### **Summary of Suggestions about Communication:**

(These suggestions pertain to parish-wide tools and systems; topics about individual ministry communications are addressed separately.)

- Promote visibility and awareness: Regular features in bulletins, dedicated segments during Mass. For example, spotlight a ministry on a monthly schedule to improve awareness of the ministry. Highlight impact and opportunities, perhaps with a speaker from the ministry at Mass. Ministry team would be available for questions in the courtyard.
- Maintain updated ministry content:
  - Directory of ministries, including contacts and descriptions, accessible both online and in print.
  - Calendar of short term and future ministry events as far out as possible so that people can manage their time and money to be ready for upcoming fundraisers, sales, special events, etc.
- Provide feedback mechanisms: Encourage a culture of feedback where parishioners can suggest improvements and feel that their voices are heard.
- Optimize use of technology to streamline sign-ups and updates, making it easier for parishioners to get involved.

### **Leadership**

Strong current leadership in the parish is widely recognized. The parish has a committed group of volunteer parishioners and staff, indicating a robust lay leadership. Father Walsh is praised for his ability to connect well with parishioners, being described as approachable, compassionate, present, and welcoming. The sharing sessions also showed awareness that leadership lies not only in the clergy and pastor but also resides in strong lay leadership. Parish events and programs are generally well-regarded and seen as well-organized, and the parish is seen as having clear direction and structure. Father Walsh is credited with creating a stable community and helping newer priests gain experience while maintaining the community's stability.

### **School**

Parishioners express a deep appreciation for the pivotal role of the parish school, emphasizing its importance to the parish community. They commend Katie Walsh for her effective leadership. The school is lauded for fostering a strong sense of community, particularly through its emphasis on academia as a priority and the collaborative efforts that build connections among families. SMM Catholic School is viewed as a blessing,

providing foundational faith formation for children and serving as a unifying and supportive home during times of crisis.

## **Finance**

Parishioners expressed the importance of transparency and their desire to be informed about how their contributions are being used.

## **Facilities & Grounds**

The church was described as a welcoming and beautiful space with open doors for visitors throughout the day. The physical set-up and design, including stained glass and a peaceful sanctuary, create a meditative atmosphere.

## **Vocations**

Some parishioners expressed a desire to continue to promote vocations within the community.

## **Other Observations**

While the sharing offers a valuable opportunity to learn more about our perceptions and experiences of life as a community, it is important to realize that we have not heard from all the voices that could have valuable perspectives to offer. Parishioners who were unable or uninterested in attending the sessions may have had other helpful observations to share. A couple of people expressed to the planning team that they chose not to attend, partly because of feeling uneasy about considering taking part, not feeling comfortable that they would be respectfully listened to or their experiences valued. While parishioners were encouraged to personally invite others who may not attend as regularly or may not have heard about the sessions at mass or through parish media, this data is missing the input of members who have become less involved and did not know about the opportunity. As we continue to be formed as a community of faith reflecting on what we do well and how we can do better, it is important for us to seek out and hear from more members.



## Recommendations & Conclusion

Where do we go from here? This experience is one step on a journey of growing together. In that regard, these pages are intended to be viewed as a living document. That is, we anticipate that there will be ongoing discussion about the recommendations provided. Some recommendations may receive a warm welcome, others will need additional discussion to find ways to implement them. New ideas will surface through that process. In all cases, this effort will require ongoing prayer to ensure that our parish continues to be led by the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

A variety of steps can help us on this path, including:

- Continuing the process of sharing and reflecting among individual parishioners and in small groups.
- Discussing within ministry groups
- Sharing results with staff members, pastoral council, and ministry leaders.
- Taking personal responsibility: Each of us can ponder what actions we can take individually to respond to the recommendations. For example, “How am I contributing to making St. Margaret Mary a welcoming parish and a community which invites active participation in one or more ministries?”

This experience demonstrates that we are living in continuity with our past. The sharing reflects a profound connection to our vision statement, ***“Called by the Holy Spirit to become the Body of Christ and transformed by our active and prayerful participation in the Eucharist, we envision a parish which embraces Christ’s call to discipleship as we go forth to serve.”*** It is evident that our community strives to embody the transformative power of active and prayerful participation in the Eucharist. We strive to create a parish where every member feels called to serve, fostering a community that mirrors the teachings of Christ and embraces the spirit of discipleship.

As we move forward aware of the Presence of Christ in our midst, we reminded that we are a Eucharistic people, anticipating our final gathering at the heavenly feast, and mindful of the words of the Book of Revelation:

*“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth. The former heaven and the former earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. I also saw the holy city, a new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, God’s dwelling is with the human race. He will dwell with them and they will be his people and God himself will always be with them [as their God]. He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there shall be no more death or mourning, wailing or pain, [for] the old order has passed away.” The one who sat on the throne said, “Behold, I make all things new.” Then he said, “Write these words down, for they are trustworthy and true.” (Rev. 21:1-5)*