

Parish Profile Committee Focus Group Update

Greetings!

We write to provide the members of our parish community with the initial results of the focus groups hosted during the month of June. As you may recall, these sessions were centered on the following three questions:

- *What are the best things about St. Thomas'?*
- *What challenges do we face?*
- *What qualities are we seeking in a new rector?*

Each question was allotted twenty minutes for discussion, and all answers were recorded on news-print. At the conclusion of each session, participants were asked to place a sticker next to his or her top three priorities within each category. Then, following the final session, thanks to Carl Jameson, all of this entered was into a database and ranked according to the number of stickers received.

In response to the first question -- *What is the best thing about St. Thomas'* -- the highest ranking by far was our "joyful, vibrant, strong, caring, and supportive" **Community**.

In response to the second question -- *What challenges do we face* -- the highest ranking, again way ahead of all others, was **Financial Stewardship**: "the cost, management, and maintenance of our large property; the need for new technology to deal with the infrastructural complexity of a large church; insufficient understanding of and participation in financial giving, which reveals the need for us to cultivate a spirit of generosity."

Finally, in response to the third question -- *What qualities are we seeking in a new rector?* -- there was a tie for the highest ranking: **Pastoral Presence** and **Inspiring Leadership**. Each of these was not entirely surprising and likely speak for themselves!

As you can imagine, responses varied among each of the six sessions, although several similar themes did emerge, which will aid us in the creation of our Parish Profile. These themes included the following:

Our Strengths: our parish community ... the many ministry opportunities we offer for all ages ... our outreach efforts to the broader community ... the opportunities we provide for education and spiritual growth ... the beauty of our church and surrounding campus ... the emphasis we place on our liturgy ... and, not least, the outstanding quality of our musical offerings.

Our Challenges: our church finances, especially given the size of our campus and our many programs ... attracting and retaining parishioners, particularly younger members ... uniting our parish (i.e., ensuring that parishioners at each of the three services feel united as one community) ... properly managing our large and complex organization, with its many ministries and buildings ... staff turnover ... and, to the extent possible, addressing diversity of all kinds: racial, socio-economic, age-based, etc.

What We Seek in Our New Rector: an inspiring leader who is authentic, approachable, and values all parishioners ... a compassionate individual, who excels in pastoral care ... an outstanding preacher ... a person with a deep and abiding faith, who can guide us spiritually ... a servant-leader, who can work collaboratively with our talented laity, empowering them for leadership and ministry ... an experienced manager, who can lead a large and complex institution, appreciating and respecting our history and heritage ... an individual who will support and cultivate our sense of community ... and, a person who will appreciate parishioners of all ages, connecting with youth while still attending to the needs of all parishioners, whatever their age.

Note too that while all of this has begun to inform our Parish Profile, which will be used to recruit our new rector, we also plan to conduct a parish-wide survey, followed by an all-parish meeting in the Fall.

So, thanks go to the 100 of you who took the time to attend our focus groups! We are now well on our way toward painting an accurate and compelling portrait of our St. Thomas' community.

With warm regards,

The Parish Profile Committee

Ginger Goodrich, Chair

Liz Butler-Rodgers

Marggy Ells

Carl Jameson

John Kepner

David Thayer