

St Martin de Porres Church
2006 Parish Survey
January 21, 2007

This report should be read in tandem with the pastor's letter published last week detailing responses to the suggestions made in the survey. It is based on analyses of the 331 surveys returned by the end of June. Not surprisingly, the vast majority of respondents indicated that they were involved in parish activities or were regular attendants at Mass. Almost two-thirds of the respondents were female, and a similar percentage indicated that they were over 55. The age of participants in the survey clearly had some effect on responses in a couple of areas, with the youngest group (who tend to be parents of children and teens) giving somewhat lower ratings of effectiveness in the areas with which they are most concerned. This report follows the order of the topics of the questionnaire, in which parishioners were asked to rate how well the parish was fulfilling various functions, how important each major area was to them, and to add comments. Two numbers are given for each rated item: the percentage giving the highest two ratings combined, and the percentage giving no response (usually an indication of lack of knowledge).

A. Liturgical Celebration

Masses are prayerful, reverent, and spiritually moving	85% 5/4	3% NR
Availability of Sacrament of Reconciliation (Confession)	82% 5/4	8% NR
Devotional services (rosary, Stations, Benediction, etc)	78% 5/4	13% NR
Preaching that enlightens my mind, soul, and/or heart	72% 5/4	3% NR
Music ministry that supports the liturgy	55% 5/4	4% NR
Masses for children and youth	62% 5/4	28% NR
Parish missions, retreats, seasonal prayer resources	60% 5/4	17% NR

Over 70% of respondents indicated that this area was very important to them, and 40% made some comment about liturgical matters, often with vigor. While liturgy and its celebration at St Martin de Porres Parish were rated as either good or very good by most, there were a number of personal comments. They ranged from the use of Latin in liturgy, the type and amount of music used (see below), the quality of preaching, various forms of celebration for children and youth, the architecture of the Church, and the hours of Masses. Several parishioners noted the responsibility the congregation shares to enhance the quality of our celebrations.

Music received many comments; indeed nowhere in the survey were the differences among us so apparent. Some requested that only familiar, traditional hymns be sung in our liturgies (including Gregorian Chant and Latin hymns), others prefer lively contemporary music, while some want no music at all. Several commented on their inability to hear the children singing at children's liturgies as well as the tendency of the organ to drown out the cantor. The music ministry has made several efforts to increase the quality of music provided, asking for volunteers from the parish to join the adult, children's and teen choirs or play instruments to enhance our liturgy. Attention to the comments will guide continuing efforts to improve our work.

B. Evangelizing

Sensitivity to religious or ethnic diversity within families	45% 5/4	35% NR
The parish is a supportive, caring community	71% 5/4	8% NR
Spirit of invitation for those interested in becoming Catholic	54% 5/4	27% NR

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Outreach to non-practicing Catholics	33% 5/4	37% NR
Encouraging vocations (priesthood, diaconate, religious life)	48% 5/4	18% NR

Over 35% of respondents indicated that this area was very important to them, while 45% indicated that it was important. Slightly over 25% made some comment about these issues and concerns. In general, the comments were positive with regard to the parish's efforts at evangelization: most found the parish supportive and caring and also very receptive and effective in its program for those interested in becoming Catholics. There were, however, a number of comments which expressed varying degrees of dissatisfaction with the parish's performance: lack of sensitivity to religious and ethnic diversity; no outreach to non-practicing Catholics; insufficient encouragement of vocations to priesthood, diaconate, and religious life; no ecumenical and interfaith activities. Some typical comments: "I just love St. Martin's. It's my home away from home. It just needs a little fresh air in certain areas." "I am not aware of any program addressing religious and ethnic diversities within families." "Would like a program for returning Catholics." "Prayers for vocations could be offered more often." "Ecumenical involvement is non-existent."

C. Teaching

Religious education for children	50% 5/4	34% NR
Religious education for adults (eg, Bible study, morality)	33% 5/4	31% NR
Providing religious-based classes in parenting, family life	16% 5/4	48% NR
Youth ministry for pre-teens, teens, and their families	30% 5/4	43% NR
Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults	45% 5/4	44% NR
Sacramental preparation for children and families	46% 5/4	37% NR
Preparation for marriage	26% 5/4	64% NR
Providing good Catholic elementary education	53% 5/4	38% NR

Over 60% of respondents indicated that this area was very important to them, while 20% indicated it was important. Over a third made some comment about this function, many noting that Catholic education is important for all, from youngsters to elderly parishioners. Not surprisingly, given the age of survey respondents, many indicated that they lacked knowledge of current programs but were very happy with the education their children received when they attended the school or religious education programs. Several respondents noted that their children currently received good preparation for the sacraments in a well-organized program and that they were being taught both Christian doctrine and values in our educational programs. The RCIA program was applauded by many for its effectiveness in introducing inquirers to the Catholic Church and our beliefs and practices.

Areas that seem to need improvement included: more space for classes; more visibility of the clergy in the school and religious education programs; more openness and flexibility in the administration, with better communication between parents and the school, particularly over issues of discipline; a need to be more innovative in the religious education program. Adult education was commented on by several respondents, with high marks given to the movie nights but a need for more formal classes and continuing religious education.

D. Caring

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Promotion of respect for human life	76% 5/4	11% NR
Encouragement of parishioners to work for social justice	50% 5/4	18% NR
Outreach to the poor	67% 5/4	11% NR
Outreach to people with specific needs (eg, divorce, death)	52% 5/4	21% NR
Outreach to elderly or homebound parishioners	56% 5/4	20% NR
Support for families with young children	34% 5/4	40% NR
Support for singles: young, middle and older	27% 5/4	41% NR

Over 50% of respondents indicated that this area was very important to them, while 30% indicated it was important. Almost 25% made some comment about this function, with considerable variation in perceptions of how well these tasks are being carried out; many indicated that they are not aware of what is being done but are confident that most needs are being addressed. Some division on the effectiveness of the current Caring Committee, with compliments for work done, but distress about situations where no help was able to be given. Several recurring themes: desire for more activities for single adults, need to do more for local organizations and families in need, need to work with other churches on affordable housing in Dutchess County, need to provide transportation for seniors to Mass and evening events. Support for existing pro-life activities, but need to do more. General appreciation for the work of the Knights in this area, but also an observation that we need a cross-gender, cross-age group that will work with those in need face-to-face.

Suggestions for improvement included: support for families with teens through outreach activities they can do together; "Mentor" program to match those in need with those who have weathered the same crisis (unemployment, death, illness, etc); support for families with young children, especially for single parents and those with no families in the area—e.g., babysitting for younger children so parents can be involved with activities of older children; support for divorced/separated families; provide annual report on outreach activities, not just financial report; partner with church in need, local or international. Radically change outreach so when people think of St Martin's they think of loving, caring, prayerful Christians who help community with prayers, talent, and generosity.

E. Facilities

Easy access to parish facilities for physically challenged	80% 5/4	12% NR
Adequate facilities for meetings and other activities	80% 5/4	7% NR
Parish facilities that are well-maintained	88% 5/4	4 % NR
Adequate parking for most church or school events	80% 5/4	3% NR

The majority of respondents (47%) indicated that this area was important to them, while 35% indicated it was very important. Slightly over a quarter made some comment about this aspect, with little variation in perceptions of how well facilities meet needs. Many positive comments about the beauty and the design of the 'new' church, although some would like the Tabernacle and the statues of the Blessed Virgin Mary and St. Joseph to be more visible. Appreciation expressed for both the unlocking of the side door and the easier access to the altar by the side stairs. Many called for the completion of the playground. Areas that were often cited as needing improvement included: parking at Saturday evening and holiday Masses; an additional bathroom in the church; snow removal on stairs and plaza, which was cited as uneven and potentially dangerous; renovation of the kitchen in the school, which is over 40 years old; improved landscaping around church, school and Nativity Center;

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renovation of the outside entrance to the Nativity Center. (Many of these suggestions have already been implemented, as noted in the Pastor's letter.) Several people noted that they have not had an opportunity to see the renovations and addition at the school to which they contributed so generously. Finally, the need for more meeting space was identified, with suggestions for self-contained areas in the school which could serve that purpose.

F. Participating

Ease in obtaining help/answers when calling the parish	60% 5/4	16 % NR
Parish leadership that listens to the concerns of parishioners	57% 5/4	18 % NR
People asked to contribute time, talents, treasure	53% 5/4	17 % NR
Parish bulletin and website are informative, encourage involvement	67% 5/4	8 % NR
Financial reports indicate contributions are well-spent	70% 5/4	12 % NR

Almost half of respondents indicated that this area was very important to them, while 36% indicated it was important. Just under a quarter made some comment about this function, with again some variation in perceptions of how well these tasks are being carried out. People commented that while the rectory is welcoming, others do not like using the answering machine as it makes them feel that "Priests seem removed from their parishioners in not being available to take calls." People indicated that Parish Leadership listens to the concerns of parishioners. There was an overwhelming response of gratitude simply for having done the survey, with a "hope that change happens and that leadership continues to listen." Referring to Time, Talent and Treasure, one person wrote, "A parish community is made up of members of the church all contributing their talents and time, yet we have a lot of untapped talent at St. Martins." Many shared this observation. Given the good people and resources in our parish we should better tap them to improve our volunteer situation. It was noted that when it comes to donations, our parish does quite well; but not so when it comes to volunteers and that getting people to volunteer is difficult. The desire to be involved in church and school activities/functions but not having information on how to do that, where needs are or feeling welcome was a repeated theme. Several indicated that the parish needs a handbook on all the church groups/activities, what they do and who to contact. Regarding the bulletin and the website, "communication is needed in a big way in our parish." A number mentioned they depend on the bulletin regarding religious events taking place at other parishes in Dutchess County. Comments indicated that while the bulletin is more appealing, the parish needs to better use this communication tool. In addition, the website does not always have current schedules, and some website items are not up-to-date. The financial reports are well-done, clear, easy to read and excellent in telling us where monies are spent.

BOLD STEPS

The last item on the survey asked respondents what bold step St Martin's should take in the next five years. Many replied with a variation of "I am too old to be thinking of bold steps!" There were many comments about the effectiveness of the priests in the work they do, with some expressing the hope that they would take a bigger role in parish and county activities. Here as elsewhere in the survey, the differences among us are apparent: Some asked for more orthodox catechesis for all ages and Tridentine Masses, some want Masses to be more "kid-friendly", some want an extended outreach to the community. The common thread was a parish that is vibrant, caring, and a place to nurture our spirits.