

May 21, 2009

Message to Parishioners Regarding the Bayshore Deanery Study

Since January of this year the Diocese has been conducting a study of 7 parishes in the Bayshore Deanery, which extends along the Rt. 36 corridor from Keyport to the Highlands. Ours is the third Deanery in the Diocese to undergo a study and eventually all deaneries in the diocese will undergo this introspective evaluation. The study benchmarks against the 11 elements of a vibrant parish outlined by Bishop Smith in a 1999 presentation to all priests.

Presently eight parishioners and Fr. Cioffi comprise the St. Joseph Parish Core Team. Our task is to work with the Core Teams of the other 6 parishes to develop specific recommendations to improve the vibrancy and parish life of all parishes in the Bayshore Deanery. Additionally, we hope to identify those practices and activities in each parish that offer the best opportunities for collaboration and sharing between parishes.

The study began in January with the parish Core Teams meeting monthly, and will continue with monthly meetings until November, at which time the Core Teams will present their recommendations to Bishop Smith. So far we have been enlightened and pleased with the information about St. Joseph Parish when compared with the rest of the parishes in the Bayshore Deanery:

- Of the 7 parishes in the study, St. Joseph had the most total responses to the Diocesan survey taken at all the masses one weekend in November last year. These responses equate to a response rate of 34% when compared to the number of registered families in the parish.
- St Joseph is the most racially and ethnically diverse parish in the Bayshore Deanery, a metaphorical Joseph's Coat parish.
- The rate of parishioners attending mass on the average weekend is 83% when compared to the number of registered families.
- 48% of the registered families use the offering envelopes on a regular basis

These demographics rank St. Joseph in the top 15-20% compared against all the parishes in the Bayshore Deanery.

When looking at Ministry activity, all parishes have the typical and usual faith and worship ministries. All seem to be doing an adequate job and all parishes have similar concerns about increasing parishioner participation in ministry activity. However, St. Joseph parish has no equal in its ministries of outreach and service to the community.

- No parish in the Bayshore has a ministry comparable to our Haiti Committee.
- Only one other parish in the Bayshore has or is establishing a Nursing Ministry and it does not compare to the depth and breadth of services offered by St. Joseph's Health Ministry.

- The quality and diverse activity of our Music Ministry is renowned and well known beyond the Bayshore area.
- Our Religious Education Ministry is innovative and using cutting edge teaching methods to bring the word of God to both children and adults.
- Our St. Vincent de Paul Ministry is well known and respected throughout the Bayshore area for its charitable works and outreach to the community at large.

We can be and should be proud of who we are, and what we do here at St. Joseph Parish. Yet more could be done and what we do can be done better. It won't take much to improve. All of us working together as a family, a faith community, can accomplish great things.

From what we know, the diocesan decision to close St. Joseph, Holy Family and St Ann Schools are unrelated to the work and purpose of the Bayshore Deanery study. That unfortunate decision and the coincidental timing of this study should not discourage or dissuade us from fulfilling our parish mission and continuing the ministry work for which we are known and recognized throughout the Bayshore.

The study is moving into the next major phase, which is the development of specific recommendations to the Bishop. We will provide you with more updates of the study as developments occur.

St. Joseph Parish Core Team

Marianne Camaratta
Nick DiFranco
Pat Hebron
Janet Herrick
Barbara Lamberth
Karen Powell
John Rimer
Kevin Surgent