



## St. Matthew Catholic Church – Condensed Focus Group Report

### DISCOVER: WHAT IS GOING WELL AT ST. MATTHEW?

**Building and Facility:** St. Matthew has a beautiful campus with reasonably good facilities.

**Communication:** We communicate well through email, the parish bulletin, the electronic bulletin, and school newsletters. Live streaming of masses was important during the pandemic.

**Community (People, Volunteers, Descriptors):** In every single focus group session, the theme of a warm, welcoming, friendly community was expressed. People feel that St. Matthew is an extension of their family - a home - where they can come to connect with friends. St. Matthew is multi-generational, which reflects a collective history. It is diverse and inclusive, where you can “come as you are.” People are generous, servant leaders, who give tremendous amounts of time and talent to the parish. When there is a need, the parishioners of St. Matthew respond.

**Faith Formation and Catechesis:** St. Matthew has an excellent sacramental prep program: Baptism, First Eucharist, and Confirmation. This keeps families connected to our Catholic faith. For the adults, the men’s and women’s retreats are excellent opportunities to grow in faith and connect with others in the parish. The scripture study is a very strong ministry that continues to grow.

**Liturgy and Worship:** The variety of mass times provides multiple opportunities for worship (Mass), as well as different opportunities for prayer (communion services, Rosary, Stations of the Cross). Each mass has its own style and feels like its own small community within the larger parish community. People feel uplifted when they leave mass due to the homilies that instruct with practical ways to live the Gospel message and the wonderful music ministry. The music ministry has committed, talented people who enhance the worship experience. The Children’s Liturgy of the Word is excellent. The lectors, mass greeters, ushers, eucharistic ministers, and altar servers are important to the worship experience.

**Ministerial/Sacramental:** There are a variety of ministries to meet the needs of our parishioners. Advent and Lenten programs bring people to church and inspire their relationship with Christ. The Peace Meal funeral luncheons are a beautiful ministry that meets the needs of a grieving family.

**Relational/Social:** “We are a social parish.” There are many gatherings and social events that bring people together. Some are tied to prayer and worship, like Stations of the Cross with Fish Fries and coffee and donuts or First Saturday Happy Hour after mass. But others are intended simply as social gatherings. The chili supper is a favorite event, as is the Gala. The large CYO sports program is an important gathering function for school-aged children and their families.

**St. Matthew School:** St Matthew School is a wonderful ministry of the parish that keeps us vibrant and growing. The teachers, staff and administration care about the children and families and they are dedicated to a quality education for the children. There is a strong sense of friendship among the students and families. The Parent Faculty Association (PFA) is actively involved and creative.

**Service and Outreach:** St. Matthew is actively involved in community outreach through many great programs. These programs are visible to the parish community, so they are a constant sign of our call to serve the poor: St. Vincent de Paul Society, Birthline crib, Harvest for the Hungry Garden, Haiti Committee, Dr. Ellen’s mission in Africa and prayer shawl ministry. The parish garden is a unique ministry and is seen as an important one in the parish. The Men’s Club, while an opportunity for fellowship, is an active organization, giving generously of time, talent, and treasure.

**Staff:** We have an approachable pastor, who is warm and open. The parish staff is responsive with good processes in place. Lay leadership in the parish is strong with new energy and ideas.

### Dream: How can we become even better?

#### **Top 10 Dreams (in order of responses, highest to lowest):**

1. **Community:** “Fill the pews” by bringing more families back to church and new families into our parish. More families, more engagement, more connection with others in a meaningful way.
2. **Ministerial/Sacramental:** Focus on young adults. Begin a ministry program that allows them to connect to their faith and each other.
3. **Community:** Personal Invitation goes a long way! Use this as a strategy to engage parishioners across ministries, programs, service, and outreach.

4. **Building And Facility:** Develop a capital improvement plan: look across the entire campus and make a list of everything that needs to be repaired, cleaned, improved, painted, and/or updated. Prioritize the list. Raise funds as needed. Do every task properly. Hiring an interior designer to create a plan would be beneficial.
5. **Relational/Social:** Have more spiritual/social gatherings that allow people to be connected. Match people at similar life stages or interests through various events, like date night, movie night, trivia games, “Mass in the Grass”, etc.
6. **Community:** With the goal of increasing volunteerism, create in-depth ministry descriptions, which includes ministry activity, how to be involved, time commitment, role descriptions, and ministry outcomes. This will make it easier for people to step into the ministry. When someone can provide witness of the ministry impact, it could encourage involvement. Effectively communicate needs to the parish.
7. **Community:** Many events, projects, and ministries are run by one person or a small group of the same people year-after-year. Break them down into smaller parts so they feel more manageable. Create job descriptions and succession plans so that leadership rotates. Provide cross-training or introduce an apprenticeship approach where people learn and then step into leadership.
8. **Communication:** Create a consistent communication procedure for the pastoral council, commissions, and committees to share their work and progress with the parish. Increase their visibility so people know and recognize the leaders.
9. **Community:** Be a more welcoming parish; an open community that welcomes all people. Up our hospitality game. How do we include new families in our parish?
10. **Community:** The school is a ministry of the parish; strengthen the relationship between parish families and school families. Acknowledge public school choice as an equally valuable option for families and work to build bridges.

## Youth Perspective

### DISCOVER: WHAT IS GOING WELL AT ST. MATTHEW?

**Community (People, Volunteers, Descriptors):** St. Matthew is a strong community that is kind and welcoming. It feels like home (this was also a predominant theme in the adult focus groups.) The students enjoy the fun school events (pep rallies, dress down days) that bring them together as a community. It seems as if more people are attending mass and participating in events, which is good to see.

**Liturgy and Worship:** There are a variety of Mass times, and the music ministry enhances the Mass (it’s great!). Fr. Bill is awesome. He is a good homilist. The Children’s Liturgy of the Word is a good program that gives children the opportunity to hear the Word at their level and provides the youth a chance to receive service hours for helping.

**Relational/Social:** The Chili Supper is a great event that brings people together.

**Staff:** There is good food in the cafeteria and the cafeteria staff is very nice. The sports program (CYO) has many options for students. The coaches are excellent. The schoolteachers are understanding, supportive, and caring.

### DREAM: HOW CAN WE BECOME EVEN BETTER?

#### ***Top 5 Dreams (in order of responses, highest to lowest):***

1. **Community:** Following the sacrament of Confirmation, help connect the students back to the parish community by engaging them in meaningful ways. It would be wise to have that engagement as a natural flow from the sacrament.
2. **Community:** Engage youth with each other and our parish by beginning youth ministry sooner than high school. If introduced at middle school, students would build a community in which they would want to be involved and not leave.
3. **Relational/Social:** The youth expressed the dream to have different ways to gather with others like the chili supper, but not the chili supper. They also mentioned more school club opportunities could accomplish the same goal. It may be a good way to engage parish volunteers through club sponsorship.
4. **Faith Formation and Catechesis:** The youth would like to have retreat experiences focused on their needs from middle school through high school. They are prayerful bonding experiences that connect them to God, each other, and our parish.