Defining and marketing the parish

Doing the work of defining and marketing allows the parish to present an honest description of the parish.

1. Parish Self Definition

This is a statement of the parish's self-understanding. It can usually be expressed in a few phrases. They are elements that might cause a person to join your parish instead of another parish. For example: evangelical, large, Bible focused, Anglo Catholic, African-American heritage, small, progressive, engaged with the community.

Those elements will appear in all the parish's communication methods. It's not a vision or set of goals.

Considerations that are involved in a parish self-definition are:

1. Size – How large are we? How large do we want to be? How large are we able to be?
2. Ministry Area – How do we define the scope of the parish's ministry? Is it directed at individual and family pastoral care and/or spiritual development; does it explicitly include equipping people for Christian living in the workplace or in civic life? Is it more directed at nurturing and equipping people for Christian living in the daily life of the family, workplace and civic life or is it more directed toward the corporate life of the congregation whether in its common service or evangelism toward others or its functioning as an organization? How does the congregation define itself in terms of geography; is it oriented to this neighborhood or town or is it regional in its draw?
3. Episcopal Church/Anglican Tradition and Spirituality – To what extent has the parish incorporated the riches of its own larger tradition – a culture of: common life and prayer and individual spiritual growth; that assumes that people have a vocation, a ministry; that is interested in stability and change; that sees spirituality as related to our relationships with God, self, creation, and others/society; etc., etc.
4. In Relation to other parishes in the area – How is this parish seen when compared with other parishes? Why would someone come to this parish instead of another?
5. The Culture and Demographics of the parish's ministry Area – How might we address this particular community? How do we address the larger contextual issues this community faces?
6. Uses Parish Strengths/Gifts – What are our strengths as a parish church? What is our "best"? What have we been good at over time? Are there people with gifts that might allow us to develop a unique identity or ministry?
7. Fits Where the Parish Is in its Life Cycle – If the parish is stable and healthy, it is appropriate to have a more "settled" self-definition. If the parish is in decline, does it need to see itself more as a "missionary society." How we see ourselves needs to be reflected in how our resources are used, e.g., in a "missionary society" self-definition the priest needs to be giving less time to internal nurture and more to evangelization of new members, programs that reach out may need to be more evangelistic, etc.
8. Rooted in Parish History – What are the stories in the history that may speak to a current need? What are the values that have served in the past that speak to the present generation's longings and issues?
9. Potential Constituencies – Who might we establish a relationship with (e.g., volunteer fire company, performing arts community, businesspeople, medical community, etc.) that would contribute to a civic life and help the general population to notice us? This would be part of the "sanctifying presence" purposes of a parish church.

2. Influencing the Image People Have

Members, and those outside the parish, have an image of this parish. That image is the sum total of people's impressions and ideas about the parish. Parish leaders need to discuss what image they would like members and others to have. You are seeking something that people can understand and appreciate.

3. Positioning

This is what sets your parish apart from others. It needs to build on your strengths and be sustainable over the long term.

You're looking for a "position" that is not easily duplicated and will cause some people to walk or drive past other churches to get to you. How many people and which people will determine whether your position is as a leader, challenger (to the leader), follower (using what the leader does in your parish) or "nicher". Another aspect of positioning is re-positioning the competition. An example of this is when we use an advertisement that says, "you don't have to leave your mind at the door to worship here." That ad's inference is that other churches don't want adult, thinking people. This is an attempt to define your congregation and the other at the same time. However, the same advertisement may tell people that you are a self-righteous and judgmental community.

4. Communicating

We need ways of communicating who we are. Methods may include using existing members to reach friends and family, mass mailings, advertising, articles in newspapers, special events that draw people and also say who we are, etc.

1) Primary – in the control of the parish system All done in a manner that may, in time, create #2 below.

Website.   Signage around church.   The buildings and grounds.   Occasional mass mailings The intentional development of relationships with groups outside the parish.

Creating and nurturing a sanctifying relationship with people and communities external to the parish, e.g., performing arts, neighborhood, etc.

2) Primary – not in the parish's control

Buzz – Is word of mouth, spontaneous, self-generating. It rises from a passion about who you are. And is around the core of who you are – liturgy, formation, social exchange in the parish community. The Sunday morning experience has to be one that is a mix of acceptance and challenge, enchantment and familiar comfort. What you are seeking is a buzz that is naturally carried by members and visitors to others because there was something that strongly touched or grabbed them.

3) Secondary - usually

New articles   Paid advertising

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