

November 7, 2013

Saint Thomas the Apostle Parish

2013 Long-range Planning Survey: 245 Aggregated Responses

Question #1

YEARS AS A MEMBER OF SAINT THOMAS THE APOSTLE PARISH FAMILY: 227 responses

Years	Response Percent	Response Count
0 – 5 years	26.0%	59
6 – 10 years	20.3%	46
11 – 20 years	27.8%	63
21 – 30 years	13.2%	30
31+ years	12.8%	29

Question #2

AGE CATEGORY: 244 responses

Age	Response Percent	Response Count
14 – 18 years (high school)	0.0%	0
19 – 22 years	0.4%	1
23 – 30 years	7.8%	19
31 – 40 years	16.8%	41
41 – 50 years	32.4%	79
51 – 60 years	24.2%	59
61 – 70 years	13.5%	33
71 – 80 years	4.1%	10
81+ years	0.8%	2

Question #3

MARITAL STATUS:

Status	Yes	With children at home	With step-children at home	With adult children at home
Single, never married	30	7	1	1
Single, divorced	13	3	1	2
Single, widow(er)	4	0	0	1
Married	157	111	0	17
Second marriage	7	3	1	1

Question #4

WHICH WAYS OF RECEIVING PARISH INFORMATION ARE MOST USEFUL FOR YOU AND YOUR FAMILY? (RANK IN ORDER OF PREFERENCE) 241 responses

1. Announcements at Mass
2. Parish bulletin
3. Email
4. Mailings to the home
5. Website
6. Parish social media (Facebook)
7. Worship aid at Mass

Question #5

HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE ANY STUDENT DEBT THAT YOU CARRY OR ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR? 236 responses

Status	Response percent	Response count
No debt	70.8%	167
Moderate debt (manageable)	23.7%	56
Significant (overwhelming)	5.5%	13
Skipped question		9

Thirty additional comments made on question #5

- Six comments indicated confusion about the question
- Six respondents considered grade school, high school and college tuition for their children as part of their current or upcoming financial commitment

Question #6

DO/DID YOUR CHILDREN ATTEND SAINT THOMAS SCHOOL? 230 responses

	Response percent	Response count
Yes, presently	27.0%	62
Yes, in the past	26.5%	61
Not applicable	25.2%	58
No	21.3%	49 Public: 31 Charter: 1 Other Catholic: 9 Home school: 7 N/A: 1

Question #7

DO/DID YOUR CHILDREN ATTEND SAINT THOMAS MONDAY NIGHT RELIGIOUS EDUCATION PROGRAM (CCD)? 229 responses

	Response percent	Response count
Yes, presently	9.2%	21
Yes, in the past	10.5%	24
Not applicable	41.0%	94
No	39.3%	90

Question #8

DO YOU HAVE ANY ADDITIONAL COMMENTS YOU WOULD LIKE TO SHARE ABOUT OUR SCHOOL OR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE?

SCHOOL

- 36x School is excellent; worth the investment; stimulating, well run, impressed with the learning, leader in the Diocese
- 3x COGS should be taught as part of school curriculum
- 3x Great staff; very dedicated teachers; appreciate the open communication of teachers with parents; a real sense of partnering in educating our children
- 2x I would like our children to attend Saint Thomas when we have them
- 2x I appreciate my Saint Thomas education. I know and understand more about the Mass and sacraments than most of my friends, even if they went to another Catholic school
- 3x Concerned for the "everyone is special" atmosphere in the school at the expense of the authenticity of the person (see very long note on page 42 of survey). Concern for the lack of support for sports as building tools to character, faith, manhood, team unity
- 2x School feels overwhelmingly cluttered with things all over the walls: over stimulating for some children, detracting from a peaceful, calming atmosphere
- 2x Wish more parents could afford to send their children to our school; cost prohibitive
- Appreciate all the religious art; display children's art more prominently in the school
- The school needs to start providing a blended learning experience (60% in seat, 40% on line). More colleges are moving in this direction. Blended learning classes offer greater flexibility and some real learning benefits
- Need more male role models in leadership positions
- Parents can be a little cliquy, but overall we're very positive
- How much integration of other ethnicities is there? Do other ethnicities feel welcome?
- Share what children study each week so I can pray for them

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

- 5x Love Catechesis of the Good Shepherd
- 6x Religious Ed program is outstanding; programs seem plentiful, conducted by qualified persons, strongly supported by the parish, well structured, and good involvement with Father and Deacons
- 2x Favorite: Programs for young children such as nursery, Sunday school, children's liturgy, VBS
- Religious Ed needs a dramatic update
- 3x Have heard that Religious Ed is a bit stale; consider integrating technology or other modern approaches to the Monday evening program; needs more "meat"
- Our older children crave more meat in some of the CCD classes. They'd rather just stay home and do homework
- Difficult to know what programs are available and when to register. Never certain who is in charge of what program
- Would like to see more online, self-paced materials made available for home faith formation
- We need parental support to make it successful
- We need bible study group for teens

Question #9

BELOW IS A LISTING OF SERVICES/MINISTRIES AVAILABLE THROUGH SAINT THOMAS. CHECK THE SERVICES/MINISTRIES YOU PERSONALLY USE AND THOSE IN WHICH YOU VOLUNTEER.

Ministry/service	Receive service/ministry	Volunteer in service/ministry
Alcoholics Anonymous & Overeaters Anonymous meetings	1	0
Altar servers	29	4
Athletic Boosters	9	13
Baptism preparation	21	2
Adult faith formation	17	7
Children's Liturgy of the Word	28	6
Christian service outreach ministry (Direct Service, Food Pantry, Thanksgiving Dinner, Angel Tree)	7	67
Confirmation preparation	10	6
Daily Mass ministers	13	9
Education commission	5	7
Educational foundation	4	6
Eucharistic ministries	33	46
Family meals ministry	10	34
Fifty-plus club	2	4
Finance council	7	5
First Communion preparation	20	9
Funeral ministry (luncheons and greeters)	11	30
Home and school/school VIP program	19	30
Homebound and nursing home ministry	1	24
Hospital ministry	7	11
Hospitality (coffee and doughnuts)	50	29
Junior high (6-8 th grade) youth ministry	8	1
Knights of Columbus	1	4
Lectors	30	13
Liturgy commission and environment	24	8
Marriage Encounter	5	2
Marriage preparation/mentor couples	5	7
Mothers and more	0	1
Music ministry	42	31
Natural family planning	8	2
New member welcome receptions	11	9
Parish library and resource center	15	2
Pastoral council	9	8
Peer ministry groups (ARISE Men's Group, Koinonia, Regnum Christi, Secular Franciscans, etc.)	31	25
Prayer line	11	4
RCIA (Rite of Christian Initiation for adults and children)	2	11
Religious education (CCD, COGS)	14	15
Rosary group or Eucharistic adoration	7	10
School	41	45
Senior high (9-12 th grade) youth ministry	4	2
Social justice advocacy group	2	7
Spiritual counseling	6	1
Sunday school team	14	4
Sunday nursery	18	2
Ushers	25	14
Vacation bible school	32	29

Question #10

WHICH OF THE PARISH MINISTRIES LISTED WOULD YOU RANK AS THE MOST IMPORTANT IN MEETING THE ESSENTIAL NEEDS OF THE ENTIRE PARISH COMMUNITY?

Top 10 responses (received 30 or more votes)

1	School	86
2	Christian service outreach ministry	74
3	Religious education	65
4	Eucharistic ministries	64
5	Adult faith formation	61
6	Music ministry	58
6	RCIA	58
7	Pastoral council	52
8	Peer ministry groups	43
9	Finance council	37
10	Homebound and nursing home ministry	33

Question #11

IF PARISH RESOURCES INCREASED SIGNIFICANTLY, WHAT SERVICES/MINISTRIES WOULD YOU ADD OR EXPAND?

Top 10 responses (received 14 or more votes)

Christian service outreach	57
Adult faith formation	55
School	46
Spiritual counseling	31
Senior high youth ministry	23
Rosary group or Eucharistic adoration	21
Prayer line	20
Music ministry	16
Junior high youth ministry	15
Marriage preparation/mentor couples	14
Educational foundation	14

Question #12

WHERE DO YOU BELIEVE OUR ENERGY AS A PARISH IS CURRENTLY TAKING US (DIRECTIONAL TRENDS, BOTH POSITIVE AND/OR NEGATIVE)?

LEADERSHIP

- 5x Recent changes in staff bring fresh perspective to parish ministry
- 4x Fr. Jim is doing a great job leading the spiritual direction of the parish; model for Diocese
- Fr. Jim is making a huge effort to build community, and be transparent, although I'm not seeing the community respond in what I can see his hopes and dreams to be
- I'm very concerned with the lack of clarity and leadership at the Diocesan level regarding schools
- I don't sense a shared vision or direction; doing a lot of great things but not a common movement

LITURGY

- 6x Blessed with wonderful, challenging, encouraging, thought-provoking and life-changing sermons and liturgies with Fr. Jim which take us deeper into our faith
- 2x Mass needs to be attended with greater seriousness – how we act during the entire Mass: preparing before we come, attending, taking it all out into the world and sharing it with all we meet including our fellow parishioners
- Too much emphasis on certain themes for too long: homilies, teachings, worship aid materials get stale after a while. Too much repetition causes some to tune out
- More time devoted to sacrament of confession

PARISH ENRICHMENT

- 6x Coordination of positive, inclusive fellowship events, such as party in the park and donut ministry
- 2x Very family-oriented parish. We also need to pay attention to college students, adult single people and older adults. As a single adult, I often feel that I don't fit in. Not sure what can be done about this
- Foster support services for parents and families of all walks of life, such as respite care, prayer groups, formal programming or family activities
- Lacking in activities for those over 50 who are still in the workforce. Most activities for this age group are held during the day when we are working

OUTREACH

- 7x Emphasis on Christian outreach to the greater community, but we also need to pay attention to our own parishioners and assist in their needs, such as counseling services, food assistance, childcare assistance, job connections and networking, spiritual development or just a new friend. Good, but we need to avoid watering the faith to be more inclusive
- Would like more mission work and outreach

EVANGELIZATION

- 2x We need more interaction as a whole – evangelism!!!!
- We encourage and challenge members to live the gospel

FAITH FORMATION

- 4x We are strengthening faith through programs and services, bolstering education and assisting those in need
- 3x Freedom in truth and eternal life with God; grow in holiness, servitude and in intimate union with each other and with Christ. We are moving in a positive direction
- 3x Want to be more faith-based in all aspects of the parish; teach the catechism. Want more emphasis on teachings of the Church. Don't water down our beliefs
- Our direction: serious Catholic believers who seek to know Jesus better and reach out to others with His love
- We don't emphasize the sacramental life of the Church enough
- More spiritual outreach to young people to balance the worldly preoccupation of our culture

SOCIAL JUSTICE

- 4x Strong social conscience is a huge plus
- 3x Heavy emphasis on social justice, but lacking greatly in sanctity of life; service to the needy
- More aggressive religious advocacy/protection against an increasingly antireligious federal government; financial assistance for disadvantaged families
- St. Thomas's continued focus on anti-abortion efforts is antithetical to Pope Francis' leadership and focuses people on the negative and exclusionary – turning people away from the Church and Jesus' true message of love and dignity for all. I urge the parish to rethink its actions toward anti-abortion actions
- The green trend in the parish is becoming more of a mandate instead of a voluntary undertaking

EDUCATION

- 6x Encouraged by relationship with Aquinas College
- 4x We seem to be on a very positive track; our school is growing, etc.
- 5x Need more investment in youth ministry programs; foster greater participation
- Vacation bible school is a true blessing to the community and children's ministries. Needs to be fundamental part of the plan going forward
- So much emphasis on the parish school but I don't feel we need to make private, Catholic education an opportunity for everyone who feels they want it
- School is trying to be too many things to too many people...acknowledgement that at times a certain special need may not be able to be accommodated because it doesn't serve the needs of the critical mass
- Quality strengthening of school staff is positive
- Negative trend of declining enrollment in our school
- Negative trend: gossip, cliques among adults especially at school. Meanness using social media, texting, etc. among youth

HOSPITALITY

- 4x I felt very welcome as a new parishioner both by leadership and parishioners; welcoming environment and good hospitality
- 5x Don't see us welcoming, greeting, meeting new parishioners
- Not sure of our direction. I feel cut off from what the rest of the parish is doing. It's like I no longer matter to the parish since my children are grown
- Not a lot of single 20-somethings to meet
- Moving toward a more inclusive environment of established and younger families and attention toward Aquinas students
- Healthy atmosphere of teamwork

OTHER

- 22x Very positive direction
- 4x Concerned about being too active and busy, forgetting to love God and love our neighbors
- 3x Headed in too many directions at once. We have talented people who do not know how they can share their gifts
- Love the new Facebook page: want more content delivered that way and on line in general
- We need better business sense and communication across the major areas
- Our focus should be on Truth in faithfulness to the Magisterium, not political leanings (reference to liberal/conservative comment on 2008 Strategic Map)
- There is so much positive going on...we need to strive to avoid the pitfall of complacency
- We are getting too big and losing focus. Need to strengthen and support what's already in use
- 2x Sometimes feels like we are wealthy people taking care of our well-off children instead of taking care of people beyond our families and comfort zones
- Energy is over-focused on people with children
- There are some really restrictive, conservative voices that are often off-putting to new people or those with a more liberal or ecumenical approach to faith
- Parish seems to be floating toward relativism and tolerance rather than truth, in love. Acceptance of sin is not love
- Communication is SO important
- I have never been in a more dynamic parish. Extremely thankful!
- How can we unite with other parishes instead of just ourselves?

Question #13

WHAT ARE YOUR HOPES FOR SAINT THOMAS IN THE NEXT 5 YEARS?

LEADERSHIP

- Father Jim is great, but we need to be strong if he leaves
- Remain financially stable in school and parish

LITURGY

- 11x Continue deeper reverence; not “conservative” nor “liberal”
- 3x Newer music hymnals or more contemplative music

PARISH ENRICHMENT

- 35x Continue growing as we are, in both parish and school (in general)
- Continue growth of younger generations
- Continue to work on being hospitable and inclusive
- Continue to see Masses “filled to the rafters” and people being open to that

OUTREACH

- 35x Continue to outreach to our neighbors, community and Aquinas College
- Reach out to singles and empty nesters

FAITH FORMATION

- 6x More focus on adult and senior education classes
- Expand youth ministry and trips

SOCIAL JUSTICE

- 6x Engage in more SJ activities which are meaningful, especially with teens
- Make the SJ ministries more than just teaching – make them applicable

EDUCATION

- Continue the strength in the school
- Break down social barriers – remove the “prominence” of families to create community
- 6x More affordable school

Question #14

HOW CAN ST. THOMAS BETTER SUPPORT YOUR FAITH JOURNEY?

LEADERSHIP

- 8x More spiritual direction opportunities
- 4x More Reconciliation times/days
- Father should be more joyful in his homilies

LITURGY

- 3x More traditional music to go along with the liturgy
- More time for contemplative prayer and/or Eucharistic adoration
- More “modern day” relevance to biblical teachings

HOSPITALITY

- 7x Reach out, include me and more connections to parishioners

COMMUNICATION AND TECHNOLOGY

- Move ahead with technology to better communicate ideas; podcasts, videos

OUTREACH

- Mentoring programs with childcare opportunities

EVANGELIZATION

- Holding more “Welcome Home” sessions to lapsed or non-practicing Catholics

FAITH FORMATION

- 40x More faith formation opportunities; deeper, more book studies, outside regular work hours, outside Monday classes, guest speakers
- Ideas: Lighthouse Media CD rack; “Ask the Deacon”; Scripture Study Group; additional reading outside of the Bible
- More opportunities for senior adults

Question #15

OFFER YOUR PERCEPTIONS ON, AND/OR EXPERIENCES WITH, THE FOLLOWING PARISH ACTIVITIES.

Ministry/service	Needs improvement responses
Evangelization (sharing faith with others)	70
Adult faith formation	55
Hospitality (interaction among parishioners)	49
Collaborative atmosphere	35
Outreach	29
Social justice education and advocacy	28
Opportunities for prayer	26
Leadership coordination	17
Communication with parishioners	15
Financial planning and management	11
Monday night religious education	11
Education (school)	9
Facilities and maintenance	7

Question #16

CLOSE YOUR EYES AND VISUALIZE THE MOST BEAUTIFUL AND LIFE-GIVING WORSHIP EXPERIENCE (AT MASS) YOU CAN IMAGINE. IN 1 OR 2 SENTENCES, DESCRIBE HOW YOU FEEL. WHAT IS THE ATMOSPHERE AND ENVIRONMENT LIKE? WHAT MAKES IT LIFE-GIVING?

LEADERSHIP

- Father Jim’s prayer after communion is wonderful

LITURGY

- 70x Music mentioned: quiet, contemplative, soft, non-disruptive music which lends itself to the liturgy
- 8x Consecration is the best part of Mass; reverent and deep
- Easter Vigil or Christmas Masses are the most reverent and beautiful

PARISH ENVIRONMENT

- Beautiful art, lit candles, low but appropriate lighting, reverent and quiet atmosphere

EVANGELIZATION

- Feeling so connected to the Mass that we are ready to go out and spread the Good News

OUTREACH/HOSPITALITY

- 17x Warm, welcoming, inclusive, open, communal environment
- True “get to know you” and not just a fake handshake

Question #17

WE GATHER FOR ALL KINDS OF ACTIVITIES: TRAINING FOR MINISTRY, STUDY AND PRAYER GROUPS, SERVICE PROJECTS AND MEETINGS. CLOSE YOUR EYES AND IMAGINE THE MOST PLEASANT GATHERING EXPERIENCE POSSIBLE. DESCRIBE IN A SENTENCE OR TWO HOW YOU FEEL BEING THERE. WHAT ABOUT THE ATMOSPHERE AND ENVIRONMENT MAKE IT PLEASANT?

LEADERSHIP

- Committed and enthusiastic leaders of the meeting or ministry
- Clearly planned, strong guidelines, childcare provided for larger groups
- Casual feel, semi-laid back, open for discussion

PRAYER

- 26x All meetings begin and end in prayer and thanksgiving

PARISH ENVIRONMENT

- Intimate meeting space (like the Fireside room) with soft lighting and no metal chairs
- Ministry Center is nice to use for hospitality versus lower level (cold feeling)
- Casual, home feeling vs. “corporate”

WELCOMING/OUTREACH

- 67x Warm greeting, inclusion, safe, no judgment, friendly, recognized, positive, inviting
- People are welcomed by name and greeted warmly

HOSPITALITY

- Childcare provided

Questions #18, #19

87 names given

82 email addresses

Question #20

PLEASE MAKE ANY ADDITIONAL COMMENTS ABOUT OUR PARISH THAT YOU CARE TO SHARE.

LEADERSHIP

- 4x Fr. Jim is exceptional
- I think it may be time for a new pastor
- I wish Fr. Jim would not add his additional prayer after Eucharist. That is a time for personal prayer

LITURGY

- 2x Amazing music keeps the congregation engaged
- Please ask the Eucharistic ministers to stand in the same place at every Mass
- I have started attending other parishes because I do not find St. Thomas’s worship format positive. I remain a parishioner because of other parishioners, not the liturgy style
- I have heard of families leaving the church for St. Isidore because they miss the depth and faithfulness to tradition
- I would like to see a Sunday evening Mass added

PARISH ENRICHMENT

- Parishioners are focused on the experience of others
- I hope we continue to stay connected and attend to our many demands as we grow
- Current parish roadmap does not support or encourage religious life and vocations

OUTREACH

- I would like to see the parish reach out to those who have not been a historical part of the community
- Sometimes we are too inwardly focused. Yes, we have a great school. But what about GRPS students that are less fortunate?
- I pray we attract new families to take the place of those leaving

STEWARDSHIP

- Is there a way to help those parishioners not doing so well?
- I wish more parishioners would volunteer

FAITH FORMATION

- We will not be a truly blessed parish if parishioners and school children live as “cafeteria Catholics”
- I wish our parish would become more orthodox in its faith formation and prayer
- VBS takes too much energy for adults and does not enrich children’s faith enough

SOCIAL JUSTICE

- The call for social responsibility and social justice is special
- I have saved bulletins that explain social issues

EDUCATION

- I would like to see the school and parish interact more
- We are grateful to have our children attend St. Thomas and have such a positive school environment

HOSPITALITY

- 4x I truly feel welcomed here
- More assertive ushers so people do not have to sit on folding chairs when there is enough room

COMMUNICATION AND TECHNOLOGY

- 3x Communication of services needs to be improved, especially outreach and decision making
- 2x Not all parishioners have a computer. Please don’t leave them out
- 2x Speaker system needs improvement. I have no hearing issues and still find it difficult to hear

COMMUNITY

- 3x Wish there were more fellowship opportunities for everyone to come together
- I wish there were more opportunities to meet other members of the Parish
- Please consider bringing back community dinners

OTHER

- 23x We love being parishioners; a place of great faith and community, assisting my spiritual journey
- 2x Very few multicultural families. It seems like there are less in the school as well. Why is this?
- 6x Thank you for letting me give feedback
- I feel the parish is too critical of others – mostly other parishioners, not Fr. Jim
- Survey was too complicated
- I wish the question ranking the most important ministries was not a ranking – they are all important
- 2x Let me know where I can help
- I feel it is outdated and behind the times
- We left St. Isidore’s and while we have not formally joined, we plan to make St. Thomas our home
- We are not parishioners but non-parishioner school members
- Please do not share my email address with anyone