

St. Sebastian's Parish Assembly

The Holy Spirit was alive and well inside St. Sebastian's school auditorium on Saturday, September 30, 2006. This day marked the first ever Parish Assembly held in St. Sebastian's history. As we looked at the pink, green, yellow and blue draped round tables, carefully chosen to match the colors symbolic of the seven essential areas of parish life, we could not help but be moved as we witnessed our fellow parishioners, both young and old, come together to help shape the future of our parish. It was clear that the first fruits of our labor as the Parish Pastoral Council (PPC) had slowly blossomed.

Preparation for the Parish Assembly first began with personal invitations made through "one to one" interviews. This alone may have caught people's attention but there were still murmurs amongst the 6,000 parishioners; what exactly is the Parish Assembly? The task of conveying a proper message to the large multiethnic community was a challenge that we were ready to face.

Our next step was to create a series of one page bulletin inserts that would define the council, define the Parish Assembly, create an air of anticipation for the future of the parish, highlight the seven essential areas of parish life and remind parishioners that together as a community, we can make wonderful things happen. We chose not to print pictures of PPC members nor highlight our names in order to emphasize that the future of our parish does not rely solely on PPC members but rather the entire community. In order to create an air of anticipation, we included a countdown to the Parish Assembly and the events leading up to it such as the pulpit talks. Each insert displayed the PPC symbol of the seven essential areas of parish life and with each consecutive week, one of the seven essential areas was highlighted. With each corresponding insert, meaningful quotations from pulpit talks of PPC members were quoted along with biblical quotations referencing each area. We wanted parishioners to go home with a lasting impression; to understand that God was calling all of us to participate not just in the Parish Assembly but in parish life.

St. Sebastian has always been blessed with a vibrant parish life. PPC members reached out to ministry leaders first and foremost to educate them on our goals and to ask them to pass on this information to their members as well as invite them to attend the Parish Assembly. The PPC also hosted a table at our ministry fair held after each of the eight masses inviting parishioners to have one on one conversation and to sign up to attend the Parish Assembly.



(St. Sebastian's Parish Assembly cont.)

Once we did everything possible to invite parishioners to the Parish Assembly, our next challenge was to prepare for the assembly itself. With 4 major ethnic groups, 6,000 possible attendees and 16 PPC members, we knew that it would be difficult for the PPC members to facilitate the assembly on our own. We then recruited "facilitators" who were trained by PPC members to help facilitate discussion at each table and to collect responses from people at their table, rubber band them and give the response cards to the runners. Facilitators not only helped the assembly flow smoothly, but it also helped accommodate the different language groups present at the assembly. In addition to having bilingual facilitators, the PPC printed prayer cards and question sheets in different languages so that no one would feel lost during the Parish Assembly. Prior to the Parish Assembly, white folders with the PPC emblem on the cover were prepared for distribution at the Parish Assembly. Inside the folder were multilingual prayer cards, a multicolored index card packet in proper order and a Parish Assembly program with an outline, hymn lyrics and thank you note. The PowerPoint presentation displayed on the big movie-like screen was also instrumental in guiding the assembly. For the question and answer portion of the Parish Assembly, we matched the background color of the screen to the corresponding color of the response index card and also had each question displayed in English, Spanish and Korean. Despite any age or language barriers that may have been faced, in that one room on a Saturday afternoon, St. Sebastian's global parishioners had once again proven itself to be one big family.

A background theme for our Parish Assembly was Fall, in many ways, a season for new beginnings. As I looked quietly at our parish history exhibitions displayed on the big screen and along the sidewalls of the auditorium, I knew that this assembly was just the beginning of our journey. One day, the pictures from this assembly will be part of history. Fellowship is truly a beautiful feeling and we pray that the universal Catholic Church will share this experience as other parishes prepare for their assembly. God has done great things for His people and we cannot wait to see how the Holy Spirit will guide us in our new beginnings for the future.

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