

RENEWAL 2013
FR. JOE'S LISTENING SESSIONS

We continue our results by considering the theme of liturgy. Here are three summary statements of sentiments shared in regards to liturgy. The numbers in parentheses reflect the number of times a similar response was given.

- There was a strong message conveyed that music is an important element in fostering vibrancy and participation at Mass (50): some parishioners expressing dissatisfaction with the current predominant style of music for worship (18), and others conveying hope for more uplifting liturgical music in the future (20).
- Mass is important in parish life (41), therefore value is placed on additional elements that enhance participation such as worshippers' level of engagement (10), the convenience of Mass times (6), and homilies that are challenging and instructive for daily living (14).
- Access to piety through the beauty of the church space (12), as well as comfort affected by temperature and ability to hear what is being sung and said (10), are added factors that can either accommodate or detract from participation in liturgy.

A large number of participants attending my Listening Sessions had something on their minds and hearts to share about their experiences at Mass at our parish. One table of participants summed up the interest in liturgy well by saying, "We are a Eucharistic people and Mass plays a key role in parish life!" As you can see, these comments ranged from concern about liturgical music, to an interest in homilies, to convenience of Mass times, and even attention to the effect of the church building itself on worship.

So many of the comments captured under this theme of *Liturgy* point to the importance of participation by everyone at Mass. I am happy to see this level of attention and concern for participation in the Eucharistic Liturgy because, as Catholics, it is foundational in our lives of worship. Personally, liturgy is one of the most important aspects of my priestly ministry! Some of the most central teachings of the Second Vatican Council come from a document on liturgy, *The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*. Within it, we read that "this full and active participation by all the people is the aim to be considered before all else, for it is the primary and indispensable source from which the faithful are to derive the true Christian spirit" (SC 14). In a similar way, our American Bishops in their document, *Sing to the Lord*, state: "Music does what words alone cannot do. It is capable of expressing a dimension of meaning and feeling that words alone cannot convey" (SL 124). Therefore, "the musical formation of the assembly must be a continuing concern in order to foster full, conscious, and active participation" (SL 26). It is clear to me that our Church's teaching and honest feedback at my Listening Sessions – reminds us of the immeasurable value of the Mass. It truly is "the summit toward which the activity of the church is directed; at the same time it is the font form which all her power flows" (SC 10). As we move forward – continuing to "hear" what else was said at these sessions, and as we make plans for our future when **I invite you to meet with me again on March 13th at 7pm to begin Renewal 2013** – let us remember the central place the Eucharistic Liturgy holds in our Catholic lives. **United with Christ's presence among us, our future is in our hands – together – as a parish community!**