

## FR. JOE'S LISTENING SESSIONS *RENEWAL 2013*

Earlier this year, one hundred and thirty parishioners took time to attend one of the four listening sessions that I had as your new Pastor. I am very appreciative of the honesty and openness shared at these sessions! As I mentioned at my Installation Mass, six themes emerged from these sessions and in the weeks to come I will report back on these themes: Community, Liturgy, Spiritual Life/Faith Formation, Participation, Youth, and Leadership.

Today, I begin sharing reflections on the first of the six themes – community. Below, you will find the top three summary statements of sentiments shared in regards to this theme. The numbers in parenthesis reflect the number of times a similar response was given.

- Life at St. Joseph Parish is described by many in terms that liken it to that of a home or close-knit family. (47)
- “Warm,” “friendly,” and “welcoming” depict the atmosphere often encountered at our parish (33); though a need to soothe past hurts was described by some (9) and an eagerness to create additional community-building and fellowship activities was stated by others (11).
- There is a concern regarding the loss of “people in the pews” and an ardent desire to welcome more people of all ages into the St. Joseph community, particularly youth and young adults. (47)

In his Encyclical, *Deus Caritas Est (DCS)*, our Holy Father Pope Benedict XVI wrote that “the Church is God’s family in the world.” This accurately captures the sentiment of many who attended my Listening Sessions. It is not really surprising that this theme of “community” was one of the most often reflected upon at the sessions. It is fundamental to who we are, whose we are, and how we live out our Catholic lives.

Made in the image of God, we belong to God, and encounter Him each week – together as family – when we celebrate the Eucharistic Liturgy. There “we become ‘one body,’ completely joined in a single existence” (DCS 14). Because this is our very nature, it is also not surprising to note from the Listening Sessions that there is a desire to deepen the spirit of communion here even further – and a longing for people to return who have left our community. As one table of participants aptly stated, “There has been a loss of people in the pews – we all suffer this loss.”

I hope you will ponder the significance of community with me, as well as the remaining five themes, and consider what these might mean for us as a parish family at St. Joseph. In facilitate this, **I invite you to a parish-wide meeting on Tuesday, March 13, 2012 at 7pm in the Holy Family Center.** I will begin to outline the process that we will undertake as we embark upon what I am calling Renewal 2013. You may ask why Renewal 2013? The answer is simple. I want us to have concrete suggestions implemented and at work by September 2012. I want 2013 to be a defining year for our community! As it was important for you to join me for the Listening Sessions, it is just as important for you to be present and willing to participate in this next phase. **Our future is in our hands – together – as a parish community!**