

ST MATTHEW

CATHOLIC CHURCH AND NEWMAN CENTER



PARISH SURVEY AND TOWN HALL FEEDBACK AND RESULTS



Thank you to everyone who completed our parish survey and/or attended the Town Hall Listening Session in January. Your love for our shared Catholic Faith and your commitment to our parish family is clear and inspiring. The purpose of this newsletter is to convey a summary of the results of the survey to you, our parishioners. The survey and town hall produced 41 pages of feedback. While it was impossible to include every comment, it is my hope that we have created an accurate snapshot of what you shared. Now that we have been given feedback and suggestions from parishioners, the first and most important part of this follow-up phase is to pray to the Lord Jesus, both for His mercy and for the inspiration of His Holy Spirit. Without prayer, our earthly efforts will not bear fruit. I ask that you pray for our parish family and leaders, your own family, and those to whom we minister.

Following a time of discernment and prayer before the Blessed Sacrament—the Source and Summit of our life—the next steps of the process will include forming a team of clergy, parish staff, lay leaders, and parishioners who work together to prioritize needs, assess resources to meet needs, and develop a plan for the pastoral care of our people and the ongoing work of Evangelization. To this end, I am working closely with our parish staff, members of our Parish and Finance Councils, and our Buildings and Grounds Committee.

I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to the members of our Parish Council. They have been instrumental in facilitating this initiative. I am particularly thankful to our Parish Council chairperson, Becca Creasy, and Parish Council member Kim Macy, and our Parish Office Administrator, Melinda Cannady. They are serving as members of a Survey/Town Hall subcommittee. With their help and guidance, we were able to develop the survey, format the town hall, and summarize the results in a way that is easily communicated and utilized to develop concrete ideas and plans for St. Matthew parish. Their input, wisdom, and diligent work in this regard has been an invaluable blessing to us all. This is not to mention their mercy and patience in dealing with their Pastor!

As your Pastor, I want to assure you that we are taking your prayerful input seriously! I am grateful for your faith, love, and your desire to be involved in building up God's Kingdom here in Bulloch County. Parish life is a solemn and sacred enterprise—one that requires constant conversion and renewal! I ask for your patience as we continue forward, boldly and without fear. Above all, however, I ask for your prayers—prayers for me as your Pastor and the network of staff and volunteers that serve our parish family. Please stay tuned as we develop and propose concrete steps moving forward. May the Lord Jesus reign in your hearts and bless our Parish! Our Lady, Mother of Evangelization, pray for us! St. Matthew, pray for us! St. John Henry Newman, pray for us!

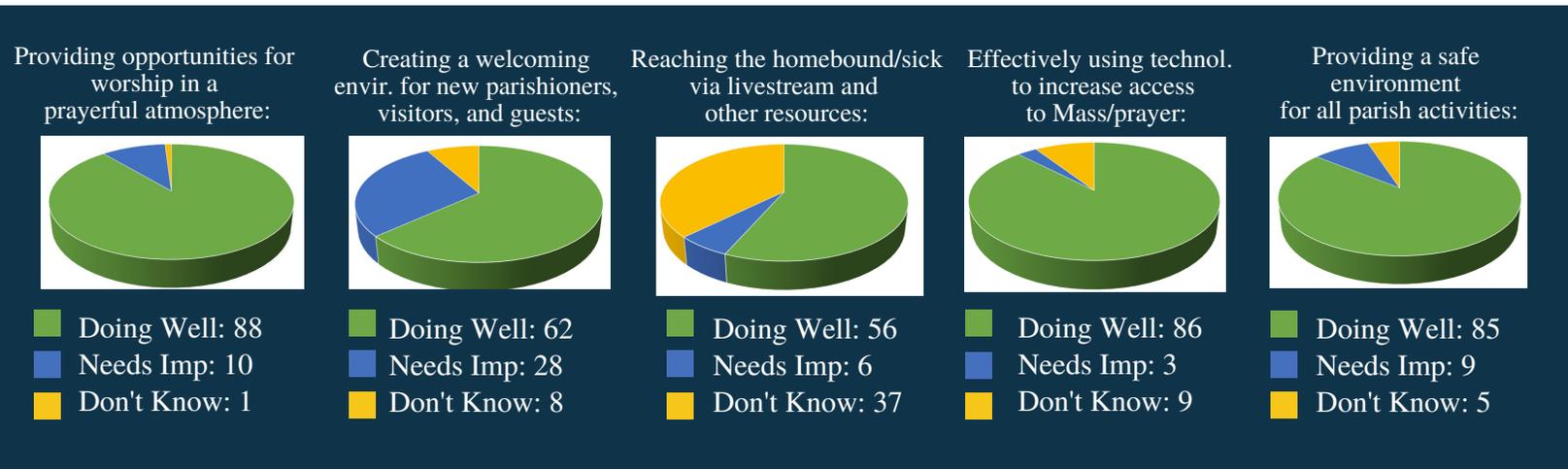
Fr. Gal R. Johnson

SUMMARY OF COMMENTS AND LISTENING SESSION

PRAYER AND WORSHIP

Doing Well: Fr. John's homilies; many opportunities to worship and pray; resumption of choir; offering supplemental books/devotional materials for different liturgical seasons; and livestreaming of Mass.

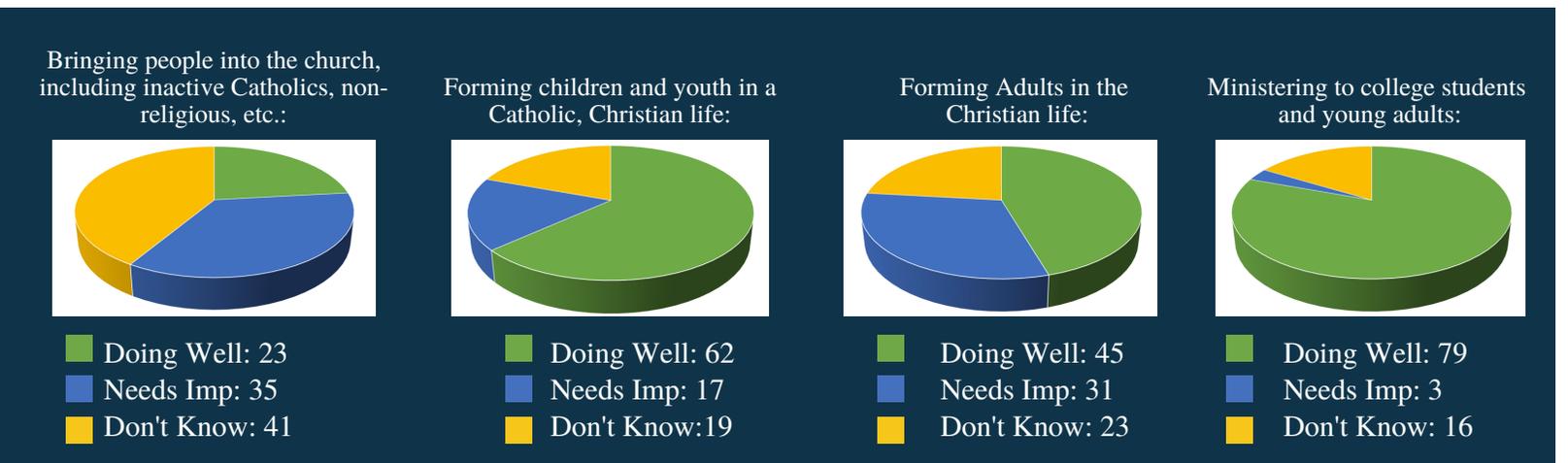
Needs Improvement: Create and maintain a quiet atmosphere for prayer before and after Mass; rearrange choir area and location; COVID directives/guidelines (some desired stricter protocols, some found ours too strict); add greeters to welcome parishioners and visitors as they arrive; return of the welcoming team; add a worship aid for latin Mass parts; resume nursery; and encourage use of the training room.



FAITH FORMATION

Doing Well: Content of curriculum is orthodox; college ministry is vibrant; RCIA and FORMED content is wonderful; Parish Nite talks are interesting and informative; time for Religious Ed. at 9:15 am is convenient; and the VBS program is appreciated.

Needs Improvement: Develop an outreach to lapsed Catholics; provide additional opportunities for children to practice their faith by participating at Mass and through acts of charity; develop a young adult ministry; provide opportunities for adult faith formation through small groups and bible studies; grow the youth program by offering a more dynamic experience; evangelization within Bulloch county; and learning more about Catholic beliefs (apologetics) to better evangelize in Bulloch County.

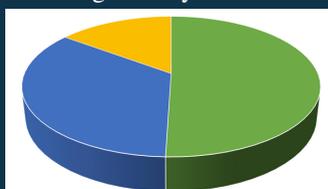


COMMUNITY AND FELLOWSHIP

Doing Well: Wednesday night fellowship; Hospitality Sunday; the All Saints Festival; Rosary celebration (October); and opportunities for college students to fellowship.

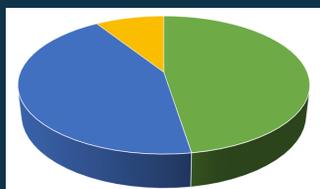
Needs Improvement: Provide additional opportunities for families with young children/youth to get to know one another; fellowship and fun for younger kids (K-7); fellowship with deanery parishes; offer more opportunities to build a sense of friendship, family, and community amongst parishioners; develop a senior adults ministry; add events that facilitate learning about different cultural heritages; communicate existing opportunities to ALL parishioners; broader support of Hispanic ministry; and be more inclusive of one-member families (single, widowed, divorced).

Providing opportunities for families to build community through family activities:



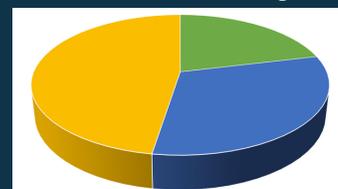
■ Doing Well: 51
■ Needs Imp: 35
■ Don't Know: 15

Providing fellowship opportunities for all ages:



■ Doing Well: 47
■ Needs Imp: 43
■ Don't Know: 9

Providing Opportunities for intercultural fellowship:



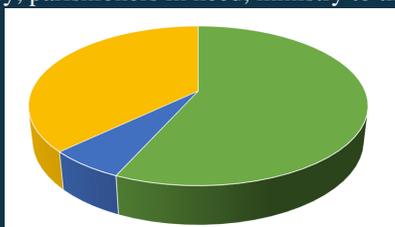
■ Doing Well: 21
■ Needs Imp: 31
■ Don't Know: 47

OUTREACH

Doing Well: Outreach is a strength of the parish; Area Christians Together in Service (ACTS), Consolation Ministry, Parish Council of Catholic Women (PCCW) Food Drives, Sewing Group making masks and dresses for Haiti, and Blood Drives are going well; offering the Dave Ramsey program is helpful; and our financial/volunteer support for ecumenical outreach programs exceeds that of larger churches in Bulloch County.

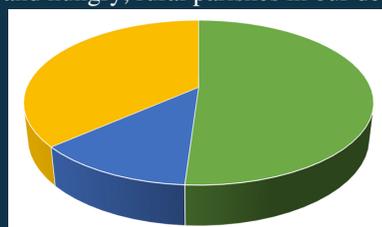
Needs Improvement: Resume Eucharistic Ministry and begin parishioner visitation to the Homebound; develop prison ministry; more communication of the needs of deanery parishes; identify specific parishioner needs and plan to address them; outreach to inactive parishioners; offer more specifics on what individual ministries do and how parishioners can get involved; more emphasis on pro-life ministries; and do a better job of identifying and ministering to homebound parishioners.

Practicing the corporal and spiritual works of mercy within our parish (Homebound Ministry, Consolation Ministry, parishioners in need, ministry to the sick):



■ Doing Well: 55
■ Needs Imp: 6
■ Don't Know: 36

Practicing the corporal and spiritual works of mercy within our community (Pro-life needs, ecumenical outreach to the poor and hungry, rural parishes in our deanery):



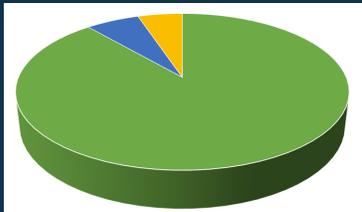
■ Doing Well: 49
■ Needs Imp: 12
■ Don't Know: 35

PARISH ADMINISTRATION

Doing Well: Staff is helpful, responsive, and available; everyday communication is well done; annual finance report published; the weekly bulletin email is helpful; and social media reminders are nice.

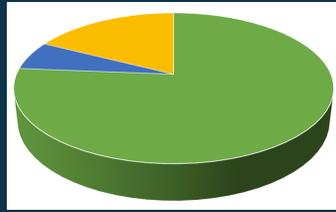
Needs Improvement: Publish financial information in more detail and greater frequency; develop a team and plan to address oversight and improvement of grounds and facilities (particularly the social hall); periodic deep cleaning of bathrooms and kitchen; implement a facility usage policy; add baptisms, marriages, etc. to bulletin; provide more information on processes for feedback and budgeting; as well as greater clarity on FOCUS funding sources and about the Annual Catholic Appeal.

Parish Administration is responsive to parishioners' needs:



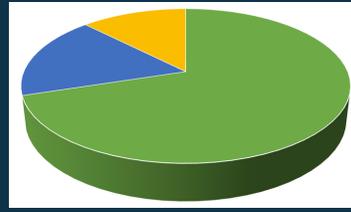
■ Doing Well: 86
■ Needs Imp: 6
■ Don't Know: 5

Managing finances and assets in a transparent and productive way:



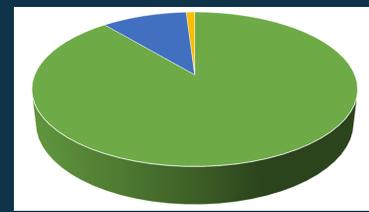
■ Doing Well: 74
■ Needs Imp: 6
■ Don't Know: 17

Maintaining our facilities and preparing for future capital improvement and maintenance needs:



■ Doing Well: 68
■ Needs Imp: 17
■ Don't Know: 12

Communicating in effective ways that best reach our parishioners and interested people via bulletin, email, website, and social media:



■ Doing Well: 88
■ Needs Imp: 10
■ Don't Know: 1

DISCIPLESHIP

How do I view the role of clergy, staff, and parishioners, including my own role, in the work of discipleship within my parish, family, and community?

Many of you expressed your gratitude for good examples of discipleship among clergy and fellow parishioners. You also expressed a strong desire for opportunities to grow individually and for our parish family to work together to move towards more active discipleship. Some of the suggestions you offered included having the parish offer more opportunities for small group discussions, promoting ways to get involved in ministries and supporting families in their efforts to teach the faith to children and to be witnesses of our faith in our community. Some of you expressed a lack of knowledge about what it means to be a disciple while others would like more opportunities to learn about Catholic teaching and beliefs and how to defend the faith (apologetics).

"Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age."

-Matthew 28:19-20

Where do you see the parish in 3-5 Years?

Your ideas for the near future of our parish envision a church community that is welcoming, growing in attendance, providing faith formation opportunities for different age groups including children, young adults, families, single adults, and seniors as well as inter-generational opportunities for spiritual growth, and lapsed Catholics actively invited back to church. You would like to see a more vibrant music ministry, large youth ministry, an active Knights of Columbus Council, and continued success with college ministry. A desire was expressed for more teaching on what it means to be a Catholic and the importance of the Eucharist to allow us to be more active in expressing our faith within our community. Suggestions were made that parishioners talents be utilized to provide additional opportunities for continuing education. You would also like to see renovations to areas of our facility and grounds to meet ministerial needs: more space for bible studies, engaging spaces for children, redesign of the interior of the church to create a stronger Catholic identity and a more spiritual atmosphere that elevates worship, exterior renovations that make our church more easily recognizable as a Catholic, Christian church, and facilities that are clean, accessible by all, and safe. Parishioners hope for growing outreach programs that identify and meet ongoing or new challenges within the parish and community.



Where do I see St. Matthew Parish and Newman Center for the next generation (10-15+ years)

- A Eucharist-centered parish that continues to grow and is equipping her members and families to adapt and actively practice the Catholic faith to meet the challenges of an increasingly secular society.
- A facility that has been renovated to accommodate the needs of a vibrant parish community that has faith formation opportunities for parishioners of all ages and circumstances, including senior citizens and a large, active youth group.
- Clergy, staff, and parishioners well-equipped with the spiritual and material resources necessary to meet the needs of a diverse parish.
- The potential for a Catholic School examined and perhaps established.
- A parish that is welcoming, fully integrated and not divided by cultures, languages, or generations.
- A parish growing in efforts to evangelize within our community and outreach efforts that reach beyond our borders.
- A dynamic Catholic community that boldly proclaims the Gospel of Jesus Christ, leading souls to Heaven.

The spread of the Gospel is not guaranteed either by the number of persons, or by the prestige of the institution, or by the quantity of available resources. What counts is to be permeated by the love of Christ, to let oneself be led by the Holy Spirit and to graft one's own life onto the tree of life, which is the Lord's Cross.

*Evangelization is the mission of the Church—
not just of a few, but my, your, our mission.*

– Pope Francis