

# ST. JAMES CATHEDRAL

February, 2011

Dear Friends,

Back in September, one-thousand of our parish households were invited to participate in a survey on our Cathedral parish. We are grateful for the large number who responded. It has taken some time and effort to sift through a mountain of data but we are now in a position to share the results with you.

If I had to sum up the survey in a sentence, it would be this: you like your parish, you support it, and you feel that you are a part of its life and ministry. (Heavens, some of you even seem to like your pastor!) And even though we are a very large parish and pray in a very large building, by far the majority of you feel that St. James is a community, your community; you know that your presence and participation are vital to the life of this community, and you are happy to be part of it.

In my view, that is no small achievement, nor is it typical of cathedral parishes across our country.

There are several reasons for this – and they emerge quite clearly in the survey responses. You love the way the Church's liturgy is celebrated in the Cathedral, you value very highly the service, outreach, and social justice orientation of the parish, and you appreciate the many opportunities provided for growing in the understanding of your faith.

Of course, there are challenges, too, and some indications of dissatisfaction. Because we are such a large parish, sometimes it can feel too big, even impersonal. And many of you, who come from long distances to pray here on Sundays, find it difficult to get back during the week and take part in all the other activities that make this place what it is.

Our Pastoral Vision Council, as well as our parish staff, have reviewed all the data and the feedback which you provided, and the results will shape a new vision statement for the parish. We think this will be a good starting place for some honest self-evaluation as well as an opportunity to grow.

Thank you for taking part in the survey. I hope you will take some time to review the results. And I hope that doing so will make you want to become even more involved in the life of our wonderful parish!



Father Michael G. Ryan

## SURVEY RESULTS

The main portion of the survey invited respondents to respond to 20 statements, taken from our 2005 Vision Statement, “Christ Our Cornerstone.” Respondents agreed or disagreed with the statement, or remained neutral. On the whole, the response to the “20 Questions” portion of the survey was overwhelmingly positive. The parishioners who responded were almost universal (more than 90% agreeing) in affirming the strength of our RCIA program, our parish liturgies, art and music, our adult faith formation programs, and our outreach to the poor and needy. The lowest responses were in the area of the Cathedral's programs for teenagers, with 23% not offering a response, and only 47% offering a positive response. Some 83% felt that their “presence and participation really matter,” while 86% agreed that “strangers and visitors always feel welcome at St. James Cathedral.” On the whole, the survey revealed that the parish is living out its vision in key areas, but has plenty of room to grow. *Those interested in the complete numeric data can download a detailed spreadsheet at [www.stjames-cathedral.org](http://www.stjames-cathedral.org).*

## WHAT IS OUR GREATEST STRENGTH AS A PARISH?

We received hundreds of written responses in addition to the numeric data. The strengths of the parish were identified as follows:

- **SPIRIT OF SERVICE AND OUTREACH TO THE POOR.** “The commitment to service is accomplished with gentleness and humility.” “The diverse social outreach programs make me proud to be a parishioner of St. James.”
- **DIVERSITY AND INCLUSIVITY OF THE COMMUNITY.** “St. James Cathedral has loving arms that reach out, embrace our community—it says, whoever you are, however you are, you matter, and you are loved!” “Everyone is welcome and all beliefs and ways of life are respected.” “Its open acceptance of all people—this is what drew me there and keeps me there.” “My initial impression of St. James is that here was a cross-section of the WORLD, welcomed, nurtured, and fed.” “Our greatest strength is

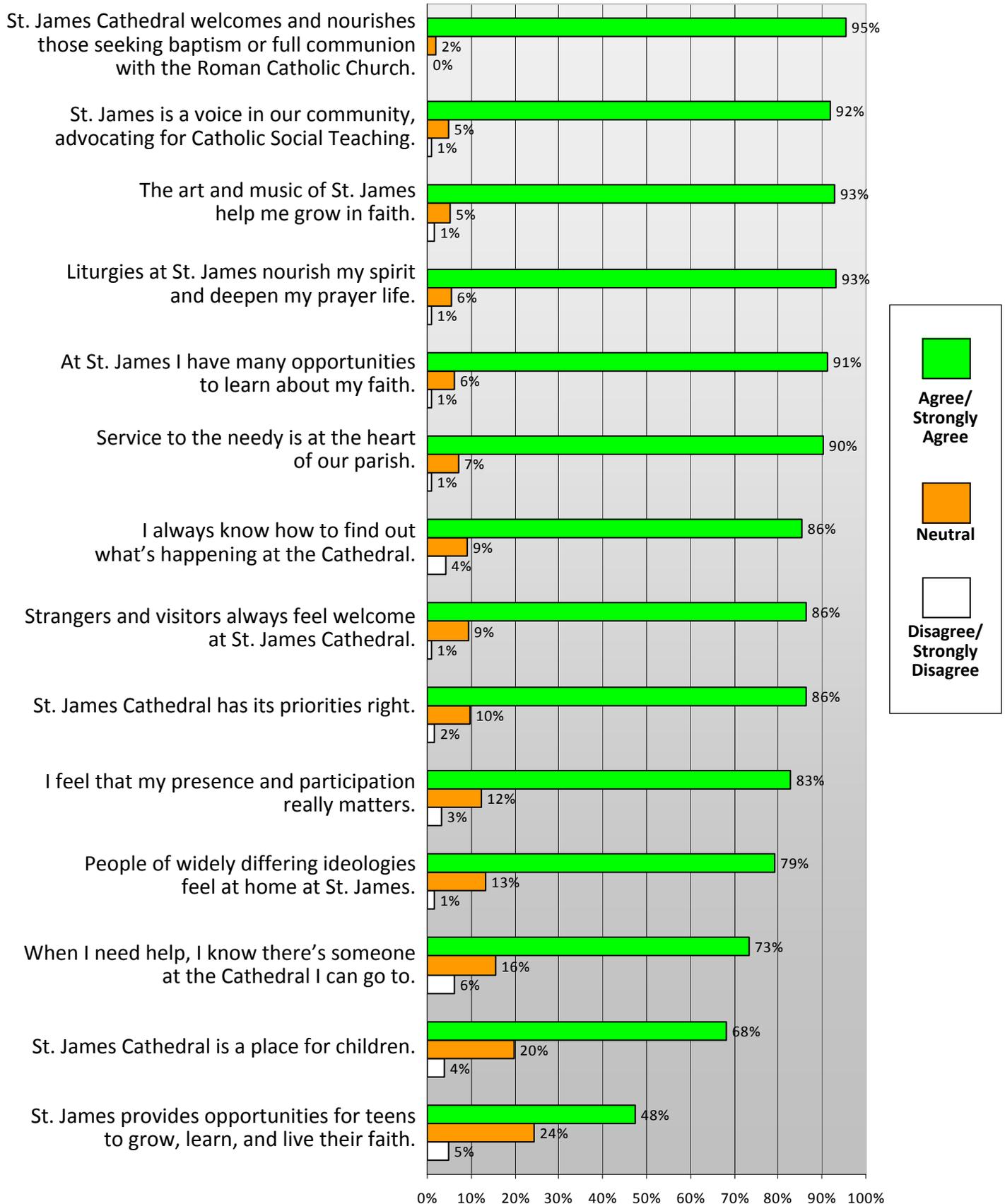
*“our greatest strength is that everyone who walks through the doors comes away blessed”*

our community, in all its rich diversity, gathered around the altar Sunday after Sunday.”

- **FATHER RYAN.** Many respondents identified Father Ryan’s pastoral leadership as one of the greatest strengths of the parish. “Having Father Ryan as our leader we are in great shape.” Many commented on his “leadership, care, concern, and personal touch.” “Perhaps we are too reliant on Father Ryan, and when he retires, the parish will lack the ability to work on effectively without a strong personality at its head.”
- **CELEBRATING THE MASS.** The beauty of the liturgies was highlighted again and again. “Powerful and prayerful.” “I have yet to leave a liturgy or celebration without feeling a deep sense of uplift, of joy.” “The best Catholic liturgies in the city.” “There is a balance, liturgy, action, invitation for deep prayer and reflection.” “A wonderful blend of grandeur and simplicity.” “The service has so much great music, majesty, and respect for the liturgy that you can’t help being awed by it.” “The quality of the liturgy, the dignity and smoothness with which the Mass is conducted—it inspires me, comforts me, helps me pray, reflect, and forgive. I can feel the faith and love around me in the pews and from the altar.”
- **MUSIC PROGRAM.** “The music program is ‘second to none’ and contributes so much to making St. James a blessed place to belong.” “I have never failed to leave Church—from the quietest Sunday night Mass to the joyousness of Easter—feeling better than when I arrived. The music plays a huge part in that.”

Other strengths identified included the beauty of the Cathedral itself and the many opportunities to learn about our faith. This comment sums up what many expressed: “If I step back a bit and look at our Cathedral with a broad view, I think our greatest strength is that everyone who walks through the doors comes away blessed. There is an ineffable ‘something’ that reaches people, no matter what their age, church, or situation.”

Back in September 2010, the Pastoral Vision Council conducted a survey of 1,000 parish households, inviting them to respond to 20 statements about the Cathedral and also to offer their comments on our strengths and weaknesses as a parish. We received nearly 600 responses. This report offers some highlights of the survey results; the complete results are available at [www.stjames-cathedral.org](http://www.stjames-cathedral.org). *Note that numbers do not add up to 100% due to questions left blank.*



## WHAT IS OUR GREATEST WEAKNESS AS A PARISH?

These are some common threads among those identifying our greatest weakness as a parish (beginning with the most commonly identified issues):

- **SIZE OF THE PARISH.** “Due to its size and the very nature of being a Cathedral, it’s easy to feel anonymous.” “The large size of the parish can make it difficult to get to know fellow parishioners.” “Parishioners often feel very distant from one another.” “Being such a large parish we can sometimes get lost in the crowd.” “Sometimes feeling too large and too far away. I don’t know if that is your weakness or mine.” “It’s difficult to find a place to fit in and be included.”
- **PROGRAMS FOR CHILDREN AND TEENS.** “I think the parish needs to develop more youth/teen programs. If the future of the Church depends on the next generation, we have some work to do!” “Both my teens would participate in a teen group if it was available.”
- **THE SOUND SYSTEM.** “The acoustics in the Cathedral are much better than before but leave much to be desired.” “Just admit we have a problem and don’t suggest earphones for everyone. We’re all in this together.” “We know the sound system has improved but we pray that more improvements will take place.”
- **GREATER PARTICIPATION.** “It would be nice if all registered parishioners would contribute financially. Even a little.” “There are too few doing the work for many—from tithing to volunteer service.” “Igniting the fire of service to a greater number of parishioners. I think we do remarkably well given the fact that many parishioners live a distance from the Cathedral, but it does seem that the same people do multiple service projects.” “We need a broader group base to feel the call to give of both time and treasure.”
- **TOO LIBERAL/NOT LIBERAL ENOUGH.** “While our views are very progressive and welcoming, we remain bound by higher church authorities.” “The weakness of St. James is the weakness of our Catholic Church.” “Inherent in the fabric of St. James is a very liberal bent. It is rare to hear a conservative perspective.” “I would like to know more

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people who share my conservative view without feeling alienated.”

Some other areas identified included a wish for more vocal advocacy of Pro-Life issues; the challenge of parking; the shortage of priests; the difficulty in volunteering for some ministries (not getting a call back), the need for social opportunities, especially for single people; and the need for small group prayer opportunities.

## GENERAL COMMENTS

The general comments offered were very wide-ranging. A very common theme was the pride parishioners take in belonging to St. James. The following are a few comments that capture the spirit of many others:

- “Being a member of St. James has changed my life. I finally feel as if I really have some roots, and that I belong at St. James. I feel that I have a family, even though I am single. I am sincerely grateful for all that St. James provides me—unmeasurable support and acceptance and inclusion.”
- “I feel blessed to have found my way to St. James. Here, I have found healing, forgiveness, and peace. For this, I will forever be grateful.”
- “I love my parish!”
- “St. James is home to me.”
- “There will always be flaws because humanity as a whole is flawed. God’s grace I believe more than fills the gaps between.”
- “I thank God almost daily for this community that has shown our faith in action.”
- “I do have a concern for the future, and this involves transition: whenever Father Ryan retires, this transition will require some extremely careful preparation, planning.”
- “Any Sunday that I’m away, I regret.”
- “St. James has helped me try to live the message of Christ.”