

Subcommittee Report

Recommendations for SMOS Strategic Plan

Faith and Spiritual Development
9/23/05

Participants

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Data Utilized

- History of Small Church Communities at SMOS
- Summary of Adult Ed Curriculum at SMOS
- SMOS Survey Results
- Archdiocesan Web Site

Scope

Identify which adults are connected and why
Identify ways to enhance voluntary participation and why
Identify kinds/types of programs desired
Identify Groups who do this well and what we can learn from them
Identify what has been done in recent past and what is planned for this year
Identify the cost benefit of developing an adult spirituality program
Identify what past offerings have stirred parishioners
Identify how the Internet could be used for spiritual development
Identify how Small Church Communities boost energy for us all
Examine possibility of presenting programs by age or other grouping

Strengths

- Interested, engaged, parishioners
- Active Small Church Committees – expected to become even more visible this fall
- A vibrant diocese, with access to numerous events, speakers and educational opportunities.

Weaknesses

- Total dependence on volunteers with sporadic interest/availability – for coordination, programming, marketing, hosting, childcare, etc.
- Tendency to direct most efforts to people with school-age children
- Limited parking at the Church and limited transportation particularly for seniors who would like to participate in these events

- Limited childcare
- Failure to communicate/collaborate with neighboring parishes
- Limited space in the bulletin
- Limited budget

Opportunities

- New website & increased use of parish email lists
- Diversity within our new community, both racial and ecumenical
- “New blood” in recent months has created a broader circle of volunteers
- SLU students from out-of-town who adopt SMOS as a parish home
- Interest in Bible Study
- Interest in parish “library” of religious literature

Threats

- Frequent loss of young parishioners as they graduate high school or college and move and/or drift away from Church connection.

Findings

After analyzing the comments on the SMOS survey and interviewing the facilitator of current and past Adult Ed efforts at SMOS, we found definite enthusiasm for additional programs for adults. Specific programs needs are detailed below, but key issues to keep in mind are:

- A) that programs be appealing to and accessible by a broad number of demographics (there is concern that parents of grade-school age children currently receive a disproportionate amount of emphasis when it comes to programs), and
- B) that activities relating to spiritual development be visible enough to attract the notice of high-school/college – age parishioners and indicate that there is spiritual “life after Catholic school”.

Which adults are connected and why? It is impossible to say “which” adults are connected, but it is obvious that they are connected. The number of responses to the survey and to the Strategic Planning Effort our Parish Forums are just a few indicators of the across-the-board interest in SMOS. Reasons for their individual connections vary from school to small church groups to liturgy to service ministry to many other reasons.

Ways to Enhance Volunteer participation. Enthusiasm for volunteering definitely exists here and our subcommittee decided that the best way to leverage that enthusiasm is by channeling it into specific, finite tasks. For example it may be very difficult to recruit volunteers to take on a large, open-ended task such as organizing a prayer group for seniors, but it would be much easier to say – “we will host a Bible Study for seniors on Saturday afternoons from 3-5. We are currently looking for 6-7 drivers who would be willing to give

rides (sometimes or every week) to elderly parishioners to and from the rectory at this time.” Since most adult faith formation efforts up to now have been run by several different volunteers at different times, we have yet to be organized enough to make this specific type of request. Note: For a real life example, we can certainly look to our own SVDP society which is the most successful model in the city and which has created a specific channel in which a large number of volunteers can each do a few home visits per week.

Kinds and types of programs desired Certainly Bible study is the most-requested adult faith program, but there have also been requests for more frequent guest speakers and presenters on topics from Catholic dogma to political action. Many of the surveyed parishioners also expressed an interest in seeing Small Church communities reinvigorated. This is planned for this fall. When planning any activity, however, organizers should be very sensitive toward making it inclusive. Many survey respondents cited the SMOS tendency to cater toward families with school-age children. Our demographics do now include significant numbers of seniors and childless adults who specifically asked for activities to be presented with them in mind. We also need to publicize these events well in the bulletin and on the website as these parishioners will not hear about events “through the schoolyard grapevine” or other school-related channel. The College Church does an excellent job of hosting and publicizing a wide variety of events in its multi-page bulletin, which gives plenty of space for details about a good number of programs and events each week.

Identify what has been offered and will soon be offered We have a strong foundation for building a meaningful adult faith development program at SMOS. Small church communities have a long history here and have helped strengthen a culture of spiritual development, as have our semi-annual Adult Ed seminars, the RCIA program, many events from the Social Justice Ministry and even the SVDP outreach. These programs are all ongoing and the Small Church Communities which did not do a call last fall are preparing for a call this year. Additionally, this fall seven parishioners have signed up for the *Just Faith* study program, a 30-week study of Catholic Social Teaching.

Cost/Benefit of Adult Faith Development To date we have managed all “adult-ed type” activities with volunteer support and in some cases, minimal support from the parish to cover materials. Our challenge now is to institutionalize the effort by creating a permanent committee and/or adding a staff person to supervise faith formation programs for adults. A permanent resource (full- or part-time) would bring continuity to activities for adults and reduce our current dependence on volunteers. Volunteers will always be an essential part of program implementation, but someone to coordinate volunteer participation is definitely needed.

The cost of such a resource has not been determined, but we are convinced that the cost of doing without it is much higher as current volunteers burn out, our

existing programs fade away and our potential for meaningful faith development is not realized.

Recommendation

As noted above, the environment for adult faith formation at SMOS is encouraging. We are blessed with many interested and talented people who can and do, volunteer for events, attend programs and participate in small groups and other activities. At the moment though, we seem to be operating at capacity. Our semi-annual Adult Ed seminars (currently run single-handedly by Agnes McKiernan) cannot be expanded or run any more frequently without additional volunteer support. Small church group coordination – also handled by Agnes – is a growing responsibility and warrants additional resources. Bible study, a fundamental faith formation activity that has been requested for a few years and was mentioned several times in the survey has also not gotten off the ground, largely for lack of a volunteer sponsor.

Other ongoing programs that might be considered in the scope of Adult Faith Formation - Eucharistic Adoration, RCIA and Social Justice activities - are all dependent on volunteers for coordination, implementation or both. There is no way to ensure the continuation of these activities, much less to add new ones in response to parishioner requests, without a committee or individual to serve as program director and volunteer coordinator. Designating an individual to coordinate, institutionalize and publicize adult faith formation activities would address most of our weaknesses and opportunities listed above. Specific responsibilities of this position should include:

- Develop a budget for Adult Faith Enrichment
- Monitor interest and planning parish events (ie. Adult Ed, guest speakers and study or prayer groups)
- Coordinate small church groups
- Organize a Bible Study program(s)
- Recruit volunteers to assist with producing and hosting programs and events
- Coordinate attendance/transportation to nearby events
- Survey parishioners to keep a current list of volunteer drivers, catechists and potential presenters
- Publicize events via bulletin, website, email list and other channels
- Help youth to continue involvement in parish post high-school
- Plan an annual parish retreat
- Keep the website/bulletin updated with news of appropriate programs and events at SMOS and at neighboring parishes
- Maintain a kiosk/library of religious literature and information that is accessible during the coffee hour after Mass

Impact on Other Committees

A full-time resource dedicated to Adult Faith Formation would definitely be an asset to other committees, particularly Expressing Faith, which encompasses outreach, service and social justice. Service is a large component of Faith Formation and there will no doubt be overlapping interests and resources between the “Adult Ed” and “Service” segments of SMOS. Other committees, including Social Activities and Celebrating God’s Presence would also benefit from a coordinating entity. A full-time resource could certainly increase communication between like-minded groups and help achieve time and cost efficiencies by reducing overlap.