**Conducting a Community Needs Assessment**

**Benefits of Conducting a Community Needs Assessment:**

In order to determine whether the ministries of a parish are satisfying a need in the community, it is important to conduct a Community Needs Assessment. This should be done every five years in order to assess the value of a parish’s current ministries and to, perhaps, uncover unmet needs in the community where a new ministry might add value.

Demographics play a significant part in determining the needs of a community. This is an uncontrollable variable but it needs to be considered in order to meet the needs of the community. As many demographic shifts happen slowly, they may be difficult to detect on an annual basis. Some changes happen quickly (e.g., a plant opening or closure) and cause large shifts in a short period of time so they are easy to detect. Others happen more slowly, e.g., perhaps over a generation or even a century. Most parishes look much different than they did 100 years ago. Even over the course of a generation or two, a parish that was once primarily young families may become one of mainly retirees. These two groups have very different needs. Frequent Community Needs Assessments will help keep the parish’s ministries relevant through the shifts as they happen.

Other possible benefits to come out of an assessment include:

- Yields an accurate picture of the community’s needs and problems.
- Allows matching of community needs with parish ministries.
- Determines effectiveness of current ministries.
- Identifies possible new ministries.
- Reaches new people.
- Allows for better utilization of the parish’s buildings and grounds.
- Identifies appropriate staffing and skills.

**Process for Conducting a Community Needs Assessment:**

1. The Pastoral Council should be involved in both the recommendation to undertake an assessment, as well as the recommendation to initiate or discontinue any ministries. Therefore, an effort should be made to conduct an assessment within a single council year, in order to have the same members in place for the beginning and the end of the process.

2. The pastor/pastoral administrator determines who will lead and coordinate the process. Ideally, an ad hoc committee should be established and include a representative from parish staff, a Pastoral Council member, and a select group of 4-6 invited parishioners. It is helpful that the group include people of diverse backgrounds.
3. The committee should decide how the information will be used. Will the data help:
   • Determine community needs to develop or tailor ministries that make an impact?
   • Garner feedback on the current ministries and how well they are meeting community needs?
   • Both?
Knowing how the information will be used will help determine what information will be collected. Ultimately, the community needs gathered will be aligned to ministries the parish is willing and able to undertake.

4. The first data collected should be a Ministry Area Profile for the parish or study area. This can be requested from the Office of Pastoral Resources and Planning. It is a 17 page demographic report on the area that includes population, households, race/ethnicity, gender, age, income, marital and family structure, education, housing, poverty, transportation, values and primary concerns.

5. Use the Ministry Area Profile to identify additional information/data needed to be gathered from the community. The best place to start to gather data is from community leaders. Use the “Sample Community Leader Questionnaire” in Appendix I, and revise according to the parish’s needs, to reach out to community leaders.

6. Devise a schedule/timeline so everyone knows what is going to happen and when, along with who is responsible.

7. Determine whom to invite to complete the questionnaire, e.g., public officials, educators, other clergy, law enforcement and business professionals. In addition to the needs, the community leaders will probably know what agencies already address those needs so there will be no duplication of effort. Try to meet them in person but realize that there are many demands on their time so if they can only do phone interview or written survey, this is also valuable. Be accommodating.

8. When all the information is gathered, the committee should organize and summarize it into a useful report. See Appendix II for a “Sample Community Needs Report.” The report should be shared with the parish staff, Pastoral Council, and parishioners at large. The report should also be sent, with a thank you note, to the community leaders that participated. The report should be made available on the parish’s website and the entire community informed on how to find it.

9. The committee should work with the Pastoral Council to use the report to develop a plan forward to match unaddressed community needs with the gifts, talents and interests of the parishioners.

Should you have questions or need assistance at any point during the assessment, please contact the diocesan Office of Pastoral Resources and Planning.
Appendix I

Sample Community Needs Assessment Survey

(Starts on next page)
Sample Community Needs Assessment Survey
Community Leaders

On behalf of __________________ Parish, thank you for taking the time to participate in this survey. Feel free to skip areas that are outside of your area of knowledge.

We ask your name and position for internal purposes only. Your individual responses will not be made public without your written consent.

Name: __________________________________________________________

Title: __________________________________________________________

Date: ___________________________________________________________________

Employment is a problem in our area because:
  (Check the top 2-3 reasons that apply)
  ___ People lack skills to obtain a job
  ___ Unable to find jobs in the area
  ___ People lack education to obtain a job
  ___ Lack of good paying jobs with benefits
  ___ Lack of child care during the hours needed
  ___ Lack of computer skills
  ___ Cost of child care
  ___ Few jobs for people without skills
  ___ Current jobs are low paying
  ___ Cost of transportation
  ___ Long commute to jobs
  ___ Employers leaving the area
  ___ Lack of transportation
  ___ Not a problem in our area
  ___ Other: __________________________________________________________________

List any local efforts you are aware of that address the area of Employment:


In your opinion, what ministries can a church offer to assist the community in the area of Employment?


Education is a problem in our area because:
(Check the top 2-3 reasons that apply)

___ No high school diploma
___ Lack of access to programs for obtaining a GED
___ Cost of child care
___ Lack of child care
___ Lack of computer skills
___ Lack of programs for gaining computer skills
___ Cost of transportation
___ Lack of transportation
___ Lack of tuition money
___ Lack of access to programs teaching vocational skills
___ Lack of college education
___ Threats of violence in Schools
___ Lack of dropout prevention programs
___ Lack of preschool programs
___ Lack of family support
___ Other:  ____________________________________________________________________________________

List any local efforts you are aware of that address the area of Education:


In your opinion, what ministries can a church offer to assist the community in the area of Education?


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Housing is a problem in our area because:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Check the top 2-3 reasons that apply)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>___ Cost of rent/house payment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>___ Cost of utility/rent deposit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>___ Housing size doesn't meet family needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>___ Lack of temporary emergency housing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>___ Affordable housing not available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>___ Need weatherization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>___ Need repairs (roof, foundation, plumbing, etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>___ Where housing is available, neighborhood conditions are not acceptable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>___ Too many abandoned houses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>___ Lack of shelters for emergency situations (domestic violence)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>___ Other: ____________________________________________________________________</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

List any local efforts you are aware of that address the area of Housing:

In your opinion, what ministries can a church offer to assist the community in the area of Housing?
Sample Community Needs Assessment Survey
Community Leaders

**Nutrition**

(Check the top 2-3 reasons that apply)

- Lack of transportation to available grocers
- Not enough income to purchase food
- Food stamps run out before end of month
- Don’t use resources available
- Not eligible for food stamps
- Lack of education in nutrition
- Alternative food resources not available (pantries)
- Other: ____________________________________________________________________________________

List any local efforts you are aware of that address the area of Nutrition:

________________________________________________________________________________________

In your opinion, what ministries can a church offer to assist the community in the area of Nutrition?

________________________________________________________________________________________

**Money Management**

Use of Income is a problem in our area because:

(Check the top 2-3 reasons that apply)

- Lack of knowledge of budgeting
- Difficulty with money management
- Lack of knowledge of the income tax system
- Lack of knowledge about savings, investment and retirement
- Other: ____________________________________________________________________________________

List any local efforts you are aware of that address the area of Money Management:

________________________________________________________________________________________

In your opinion, what ministries can a church offer to assist the community in the area of Money Management?

________________________________________________________________________________________
Transportation is a problem in our area because:
(Check the top 2-3 reasons that apply)

___ Lack of knowledge on how to buy a car
___ Cost of buying/down payment for a car
___ Lack of credit to buy a car
___ Cost of maintaining a car
___ Cost of car repairs
___ Cost of gasoline
___ Lack of assistance in learning to drive or getting a license
___ Limited public transportation
___ Lack of other transportation service options
___ Other: ____________________________________________________________________________________

List any local efforts you are aware of that address the area of Transportation:


In your opinion, what ministries can a church offer to assist the community in the area of Transportation?


Health is a problem in our area because:
   (Check the top 2-3 reasons that apply)
   ___ Doctors will not accept Medicaid
   ___ No clinics or doctor offices in same town
   ___ Waiting list for dental services
   ___ Hospital/emergency room not available in same town
   ___ Lack of insurance
   ___ Lack of income for medical emergencies
   ___ Lack of resources for alcohol or drug abuse treatment
   ___ Lack of resources for mental health treatment
   ___ Other: ____________________________________________________________________________________

List any local efforts you are aware of that address the area of Health:

In your opinion, what ministries can a church offer to assist the community in the area of Health?

Prioritization

All of the above issue areas are important but prioritization will give us an idea of what should be addressed first.
   Please rank the issue areas 1 through 7 with a 1 being the area that you think should be addressed first.
   ___ Employment
   ___ Education
   ___ Housing
   ___ Nutrition
   ___ Money Management
   ___ Transportation
   ___ Health
Appendix II

Sample Community Needs Report

Why the Community Needs Assessment was Done:

On ________ the Pastoral Council determined it would be beneficial to survey leaders in the community in order to determine what ministries the parish might be able to provide to better meet the needs of the people in the community where we worship. The Pastor agreed and the survey commenced.

How the Community Needs Assessment was Done:

Between the Pastor and the Pastoral Council, the following group of people were identified to perform the survey:

_________________________________  __________________________________
_________________________________  __________________________________
_________________________________  __________________________________

Starting with a survey created by the diocesan Office of Resources and Planning, we tailored it to meet the needs of our parish. We focused on the areas of Employment, Education, Housing, Nutrition, Money Management, Transportation, and Health.

We identified 12 community leaders and received responses from:

_________________________________  __________________________________
_________________________________  __________________________________
_________________________________  __________________________________
_________________________________  __________________________________
Summarized Results of the Survey:

Employment:
Top 3 Problem Areas are:
- Problem Area 1
- Problem Area 2
- Problem Area 3
Comments:
- Comment 1
- Comment 2
- Comment 3
- Comment 4

Education:
Top 3 Problem Areas are:
- Problem Area 1
- Problem Area 2
- Problem Area 3
Comments:
- Comment 1
- Comment 2
- Comment 3
- Comment 4

Housing:
Top 3 Problem Areas are:
- Problem Area 1
- Problem Area 2
- Problem Area 3
Comments:
- Comment 1
- Comment 2
- Comment 3
- Comment 4

Nutrition:
Top 3 Problem Areas are:
- Problem Area 1
- Problem Area 2
- Problem Area 3
Comments:
- Comment 1
- Comment 2
- Comment 3
- Comment 4
Money Management:
Top 2 Problem Areas are:
• Problem Area 1
• Problem Area 2
Comments:
• Comment 1
• Comment 2
• Comment 3

Transportation:
Top 2 Problem Areas are:
• Problem Area 1
• Problem Area 2
Comments:
• Comment 1
• Comment 2

Health:
Top 3 Problem Areas are:
• Problem Area 1
• Problem Area 2
• Problem Area 3
Comments:
• Comment 1
• Comment 2
• Comment 3
• Comment 4

Prioritization of Areas:
1. Employment
2. Housing
3. Health
4. Education
5. Money Management
6. Nutrition
7. Transportation