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 particpate 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

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

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?

Sample Community Needs Assessment Survey
Community Leaders

Housing

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

____ Cost of rent/house payment
____ Cost of utility/rent deposit
____ Housing size doesn't meet family needs
____ Lack of temporary emergency housing
____ Affordable housing not available
____ Need weatherization
____ Need repairs (roof, foundation, plumbing, etc.)
____ Where housing is available, neighborhood conditions are not acceptable
____ Too many abandoned houses
____ Lack of shelters for emergency situations (domestic violence)
____ Other: _____

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?

| |
| |

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

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?

Sample Community Needs Assessment Survey
Community Leaders

Health

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 priotization 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

<u>Sample Community Needs Report</u>

<u>Why the Community Needs Assessment was Done:</u>

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.

<u>How the Community Needs Assessment was Done:</u>

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:

_____   _____

_____   _____

_____   _____

_____   _____

<u>Summarized Results of the Survey:</u>

<u>Employment:</u>
    Top 3 Problem Areas are:
- Problem Area 1
- Problem Area 2
- Problem Area 3

    Comments:
- Comment 1
- Comment 2
- Comment 3
- Comment 4

<u>Education:</u>
    Top 3 Problem Areas are:
- Problem Area 1
- Problem Area 2
- Problem Area 3

    Comments:
- Comment 1
- Comment 2
- Comment 3
- Comment 4

<u>Housing:</u>
    Top 3 Problem Areas are:
- Problem Area 1
- Problem Area 2
- Problem Area 3

    Comments:
- Comment 1
- Comment 2
- Comment 3
- Comment 4

<u>Nutrition:</u>
    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