

ST. MARY STAR OF THE SEA – Comments ran the gamut from the liturgy, social interactions, support and acceptance of fellow parishioners, event planning, and general behavior. The overall goal is to create a parish that is more energetic and welcoming and that continues to grow and thrive.

St. Mary Star of the Sea

Demographics – age and geography – are a hurdle. Our parish roster has declined by 100+ households over the past couple of years. Many who are still active are elderly. Our parish is very spread out, and people must travel sometimes for an hour+ to get to Mass.

Our hope is our Hispanic community as the families are involved and most of the children in Religious Ed are from that community.

We are a highly Caucasian and elderly community, so it is difficult to bring in other perspectives. Would love to see more people of color active in our parish.

We must create a parish that families and children want to participate in.

Many respondents said they would like to see the parish rank higher on every individual's priority list and become more of a central aspect of life rather than just an obligation.

There is a lot of red tape just to come together as a community and do things, especially involving the youth. We are worried about insurance and liability to the point of it preventing gatherings from happening either spontaneously or with planning.

It sucks the life out of things. We can't do the simplest activity without having to jump through a bunch of hoops.

Perhaps we need to just form a youth/teen group separate from St. Mary's – hopefully we could put announcements in the bulletin – that would bring kids together and give them something to do as youth and as Catholics.

Better communication is needed.

Teens, for example, talk on WhatsApp. They don't read the bulletin or use phone calls.

One problem is that people do not speak up until they are fed up and leaving. We need to encourage more honest, open communication – listening and action. There has got to be a better and more engaging process than a suggestion box.

Sometimes we don't want to speak out because we think we might be judged for what we say. We need to stop thinking about what people think about us and instead have the courage to speak out and give our ideas or opinions.

I'm always thinking along the lines of how to make the liturgy more beautiful.

Overwhelmingly, participants said we need to encourage each other to share the joys of responsibility for our liturgy and other activities.

Sometimes I feel like a dentist pulling teeth without an anesthetic when asking people to participate or help.

Many people are willing to work behind the scenes, but they don't want to be leaders.

People are tired. Many of the same people are always called on. They want to come to Mass but don't want to participate like they used to.

Availability is an issue. And follow-through – both from leaders and parishioners.

Perhaps one ministry a week could be featured in the parish bulletin with an appeal for membership. Our ministries have lost members, sometimes to the point that those remaining are being over-worked and in danger of burnout.

Sometimes we don't speak out because we may not have the support from others. Starting a group or organizing a celebration takes people and support, and I think that if it were me, I wouldn't end up doing it because I don't think I would have the support and help from others.

We need to recognize people more. Do more announcing of birthdays, anniversaries, the groups who help – such as ushers or lectors.

Personally approaching people, even at the last minute, for help at Mass can be more inviting. It can be less intimidating because then people are not overwhelmed by having to put another responsibility on an already-full calendar of commitments.

Perhaps we could put a sign-up sheet in the narthex near the entrance to the church where people could volunteer to be an usher or bring up the gifts for each particular Mass. Maybe the sacristan could oversee that.

There should be no visiting or talking in church, people are praying. Use the narthex to chat.

Perhaps we could close the doors after most have left the church after Mass so those who want to talk can do it in the vestibule without disturbing those who want to pray and sit with God.

Several respondents said they would like to see the 8:15 Spanish Mass become bilingual friendly so those who prefer an early service but don't speak Spanish could attend and feel welcome. And others mentioned the same for those who speak Spanish and would find another Mass time more convenient.

Let's have missals for everyone with Spanish on one side and English on the other.

I would like our parish to learn and pray from memory the Our Father in Latin, not necessarily at all Masses but at some.

Respondents indicated a desire for more adult religious ed/Theology Kettle classes after the 11 am Sunday Mass and/or in the evenings.

I have two hours of driving to come to Port Townsend and would welcome further activities.

I wish we could go together, financially, with other parishes to bring outstanding speakers and preachers to our parishes to illuminate Christ's word from other considerations than our own (ex: Fr. Wade Menezes from EWTN or the theologian Fr. Brian Mullady, O.P.).

We should have more adult catechesis, offer programs like Life in the Spirit Seminars and Catholics Come Home, and participate in devotionals such as Mary's Mantle and Divine Mercy.

Many religious communities have vocational brochures and other materials describing their life as religious. March used to be recognized as vocation month; however, the time is not as important as having materials for young people, and even older single people, to read and consider.

When can we use the library again? Let people know there is information in the narthex that could be helpful in their faith.

We need to reach out to women who are seeking abortions. Can we set up a helpline? Give them someone to talk to before they make the wrong decision. Can the parish provide outreach materials to doctors and service providers?

One thing I'm proud of at St. Mary's is that our priests have confessions at different times to accommodate the needs of parishioners.

People today do not take the Host with appropriate reverence. We need to watch to ensure it is not being put in pockets and purses, taken away by hand.

Music

I like when the musicians lead the music from the front. It is easier to hear and participate in singing.

The piano in the sanctuary is not only a distraction but completely out of place. The sanctuary is dedicated to the altar where the sacrifice of Our Lord takes place and the Tabernacle which houses Our Lord and King!

Choir and community singing are important, and there is room, and a need, for both. I wish we could once more form a choir.

A more youth-oriented band to lead music, especially for Youth Masses.

One of the most profound experiences I had was when the Knights at our parish supported a fundraiser for a little girl who needed a heart transplant. We held a pancake breakfast, and people came from around the parish and community. People of all political views enthusiastically cooked, served, and ate alongside each other – so happy to be helping this precious child.

We need physical security during Mass and Adoration. Just because we are a small town doesn't mean we are immune to people coming in without good intentions.

One woman told the story of how she was alone at night during Adoration when a "rough-looking" man stormed in and bolted up to the altar near the Host and shouted. She didn't know what to do. She couldn't leave our Lord alone but didn't feel safe and was concerned for the body of Christ. After a few minutes, he left.

We have to balance being secure and safe with keeping the church open and available when people need to pray or just sit with the Lord.

Many noted appreciation that Father's Sunday sermon is typed and made available. Several said they find it difficult to understand Father's sermon message when he ad-libs.

This is such a wonderful opportunity to speak and listen. We need to do more of this. We need to get to know each other more. I look around and don't see but four people at Mass who I recognize.

Unwelcoming – A number of participants categorized St. Mary's as unfriendly.

As a recent newcomer to this parish, I have found it hard to break into the community. It feels like tight-knit groups of people and very little openness and warmth toward new members. The office staff is wonderful, welcoming, and accommodating but I have not found that anywhere else. I am presently volunteering in several areas, so I don't fault my own lack of participation.

I wish there were more people like me in this parish. I am a low-status male, and I don't feel welcome. That would be at any church, not just Catholic. People make snap judgments in society and the Church.

I am disgusted at the not-too-distant treatment of our interim pastor, who was maligned and abandoned by our very own.

People can be self-righteous and self-satisfied if me and mine are saved from hell. What about the sex worker, the abuse victim, those that are consumed with substances and trapped? This is how the church in Port Townsend feels to me – me and mine is all that matters; the rest can go to hell, we don't care.

One way St. Mary's may be contributing to social marginalization is by the way the church itself is set up so that people with disabilities are always sitting in the back. That shouldn't be the only easy option for people in wheelchairs or who need a bit of extra help. We need to cherish all our people. Perhaps we could shift the seating to accommodate and help those who want to be in the front, closer to the altar to be there.

When I came to St. Mary's, I was appreciated and welcomed here as never before. God did something incredible for me; He transformed me, through this community. St. Mary's really opened me up.

As a parish, we welcome visitors at every Mass. Currently, we do that at the beginning, before Mass, but we used to do it at the end – after having the shared and crucial experience of Mass and the Eucharist. Maybe people would be more likely to engage with guests and newcomers if we greet them at the end of Mass so that they can chat before leaving.

Our parish, especially through St. Vincent de Paul Society, does a great job of being inclusive and helping others regardless of their economic status or religious beliefs. We are present to people.

Now that society is opening again and managing COVID better, people expressed hope that the parish can restore its sense of community and be more welcoming by bringing back coffee hours, potlucks, and seasonal celebrations.