



ST. PHILOMENA & ST. THOMAS PARISH FAMILY

DISCOVERING WHO WE ARE



Together in Discernment: Summary of Challenges & Opportunities Listening Sessions

The communities of St. Philomena and St. Thomas continued the journey toward becoming one parish family through the Partners in the Gospel process, this time reflecting on concerns and potential areas of growth. Previously, we have focused on describing Who We Are [link], Discovering Our Gifts [link], and looking at operational Metrics [Link].

During the winter and spring of 2026, we held 13 synodal **listening sessions**, including dedicated sessions for the St. Philomena Knights of Columbus, youth confirmation class, school families, Bible study groups, and the Spanish communities at both parishes. Across the parish family, **217 parishioners** participated, representing about 9% of the number of individuals who typically attend our weekend Masses.

In the listening sessions, participants reflected on:

What challenges do we face?

What opportunities do we see?

Each question was addressed through periods of uninterrupted sharing, silent reflection, and open dialog on where participants sensed the **Holy Spirit** leading.

The conversations were an honest, though sometimes difficult, exchange about the realities facing our parish family. They revealed hope about where the Holy Spirit is leading us. Although individual perspectives varied, several common themes emerged across nearly every listening session.

Additionally, 42 parishioners chose to participate through an **on-line survey**. Their responses are also reflected in this report.

Growing Together as One Parish Family

The strongest theme throughout the listening sessions was the desire to become **one parish family**.

Participants spoke honestly about the challenges of bringing together two parish communities, multiple cultures, and different traditions. Many observed that parishioners currently experience

The Parish Family Voices

The Holy Spirit was with us and we were able to have a tranquil conversation without argument.

We heard everyone's point of view, even though there were differences in opinion.

Having more conversations like these would be good so that we can learn from each other and feel part of the community.



We don't have a shared life with [the other parish]. It is a marriage forced on us. The apprehension is huge.

We are a community but not really—there is no real connection.

Lots of divisions—St. Thomas / St. Philomena; Spanish / English; School / Parish. These subcommunities stay separate.

the two campuses, language communities, ministries, and even the school as separate parts of parish life rather than one united family.

It was recognized that becoming one community will require patience, trust, and **intentional community-building**.

Rather than viewing these differences as obstacles, many participants expressed hope that they could become opportunities for mutual learning and enrichment. They envisioned a parish family where diversity is celebrated, relationships are strengthened across cultures and generations, and everyone experiences a shared identity rooted in Christ.

Creating a Home Where Everyone Belongs

Closely connected to the desire for parish unity was an equally strong desire for **deeper personal relationships**.

Participants spoke candidly about the loneliness and isolation that characterize modern life and acknowledged that these realities are also felt within the parish. Many expressed a longing for a community where people know one another by name, notice when someone is missing, welcome newcomers, and invite others into friendship and service.

They envisioned regular opportunities for fellowship, prayer, conversation, hospitality, and shared service that help people know one another beyond Sunday Mass. Some mentioned the importance of **clear communications about upcoming events** to encourage more participation and allow people to plan ahead.

Many emphasized that **personal invitations** are far more effective than general announcements. They encouraged parishioners and staff to intentionally welcome newcomers, invite others into ministry, and help every person feel that they belong.

Passing the Faith to the Next Generation

Children, youth, and young families were among the most frequently discussed priorities.

We need to be more intentional about building community.

A community of joy attracts everyone.

We know that the Holy Spirit called us to be part of this conversation.

God will lead us.

Loneliness – in our society we live separate lives and create silos without connecting; driven by fear and anger... and a sense of self-sufficiency.

As a new Catholic, I got confirmed and now I'm forgotten.

We need to build communities that have genuine connection and relationship.

We need a monthly calendar again.

We need to talk to people on a personal level – develop a friendship - then invite them to walk alongside us to help.

Young people are leaving and not Baptizing their children.

There is not enough ministry for children.

Participants expressed concern that many young people are growing up without strong connections to the Catholic Church. At the same time, they demonstrated hope for the next generation and a desire to invest in them intentionally.

They envisioned vibrant youth ministry, engaging faith formation, opportunities for children to participate in the liturgy, meaningful service experiences, and stronger support for parents as the primary educators of the faith.

Many participants observed that young people are most likely to remain engaged when they see adults joyfully living their faith and serving together.

Every Person Has Gifts to Share

Throughout the conversations, parishioners spoke about the many gifts already present within the parish family, despite the concern that frequently there are not enough volunteers.

Many expressed a **willingness to serve, but felt unsure where their help was needed** or how to become involved. Participants encouraged exploring different formats and modes of communication about ministry opportunities, more personal invitations, leadership development, and greater efforts to recognize the talents and experiences of parishioners.

Rather than relying on a small group of volunteers, participants envisioned a parish where everyone understands that they have an important role in the mission of the Church.

Growing Together in Faith

Participants consistently expressed a need to deepen their relationship with Christ. They recognized that becoming one parish family involves more than organizational change—it requires spiritual renewal.

Many spoke about the importance of **lifelong faith formation**, prayer, scripture study, evangelization, and opportunities to grow spiritually as individuals and families. They saw faith not only as something learned but as **something lived** through relationships, hospitality, service, and witness.

The youth feel they don't need God or Church.

After our youth receive confirmation, it would be good to have opportunities for them to serve in the church.

We need to be the example to our children—they will respond based on how they see our actions and words towards the church and essentially to God.



The same people seem to be the only ones helping.

I find it hard to be part of a ministry and to know opportunities to serve.

There are many talents in our community, but people may be too shy – if we invite them, they may respond to our personal invitation.



We need more catechism for everyone, young and old.

We need more evangelization within our Catholic community to understand what we believe and to teach our children what the Bible and the Church teaches.

There should be more reverence before and during Mass.



They also emphasized the **importance of reverence during Mass**, relevant homilies, beautiful music, and liturgies that inspire people to live their faith throughout the week. The use of smart phones and other technology during Mass, especially by children, was mentioned several times as a source of distraction.

Serving the Wider Community

The listening sessions also revealed a strong commitment to serving others.

Participants envisioned **expanding outreach** to people experiencing poverty, loneliness, homelessness, addiction, and other challenges within the surrounding community. They encouraged building upon existing ministries while exploring new ways to respond to local needs.

Many also recognized opportunities to **strengthen partnerships** with the local college, neighborhood organizations, and other faith communities in order to better accompany those who may be searching for hope and belonging.

The Holy Spirit is asking us to open our hearts to be of service to others.

We need to care for the lonely, the elderly, and those who are forgotten.

We should partner with other churches and organizations to serve people in need.

The word of God that we heard in mass should be shared at home.



A Parish Filled with Hope

Beyond the themes that emerged, many participants reflected on the listening process itself. They appreciated having the opportunity to be heard, to listen respectfully to others, and to discover common hopes across different generations, cultures, and parish communities. For many, the sessions became more than a conversation—they became an experience of the very community they hope to build. Participants expressed a desire for similar opportunities in the future as the parish family continues its journey together.

Although participants were honest about the challenges facing the broader society, the Catholic Church as a whole, and our local community, the conversations consistently moved toward possibility rather than discouragement. Participants described sensing **the Holy Spirit calling the parish to become more united, more welcoming, more prayerful, and more engaged in the mission of Christ.**

Again and again they expressed confidence that renewal will not come from programs alone, but from **parishioners who know one another, share their gifts generously, strengthen families, welcome newcomers, accompany young people, and take shared responsibility for the life of the Church.**

The listening sessions revealed a parish family that is ready to move forward together. Participants recognized that the work ahead will require patience, commitment, and trust, but they also expressed confidence that God is already at work among us. Their shared hope is for a parish where every person encounters Christ, every generation has a place to belong, every gift is welcomed, and every parishioner is invited to participate in building one vibrant parish family.