

Both Saint Therese Little Flower (STLF) and Saint James Parishes seek a bright future. As a result of recent diocesan planning, which concluded in the spring of 2022, Saint Louis Church closed; about ten others have also closed in our dioceses over the past couple years. As the urban core of Kansas City has sorrowfully witnessed over the past fifty years, from Risen Christ to Blessed Sacrament to Saint Augustine to many more, parishes that are not viable do not remain open.

I was assigned to St. James and STLF in the summer of '22 and have sought to encourage our two parish communities to work diligently, work together, and work prayerfully to illustrate that we are viable as well as vital to the church's mission in the heart of our city. Key indicators of livelihood include the number of registered households in our parishes and the number of congregants who attend Mass regularly. The numbers at Saint James diminished substantially from before the Covid pandemic (roughly 225) to after (roughly 135); the numbers at STLF rose (from around 70 to around 140). It is important to increase the number of Sunday worshippers at both sites. We also need to enlarge the number of registered households. Each list about 225 households on its roster; diocesan officials have stated that 300 is a good and reasonable standard to reach. Sacraments are another key sign of viability to measure Catholic church's strength and impact. As such, we need to increase the number of baptisms, first communions, confirmation, marriages, etc., to show growth in spiritual life.

Other core indicators of dynamism are finances and care of property. Though neither parish carries a debt nor operates from a deficit, both have deferred maintenance issues that will plague us if not handled in a proactive manner. Saint James has little to no savings; STLF has money on deposit but will spend a significant portion of it on the school building (per historic agreements with the diocese) which the SOLT (Society of Our Lady of the Trinity) Community will take responsibility in the future. Both parishes have incredible social ministries (e.g., food pantry, urban café, senior center, clothing, and thrift store service...) that are deeply appreciated by members of our wider faith community but not part of the corporate statistical report.

Finally, I want to mention the ACA (Annual Catholic Appeal) as an immediate indicator of our ability and willingness to demonstrate activity and enthusiasm. Last year, only seven households from Saint James contributed to the diocesan ACA falling way short of its goal, though the parish had reached the assigned goal four of the last seven years. Last year was the first time that STLF reached its goal during the same period, with 67 participants. This year, each parish that does not reach its goal (about \$7,400 for each of our two parishes) will be assessed the shortage, but those parishes that do reach their goal will receive a rebate (50% of donations beyond the goal). Our participation this year will be a good indicator of our ability to respond to financial challenges and diocesan collaboration (we receive parish-based ministry funds from the ACA fund), as well as express our ability to show viability. So far, about ten households from each of our two communities have contributed, totaling about \$1,000 in the name of each parish. I will keep you updated until we reach our goals.