

November Town Hall Take Aways

Introduction:

The initiative to hold a Town Hall meeting to listen to community members' thoughts, feelings, and hopes about "life at Newman" originated in the Parish Council. The entire parish was invited to the event, which was held on Sunday, November 14, 2021, in the Terrace at Newman. It was the first of several Town Hall meetings that we hope to hold during the 2021-2022 year. Over 50 people attended in person, and email responses were received from another 20 individuals.

Opinions were sought in three general areas: What brought you to Newman? What do you currently value at Newman? What do you see our future at Newman might be? An additional goal was to strengthen parish relationship through meaningful conversation, so to meet that goal, people were randomly assigned to small discussion groups. Groups were led by a pre-arranged volunteer and a notes taker recorded responses. Special thanks to these volunteers!

Results were recorded and categorized into 5 general areas by several members of the Parish Council. These "Take Aways" are summarized here to provide the parish with a direct way of seeing results. Please contact Pat Welter or Caroline Williams to see more specific information if needed. These results will be used by the new Parish Council and Parish Committees moving forward.

1. A Welcoming, non- judgmental culture:

The majority of participants at the Town Hall came and stayed at Newman because of the welcoming, accepting, inclusive, non-judgmental and diverse culture and climate they found when they arrived. The phrase, "All are welcome" and openness to all was often mentioned. Many cited a keen sense of community and feeling of "belonging" at Newman.

Looking to the future, a strong desire was expressed to maintain and intentionally increase these characteristics and to attract college students and younger adults and families. A concern was expressed that Newman may be losing some of these traits and becoming less inclusive, less open-minded and pushed to be similar to many other Catholic churches. The impact of the pandemic on the parish community also weighs on people's minds.

2. A Vatican II Church:

Living out the principles of Vatican II as "the people of God" was and is a foundational value expressed at the Town Hall Meeting. This was described in many ways:

- A vision of a loving and caring God;
- Decentralizing the hierarchy and increasing and empowering the role of the laity;

- A laity who are active and involved in the church community;
- Acceptance of examining multiple viewpoints and the freedom to express opposing views;
- Challenging parishioners and young people to a lived faith in the larger community;
- Adopting liturgical practices “in the spirit of Vatican II” which signify an open, welcoming, and inclusive community.

Moving forward, many believe that Newman needs to be more focused on a Vatican II spirit for today’s world. This includes:

- Promoting a wider understanding of Vatican II and its meaning today;
- Opportunities for dialogue and diverse opinions about the many troubling issues confronting people today;
- Challenge and support to live out “a theology for the common good.”
- Many cited the words and teachings of Pope Francis as a needed guide to move forward.

3. The Liturgy:

If the spirit of Vatican II was and is foundational at Newman, many said they experienced it in the liturgy first. From the translation into English, the move to inclusive language, the vibrant and diverse contemporary music employing multiple instruments and rhythms, the unique and welcoming liturgical practices, and the life lesson homilies, people felt welcomed, inspired, and part of a vibrant faith community.

The liturgy continues to be important, but there is concern about a kind of return to a pre-Vatican II spirit that seems to have happened with a resulting decrease in a sense of inclusion, vibrancy, and relevancy. Repeated calls are for more careful planning to include diversity in the music and especially in the homilies - including a need to hear lay women and men speak to the relevant issues of today raised by the Gospel message as well as to resume liturgical practices signifying a welcoming community.

4. Spiritual Growth for All: The Parish, Students, and Youth

The importance of spiritual growth for permanent members as well as students and its connection to living in today’s complex world was a major gift which people said they found at Newman. It was why they stayed and is what they desire again. As one person said, “We are all students of life and are urged to continue to grow spiritually.” The lively liturgy and meaningful expression of the sacraments were central to this, but adult education, including videos, discussions, “struggles with grace,” guidance from contemporary men and women theologians and lay people, and thought provoking challenges made Newman a “faith home” for many.

Focus on College Students:

While people were and are clear that Newman has a special mission to college students, many voiced that the calling was to serve students by helping them develop a

mature spirituality, and much of this comes through experience in a Vatican II parish living out the faith. One person said it was by establishing a spiritual connection and “reciprocal relationship of the spirit that feeds us and inspires us to grow.” Many felt that Newman needs more student involvement, and that the decline of students in the parish is related to a decline in the open, inclusive, relevant spirit of Vatican II in the parish. Others added that it means going where students are – in the larger community through various forms of outreach and social justice activities like presence at community events such as PRIDE in the park.

Teens, Pre-Teens, REP, and Young Adults:

The current Religious Education Program drew many comments relating to what people would like to see at Newman, from wanting to revisit REP for younger students, to wanting it back in Newman. More activities for pre-teens and teens were also called for, as well as outreach for singles in the parish.

5. Social Justice:

Feedback from every discussion group at the Town Hall cited social justice as an important part of Newman’s mission which brought people and kept them here. It was described as a critical way Newman “lived out the spirit of Vatican II” and pointed to how the diverse spiritual development activities – many focused on social justice issues - “nourished and challenged” both adults and students together to stretch and act out their faith in ever deepening ways. This included speakers for coffee hour, social justice sermons, and more “Gospel Way” outreach in the larger community to immigrants, refugees, and the many oppressed people living here. These and more were among the strong calls for greater social justice focus in all of Newman’s ministry going forward to provide opportunities to gain moral vision and clarity around challenging issues in today’s world that call us to action.