

Best Practices for Parish Life Organizations

Below is a collection of best practices observed among the various Parish Life organizations. Consider adapting these practices to your group to make it vibrant, meaningful and sustainable.

Membership:

- Continually recruit new members as a means of introducing new ideas, providing additional helpers, and welcoming parishioners to expand their involvement in our community.
- Personally ask members to join; face-to-face recruitment is by far the most effective as it tells the candidate, "I'm interested in you."
- Have processes in place for harvesting volunteers from New Member packets (see Welcoming Committee and Parish Office) and the Ministry Fair (see Stewardship Committee)
- Consider recruiting members from St. Thomas and Sts. Peter & Paul as both parishes if they do not already offer a similar organization
- Consider asking non-registered, non-practicing and non-Catholics. This is a means of evangelization!
- Be aware that some parishioners consider service to various organizations as their calling; treat idiosyncrasies with sensitivity.
- Especially with service-related groups (Funeral Lunch Preparation, Prayer Chain, etc.), make sure that members are thanked. An occasional hand-written "Thank You" card means a lot.
- Consider approaching other Parish Life and Faith Formation organizations to fill open slots for service opportunities.

Leadership:

- Consider leadership "terms" of 1-2 years. When the term is unspecified it is interpreted to be infinite, discouraging qualified people to sign up for leadership positions. This also promotes continual new ideas and guards against burnout.
- Consider a defined leadership progression so new perspective leaders have the ability to be mentored by experienced leaders.
- Consider co-leaders for organizations requiring significant personal time commitments.

Meetings:

- Meet regularly. If a set time/location doesn't exist, it's a good idea to schedule the next meeting prior to adjourning the current meeting.
- Planned meetings with a published agenda are highly recommended to ensure that meetings don't drift aimlessly. Many parishioners are busy people and want their time to be used wisely.

- Members of many service-related groups (Prayer Chain, Meals Ministry) work in isolation. Consider getting the group together annually for socializing, recognition, team building and process information purposes.

Technology & Communication:

- Match the communication methods to your target population. Bulletin announcements/inserts and email work well for older parishioners. Facebook and Twitter may be better choices for millennials.
- Utilize technology such as email and online sign-ups where possible to reduce time requirements. Almost everyone is busy and this can dramatically reduce time
 - Prayer Chain utilizes email to communicate requests phone calls, reducing the number of phone calls from 42 to 15 *per request*
 - Coffee & Donuts & Meal Ministry use Sign-Up Genius and have virtually eliminated the need to call for volunteers
- Limit “Reply All” on emails to only those communications that truly need to be shared with everyone (encourage team members to do the same)

Balance:

- Although Parish Life organization primarily to provide a social base for parishioners, remember that we are a Catholic parish. Consider occasional service and spiritual activities in addition to social.

Continuously Improve:

- Keep asking members what your group can do better.