

## Directions for Discerning Key Themes and Quotes from the Interviews and Open-Ended Questions

*“Making sense and meaning from what our people have said”*

Now that the interviews and surveys are complete, the next step is to coordinate a process for the discernment teams from the pastoral council to discern the key themes and illustrative quotes from the stories and experiences which people have shared.

Discernment is a prayerful process of seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit in listening to and interpreting what is being said.

This work will be used to share an overall summary with the parish and develop a parish pastoral plan.

**Small teams of 2-5 people are each assigned specific topics/questions and asked to do the following:**

### **On your own:**

- You will receive a copy of the responses for the questions assigned to your team. These will be in verbatim form, exactly as they were entered.
- Begin with prayer in seeking to be open to listen to and understand what people are saying.
- Read through all of the responses to obtain a general sense of the ideas and themes expressed, and the words and phrases being used. This is to form an initial impression on your own.
- Consider what inspires you – what is insightful and compelling. Identify quotes that communicate that insight and inspiration. You may make notes or highlight content that stands out to you.
- In the Appreciative Inquiry interview format, there is typically a question about ‘the best experiences of the past’ and a second about ‘what people imagine and most hope for in the future.’
- **For each question:** discern the 3-5 key themes and 2-3 sample illustrative quotes and phrases that best reflect responses to the following questions.
  - *What do you hear our people saying about what is most important to them – the “positive core” and life-giving forces in this area of parish life?*
  - *What are the deeper hopes, dreams and related actions our people want addressed to support this area of parish life and ministry?*
- Each team member then prepares their individually discerned highlights in response to these two questions to present at the team meeting.

### **At your team meeting:**

- Each team member brings their individually discerned highlights to the meeting.
- Begin with prayer.
- Go around and one at a time and share responses to a given question.
- The team will then discuss and discern what they see as the emerging overall themes.
- For each major theme your team identifies, your team will then discern three or four inspirational quotes that compellingly address that theme. These quotes might be particularly insightful, exciting or inspiring. The quotes should capture and communicate the energy that parishioners shared about the major themes your team discerned.
- A member of the team needs to capture the fruit of your team’s work on 1-2 pages. Copies of the resulting summary can be presented at the designated pastoral council meeting.

(Over)

### Sample of work by a team from another parish:

Theme: Feeling welcomed

Quotes:        “At our parish we feel like we are part of one big family.”  
                  “People go out of their way to show care for one another.”  
                  “This family spirit makes our own personal family a better one.”

### Sample follow-up that might be done by the council in the later plan development:

Goal: Each parishioner will feel like a welcome member of our parish family.

Action: Assign a sponsor family to each new family joining our parish to personally invite and encourage the new family to participate.

### Notes on doing this work:

- Realize that this is a process of “mining” the comments shared for the “gold and jewels” in people’s experiences and hopes. Discover words that evoke life, understanding and inspiration.
- Recognize that this is a more intuitive experience rather than an analytical approach of only counting what is said most often.
- While there is value in identifying themes that occur most frequently, also look for the prophetic or compelling images that only one person might express. Sometimes only one individual can identify with just the right words that idea which comes to significantly resonate with many others.
- **Please hold these materials in confidence.** While a formal way for sharing what you discern as key themes and quotes will be decided, it is important to not have random quotes and initial ideas shared outside the team in ways that can misrepresent or distort the overall message and spirit of this work.

Remember that amidst all that is being said, we are looking for what most gives life and meaning to our people, and what can most enhance their lives and parish life/ministries in the future. We need to discover and build upon the positive core – the words and images that evoke life, understanding, hope and creativity, as we seek to be faithful to all that our God calls us to be and do in this time.

If you have any questions about these guidelines please feel free to contact Rick Krivanka at 216-536-4991.