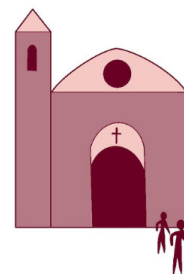


PARISH FAMILY

COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS



Four Communities - One Parish Family

ST. JOSEPH & ST. THERESE

Summary of Community Conversations January 29, 2026 • February 7, 2026

Dear Members of our Parish Family,

As we move toward becoming one faith community, comprised of St. Mary, St. Joseph, St. Patrick and St. Therese, our parish family continues to provide opportunities for dialogue and deep listening for all members.

Most recently, our Community Conversations held on January 29, 2026 at St. Joe's and February 7, 2026 at St. Therese explored the following questions:

In becoming a parish family, what challenges and opportunities do you see and why?
What words of wisdom do you have for our parish leadership as we shape our future together?
How might the Holy Spirit be prompting us as we move forward?

This booklet summarizes the responses received to these questions. We are grateful to the more than 150 people who participated and offered their insights and experiences about this journey we are making together.

As you read this summary, we hope you not only see your hopes and concerns reflected, but also a collective longing for healing, equity, inclusion, greater lay leadership, and continued commitment to companioning and serving people on the margins of the Church and society. In this distillation, we have strived to accurately capture the range and approximate frequency of comments offered. For those interested in diving deeper, the raw notes taken in every discussion group at every meeting are available online at st-therese.cc and stjosephparish.org.

We each share a responsibility to help shape our future as a parish where all are welcome and all feel a sense of belonging. The graphic below shows our parish formation process. **In the next step of our collective journey, titled “Who Do We Want to Become,” we will weigh key questions of our future identity.**

These questions include:

“What is our vision?”

“Who is God calling us to become?”

“Who are we serving?”

“What do we want to prioritize?” and

“What ministries are important?”

Who do we want to become? **The present moment offers us an extraordinary chance to reimagine what kind of church we will be.** During our most recent discussions, many voices within our parish family advocated for us to rethink what it means to “be church.” We heard proposals that we live out boldly and courageously our gospel calling to seek justice and love our neighbors, to make disciples of the nations. Some feel that authentically living gospel values can, among other benefits, help rebirth the church's appeal to our youth and instill a new parish vibrancy. This is your moment, our moment, to imagine, pray, and create.

The next round of community conversations will take place on April 28 and May 9, 2026. Your comments will further inform parish leadership on what's important and where to focus our attention as we work to become one parish. May God's grace be upon us.

Blessings,



Deacon Steve Wodzanowski, Pastoral Coordinator, St. Joseph & St. Therese

How Far We've Come

The beginning phase of Partners in the Gospel explored “Who Are We?” Our parish family certainly put in the work with: coffee meet and greets, shared liturgies, Lenten small groups that encompassed all four communities, shared ministry meetings, forming shared Faith Justice Commission, Pastoral Council, Parish Family Advisory Council, shared Masses for Holy Days, Simbang Gabi, combined bulletins, organizing staff in the new parish family structure, community building events, concerts, singalongs, fish fries, the Magnificat, retreats, workshops, listening sessions, and finally culminating in our Lenten Pilgrimages to each of our four churches.

Next Steps

“Who Do We Want To Become?” and “How Do We Get There?”

PARTNERS IN THE GOSPEL PARISH FAMILY TIMELINE

JAN &
FEB
2026

THE STEPS OUR PARISH FAMILY IS TAKING TO BECOME ONE CANONICAL PARISH

MARCH

APRIL
& MAY

MAY

JUNE TO
AUG

COMMUNITY CONSULTATION SESSIONS WERE HELD TO DISCUSS OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES IN OUR PARISH FAMILY

THE PARISH FAMILY ADVISORY COUNCIL (PFAC) SUMMARIZED THE INPUT FROM THE COMMUNITY

THE NEXT ROUND OF COMMUNITY CONSULTATION SESSIONS TO DISCUSS THE VISION OF PARISH FAMILY

THE PFAC WILL SUMMARIZE THE INPUT FROM THE COMMUNITY

PARISH LEADERSHIP WILL MEET TO CREATE A DRAFT VISION STATEMENT BASED ON COMMUNITY INPUT

SEPT

OCT

NOV

DEC

EARLY
2027

THE PFAC WILL DRAFT INITIATIVES TO SUPPORT THE VISION STATEMENT

COMMUNITY CONSULTATION HELD TO REVIEW AND COMMENT ON VISION STATEMENT AND INITIATIVES

THE PFAC WILL REVIEW AND SUMMARIZE THE INPUT FROM THE COMMUNITY

THE PFAC WILL REVISE THE VISION STATEMENT AND SUPPORTING INITIATIVES BASED ON THE INPUT FROM THE COMMUNITY

THE PFAC WILL SUBMIT A FINAL VERSION OF THE VISION STATEMENT AND INITIATIVES TO THE COMMUNITY

COMMUNITY CONSULTATION IS AT THE HEART OF BECOMING ONE!

SECTION 1: What We Face: The Challenges Before Us

The Challenge of Grief, Loss, and Unresolved Pain

The single most consistent thread running through both Community Conversations is grief — and the recognition that it has not yet been fully honored. Parishioners across all four communities carry real loss. Particularly hurtful: the loss of St. Patrick's, closed in a process many experienced as abrupt and unilateral; and the loss of St. Mary's, whose Hispanic community was dispersed without meaningful assistance. Many also named the quieter, ongoing loss of intimacy that comes when people who knew each other by name are absorbed into something larger and more anonymous.

Leadership must understand: this grief is not resistance to the future. Parishioners recognize it is the price of belonging. People grieve because they loved. Nevertheless, the parish family process will not fully succeed until it creates intentional space — ritual, story, ceremony, honest conversation — for that grief to be named, honored, and moved through together. These conversations are an important first step.

*"There is a lot of healing that is needed. Each community is grieving."
"Keep a space for grief. Do not rush the process."*

The Challenge of the Trust Broken with the Archdiocese

Many participants name the closure of St. Patrick as a wound that continues to fester. The way it was done — through a disrespectful, non-participatory process, with zero pastoral care from the archdiocese — seeded a deep distrust of top-down decision-making in the diocese that shapes how parishioners engage with this process today. St. Mary's parishioners carry their own particular pain: they describe their community as having been "intentionally damaged and then shut down." The displacement of the Hispanic community without a plan for continuity is cited repeatedly as an unaddressed injustice.

"Big trust issue against the Archdiocese."

The Challenge of Losing Our Identities

Parishioners from smaller communities express a visceral fear of being absorbed rather than integrated. They worry that the richness of their distinct cultures, charisms, worship styles, and commitments will be swallowed rather than celebrated. Meanwhile, some parishioners worry the parish family will lack the Jesuit charism, grieve a perceived decline in liturgical quality, and worry their community is being redefined by the demands of consolidation rather than shaped by discernment. Communities want to be honored, not homogenized. The fear that one community's culture will dominate surfaces repeatedly and deserves direct attention. Leadership must name explicitly which decisions are open to parishioner input and which are not — false expectations breed deeper anger.

"How do we become one family WITH all of the diversity and the unique identity - together and not leave people behind."

The Challenge of Belonging in a Larger Parish

Again and again, parishioners describe the loss of intimacy that comes with scale. People who were known by name, whose needs were held in communal prayer, who ran into their priest at coffee hour — now find themselves untethered in a much larger body. This is not simply nostalgia; it's a driver for disengagement. The parish family must build deliberate structures for belonging, or it will lose the very people who make it vibrant.

*"I feel known at my parish. I know my needs are going to be met.
Going someplace bigger, different, unfamiliar, unknown is a big challenge."*

The Challenge of Racial and Cultural Equity

Multiple participants raise the issue of racial equity with urgency and specificity. The Black Catholic community — centered for many years at St. Mary’s — has been significantly diminished. The Hispanic community at St. Mary’s was dispersed without a plan. The Deaf, DeafBlind and L’Arche communities, while celebrated, remain small and require ongoing intentional inclusion. Participants who are immigrants, people of color, or members of historically marginalized groups name the fear that the dominant culture will assert itself, erasing the diversity that makes these parishes distinctive.

“The parish family will lose people — for good — if it does not actively center the voices and needs of those on the margins. The Gospel choir, liturgical dance, multilingual worship, and inclusive ministries are not peripheral; they are mission-critical.”

The Challenge of Finances, Facilities, and Institutional Sustainability

Parishioners are clear-eyed about structural difficulties our parish community faces: multiple aging buildings, a serious funding shortfall at St. Therese School, an imbalance of resources between the parishes, and a priest shortage that is only going to deepen. Several participants note that St. Therese is carrying significant debt and that St. Mary’s is highly vulnerable in an earthquake. Many acknowledge the parish family cannot continue to operate all current facilities without a definitive plan to address these issues.

At the same time, participants push back on a purely financial framing of these decisions. They call for decisions that reflect the values of stewardship described in Laudato Si, that prioritize mission over real estate optimization, and that are made transparently and communally — not handed down from the Archdiocese after the fact.

“I think we ought to be good stewards of resources. That is an integral part of our mission.”
“The range of parish facilities across Seattle imposes real logistical challenges.”

The Challenge of Engagement, Particularly Youth

The parish family skews older. Participants observe that the median age of members continues to climb. They worry that young people who were raised Catholic no longer practice. They wonder how to make our communities compelling to the next generation. Contributors note that the challenge is not simply programming; it is prophetic witness. Young people are not looking for a comfortable institution but for a community that actually lives what it professes.

“Our faith is being challenged and we must step up. We have to recall our commitment to God and to each other to make this new body.”
“A big challenge is getting more young people into the parish family.”

SECTION 2: What We See: The Opportunities Before Us

Retain and Leverage the Gift of Combined Diversity

The parish family contains extraordinary human richness: gospel choirs and contemplative masses; liturgical dance and ASL interpreters; Ignatian spirituality and Latin American base community models; food banks, schools, and sister parish relationships. Together, we can. Participants describe this diversity not as a problem to be managed but as a gift to be celebrated — a living expression of the Body of Christ.

“An ecosystem thrives because of diversity.”

Build on the Transformative Power of Small Groups

Across every session, small groups emerge as the primary vehicle for integration, belonging, and mission. Participants who have experienced small groups describe them as transformative — capable of moving

mountains. The parish family must invest seriously in small group infrastructure: neighborhood-based, ministry-based, and affinity-based groups that give people a place where they are known and where they can do meaningful work together. Some note that the lack of intimate spaces to meet people following liturgies hinders meaningful connections.

“We need a good plan that names small groups, what they do, and how to join.”

Activate the Power and Potential of Lay Leaders

These four parishes have a remarkable tradition of lay leadership — particularly with women playing pastoral leadership roles — rooted in the Jesuit charism, the Vatican II vision of the priesthood of all believers, and the practical necessity that drove communities to survive and thrive without clergy. This is not a liability; it is a profound asset. The parish family has the lay talent, theological depth, professional expertise, and pastoral capacity to lead boldly. It must be empowered to do so.

“Smaller parishes were led by women in the past. That contributed to strong lay leadership.”

Seize This Opportunity for Overdue Healing and a New Beginning

Many participants name the parish family process itself as an opportunity for the kind of healing and reconciliation that the Church has often failed to offer.

“Healing and reconciliation needs to happen now, not wait.”

“We are listening to each other, we all have commonality, we want to be united.”

We Are Called to Outward Mission

Participants consistently resist an inward-focused parish family. They want a community that is visible in the city, an impactful force in justice work, and genuinely present to people seeking a spiritual home in Seattle. The parish family has the resources — financial, physical, human, and spiritual — to be a significant civic and prophetic voice. The question is whether it will choose to turn outward and engage the city and beyond with courage.

“Be a light that people are drawn to because we know what we stand for.”

“Embrace radical change and live the gospel; recover the reason for church and reasons for membership. We all need to start over.”

SECTION 3: Words of Wisdom: Our Guidance to Leadership

Parishioners offer leadership a rich and consistent body of wisdom. Below are the themes that surfaced most powerfully and most repeatedly in the Community Conversations:

Lead With Presence and Relationship

Participants urge their leaders to be visible, approachable, and connected. They ask for leadership to spend time with them rather than stay confined to administration or meetings. This kind of leadership, they say, builds trust and strengthens community.

“Get out of the Parish House. Mix with congregation.”

“Come to coffee hour. Sometimes it takes a candid conversation.”

“Don’t need to put all the responsibility [for relationship] on the priests.”

Lead With Transparency, Honesty, and Decisiveness

Participants call for radical transparency about finances, about what decisions are made and why, and about what is and is not open to community input. They have been burned by processes that felt participatory but

were not, notably at the Archdiocese level, and they will not trust a process that hides its reasoning. At the same time, they call for decisiveness — the ability to make hard calls, communicate them clearly, and move forward without endless deliberations and deferrals. Communicate early, often, and through multiple channels — not just email and bulletins. Be explicit about what is negotiable and what is not so peoples' expectations don't get raised in a way that angers them. Do not create the appearance of listening if the decisions have already been made.

"...want to be optimistic and want the conversations to be transparent and not let it be a top down process because that won't go well."

Focus On Mission Over Maintenance

People invite leadership to stay centered on the Gospel and Jesuit charism rather than getting trapped by administrative burdens. They emphasize listening actively and moving prayerfully, trusting that the Holy Spirit will guide decisions. They call for emotional awareness and a spirit of curiosity rather than fear as leadership works to discern what truly matters.

"Our job--and this is the one that will give us hope, joy, and new life--is to look outside of ourselves. It's to see the needs of the broader Seattle community and celebrate the incredible resources we have across our four parishes."

Ritualize the Transition

Multiple participants — in multiple sessions — call for intentional ritual as a vehicle for grief, transition, and welcome. The pilgrimage that accompanied the closure of St. Patrick's is cited as a powerful model. The parish family needs ceremonies: rituals of letting go, rituals of welcome, rituals that make the invisible visible and give people a way to mark what has changed and what endures. Done right, these rituals can also facilitate the new connections between parishioners that are crucial to building up the new community.

"Ritualize the change and the grief. How do we come together to hope?"

Invest in Integration, Not Just Information

Listening sessions and bulletin announcements are not enough. Parishioners call for structured, intentional programming that brings people from different communities into genuine relationships: shared service projects, cross-community social events, joint liturgies, and the small group infrastructure described above. Integration does not happen by accident or by announcement; it requires sustained investment of time, energy, and resources.

"Continue to find ways to be together. Serve and pray together. I want to find more ways to be with you all."

Center the Marginalized

Participants repeatedly urge leadership to ask: who is not at the table? Who has been hurt and not yet heard? The St. Mary's community, the Hispanic community, the Deaf community, the LGBTQ+ community, people of color, young people, and those who are spiritually homeless in Seattle all deserve active, named, and resourced welcome. The parish family must resist the gravitational pull of the dominant culture and build structures that ensure every voice is genuinely heard. In particular, engaging youth is seen not only as a matter of diversity and a holy calling but an existential issue.

"Help [marginalized groups] find a spiritual and physical home, reaching beyond our four churches."

"Open [the parish family] up for those who don't have a faith home."

Prioritize the Development of Lay Leadership for Parish Management

The priest shortage is real, structural, and will not be resolved by the Archdiocese in time to solve this parish family's needs. Participants call on leadership to accelerate the development and empowerment of lay leaders

in parish management — in liturgy, pastoral care, administration, and governance. This is not a compromise; it is a return to the fullness of the baptismal call. The parish family must build the infrastructure to support this, including formation, mentorship, and formal roles.

*“Keep looking for/providing opportunities for women leaders as that is part of our joint approach to ministry.”
“Can we move away from clerical leadership to lay leadership?”*

Take Care of Each Other

Leadership carries an enormous burden. Participants see it and name it. They call on leadership to practice self-care, to ask for help, to be vulnerable about needs, and to draw upon the extraordinary human resources in the pews. Several participants note that the parish family cannot afford to burn out its leaders — lay or ordained. The community wants to support its leaders and asks only to be invited to do so.

“Priest shortage is going to continue to be a problem. Work on solutions. Priests are feeling the pressure.”

SECTION 4: How the Holy Spirit is Prompting Us

Asked what the Holy Spirit is prompting, participants speak with striking clarity and convergence. Their words carry the weight of prayerful discernment:

“The Spirit is prompting us to return to our roots. What does it mean to live out our faith?”

The Spirit calls this community to:

- Gather — again and again — the gifts and the people who have been scattered or lost.
- Be not afraid. Fear is the enemy of the Spirit’s movement. Courage is required.
- Return to the fundamentals: the Eucharist, scripture, the gathered community, and the call to serve.
- Look outward — to the city, to the marginalized, to the spiritually homeless — not inward.
- Become small enough for intimacy within a parish family large enough for impact. Small groups are the Spirit’s vehicle.
- Trust that God is already here, already leading, already making something new.

“When each of us leads from our gifts, beautiful things happen.”

Participants describe a Spirit who is not waiting for the parish family to get its institutional act together before showing up. The Spirit is already moving — in these conversations, in the courage people have shown to speak hard truths, in the hope that persists despite real pain, and in the hunger for a community that genuinely lives the Gospel in a city and a world that desperately needs it.

“We all share this faith. From the scriptures, where two or more are gathered — let’s go back to that concept. It’s not about the building.”

In conclusion, the parish family is not yet one — but it is becoming. And that becoming, difficult and beautiful as it is, is exactly where the Spirit lives.

The people who showed up to these Community Conversations did so because they love this community and believe it can become something worthy of that love. Their willingness to speak honestly about grief and fear, to name injustice without walking away, and to hold hope alongside pain is itself a sign of the Spirit’s presence. Leadership now carries the weight of that trust. The call is clear: listen deeply, act courageously, communicate honestly, center the margins, build for belonging, and trust that the God who began this good work will bring it to completion.

“Be not afraid. There are so many opportunities.”