

# St. John the Baptist



# Parish Assembly 2019

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# Summary

The 2019 St. John the Baptist Parish Assembly had sharp focus and Biblical direction:

- Divine Worship Assembly was inspired by The Great Commandment from the time of Moses to know, love and serve God with our whole strength, mind and soul (*Deuteronomy 6:4*)
- Evangelization Assembly was inspired by The Great Commission to go and make disciples, teaching them and baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit (*Matthew 28: 19-20*)
- Community Outreach and Stewardship Assembly was inspired by the New or Second Greatest Commandment to love one another (*John 13: 34*)

Our three Assembly sessions involved nearly 80 individual parishioners whose participation totaled 400 hours of insights, sharing and recommendations. One particular observation is telling: At the first Assembly, more than 50 of us were scattered across the front of the nave as reports were delivered from the ambo. At the last Assembly, all participants were in the same section at the front of the nave, a visual indication, perhaps, that we were closer together in our work at the end than in the beginning.

We also received many comments about Parish life through nearly 175 total responses in the three pre-Assembly surveys, as well as additional comments in the post-Assembly evaluations. The volume and breadth of those comments are capsulized in this report, and will be referenced in their entirety by Pastoral and Finance Councils in their ongoing work.

There is a tremendous volume of suggestions and ideas to improve or enhance the four areas of Parish life we examined during the Assemblies. An abbreviated summary of actions or focus to consider in the coming months and years:

## **Divine Worship**

- Establish a new Liturgy Commission:
  - Coordinate ongoing training/education for all lay ministries
  - Improve cooperation and standards for all lay ministries
  - Better preparation for all liturgies, from daily Mass to sacraments
- Plan a retreat (annual, semi-annual) for all lay ministries

## **Evangelization**

- Become even more welcoming as a Parish, especially to new parishioners and children
- Find new ways to reach the 75% of parishioners who do not attend weekly Mass

## **Community Outreach**

- Better Parish communications, internally and externally
- Assess community needs, e.g., “mission” opportunities

## **Stewardship**

- Better engage parishioners about financial needs of the Parish
- Discernment of individual stewardship responsibilities (time, talent and/or treasure)

This report – these observations and recommendations – is a way for us to begin.

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# Divine Worship — January

## Assembly Discussions

The Assembly began with Benediction, followed by two roundtable sessions. A total of 56 parishioners registered and were assigned to one of eight tables in each session. During the first session, participants were presented with three “principles” based on the Catechism, Sacred Scripture and Vatican II documents. Each table group reported highlights of their exchange to all attendees, included here. Highlights are edited to avoid redundancies; we were in agreement on many things.

### Session #1

#### **First Principle: God’s Omnipresence/Man’s Longing**

*Name three major ways people in our culture today are seeking and misplacing their desire for God?*

- Money/power/pleasure
- Technology
- Addictions
- Reading/seeking negative things online
- Materialism
- Impersonal nature of modern communications
- Lack of compassion
- Self-centered
- Pride

*Name three major obstacles that prevent people today from believing and trusting in God?*

- Money/power/pleasure
- Consumer society
- Cafeteria Catholics
- Peer pressure
- Materialism
- God doesn’t want what I want
- Poor catechesis
- Lack of responsibility
- Worship of money
- Denigration of Life/Family
- Church scandal
- Media negativity

*Name three major ways in which God continues to show His care for His people of today who do not believe and trust in Him?*

- Nature/beauty around us
- Lives of saints
- The Incarnation
- Acts of charity
- Miracles
- God sends people to us in unlikely time/place
- God’s Wisdom, e.g., in physicians who heal, teachers who enlighten, etc.
- Holy Spirit

#### **Second Principle: God’s Definitive Revelation: Jesus Christ**

*When I attend Mass, what are three signs that I see pointing powerfully to the saving presence of Christ?*

- Bread, Book, Brethren
- Sense of Holy Spirit
- The Word
- Holiness of the people
- The Eucharist
- Peace felt during Mass

*Do we see the redemptive suffering and death of the Lord as something we should be announcing to a world that is searching for consolation amidst their struggles?*

- Yes, Yes, Yes
- Charity = Love
- Outreach to those in need
- As simple as a smile
- People know we are Christians by our love/action
- Awareness of others
- The Crucifix
- See what is in front of us

*Name three ways in which we can feel more strongly the forgiving love of Christ when we celebrate the Mass in our church.*

- 
- Sign of peace
  - Reduce noise
  - More reflection/meditation time
  - Lamb of God
  - Use of Confiteor in the Penitential Act The Our Father
  - Silence before Mass

### **Third Principle: Liturgy, Sacrament of Jesus Christ**

*When I am at Mass, am I aware of the presence of (communion of saints, heavenly powers)? If so, in what way am I made aware?*

- The Trinity
- Music
- Profession of Faith
- Holy water
- Everything in the sanctuary points to something greater/symbols in church
- Saints themselves are called out
- Readings
- Eucharist

*Name three ways we can prepare our minds so that we can come to Mass with the proper dispositions so that we may be enriched by its effects.*

- Examination of conscience
- Minimize distractions
- Coming early
- Quiet time before Mass
- Preparing for Mass if you are to be a lay minister
- Example of Men of Faith
- Sit up front
- Focus on the altar

*Do I see Christ in the priest, the Word proclaimed, the Eucharistic species, the praying and singing community? In what way do they point to Christ's presence?*

- Yes, yes, yes
- Transubstantiation
- Celebrants—in word and action
- Focus/simplicity of the Mass
- Hymns that we sing
- In servers and lectors
- Prayers that Jesus prayed

### **Session #2**

In the second session, the participants again gathered at their tables for a discussion about our Divine Liturgy ministries: Welcoming/ushers, Altar Servers, Lectors, Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion, and Music. Three questions were asked. Some tables discussed more ministries than others. **Comments summarized here can be associated with any or all of our ministries.**

*Do we receive enough training on our role and the correct and orderly performance of our role in the Church's liturgy?*

- Lack of consistency
- No
- Deepen understanding
- Noise in Narthex/close doors
- Take advantage of archdiocesan training programs
- Refresher training for all ministries
- Too much talking prior to Mass
- Retreat suggested

*Name three to five Christ-like values that ministers must try to exhibit in their ministry.*

- Proper dress/respect
- Smiles/acceptance of others
- Willingness to have impact
- Attention to responsibility
- Patience
- Sincerity/reverence
- Choir is well-trained
- Enthusiasm
- Arrive early/prepared

*Are we invited, encouraged and inspired to worship with Christ and His people through these ministries and in active participation during Mass?*

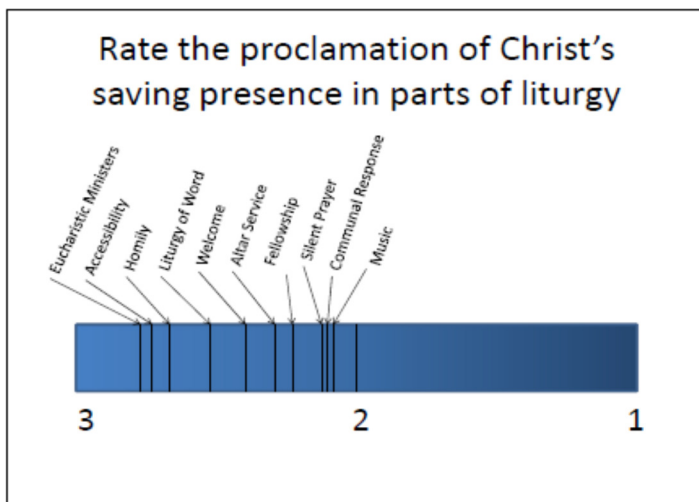
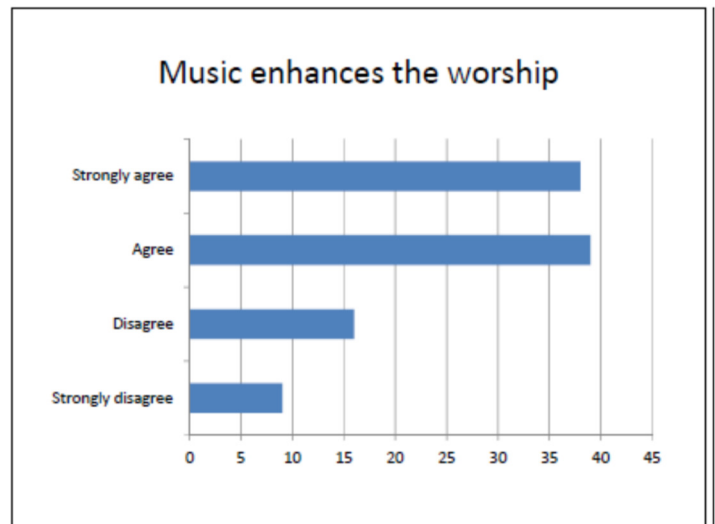
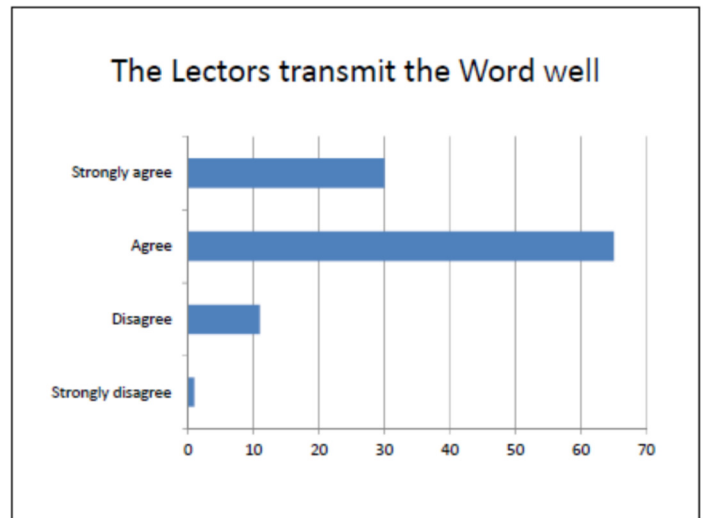
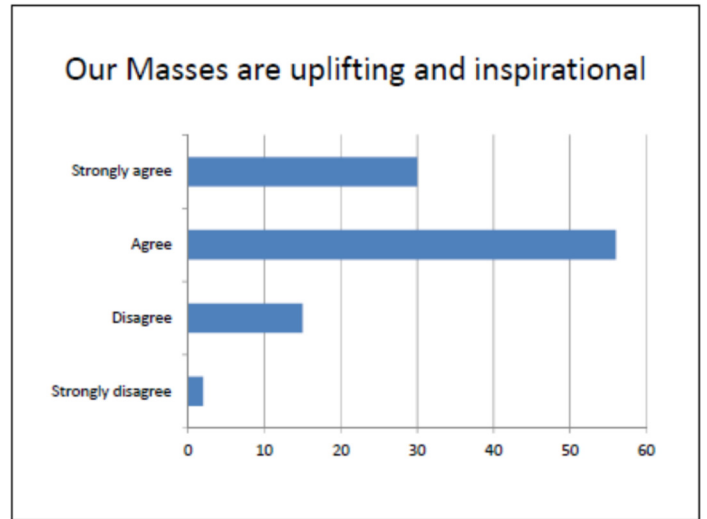
- Yes
- Greeters set tone
- Interaction/invitations with new parishioners
- Silent meditation vs. meditation hymn
- Through their example
- As a small parish, we see our lay ministers in the community
- Personal invite important
- New/diverse people to bring up gifts

## Pre-Assembly Divine Worship Survey

There were a total of 116 survey responses. Some surveys were incomplete, but all were counted. The survey was not scientific and there was some obvious confusion on several topics. It was our basic intent to use the survey as an indicator of parish life, not an in-depth study. Approximately a third of respondents included comments, all or at least most of them mirrored discussions at the Divine Worship Assembly.

In addition to the wide interest, there were overwhelmingly positive responses or input regarding our practice of Divine Worship. Confusion stemmed from individual interpretations of a few questions. For example, the statement: "Music enhances the worship" had some people respond to the simple declaration that music does enhance worship, while others used the statement to grade various styles of music. Similarly, there were other survey questions that could be interpreted in more than one way.

While there was general and positive consensus on most topics, responses to moving the tabernacle and the placement of our baptismal font generated near equal responses between the strongly agree/agree and the strongly disagree/disagree respondents. This division suggests there is opportunity for teaching and further discussion.



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# Evangelization — February

## Assembly Discussions

The Assembly began with Benediction, followed by one roundtable discussion and a general question-and-answer session. A total of 40 parishioners registered and were assigned to one of six tables in each session. During the first session, participants at half the tables discussed “Evangelization in Family Life” and half discussed “Evangelization in the Parish. Each table group reported highlights of their exchange to all attendees, included here. The second, general session spent only a few minutes on questions or topics brought before all participants. Highlights are edited to condense and avoid redundancies.

### Session 1-A “Evangelizing in Family Life”

Evangelizing is in fact the grace and vocation proper to the Church, **her deepest identity. She exists in order to evangelize**, that is to say, in order to preach and teach, to be the channel of the gift of grace, to reconcile sinners with God, and to perpetuate Christ's sacrifice in the Mass, which is the memorial of His death and glorious resurrection. (*Evangelii Nuntiandi-Evangelization in the Modern World*, Pope Paul VI, Dec 8, 1975; n.14)

*I am able to evangelize only because I am being evangelized myself. Share your thoughts on what He might say about us as His disciples living within this current culture in our lives.*

- Look for “holy moments” in daily life to transmit faith (Matthew Kelly)
- We are called to be saints
- Step away from technology and towards God
- One must have Hope
- Pray for others
- Be positive, encouraging
- Read sacred scripture/Lectio Divina
- Recognize challenges created by social media and changing times
- Smile, invite and sometimes be quiet

*How do I continue to share the good news of Jesus Christ with the family? Share some thoughts on the faith journey of our children beyond the Sacrament of Confirmation.*

- By example
- Invite, encourage to share a special talent or skill with parish community
- Pray for them
- Youth ministries
- Through a father’s participation/example
- Use social media for the good in outreach to younger members
- Recognize that it begins with seeds and roots
- Lead them to outreach activities

*The family is the domestic Church. It is also the most basic unity of society. How does a family evangelize society?*

- By example
- By lending an ear
- Youth groups (e.g., Conquest, Boy Scouts)
- Girls opportunities lacking?
- Showing up as a family
- Express love through actions
- Recognize positive role of youth

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Name three major challenges that families are facing today as evangelizers and suggest some ways these challenges can be overcome.

### Challenges

- TV/YouTube/video
- Internet
- Mobile devices
- Social media
- Children are overscheduled
- Lack of awareness/dependence on God
- Isolation
- “Because I can”/Belief in “me”

### Remedies

- Parents/grandparents need to take responsibility
- Begin setting standards early, build foundation
- Rely on the Sacraments and Scripture
- Respect each other
- Family dinners

### Session 1-B “Evangelizing in the Parish”

The Church is an evangelizer, but **she begins by being evangelized herself**. She is the community of believers, the community of hope lived and communicated, the community of brotherly love, and **she needs to listen unceasingly to what she must believe, to her reasons for hoping, to the new commandment of love**. (*Evangelii Nuntiandi-Evangelization in the Modern World*, Pope Paul VI, Dec 08, 1975; n.15)

*The parish is a stronger evangelizer when we are one. Discuss ways in which we can grow our unity.*

- Encourage/appreciate those who participate
- Assemblies this this
- Focus on positive
- Opportunities to share
- Develop shared spirituality
- Pot luck suppers

*The parish must continue to be evangelized herself. In addition to the sacraments, what are some other ways in which we as a parish can continue to be evangelized?*

- Retreats, a la men’s Rise Up retreat
- In knowing we are loved we attract others
- Encourage participation in the Mass, e.g., bringing gifts up
- Be welcoming – all of us are “greeters”
- Outreach to new families/newly married
- Find ways to reach out to the greater community

*Jesus said, “Let the children come to me, and do not prevent them; for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.” How are we leading children to Jesus as a parish?*

- Children’s Mass
- Promote/increase youth ministries
- Begin with invitation to participate in parish life to confirmed students
- Youth-led ministries at a special Mass(es)
- Notice, acknowledge youth who are active
- Evangelize high school-age students to bring peers to Mass/activities

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*Many of our parishioners are not actively engaged in parish life. Name some ways in which we as Catholics can be salt and light to them and the rest of the community?*

- Small evangelization/Bible study groups
- Personal invitations
- Letters, phone calls, text messages to those who are not attending
- RCIA “refresher” for Catholics
- Parish directory
- Parish picnic
- Demonstrate real faith through actions
- Offer tours of cemetery/encourage volunteering for cemetery upkeep
- Day of appreciation/recognition for those who volunteer/are active

### **Session 2 – General session/Q&A**

*How can we help evangelize each other?*

- Community prayer
- Telling our parish life story
- Sharing parish life/events
- “They will know... by our love”

*What can we do today to be more inviting, welcoming?*

- Move in so others can join us in the pew
- Recognize those around us
- Reach out to children and youth
- Welcoming in narthex/fellowship after Mass

*How can we provide opportunities for youth participation?*

- Invite them into parish ministries
- Offer a retreat day for teenagers
- A concern: We need youth leaders
- Involve in community outreach activities
- Tap into neighboring parish youth groups

*A number of topics related to evangelization were offered as the session was closing:*

- Promote the practice of lectio divina to help evangelize ourselves
- Find ways to reach out to parishioners and non-parishioners to participate in Mass and parish life
- Develop a system to offer rides to the homebound or those unable to drive to Mass
- Remember the resources and prayers of Fatima House



## Pre-Assembly Evangelization Survey

There were a total of 48 survey responses tabulated. Some surveys were incomplete, but all were counted. The survey was not scientific but designed to give the parish an indicator of parish life. A number of respondents included comments, many of which were mirrored in discussions at the Evangelization Assembly.

There appears to be consensus in favor of more healing and young/young adult faith formation ministries. Many more have been approached to participate in parish ministries than not, and we were split nearly even on interest in having a home blessed – several respondents indicated their homes were already blessed. Less than half of respondents rated the various evangelization ministries; however Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament was the most “enriching.”

<p><i>Have you been approached to participate?</i> Yes = 26 No = 9</p>	<p><i>Would you be interested in having your home blessed?</i> Yes = 17 No = 16</p>
<p><i>Is there a need for more healing ministries?</i> Yes = 27 No = 4</p>	<p><i>Are you interested in offering more youth/young adult faith formation programs?</i> Yes = 26 No = 7</p>

*Do faith-building opportunities at SJB enrich your spiritual journey?*

	<b>#Ratings</b>	<b>3s</b>	<b>2s</b>	<b>1s</b>	<b>Average*</b>
Adoration	24	20	3	1	2.8
Christ Life	19	12	7	0	2.6
Bible Study	18	9	5	4	2.3
Women’s Tea	16	9	4	3	2.4
Flame of Love Rosary	12	9	2	1	2.8
PREP	11	6	4	1	2.5
Regina Academy	11	7	3	1	2.5

*\*Perfect score = 3.0*

*Note: Only included opportunities with 10+ total ratings*

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# Community Outreach/Stewardship — March

## Assembly Discussions

The Assembly began as the others before it with Benediction. There were two sessions planned, the first focused on Community Outreach, the second on Stewardship. A total of 39 parishioners registered and were assigned to one of six tables in each session. Each table group reported highlights of their exchange to all attendees, summarized below. Highlights are edited to condense and avoid redundancies, although there was often consensus.

### Session 1: Parable of the Wise and the Foolish Maidens

“Then the king will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father. Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me, ill and you cared for me, in prison and you visited me.” (Matthew 25: 34-40)

*Jesus has clearly identified Himself with the needy. Do we see Him in the needy? In whom do I see Him most visibly? In whom do I struggle in seeing Him?*

- Needs not merely monetary
- The poor
- Be complimentary
- The addicted
- Those who are “invisible” but in need
- It is hard sometimes to “see” Jesus
- Reaching those who are “different”
- We resist, put up walls
- Help with learning “how” to identify needs
- Get out of our comfort zone
- Offer additional help at Lord’s Pantry beyond food
- How do we engage those who are hostile?

*Jesus says that I am blessed by my Father with unique and varied gifts to help others now until I inherit His kingdom.*

*What are those gifts and with whom in our parish can I share them?*

- Some not aware of their gifts
- Engaging others/newcomers
- Welcome packet
- Recognize gifts we already have (music, KofC, etc.)
- Better Parish communications
- Community potlucks, informal gatherings
- Volunteer development
- Welcome those receiving sacraments for the first time
- What are our needs?
- Can we do more? Code Blue at SJB?
- Youth involvement
- Connect groups/more unity
- Bulletin as classified ad resource?

*In Matthew’s passage read above, the righteous show up at the king’s throne as a group of people, not individually. Do we see ourselves as part of a team of disciples ministering together in our parish for the same king? How can we grow and build that unity?*

- Come together more often
- Picnics/parish events
- Visit nursing homes
- Unite for 2 or 3 projects identified by ministries
- Use technology to reach out
- Visibility of our priests
- Encourage youth participation
- Realize we have commonality
- Acknowledge newcomers

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## **Session 2: The Parable of the Talents**

"It will be as when a man who was going on a journey called in his servants and entrusted his possessions to them. To one he gave five talents; to another, two; to a third, one – to each according to his ability. Then he went away..." (Matthew 25: 14-30)

*As seen in the parable above, money is something we are stewards of, that is, it is a gift that the Master has entrusted to us for profitable use in His Kingdom. Do we view our money and talents and time that way? How do we view time, talent and treasure?*

- Tithing is important
- Challenge ourselves to be more generous
- Be accountable/report finances
- We are the Church
- Personal invitations
- God-given, for us to share
- "Be loved, feel love" (Christ Life)
- Develop relationships before stewardship
- Do talent survey

*In the parable above, our Lord is teaching us that we will have to give an account for our stewardship to Him. If that time were now, how could we as a parish rate ourselves; do we have the commitment and joy of the first, second or third servant?*

- Yes, we do have joy
- Hard to reach unchurched
- Bring back our own families
- Parish communication database
- Unrecognized talent
- Same people often volunteer
- We need more people
- We are a work in progress

*Where in the parish do I feel the Master is sending me to invest the time, talent and treasure that He has entrusted to me?*

- Carve out more prayer time
- Welcome others back
- All have gifts—some obvious
- We are "sent" into the community
- Visit the sick
- Church also a steward of environment

## **Pre-Assembly Community Outreach/Stewardship Survey**

There were a total of 25 survey responses tabulated, the fewest of all Assemblies. Perhaps we are tired of paperwork; however, the comments and insights continue to be substantive. Because the survey numbers are so small (Note: Participation in the Assembly itself numbered nearly twice the amount) it is difficult to draw firm conclusions. However, there are several consensual observations, often mirrored in Assembly discussions:

- The Knights of Columbus and its Pro-Life activities are perceived as the most significant community outreach
- The Lord's Pantry was perceived as the most visible and necessary, meeting significant community needs
- More than half of respondents cited the needs of the elderly and shut-ins, and that outreach is an opportunity for more parish involvement
- Near unanimous consent that all three elements of stewardship – time, talent, treasure – are necessary for parish life
- We need to be better "stewards" of the Gospel message through better communications

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# What's Next...

Your Parish is seeking additional interested persons in developing plans to study and implement short-term and long-term goals identified during the Assembly sessions.

Four Commissions will be established for the study and implementation phase:

- Liturgy Commission
- Evangelization Commission
- Community Outreach Commission
- Stewardship Commission

The four Commissions will report to the Administrator/Pastor of the Parish.

Indicate your interest in participating by emailing: [ministries@stjohnsottsville.org](mailto:ministries@stjohnsottsville.org) or contacting any member of the Pastoral or Finance Councils.

Thank you!

## **Pastoral Council**

Anita Colahan  
Tom Costello  
Christina Crews  
Kathy Fetter  
Liz Katra  
Jeanne Keller  
Cathy Leidtke  
Tony Luna  
Sue Rogers  
Donna Sciacca  
Phyllis Schmerbeck  
Anne Slifer  
Ron Watson  
Rev. Tony Ripp

## **Finance Council**

Adam Crews  
Mark Fetter  
Chris Hackley  
Liz Torgerson  
Mary Miller  
Jerry Peters  
Ron Watson  
Rev. Tony Ripp