



ST. THOMAS AQUINAS
CATHOLIC PARISH

Report on the ME25 (Member Engagement Survey) Results

Why did STA do the ME25? What did we learn? What does it mean?

1. The context

For the past year and a half, Fr. Bart and the St. Thomas Aquinas staff realized more clearly than ever that there was a crisis – a crisis of faith and discipleship, of fewer and fewer people finding faith meaningful in their lives, and more and more people perceiving the Church as irrelevant, or worse, harmful. The statistics were shocking. It galvanized us to take a piercing look at where we were as a parish, and what we should be doing to get back on track...to move from maintenance to mission...from looking in to looking out...from living faith as an obligation to becoming fully aware of the personal love of Jesus and how that love changes all we do and are. We developed a five year plan, with specific programmatic tools (like Alpha), to begin opening our hearts and minds to the transformation of the Holy Spirit. But we were going to need more than anecdotal evidence to see if our changes were making a difference. That is the role of the ME25 – to give us a baseline measurement of parishioner engagement, against which we can measure our progress.

2. What we discovered

Compared to the national average, our parishioners are very well educated (69% are college grads or above) and more are financially well off (over 40% earn over \$100,000/year). Over half of our parishioners are age 55+; and more than a third of our parishioners have been here less than 5 years. Of the parishioners who come to Mass, most come almost every week (85%), which is great. People largely feel that their opinions count, and that they are cared for. On the other hand, very few felt that they had a best friend here at the parish. Our level of giving (both financially and in giving of our time) was below what we expected (and below the national average). It was interesting to note that our parishioners were less likely to take unpopular stands or to invite people to come with them to the parish than is seen in the US Catholic church overall.

3. Where does that leave us?

Overall, we came to the bittersweet conclusion that we are ‘normal.’ Our parish is in the same boat as parishes all across the United States. This affirms the anecdotal evidence we had before taking the ME25 that we need to change our focus very intentionally to evangelization, to being a place where people can experience Jesus in a way that changes how they live.

We also came away with many questions. Why don’t people have friends here? Even though we at the parish are seen as caring or welcoming, those interactions are not usually developing into friendships. Do we have a consumer mentality about our parish? Do we come, expecting the parish to listen to and serve us, but remain unwilling to invest ourselves? Why is it so difficult to take unpopular stands, and does it have to do with the socio-political climate particular to Madison or is there more to it? How do we engage new members quickly, given the fairly quick turn-over, so that people can discover and develop their God-given gifts?

Good News

The ME25 gives us a baseline for measuring our progress. It points to areas where we can focus our energy effectively. We intend to do the ME25 again because it will help us to be accountable to each other. And it will be exciting to see where our parish will be a year, two years, five years from now.

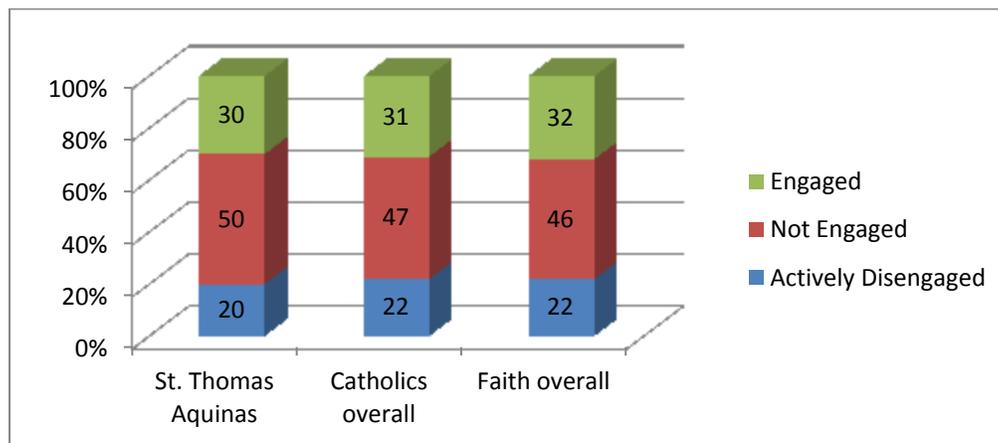
Because it is exciting.

As a parish we are awake to the difficult realities and challenges facing the Church, and we are choosing to address them. We are not going to go quietly into irrelevance. We are not going to remain in maintenance mode. The Holy Spirit is calling us, and while we may not know where we'll end up, we do know that we will be different. Jesus is calling us into the deep. Be not afraid!

You can check out the full report on our parish website, or ask at the parish office for a hard copy. Is there something that strikes you? Raises questions? We'd love to hear your feedback.

Please continue to pray for Fr. Bart, for the staff, and for your fellow parishioners. Pray for our parish – for each one of us – to be a light to all those who need the love of God.

ME25 Results: Overall Member Engagement Summary



ME 25 Definitions:



Engaged (30% of STA members): Members who are strongly connected to the parish, who are spiritually committed, and who give generously both financially and of their time.



Not Engaged (50% of STA members): Members who may attend fairly regularly, but are not deeply connected to the parish. Their connection is more 'social' than 'spiritual', they give moderately, volunteer minimally, and are more likely to leave.



Actively Disengaged (20% of STA members): Members who show up once or twice a year, if at all. They may be physically present, but psychologically absent. They are unhappy with their parish and are happy to tell you so, even if they can't name their priest.