



PAR: What and When?

...and Why and How—what does it mean for me?

For the past few months, you have been asked at every Sunday Mass to join in prayer for God's blessings "as we respond to the needs and plan for the future of our Good Shepherd Community." Very specifically, we ask that we may "affirm our strengths and open ourselves to new growth."

Beginning this month, you will be hearing a lot more about this *Parish Assessment and Renewal* Process, usually abbreviated as PAR. A lot of questions have been asked about it, and it may be helpful to review what it is all about and why we are doing it.

On the surface, PAR is a strategic planning process that engages all members of the parish together, first to take a good look at ourselves as a parish, and in the light of our unique situation, to chart a course for our future health and activity.

For a Catholic parish, planning has to go beyond the usual goals of organizational efficiency or business success. As Catholics and members of Good Shepherd Parish, each of us is a disciple of Jesus Christ, living with his life and sharing in his mission. We fulfill this life and mission in communion with one another as members of the one Body of Christ, as Saint Paul never ceases to remind us in his letters to the earliest Christian communities.

Do we need this thing called PAR?

There is an old saying, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it." Well, nothing's broken here at Good Shepherd. The parish is in good shape, thanks to all of you.

However, PAR is not a program to "fix" broken parishes or to solve problems. *Its purpose is revitalizing our life and mission as disciples and apostles of Jesus Christ.* The purpose of a Catholic parish is not simply to provide services for its members. It is to provide opportunities and support for all members, individually and communally, to be disciples of Jesus Christ, actively living in union with him and fulfilling his mission in our world.

During the past year, many people have spoken to me about the great potential our unique parish community has, situated in the midst of one of the most strategically influential communities in the world.

Many of us hear at Mass on Sunday that we must live our faith throughout the whole of our lives, but

are often uncertain as to just how to do that. The parish offers a variety of activities, but many people don't seem to be touched by them. The goal of PAR, the "renewal" part, is to give us the tools to concentrate our resources toward a diverse and vibrant parish life that can touch and engage Catholics across the whole spectrum of interests and talents, and center them on Jesus Christ and his mission.

Having experienced PAR myself at my former parish, I can testify to the great benefit this process can be for a parish that is already alive and active. People who were good Catholics already doing many good things discovered a spirit of collaboration and mutual caring that many people formerly "on the margins" found appealing, and joined in.

The Marriage Encounter program often says that good marriages don't *need* Marriage Encounter, but they *deserve* it. I think it's the same way with PAR.

Whose idea is this anyway?

Father Tom Sweetser, SJ, has spent almost forty years working with hundreds of Catholic parishes in the United States. He is the author or co-author of seven books that explore the best practices of parish communities throughout the country, and the ways of organizing parishes to help them realize their potential. He has developed PAR as a program for parish renewal that works, and is continually being refined by experience.

This is not a program that is mandated by the Archdiocese of Los Angeles. However, the Archdiocese has encouraged this and similar programs of parish planning and renewal for many years. Father Sweetser regularly speaks at the Archdiocesan Religious Education Congress, and over the past ten years, PAR has successfully helped at least eight parishes in Southern California.

What is going to be done at Good Shepherd?

Information gathering already happened.

In the fall, a lot of things were going on beneath the surface. A random sample of parishioners was asked to complete a survey about their experience of parish life. These were collected anonymously and sent unopened to the PAR office in Milwaukee. No one on the parish staff, not even the pastor, has seen any of the responses. (The surveys were also available

for anyone else who wished to fill one out. It was announced at Mass for several weekends, and everyone was given the opportunity to have a voice.) Leaders of organizations and ministries were also asked for information about their purpose and activities.

Now in this new year, we will begin a very intensive process of planning for the future health and vitality of our parish. Father Sweetser's office will prepare an assessment report from all this material, which will be used in the February planning period.

February 11-27: Two-Week On-Site Visit.

During this time, Father Sweetser and his associate, Wendy Rappé, will spend two weeks, including three weekends, here at Good Shepherd. They will interview key leaders and others involved in the parish. They will meet with staff and organizations and observe day-to-day parish life.

- On Saturday, February 12, from 9:00 am to 1:00 pm, they will meet with the PAR Planning Team, a group of about 50 parish leaders, to introduce and begin the process.
- The same weekend, Fr. Sweetser and Ms. Rappé will speak about the PAR process at all the Masses.
- **On Sunday, February 20, from 1:30 to 3:00 pm, all members of the parish are invited to a general "town-hall" meeting to give your own input about parish life.**
- On Saturday, February 26, from 9:00 am to 3:00 pm, the PAR Planning Team will again meet to finalize goals and objectives.
- The same weekend, Fr. Sweetser and Ms. Rappé, together with members of the PAR Planning Team, will share the results with the parish at all the Masses.

After those two weeks, then what?

All existing elements of parish life, ministries, and organizations will remain, but there will be a revived Parish Pastoral Council, whose purpose will be to monitor the implementation of the plan and make effective assessment and planning an ongoing part of parish life. This is key to the success of the process. Five areas of parish life and ministry will form the basis of these ongoing groups: prayer and worship, education and formation, outreach and social justice, community life, and administration. Representatives

from the organizations and ministries will meet on a regular basis, and will select from among their own members who should represent them on the Parish Pastoral Council.

The purpose of these groups will not be to solve problems or come up with new ideas and projects, but to continually evaluate and promote healthy parish community life and activity in fulfillment of the mission of Jesus Christ.

Father Sweetser and Ms. Rappé will stay in touch with us to help us monitor the progress of the plan, and six months later, November 11-13, 2011, they will return for a follow-up visit.

But even after that, unlike many planning consultants, they do not "leave us orphans." Fr. Sweetser is always available by phone, and frequently stops by to visit when he is in the area.

And he always brings with him the tremendous depth of his experience, the breadth of his wisdom, and the sparkle of his wit.

So, what does all this mean for me?

A lot depends on your own spirituality and what you want to get from and give to your participation in the Church.

If you are active in a Church organization or ministry, wondering why so few people seem interested in joining, you will very likely find, bit by bit, more folks getting interested.

If you are frustrated because no one seems to share your interest or vision for the Church, you may well find other like-minded and like-spirited people sharing your passion.

If you feel that the Catholic faith is somewhere on the fringes of your life, you may find it coming closer to the center.

If you are fearful of change, you may find those fears replaced by a greater understanding of what being a member of the Body of Christ is really about.



Overnight changes or big projects are usually short-lived and superficial. PAR enables our whole parish community to build a new way of planning and organizing that results in gradual and lasting transformation.

I love you. Fr. Tom Welbers.

For more about PAR, go to to: <http://www.pepparish.org/>
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