

Learning from Thriving Parishes

The data clearly show that **some parishes are already neutralizing major fears**. Below are the most significant fear-areas—and what thriving parishes are doing differently.

A. FEAR: *Youth Are Leaving / No Future*

Thriving Parishes Are:

- Personally inviting youth and families (not just advertising)
- Offering post-Confirmation pathways
- Giving youth visible roles (servers, music, leadership)
- Connecting youth to **real relationships with priests and lay mentors**

Result:

- Children in pews
- Teens volunteering
- Young families inviting other families

KEY INSIGHT: *This fear is already being actively addressed in parishes where relationships come first.*

B. FEAR: *Parish Will Close / Attendance Is Too Low*

Thriving Parishes Are:

- Creating strong community beyond Mass
- Making visitors feel seen and followed up with
- Hosting regular social gatherings tied to belonging
- Sharing testimonies of growth and conversion

Result:

- Attendance stabilizes or grows

- Parish identity strengthens
- Fear of closure diminishes even if consolidation occurs

KEY INSIGHT: *Closure anxiety decreases when people experience vitality.*

C. FEAR: Priests Are Overworked / Too Few Sacraments

Thriving Parishes Are:

- Delegating administration to laity
- Sharing staff and formation across parishes
- Freeing priests to focus on preaching, sacraments, and presence
- Treating priests as spiritual leaders, not managers

Result:

- Healthier priests
- More visible pastoral presence
- Stronger sacramental life

KEY INSIGHT: *The priest shortage fear is reduced when leadership is shared.*

D. FEAR: Faith Is Shallow or Confused

Thriving Parishes Are:

- Offering adult faith formation beyond “classes”
- Using small groups and relational catechesis
- Teaching clearly about the Eucharist
- Integrating formation with prayer and worship

Result:

- Converts through OCIA
- Parishioners articulate their faith

- Strong Eucharistic devotion

KEY INSIGHT: *Confusion is replaced by confidence where formation is relational, intentional, and beyond mere “programs.”*

E. FEAR: Division Will Tear Us Apart

Thriving Parishes Are:

- Refusing to lead with ideology
- Centering preaching on Jesus, Scripture, and discipleship
- Focusing on shared mission instead of personal or ideological agendas
- Creating intergenerational and cross-background relationships

Result:

- Differences still exist—but don’t dominate
- Mission becomes the unifying force

KEY INSIGHT: *Unity grows when relationships, communion, and mission outrank personal preferences and agendas.*

F. FEAR: Aging Volunteers / No One to Replace Us

Thriving Parishes Are:

- Open to new ways of addressing new needs
- Recognizing when older needs are no longer present and willing to re-align time and priorities
- Inviting younger people into leadership early
- Letting people try and fail safely
- Focusing on multiplication, not perfection
- Celebrating service publicly

Result:

- New leaders emerge
- Burnout decreases
- Ownership spreads

KEY INSIGHT: *Succession to the next generation happens when invitation, intentionality, and openness replace rigid assumptions about the status quo.*