

2007 State of the Parish Report

Pentecost Sunday 2007

St Vincent Ferrer (SVF) Parish continues to grow in wisdom, age and grace. This means that we are a changing community on many levels. We are in villages that are changing. Moving now closer to our eightieth birthday as a parish, we look at our roots in Italian and Irish founding families. Today the SVF community has many more welcomed accents. Many new faces are coming to our villages and therefore shopping for churches. The Polish people are immigrating into Elmwood Park in large numbers. A survey of about a decade ago said that if SVF masses were needed in another language, it would be Polish. The further recommendation was to keep SVF an English-only speaking parish of many people. The Filipino community continues to grow at SVF; remember St. Vincent Ferrer himself is a major patron of the Philippines. SVF has Latinos, Blacks, Indians, Chinese, etc. but not in the volume of the already mentioned. All are welcome! As the scripture says we are people of every tribe, race and tongue. We embrace growing in our diversity but it does mean change for us all.

SVF is a good parish that can become better. As Catholic Christians, we are always moving forward toward a goal that we have not yet reached. In this report I will build on the same goals of past reports; namely, the contrasts and uses of charismatic leadership and structural leadership. The former is the personality as the leader; the latter is the written norms that are followed. My experience of SVF is super strong charismatic leadership and weak structural leadership. Both need to be in balance for leadership to be solid.

One pitfall of purely charismatic leadership is that standardized procedures are not established or followed. This causes fast burn out. That not only means pastors, but all voluntary leadership positions become short lived with burnout. Another pitfall is that preferential treatment reigns. You can always cut a deal with the charismatic leader ignoring laws, guidelines, policies, etc. Sometimes this is falsely labeled the "pastoral" thing to do. All norms exist for others. Exemption rules. Special treatment is common place. When structural leadership is weak, the system runs like a roller coaster. Conversation is not about **what** is correct, proper, or right; conversation is about **who** to wheel the deal with. Everything becomes personalities. Charm, manipulation, bullying, etc. become the methods of getting what is wanted from the charismatic de jour.

This is the fourth report of my assigned ministry as pastor with SVF. I say this because we are at a crucial time to put our leadership balance to the test. Basically this report is already moving to another transition of the pastorate. I will finish my term in 2010. The structural leadership of SVF will need to be in place for a transition that is holy and healthy.

One strong example of SVF structural leadership is the parish website, **svfparish.org**. This creates a level field; no secrets. A newly formed parish outside of Melbourne, Australia asked to use our site to model their structures. Recently, a deanery in Ohio that is consolidating found our wedding/marriage site saying there is nothing even near it in clarity and detail. Structures help make life move. Our younger generations prefer to read rather than talk. When they call, they are already catechized to the extent that they understand what is written.

All pastors inherit a given job description: 1) To protect, foster, encourage the sacramental life of the parish in accord with church teachings. 2) To insure safety structures for personnel and the physical orderliness of the campus. This would include finances, properties, etc. This also includes calling for Christian skills of both salaried workers and volunteers.

My speaking about structures has taught me much that I need to clarify. I have presumed inner personal structures. These need to be in place for the external structures to develop. My presumption of inner structure was not a given. When internal structures are not in place, anything external is viewed as policing and strong-armed. Our Catholic structures are about discipline which is for the common good.

+ *The call to inner personal structure:* Often I refer to our soap opera society as the “Jerry Springer” factor within us and among us. We are a nation in a declared active war since I have been pastor here. The moral of people has shifted. Terrorism moves us to fear, aggression, anger, hatred, depression, anxiety, withdrawal, etc. Recently while reflecting on his decade in Chicago, Cardinal George said our church has become secularized with a “fear of Jesus, a fear of faith, and a fear of love. ...That’s a great tragedy”. (**Chicago Tribune**, 4 May 2007)

We are not isolated in our society. As a matter of fact our greatest sin could be fitting into the culture. It was a price that immigrant peoples paid. I would like us as Catholic Christians to look at who we are and our pre-Christian disposition. Without the inner construct, we are not going to ever have a parish infrastructure that will work.

There are four inner calls that are presumed and pre-Christian: 1) The call to civility. 2) The call to respect. 3) The call to affirmation. 4. The call to the common good.

+ *The Call to Civility:* Many people in our culture have lost or never had civility. A civil tongue, a civil thought, skills to create a civil environment—it just is not a given. SVF has a very, very small group of these folks but they are present. Remember the old adage that a rotten apple can spoil the entire

bushel? Well, in the Christian life one sinner does **not** cause others to sin, but we need to know the demons. Scott Peck who wrote the famous book ***The Road Less Traveled***, wrote a book years earlier titled ***Civility Rediscovered***. It was an expose of the USA culture on trends showing us our losses—the very core of soul. Peck writes in theory but being a psychiatrist has many stories to exemplify his points. Civility is an inner structure of the soul at SVF that is getting stronger.

+ The Call to Respect: As Catholics we try to focus on the respect of life. Respect for humanity, property, space, process, authority, the earth—it is all seen as disposable. Dare I say even fashionable. Much of our TV and movie humor is built on debasement. At SVF there are times of huge disrespect. Again remember this is a very, very small group who is comfortable in sins of crude and rude behavior. To call oneself a Christian and snub, shun, defame, chastise another is outrageous. Unfortunately families have left the parish over such encounters. Sad to say most of the staff have experienced this. There is a very small cell—and not a sleeper cell—here at SVF that thrives on grandstanding anger. Bear in mind this leaves a mark when hiring, marketing, and even making clergy assignments. Self-respect is the core of the incarnation—the Divine within. Respect for process and authority and space are the most primary of structure in the self and the home and then beyond. Often staff are under constant performance review—not from me; from those who feel they can do their jobs better. I mention this because disrespect is still present at SVF but much less so than in the past—thank God! Respect is an inner structure of the soul growing in SVF.

+ The Call to Affirmation: This is more than telling someone they look nice or even having good manners. Affirmation is hospitality—a primal virtue of both the Hebrew and Christian scriptures. To co-exist even in the midst of disagreement is a doorway to the holy. At SVF too often I hear of a lack of affirmation in church. At any Mass every day we have visitors. We may affirm those we know, but do we affirm the stranger and alien? What is the look, glare, stare, gesture, body language or verbal message we convey? The home is the primary place of authentic affirmation. Have you experienced the attitude and mouth on some children to their parents? I am embarrassed for the dear parents and these children. Affirmation skills must to be taught from the earliest age. This is more than manners. Affirmation is saying the positive. SVF has at times been an environment of critique. That is not a problem—critique is good. What is needed is both the critique of the dislikes and the likes with the same detail. One of the old labels of SVF is that we are a “tough lot”. We are changing this image and need to be critiqued as practicing Christians. Silence is never affirmation. Think about that in child rearing. If you are doing okay I will say nothing and be silent but fasten your seat belt if you are out of line. Jesus critiques us in our sins and graces. Affirmation is an inner structure of the soul finding a home at SVF.

+ The Call to the Common Good: The three preceding calls bring us into community—life in common. We can think of the common good as the majority rules. These are opposite statements. A majority can agree on something immoral which doesn't make it right. Legislating by volume does not even have to look at the common good. If our planet has a damning vice at present, it is putting individual pleasure, preference, and person over the common good. Much is being written on this individualism today, and we call it narcissism. "I did it my way" becomes our theme song. This disorder is epidemic. All healthy inner structures have to see the common good. Most of us most of the time try to create a world of comfort calling others to accommodate us. In SVF or any community, flexing for the common good is important. We need to give and take. We need to see the biggest picture. In our own niche we do not necessarily see the bigger picture. We are called to the bigger structure of the community beyond our own self and our agenda. Sacraments are always for the common good and causing common good.

These inner structures cause us to be good communicators. SVF struggles with communication because of "bad apples". It is the sin of spin. Many of the weekly if not daily examples of the spin I cannot put in this report because of confidentiality. These examples may bring this to some clarity.

This last year you saw much with parish parking and reconfiguration of the inner church space. Derogatory comments were made of me bothering myself with such pettiness. It was not my battle of choice. Someone turned the parish in for violations on parking and fire code—this was following an Ash Wednesday service. Mind you people were double parked, illegally using the handicapped parking, blocking fire lanes, etc. SVF does not dodge or wiggle out of the norms of the common good. SVF observes "best practice" of the Archdiocese. No one on staff was contacted until the River Forest Village said we were reported. There was no respect for process; this was done without civility, not to mention the common good. After over a year of meetings we were able to come on board with the violation infractions. More handicapped lanes are added with the posted \$250 fines—and yes, police can ticket on private property. The fire lane is marked as required. In the church itself the piano/music ministry is now in the alcove to accommodate that fire code infraction.

Another lack of inner personal structure was with the 2005-2006 budgeted expenses. All our moneys are transparent. The year ended \$148,000 in the red. The sum of \$48,000 was with the SVF day school not making budget. Someone took a fact and turned it to fiction. The lie was that \$50,000 was defrauded by someone within the volunteers working within the school. No one took anything! We were short in our budgeted projections but were able to identify those shortcomings. I was furious at the accusation of a volunteer. At a financial gathering I publicly said I would support legal action of slander if the accused wanted to pursue it. Gossip is lethal and sinful.

Our School Board this last year was digging out of a hole at most meetings trying to correct information from rumor, gossip, spin and slander. This meant the board was handicapped trying to address the issues they were empowered to govern. Can you see the lack of inner personal structures? There is a very small group of school parents who are fueling sins of gossip.

When existing structures such as the School Board are disempowered, the meeting goes to the grocery store, the playground, the coffee clutch, etc. Those elected or invited to serve become pawns and feel their time wasted.

An example of SVF disrespect is in the area of confidentiality. Too many feel entitled to know everything. There are federal privacy rights protecting personnel, employees, parishioners, etc. Would you believe we get requests about people's health details? Families share that if they wish—not us. I have come to believe that a tactic used by some is to spin a story to get what they want to know and attack confidentiality in the process. I am shocked to hear the things I have supposedly said. I directly contact people who are being quoted about something outrageous. They are shocked. Remember as children when we played the game telephone? The statement of truth was not the final statement given after it went around the circle.

You know that we struggle with bullying on all age levels and that includes the school. This is again normative in terrorist times though unacceptable in a Christian community. Racial bullying is our most common form of SVF bullying. We identify it and work with the healing needed daily. This belittles civility, respect, and affirmation in one fast sweep.

A common example is when someone talks with me or a staff member and then walks away supposedly being heard on both sides. If the outcome of the conversation is not visible and to the person's liking, they claim they were not heard. Issues of confidentiality are weak at SVF. Some will spin a story following conversations to meet their agendas. Too often these are sinfully slanderous.

Having looked at some of the inner structure, I want to move to viewing the structures that call us parish, community, family, and more than we could ever be on our own.

+ The Call to Worship: One of the canons of the Mass refers to praying to God “in Spirit and in truth”. When we worship we come into the duty of our creature-hood—this is a primary Catholic structure. One milestone we have reached as a parish is that people comment about our sacraments being prayerful. In an “events culture” we can see the sacraments as an event and have even competed in their “presentation and performance”. as if competitive. We are becoming more prayerful and less event oriented. Funerals bear the most affirming reality of this. Baptisms and weddings are beginning to be seen with the inner eye and not the showcasing. Sometimes we can go to Mass with

the critique card and say “I didn’t get anything out of it!” In true worship “I” is not the focus—God is. God gets something out of all our worship—even the most strained. In true worship we are never spectators but participants. Confirmations and First Communions have been appreciated as sacraments.

The weekday Masses are becoming more prayerful. Ministries are becoming slightly more responsible. There is a faithful remnant you know will be there. There have even been Masses where the congregational singing is good. People seem to be fewer on leaving early and a bit more respectful when coming late. All this demonstrates a value of worship. Recently an engaged couple new to the area selected SVF because the worship was “predictable” and Catholic.

A footnote on worship/sacraments: one half of the weddings, funerals, and baptisms at SVF are non parishioners. These folks have written permission of their pastors which is canonically proper. The wild card in this for the parish is that the people we spend the majority of the time with we will not see again. This means that the active membership of SVF does not get the attention of their paid staff as they deserve. It also means moral is challenged when those to whom we minister are strangers to the parish if not the faith.

+ The Call to Lead: Structurally having leaders volunteering their passion and energy is what makes a parish. The Koenig Archdiocesan history I referred to in the 2006 Report indicated that SVF people do not have time to serve. They preferred hired ministries. In studies of parishes (both Catholic and others) where income is disposable, so too the salaried ministers are disposable. An attitude of “we’ll just let someone else do it” becomes acceptable. This is a challenge to the gospel values we want to be structured upon. While that still has some Koenig reality at SVF, the volunteering of the parish is growing. You will see this later as the report goes into both catechists, board members, etc.

The leadership call I want to expand on here is that in November 2006 we had a Parish Summit. This was only one part of the SVF leadership. Five groups gathered: the Finance Board, the Parish Council and School Board. The two newly formed committees joining them were the Marketing Committee and the Building and Grounds Committee. The agenda was very simple: to meet one another and hear what each other were doing. Remember what I say about seeing the big picture of the parish? It is easy for the right hand not to know what the left is doing. The meeting was very well received and appreciated. Affirmations flowed. Horizons widened. The Parish Summit will be called annually.

The five groups following are certainly not the entire SVF leadership. Some groups even felt jilted for not being included in the “chosen five”. Catholic leadership is structured in an advisory way. These five groups’ major roll is to make motions and recommendations to the pastor for decision making. All groups and committees are valuable. Some have different missions than others.

What follows is the advisory leadership only. Here follows the structure of each of these entities. Note volunteerism constructing the infrastructure of SVF.

Parish Finance Committee

**Chair of Organization:
Lud Streck (retiring '07)**

Membership:

**Nancy Burke
Dan Finnegan
Anthony Kolovitz
Bob Gale**

**Gabriel Romanucci
Bob Sassetti
Jerry Trakszelis**

Jean Finnegan – Parish Business Administrator (ex officio)

Mission of St. Vincent Ferrer Parish Finance Committee:

The Parish Finance Committee exists to provide advice and counsel to the pastor on financial matters affecting the parish. The committee provides oversight for the pastor's management of the parish and assists him in identifying the financial implications of various issues facing the parish. The committee is responsible for the preparation of an annual operating budget, monitoring actual financial results in a timely manner, and preparing an Annual Parish Financial Report. The Finance Committee assists the pastor in managing the parish's debt and advises the pastor and the parish Business Administrator in implementing and maintaining "Archdiocesan Best Practices" in conducting the business affairs of the parish.

Specific Agenda of 2006-07:

- Assist the pastor in developing an effective program to increase Sunday collections.
- Participate in the preparation and approval of the budget for the 2007-2008 fiscal year.
- Monitor monthly financial results and recommend actions to improve financial performance.
- Based on the recommendations of the upcoming Archdiocesan audit, advise the pastor on changes to "Best Practices."
- Advise the pastor on any proposed capital expenditures for the parish.
- Incorporate Marketing, Building and Grounds into meeting reports, agenda, and budgeting.
- Estate planning workshops.

Parish Council

Chair of Organization
Cathy Platt-President *

Membership:

Marty Christensen	Ruth Skinner (Vice Pres.)
Ed Gesualdo *	Sean Toohey *
Al-Xuan Holterman	Jerry Trakszelis
Valsa Kappil *	Pat Wallenberg (Secy.)
Nancy Morelli	Veronica Zemgulys
Joshua Quail	Jonathan Zivojnovic
Marlow Comiskey (Consultant)	

*term ending 06/07

Mission of SVF Council:

The Parish Pastoral Council exercises shared responsibility for the pastoral life of the parish under the leadership of the pastor. The purpose of the council is to prayerfully engage the people and the pastor in common reflection about the parish's mission. The parish council exists to: 1) Research the needs, ideas, and hopes of the faith community, 2) To encourage and support existing ministries, 3) To evaluate the quality of life of the parish faith community, 4) To plan for the parish's future by recommending policies, procedures, and programs that will implement its values and fulfill the Church's mission.

Specific Agenda of 2006-07

The Parish Council will be evaluating the collected data from the Parish Survey/Opinion poll. It will communicate this information to all segments of the parish and work to implement it.

School Board for the Day School

To support the long-term success of Catholic school students, the Archdiocese has launched an action plan for Catholic schools in the Archdiocese of Chicago entitled, **Genesis: A New Beginning for Catholic Schools**. This plan offers some new directions and goals that will help to modify school governance, improve instruction, update curriculum and utilize networks of educators, constituencies and others to make our schools increasingly more **Catholic, excellent** and **vital**. SVF School has embraced **Genesis** implementing its

directives in an effort to make our school viable for future generations of students.

Kudos to the School Board of 2006-07. Frank De Silvio, President, Jackie Liuzzo, secretary, Brian Maite, Steve Sugg, Jim Pape, Cindy Mentone, Gabriele Romanucci, finance, Terry Schwager and Peter Fosco. Many non-agenda items were handled at many meetings. The passion and energy of this board is most appreciated. Some of these members will be transitioning into the newly formed school board.

Catholic School Boards are, and will continue to be, critical to the long-term viability of Catholic schools. Within **Genesis** a new model of boards is defined. These new boards are called Boards of Specified Jurisdiction. This board shall have as its primary concern the ministry of Catholic elementary school education: the spiritual, intellectual, emotional and social development of the students. This Board of Specified Jurisdiction shall formulate local school policies that will enable the school to reach its goals. It shall be responsible for:

1. Strategic planning
2. Formulation of school policies to guide planning and administration in the areas of:
 - a. Academic affairs;
 - b. Student affairs;
 - c. Faith community affairs;
 - d. Business affairs;
 - e. Development affairs.
3. Oversight of financial operations.
4. Oversight of and participation in institutional advancement/development programs designed to attract human and financial resources.

SVF School is in the process of finding and selecting members to this board. The specifications of membership as defined by the Archdiocese are that the Board shall consist of a minimum of eleven, but not more than twenty-one members appointed by the Pastor. The Board shall comprise:

- I. School Parents (no more than 25% of membership).
- II. Alumni/parents of alums.
- III. Leaders within the civic, business and professional communities.
- IV. Parishioners.

We are fortunate that several of our current School Board members will be on the Board of Specified Jurisdiction.

We need additional members who fulfill the following criteria:

- Interest in, and commitment to, Catholic education in general and a specific commitment to the mission and philosophy of the school;
- Availability to attend Board meetings and periodic in-service programs, and to actively participate in committee work;

- Ability to maintain high levels of integrity and confidentiality;
- Ability to deal with situations as they relate to overall operation and good of the school;
- Ability to understand and accept the parameters of Board operation, as directed by the Board's bylaws;
- Capacity to give witness to Catholic and moral values;
- Willingness to participate in, and provide leadership for, resource development programs.

In our commitment to implement this new Board of Specified Jurisdiction, which models the Church at its best, we are assuring the viability of SVF School for generations to come.

Buildings and Grounds Committee

**Chair of Organization:
Brian Maite**

Membership:

**William Foellmer
Jose deAvila
Jim Pape
Mark Holterman
Steve Sugg
James Farina
Sonny Bernardi**

**John Ciccio
John Sabella
Dan Watts
Anthony Kolovitz
Bill Samatas
Erik Wollenschlager
Jim Jakaitis**

Mission of St. Vincent Ferrer Buildings and Grounds Committee:

The Buildings and Grounds committee shall establish and maintain a viable and resourceful 50 to 75 year plan (master plan), oversee, implement and advise on all matters relating to the built form and physical plant at St. Vincent Ferrer Parish and School, including ongoing maintenance repairs and improvements. The committee shall also oversee any construction, maintenance, landscaping and other said improvements to ensure that they are compatible with the existing character and nature of the Campus. This oversight shall also include the review and advisement of contracts, quotes, requests for quote and any grant funding that may be available. The committee shall fall under the Parish Finance Board.

Specific Agenda of 2006-07:

1. Recruit and empower a viable and driven committee.
2. Establish a formal structure of leadership and chain of command and the appropriate subcommittees. i.e. Grounds and Beautification, Maintenance and Life Safety, Grants and Funding, School, and Master Plan and Asset Management.
3. Begin master plan and assessment of existing assets (Physical).
4. Follow through with grant submitted for ADA ramp at rectory. Grant applied for and currently under review.
5. Review and prioritize maintenance needs and available funding of School, Parish and entire campus.
6. Review costs associated with adding more green space and increasing parking.
7. Parish physical needs assessment
 - Consolidated offices
 - Large gathering space with usable kitchen
 - Increase parking
 - Gym with seating

Marketing Committee

The Marketing committee provides multi-media and multiple front marketing for both parish and school. This advisory group consists of four sub committees: web design, print and public relations, alumni and admissions, and parish. Marketing is responsible for development of graphic standards, logo, establishing a viable and workable marketing budget. Marketing is responsible for the start up and continued support of the Annual Alumni Fund.

Membership

Brian Maite, Chair

Donna Pape

Cathy Platt

Suzie Giacotto

Steve Sugg

Janet Stompor

Francesca Mazzulla, Principal / ex officio

Goals of 2007

1. establish a network and maintain annual funds
2. provide a consistent and professional information package, folders, pamphlets, brochures, and other readily available marketing materials for both parish and school. Document are to be a consistent logo, font , graphic, etc.
3. establish and maintain a “keeping it beautiful” campaign for the church and grounds.
4. redo and revise the web page for more consistent graphics and more active interface
5. establish and actively maintain a marketing contact database and provide continued marketing efforts to those contacts throughout the year.

+ A Missing Link: At the present time SVF has been without a welcoming/newcomers committee. This has been for a year or longer. Currently what is happening is a generic letter from me and envelopes. This would be a sign of a closed system. The message we want to convey is that we welcome households to our parish family. Many parishes do an orientation for the newcomers offered monthly or bi-monthly. These are often required for membership of those using either the day school or school of religion. No matter how we look at it, we have a missing link in our hospitality chain.

+ A Call to Simplicity: The Christian life calls us to live simply that others may simply live. Our SVF connect with the less fortunate is admirable. The standing twinning projects with St Pius V Parish is a great example of this. The youth starting to get on board with this is positive with their Appalachia involvement plus the Katrina follow-up. Children in the school of religion became part of an African outreach project. The grammar school also has the outreach in the Heifer Project and others. Simplicity of life can come to us in our comfort if we think green. It can also come to us with our attitude toward all resources in our parish. Simplicity will become a virtue with us when we are less competitive in conversation, sacraments, product consumption, spending and even prayer. Recently a lady in her fifties who had retired talked about simplifying her life. She shocked herself on the extras of her life. She changed her TV provider, net, phone, eating style, etc. She said she became much more prayerful than she had been. Sometimes just simplifying our schedule is the start that we need. Simplicity always brings us closer to God. Blessed are the simple hearted.

The contrast I would make in saying this another way is to not act in duplicity. One example of this is to blow up and then act all sweet like nothing happened. This duplicity has already destroyed trust and community building. Another example is when our children hear adults speak against a person of SVF and then say to the child "go to church" or "go to school". The child has just heard some double message. Our gospel is one of being called to simplicity.

+ A Call to Learn: As disciples of Jesus Christ, our teacher, we are always learning. For anyone to think they know their faith fully would be arrogant. We continue to hear the call and learn more about Christ and His Church. Permit me to allude to last year's parish report referring to the seven levels of catechesis in the SVF experience.

Some of the areas of stronger structures at SVF are in the School of Religion. SVF director of faith formation, Karen Dix, has all of her catechists returning. This not only is kudos to her ministry but to the stability of the program. Thank you catechists! The quest to learn makes for good teachers. The structures added in the school of religion this last year were family based learning sessions.

This was well received. Bible study continues to be a strong factor on a weekly basis.

The SVF day school mirrors all the transitions of our society in the struggles of private education. In 2000 SVF was 400 students; today we are just over 300. This is the first year faculty reduction has moved to meet the numbers in the classroom. While this reduction of students with no reduction in faculty gave SVF a high student to teacher ration, it has been financially crippling. Several of the intermediate grades will be one and not two of the given grade. Bear in mind teacher-child ratio is not a major factor in learning according to most studies. Obviously SVF school is in transition. What is our future? What is changing? The Genesis of the Archdiocese is truly the headliner and will remain so into the distant future. We are adding a program for three year old children this coming year. This reflects the changes in the neighborhoods of our villages. Our hallmark identity will be the Catholic identity we offer. Being a Dominican parish, our students have greater priest exposure plus other friars such as student interns. If we were a diocesan parish, we would have likely one or two priests. We have four priests plus friars. We continue in meeting the challenge of teachers who are catechist-certified by the Archdiocese. This is for Catholic identity: whether they teach math or science, catechist certification is desired and encouraged. SVF school is virtue-based in its spiritual development. This is very Dominican. We are not about just avoiding sin—a minimalism, but about growing in virtue. Daily virtues are part of the continuing curriculum. Faith partners of upper grades mentoring lower grades makes for an integrated applied life of faith. Discipline is done always in the context of scriptural and Catholic moral principles. The Catholic identity of SVF is constant: students are at the parish noon Mass, penance services are regular, stations of the cross, all school Masses are regular, etc. The SVF school offers a faith depth and education quality particular to the area. In three years SVF produced four Lawless Scholars. (These are perfect scores on high school entrance tests.) It is an exception if an SVF student does not get the school he/she desired. Eighth graders take a Catholic National Exit Exam. Scholarships are awarded for the highest score on this. An essay exam is also administered using the principles of applied Christianity. This also carries a scholarship. Another SVF strength is moving our school to both a green conscious world and also service minded world. We are raising the scientists of tomorrow who will address the problems of greed and consumption of our present culture. The future of SVF is strong and Catholic. While we can focus on quantity only, Catholic quality is becoming ever more the SVF banner of excellence.

Adult catechesis is weak in proportion to the SVF greater community. There are usually 30 to 60 people who attend no matter the content. This past year we had an Advent series which was lecture style. Lent we had weekly prayer service. Bro. Timothy was the resource on these. The SVF novena was done again by Fr. Albert Judy. He has been offering the 15th century translations of the actual sermons of St Vincent Ferrer himself. Father has a doctorate in

medieval studies from Toronto qualifying him for the acuity of scholarship needed to translate and present these texts. Dr. Jack Miller has brought his grief ministry to SVF. This is more than theory but true journey through the burdens of grief. Individual follow-up is also offered.

+ *A Call to Listen:* Specifically here I refer to the parish survey. This was both opinion poll and survey. Following is a brief initial peek at what the parish council is working on.

Submitted by the Parish Council Survey Committee

In October 2006 the Parish Council sent out 2600 copies of the Parish Survey to currently registered parishioners via US Mail. The Survey was also available on line as well as in the Church; that information was publicized in the weekly bulletin and on our web site. The combined response to the various means of obtaining the survey questions was only 198 completed surveys representing less than an eight percent response rate. The reasons may be that most people are satisfied with things as they are, people are just not interested, or they may not be comfortable with offering an opinion. However, the Parish Council greatly appreciates the effort of those who chose to respond to the survey and would like to describe our progress to date in processing your answers.

Many of the questions in the Survey asked for Yes or No answers, but much of the useful data came in comments either specifically attached to a question or written in the margins of the survey. A special database was designed to record all of the answers. There were fields for each question to tally the quantifiable data and text fields for all of the written comments. Even questions that on the Survey had no specific text area for comments were assigned fields to hold comments written alongside the question. As completed surveys came back each one was entered into this database taking great care to correctly interpret things like handwriting and spelling. Data entry of the submitted information into a useful format took several weeks. In its final form the survey was printed with Yes and No totals as well as with percentages for each question that had a quantifiable component. Then the comments were printed, sorted by question for convenient analyzing. Every word submitted on the surveys was input to the database and is contained in the resultant reports.

In February, each member of the Parish Council was provided with a booklet of the compiled information and took the month between our meetings to study every answer for every question in the Parish Survey. At the following Council meeting each member of the Parish Council offered observations and suggestions to the sub committee who were charged with compiling members' input and finally making recommendations based upon our discussion of the Survey data. This has been a lengthy process and continues to be a work in progress as final recommendations continue to be drafted.

We can offer some preliminary results by saying that seventy-seven percent of the people who responded to the survey were in the 45 or older age groups; thirteen percent were in the 25 – 44 age ranges; and the rest gave no indication of their age. Forty-six percent of respondents were from Elmwood Park; twenty-four percent from River Forest; sixteen percent from Chicago and the surrounding suburbs; and fourteen percent gave no indication of residency. Most people who responded are at least aware of programs and ministries within the parish and eighty-eight percent of respondents felt that the Mass times were convenient. In general the Religious Education program and the Day School received positive comments. The names and contact information of those who offered to assist with various programs were passed along to the appropriate people responsible. There were many legitimate concerns expressed in the surveys, which will result in specific recommendations made to the Pastor. However, many of the suggestions and comments included in the surveys about activities, programs, committees, and physical changes to the plant were not new ideas. We will make recommendations for changes where necessary and we will continue to explore your ideas about adding or expanding activities, programs, and committees. But, while we are making a serious effort to address the concerns of all who responded, the bottom line is that we need your help to volunteer to become involved. In order to make our Parish into the place you want it to be we need you to come forward. Again, thank you to those who took the time to complete the survey.

+ A Call to Stewardship: As reported in our bulletin, last year's financial results were disappointing. Our total revenues were not large enough to cover all our bills and other obligations. In fact, we had to take over \$148,000 out of our parish savings to pay our bills and make the required payments on our debt to the Archdiocese. Our original Millennium Campaign loan to restore our damaged church was \$675,000 and began 11/1/03 and will continue until 11/01/13. As of 5/31/07 our balance due on this loan is \$430,580. Our annual budget covers all interest payments due during the year. We must rely on our surplus to make the principle payments; in a deficit year we must go to savings. We have been very blessed to have received a number of large designated donations to reduce this debt.

SVF parish is comprised of about 1400 units. This was reduced greatly with clarity in our records. Beyond this 1400 household base, the parish has two other categories of important connection: friends of SVF and alumni of SVF. While neither of these are members of the parish, they identify their faith life with SVF. One of our goals in 2007 is to more accurately identify our membership. This began in November with mailings and will continue on through 2007.

Stewardship will remain the goal of a Christian to tithe the first ten percent of their income to charity. This is not the financial structure of SVF. Do you want my theory on church income? Watch the gas pump prices: when gas is down collections are up. I say this because most give to the church as disposable

income and not tithing. In November 2006 SVF began an Increased Offertory Appeal. The appeal was very successful with collection increases of \$3,000 per week. Unfortunately the momentum has worn off a little and we are currently showing an increase closer to \$2,000. We greatly appreciate the sacrifice that comes with an increase in weekly contributes. Many people find ParishPay (www.pariishpay.com), our electronic contribution system, very convenient.

There is a continuing confusion in the fiscal realm regarding designated moneys. By federal law when someone gives a gift specifying its use, we must follow that request. Many times these moneys are anonymous. Criticisms are made of spending on the wrong thing at the wrong time. Presume it earmarked and non negotiable. I am always grateful for and impressed by generosity in all forms.

A major fiscal structure that developed in 2006 is our one-bank banking. SVF is with a local bank who specializes in not-for-profits. All our major accounts and auxiliary accounts now come through the SVF business office. This means that not only is money protected but people are protected as well. The Archdiocesan “best practice” has many structures to protect and make efficient all that we do. Even those sealed bags you see the ushers using are from these best practices. You may think it foolish but if we use them and the collection is stolen we are insured; if they are not used—no insurance.

Staff Transitions

SVF continues to enjoy well qualified servants of the gospel. Staffs are always in transition as are we. **Patrick Curran** resigned as full-time youth minister in February. He openly wrote to the parish on that resignation. We miss him and his ministry. We advertised for a youth minister; had several applicants but none who could handle the SVF needs at this time. **Mary Ann Trakszelis** now works with two main areas of the parish office: the parish calendar and parish records. These are major undertakings. **Mary Sklenar** is now the parish financial secretary and bookkeeper. **Courtney Martaugh** will be coming on to the staff as part-time liturgist. Liturgy and music together are very large undertakings. Courtney’s main job will be the ministries of the Mass people: EMC’s, lectors, sacristans, usher/greeters, servers, etc. Her job is to train and build these ministries. **Steve Senski** remains full-time in music ministry. Some of you presumed him part-time because he is not at all Masses. The music job description says the person ministering the position is to make certain all Masses are covered with music ministers. **Brandon Hurren** continues to help SVF while he is a resident intern at Salerno Funeral Home. Come September Brandon will be returning to Michigan. **Fr. Robert Kilbridge** has had some energy challenges with his accumulation of years. While he has not been scheduled for Masses since the beginning of the year, he helps out with confessions and benediction. Keep him in your prayers. I have said yes to being a supervisor for resident interns with Aquinas Institute in St. Louis, Missouri. This past year we have had **Brother Timothy Combs** with us from

August 2006 to May of 2007. He is my ninth intern and one of the easiest ever. SVF is blessed and the Order is blessed. You have treated him well. This is affirmation in action! Come August we will receive another resident intern until May of 2008.

There are staff members I have not mentioned which means their jobs remain the same as they were. The school will reduce in faculty for the coming year. The second grade last year was only one class. Already this coming year it will be back to two classrooms. The program for three year old children will hire a new teacher.

Positions of SVF staff that would be realistic for the future would be youth minister, computer technician, Eucharist out-reach and pastoral care minister (Fr. Michael is presently doing this), parish administrator of campus and personnel. Jean Finnegan is both CFO and also administrator. It is too much for one person.

SVF continues to work with contractual services in yard care, snow removal, janitorial, etc. We always look for the best product for your generous support.

+ A Call to Serve: We are all called to serve the gospel. Jesus says He came to serve and not be served. Sometimes we can become presumptuous of our faith and turn church into somewhat of a club. This happens when people come for sacraments on demand. They feel entitled to them. The message they give is “what can you do for me?” What follows from them is their evaluation of whether SVF is a good or bad place. True service is always entering into the common good becoming a team member. Being people of service means also being people of prayer. When I came here in 2004 I was shocked at the attitude of option for Sunday Mass—especially with families raising little ones. Church teaching says missing Mass is a mortal sin unless sickness or travel are an issue. Any other reason calls us to confess in reconciliation before being fully communed by receiving Eucharist. I was corrected by some as not following Vatican II Council teachings. I was confused and asked for an explanation. I was told Vatican II made Sunday worship optional. Not so! We have made it optional to fit into the culture; the church has not made it optional. Catholic identity is of service in worship, almsgiving, and tithing of our time. What has happened is that we have made many of the demands and commands of love optional.

I began the report with the structures of the self and reflected on the 2007 SVF parish. Permit me to conclude in two non negotiable structures that we at SVF need and the world at large. The structure of marriage and the structure of the family. These are the institutions where loving boundaries are learned and lived. We become schooled here in love of self and others. Let me share a bit of the social effects when these structures become endangered:

- Trust is lowered, limited or even obliterated.
- Leadership (parenting) is constantly disempowered if not totally impotent
- Safety survival cliques are formed
- Interpersonal relationships are superficial and often become two-faced.
- Lashing out and blaming is seen as dialogue
- Slander and detraction are normative.
- Healthier people withdraw or drop out; people with personal agenda thrive
- Involvement is high risk so very tough in engaging new blood.
- Signs of trauma and post trauma are ever present: anger, anxiety, fear, depression, etc.
- Threats, bullying, force, etc, are not only used but seen as justifiable.
- What was written or inherited by past leadership is ignored, not known or casually dispensed.
- Listening skills are gone; people talk over or even down to each other.

SVF is in the business of building holy marriages and even holier families. We have a call in this culture to recreate our world. I began by making two observations: 1) The neighborhood is changing. 2) The world has subscribed to the crazy (terror). By using everything Jesus taught us we can overcome all these obstacles. We are referred to as temples of the Holy Spirit. My closing is a temple (structure) that makes us the charismatic people of grace we are called to be.

+ A Call to Truth: Veritas is the Dominican motto. In a culture of lies—just think of the daily saturation in the fiction of commercials alone—truth is no small goal. The primary title of the devil is the Prince of Lies. Nothing spirals us downward in sin more than losing the truth. Truth is about who we are, where we are going and how we are going to get there. Any lies, spin, gossip, or reconstruction of the truth destroys the body of Christ. Again we are called to the truth in a culture of the phony and fictional. This report has tried to focus on truth that will set us free to build in Christ. Jesus died for telling the truth. Truth builds trust. Truth builds relationships which are holy.

This report is a Pentecost of 2007 snapshot. The structure of the church flowed from those early flames of faith in the apostles as it does today at SVF and throughout the world. The early church suffered with the struggles of not being absorbed into the culture. The early Christian communities had back biters and busy bodies. Read the Acts of the Apostles and the epistles taking us to the inside story. As we rebuild the structures of marriage, family, parish, and society

we do have a blueprint. Every one of our sacraments moves us to the structures of being a people beyond ourselves. The last page is a meditation on the temple structure within us that unites all we are taught to become as Catholics. Growing in virtue is our call. Calling each other to virtue is our example. "By their fruits you will know them." Virtue has a face. May God's choicest blessings be on SVF as a good parish becoming better and growing in wisdom, age and grace.

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Fortitude

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WHEN?

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WHAT?

ANGER

G U I L T
R E S P O N S I B I L I T Y

SHAME*

counsel doubtful

feed hungry

drink to thirsty

clothe naked

shelter homeless

visit sick

visit imprisoned

bury dead

pray for living & dead

bear wrongs patiently

forgive injuries

comfort sorrowful

admonish sinners

instruct ignorant

HOT SPOTS*

Virtue collapses usually with the threats of shame, anger, and fear. Anger & Fear are positive. Shame is negative, and born of the devil, "Who told you that you were naked?" (Gen)