

# Renew My Church

## St. Cletus Parish

600 W. 55<sup>th</sup> St. Street

La Grange, IL 60525

St. Cletus Parish generally incorporates the southern half of LaGrange between 47<sup>th</sup> St. and 79<sup>th</sup> St., and generally between Wolf Road and the railroad tracks on the east side. While geographically large for Chicago (approximately 10 square miles), much of the property included in the parish is not residential, consisting mostly of small factories and retail. The parish was established in 1951 to accommodate post-war suburban growth in LaGrange and Western Springs. Currently, we have approximately 2500 registered families. We remain well-resourced and well-attended, with a strong school and strong outreach to the LaGrange community.

As part of the Renew My Church process, we held an in-person parish conversation and asked our parishioners about the strengths and weaknesses of the parish. This was advertised in the bulletin and we established an email box to which stakeholders could send their thoughts. Some people did take advantage of this.

- Uniformly, people cited our energetic and enthusiastic parishioners, who are willing to take on all kinds of challenges. Our physical plant is in relatively good shape, and we have a new Parish Center with offices, a big conference room and a dedicated gym (which the school and intramural leagues regularly use). We just retired the debt on this building. Coming out of the pandemic, we have revived a strong, vibrant, active and dedicated Parish Finance Council, which meets monthly. Our Hispanic Ministry is strong; we have a weekly mass in Spanish and are trying to institute more bilingual prayer events. Six members of our staff, including both the pastor and the associate pastor, are bilingual in Spanish and English. Our school is strong and well-supported by the parish. We have a thriving religious education program and a large RCIA process. Earlier this year we confirmed over 100 candidates, including adults. We had a large number of baptisms, an above-average number of weddings, and, sadly, an above-average number of funerals. We are sure that as we come out of the pandemic these sacramental numbers will shift slightly. We already have 13 weddings on our books (50% increase over last year) and our baptism classes are full.
- St. Cletus suffers from the same cultural problems that many parishes face in 2022—we lost a lot of attendance during the pandemic, and young single people and younger families do not attend church as often as they might have ten or twenty years ago. We believe we have also lost a lot of younger people because of things out of our control--divisions in the church, the church's attitude toward the LGBTQ community, political divides in the US, etc. We as a parish try to be welcoming and hospitable to all, but the institutional church is perceived as negative and inflexible, and some people do not see an advantage to belonging. That said, we had a much greater turnout for Ash Wednesday than we expected. Our pastor distributed ashes at the LaGrange village center to staff and police and

firefighters, and we visited several facilities and individuals to distribute ashes. The people we visited seemed to really appreciate this.

- We also find opportunities in that a significant percentage of the parish staff, including the pastor, is new in the last year, bringing new energy and new ideas. Our pastor places great emphasis on being present to parishioners and being transparent with them. They are responding positively to this. As we come out of Covid, we plan to provide more adult formation opportunities and to reach out into the community, as well as collaborating with the other parishes in our cluster to provide ministries at scale (larger and better confirmation retreats, speaker series, common missions with nationally-known speakers, etc.). We had a number of good suggestions for formation from the parish conversations.
- Our social concerns ministry is very strong, overseen by a paid minister. We are especially proud of a large and well-supplied food pantry that services both our parishioners and the community at large. Our food pantry recently moved into a larger space on the campus and we have attracted a substantial matching grant as we fundraise for our food pantry operations. Our parish conversation surfaced a number of suggestions for social concerns activities, including a blood drive, community service day, recycling, etc.
- Challenges: We lost one of our associate pastors and our liturgy assistant this year. This stretches our professional pastoral staff (although we have hired a pastoral associate), and we will need to turn to recruiting volunteers to cover some of our ministries. Our current cadre of volunteers remains enthusiastic, but we need to be careful not to burn them out. We feel that potential volunteers are definitely there, but we need to tell them what they can do. Another recent challenge was the discovery of a substantial debt to the Archdiocese remaining from the To Teach Who Christ Is campaign. Between the pandemic and the turnover in staff, the existence of this debt was not immediately front and center for us. We have been transparent with the community about this and are making efforts to reduce it as quickly as possible.
- Parishioners pointed out that at the moment they feel our Hispanic community and the English-speaking community are almost two separate parishes. We are instituting some bilingual services now and making an effort to bring the communities together more often.

Some interesting suggestions came from our parish conversation:

- Provide opportunities for parishioners to get together offsite
- Children's Liturgies and teen masses
- Some people seem to want adoration. (We are providing adoration now; perhaps we just need to publicize it better.)
- Adult formation activities: Bible Study, speakers, etc. (As we come out of the pandemic, we will be resuming this)

--More hospitality of the coffee-and-donuts variety (again, as we come out of the pandemic we will be resuming this)

--More communication between parish organizations to avoid duplication of efforts

Many of these suggestions are already on our radar and we will be implementing them as we come out of the pandemic and as we have time and personnel to do so. We were gratified by a decent-sized turnout of thoughtful parishioners at our parish conversation meeting, and a much bigger-than-expected turnout at our liturgies on Ash Wednesday. We look forward to opportunities for collaboration with St. John of the Cross and St. Francis Xavier for formation and other events; we already do collaborative adult confirmation and youth ministry programs, and we will pursue a tri-parish Confirmation retreat event in the coming academic year. A number of people at our parish conversation suggested an “open house” of all three buildings on one day, with hospitality at each site. We also, as mentioned above, could perhaps hold common missions or common speaker events in order to work together with the other parishes. We are excited to re-energize St. Cletus and we look forward to our renewal as we go.