



UNDERSTANDING the signs of our times: **The Third Step on our Discernment Journey**

As we continue meeting the challenges of our current parish theme and calling: "Hearts on Fire! Come Encounter Jesus & Embrace His Kingdom," our Leadership Community (parish council, pastoral staff and Fr. Paul) continue their work of taking a fresh look at the signs of our times in order to better understand God's call for our parish community.

The first step on this discernment journey involved conducting one-on-one interviews and gathering on-line questionnaires to better understand the world our parishioners inhabit – their deepest concerns for themselves, their family, Naperville/Lisle, our nation and the world. The second step on our discernment journey involved prayerfully reflecting on these interviews and questionnaires in order to IDENTIFY the signs of our times.

The third step on this discernment journey took place on September 5th. Our Leadership Community sought to better UNDERSTAND the signs of our times identified in the previous step. This was done by studying resources that shed light on what was heard from parishioners. They looked at research studies and articles by sociologist and psychologists.

Based on their study they found that, overall, the reading material generally supported the identified signs of the times, with some exceptions. They found that in many respects there is a disconnect between perceptions of our world and what the data tells us. Many parents worry about the economic prospects of their children but polling suggests that young people are not as pessimistic about their future as their parents. Many people have a great deal of fear of crime, even as overall crime statistics tell us that crime is down in most major cities.

Many people have the perception that good jobs are in short supply, but the situation is not that simple. Some

types of good paying jobs require skills that are in short supply; some good paying jobs are in areas of the country where job seekers are in short supply. There also seems to be less stress and more financial stability (whether perceived or actual) among people who are active in their faith community.

When considering why there were so many misperceptions about the world we live in the Leadership Community noted that one source of these misperceptions is political parties who seek to inform attitudes and opinions for partisan advantage instead of seeking a common understanding. Another source of misperceptions is the media, which tends to sensationalize their news coverage in a way that often confuses news with entertainment. Many times the media focuses

more on conflict between groups and not enough of cooperation between groups.

As they reflected on growing polarization, economic anxiety and other signs of the times in light of all of the reading material there was still a need for a deeper analysis into why these things are happening. It seems clear that there is a desire, sometimes unacknowledged, for face-to-face connections beyond social media. In addition there seems to be a universal draw and attraction to communities that focus on service to others.

The Leadership Community would like to get your input on the work they have done to this point. You can take a look at the reading material that was studied by going to www.smp.com/discernment. You can also give us your input by completing the on-line questionnaire at the bottom of the link.



(L-R) Carl Van Dril, Jim Chitwood, Kristen Slevnik and Carrie Tilton have a conversation about the signs of the times.