

Discerning Community Needs

1. First and foremost, your Church must know and understand its vision (identity) and its mission (purpose for existence). The discernment process to determine community needs will establish the specific concrete actions that your Church will then implement in order to best live out the vision and mission within your particular context.

Vision is identity - who we are and who God wants us to become as the Church.

Mission is purpose - why we exist as the Church. The Diocese of Algoma has an excellent statement of mission...one in which we all participate: *To share in the gathering work of Christ so that His newness of life overflows into our hearts, homes, churches, and community.*

2. Understand the Framework



Bringing Clarity to Identity, Purpose & Action



3. Take a walk (or a drive): You need to know what is in walking distance (or short driving distance) to your church. Houses? Businesses? Well-kept? Run-down? What people do you see?
4. Talk to People: School personnel and community leaders will be able to tell you about the strengths and needs of your community and the people in it. Checking the online census data for your community will give you very valuable information as well. Talk to other faith communities in your area to find out what they are doing and who/how many are accessing their activities.
5. Take Stock: Sit down together with all of the information you've gathered and figure it out...where do you see God's hand at work already? Perhaps you could join in. What assets are present in your area? Could you make use of any of these? What is lacking in terms of assets? Could you fill the gap? What basic human needs have not been addressed in your community? What can you do to help?
6. Organize and Prioritize: You probably have quite a few great ideas by this point. Now you need to sort through them...organize by type of activity and number them in terms of priority. Your top three should be the ones that most strongly call to you (in terms of your vision and mission) AND they will be the ones you are most

able to put into action right away. Don't announce them all at the same time...give your community time to digest the news of one before you tell them about another.

7. *Assess and Tweak*: Once things are rolling, remember to continue your prayer and discernment. If things aren't working, ask around, talk together, and figure out why, then make small adjustments. Things will evolve over time. Don't ditch an activity outright when its not living up to your expectations...things take time - sometimes several years - to grow and develop into their successful form. (Remember that 'success' is when you're transforming lives.)

8. *Important Reminders*: i) Keep all of your activities connected to God. You are building for the kingdom. Volunteers should always begin and end their time together with prayer - it doesn't need to be long but it does need to be there. ii) Gather together once every couple of months to talk about your ministry of service together - how do you feel about it? What spiritual benefits do you feel in yourself and see in others? Keep each other encouraged and rooted in Christ.