

Parish Life Assessment 2015 Survey Results



St. Athanasius Parish
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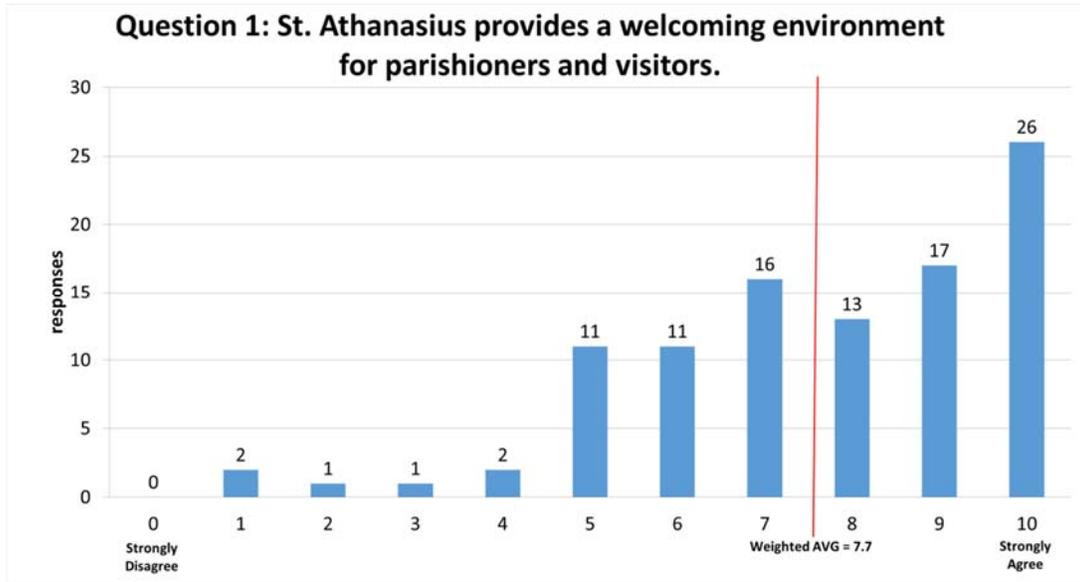
In February of 2015, parishioners were asked to participate in a parish life survey to assess parish programs and activities. At over 100 respondents, including some former parishioners, we feel that the data provides a representative cross-section of opinions as can be seen from the graphs on the following pages. Data was collected via Survey Monkey and paper surveys. The graphs show the number or percentage of respondents for each score value or answer choice.

The data and comments collected will help direct Parish leadership in improving the areas that need to be strengthened while validating so much that is vibrant about our parish. Working groups are being formed to prioritize and address the top issues and we look forward to your continued participation in this process.

Thank you to all those who participated in the survey. If you have any questions or would like additional information, please contact any member of the PPC.

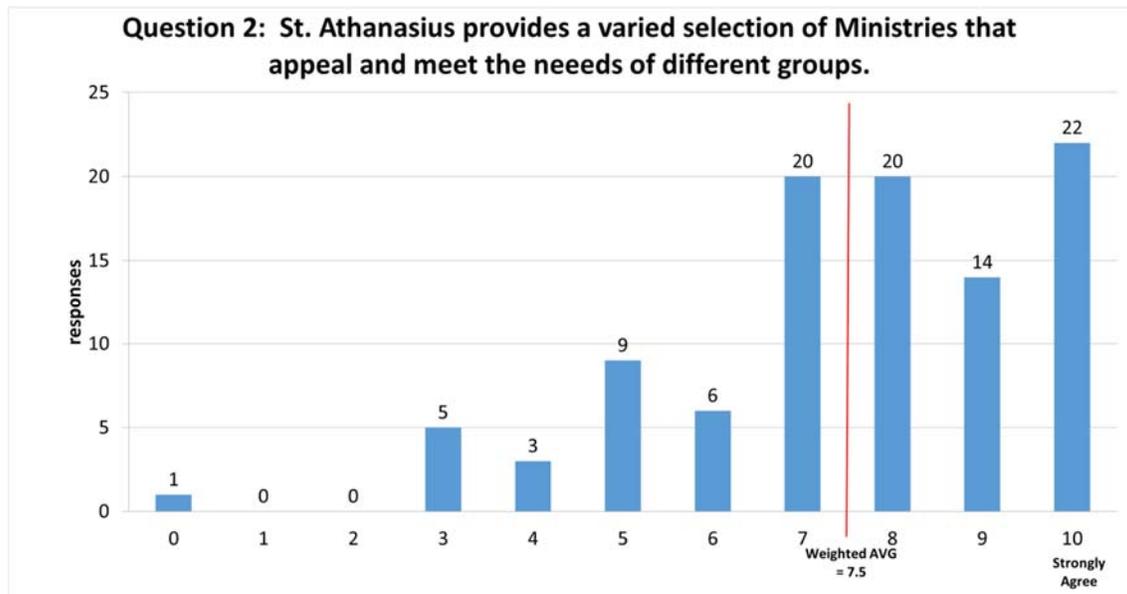
2015 Saint Athanasius Survey Results

1.



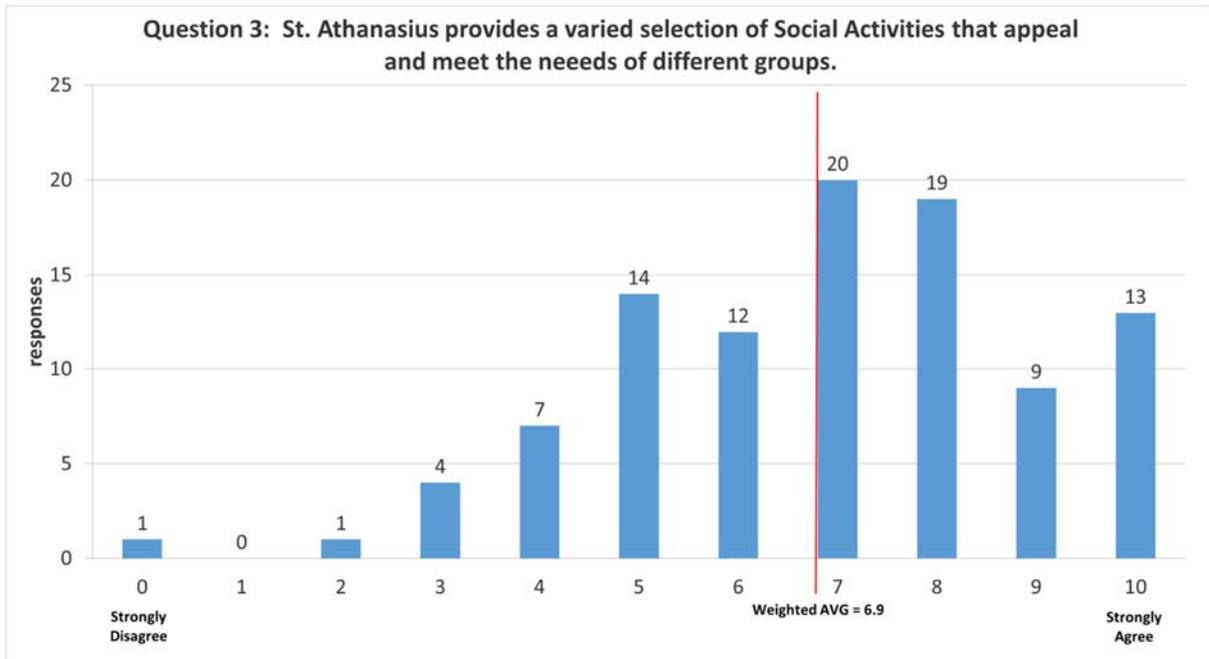
Collectively, our parish believes that we provide a welcoming environment for parishioners and visitors. We want to make sure that we are always nurturing a welcoming culture, so if you see anyone new please do not hesitate to make them feel at home. We want our church to be a place of community. E.g., invite them to sit in your pew, introduce them to others at coffee hour.

2



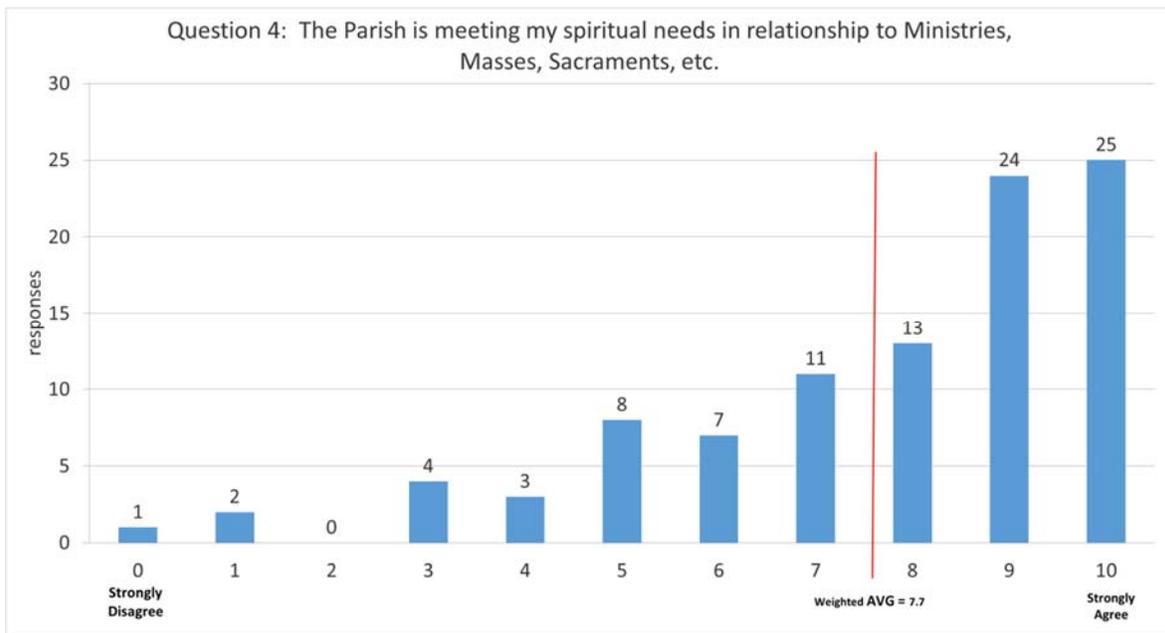
There are numerous ministry opportunities already in place. We will take suggestions for additional ministries and seek to make them a reality at the next Ministry Fair, in the Fall of 2015.

3.



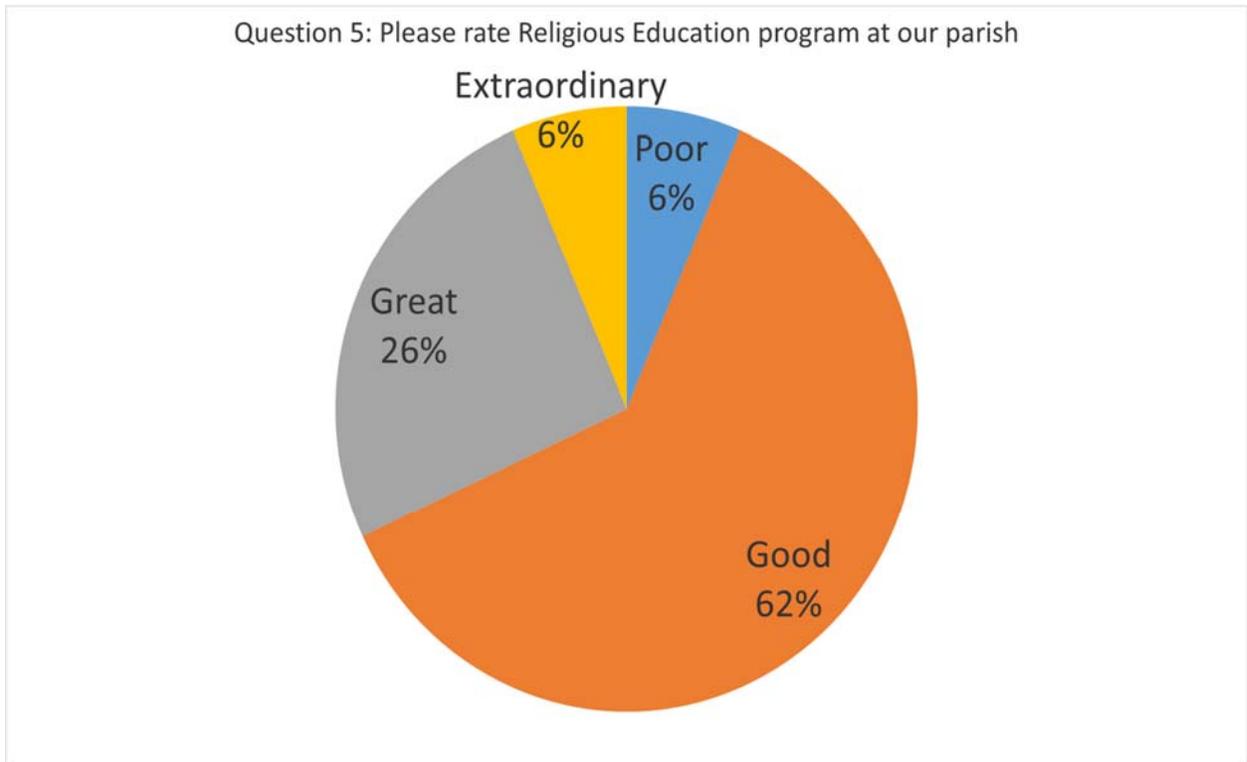
Please see the response to question # 10 for an explanation. Please know that the Parish Council is currently forming a Social Events sub-committee to meet the needs of additional social events for our parishioners, particularly for families.

4.



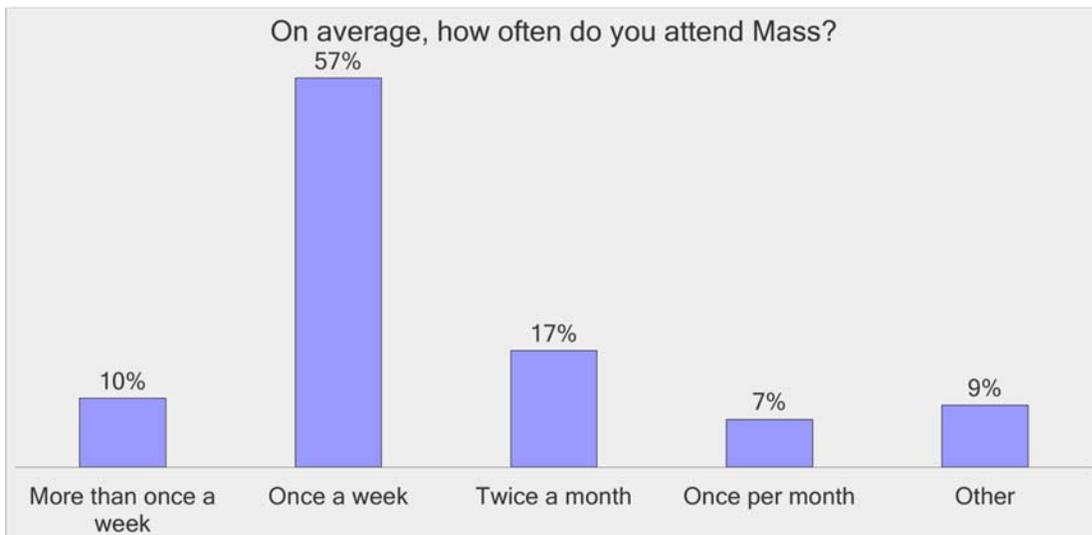
Overall, our parish strongly believes that we offer multiple opportunities for people to celebrate the Sacraments. We want to continue to encourage everyone to participate in Adoration/Reconciliation on Thursday nights at 6:30pm, and the Sacrament of Reconciliation on Saturdays at 3:30pm.

5.



Overall, our parishioners believe that we have a good religious education program. We are always looking for ways to improve this, and have recently completely revamped the Confirmation program. We are grateful to have Brad Agostinelli on our Staff who is a professional Youth Activities Director in our community.

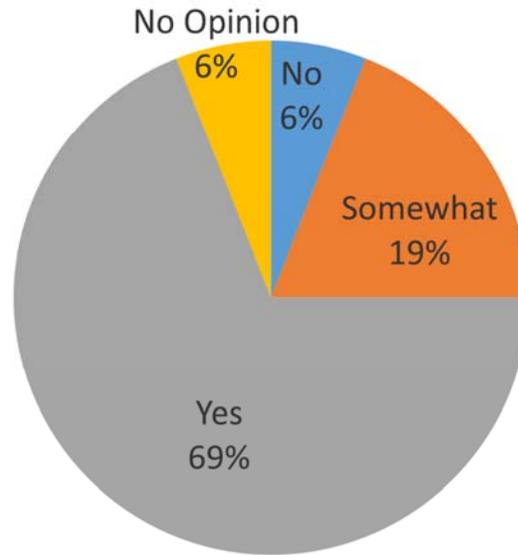
6.



The majority of people who responded to this survey attend Mass once a week.

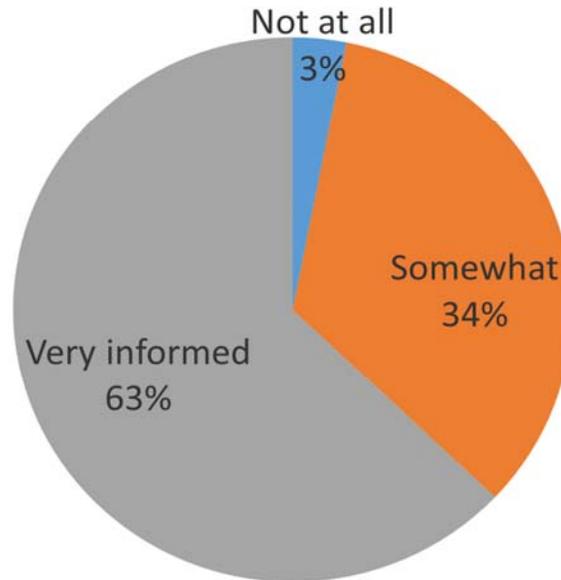
7.

Question 7: Do you feel as though you are aware of the parish's financial situation, and the financial decisions that are made to better the parish?



8.

Question 8: How informed do you feel you are regarding how you can participate/volunteer in the Parish's needs such as coffee hour, being a lector, greeter, Eucharistic minister or being involved in music ministry?



Overall our parishioners believe that our financial situation is transparent.

9. Community is an important part of our Parish life. Do you think our Parish is meeting your needs of fellowship? If not, what type of activities would you like to see in our parish?

Many parishioners requested that we schedule events for kids, single people, widows/ers, divorcees, couples and schedule Bible Study Nights for different age groups. If you feel called to lead any of these events please reach out to Father Colarusso.

To meet the needs of people requesting Bible Study nights Father Patrick recently taught a 6 week course called "Acts of the Apostles", an average of 20 people attended.

10. In general, what suggestions or feedback would you like St. Athanasius to take into consideration?

Many parishioners requested that we have more social events such as themed pot luck dinners, movie night, a dance and one day retreats. People requested that we host volunteer activities such as Mission of Deeds, Homeless Shelters and the Food Pantry. If you feel called to help participate in hosting a volunteer event, please reach out to our office staff.

We received positive feedback regarding the Christmas Faire, Picnic, Ladies Bingo and our Wine Tasting Event.

We also received feedback regarding the music we play during Mass. Most people do not know that the Second Vatican Council taught in the "Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy" (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*) that Gregorian chant is to retain pride of place in the liturgy and that the people are to participate in the singing *of the Mass*. The current music selections and, on occasion, the use of simple chant tones are the expectation of the Church. As a parish community, striving for fidelity to Christ, we seek to be true to the renewal of the Second Vatican Council while incorporating other permitted music (i.e. hymns). Therefore, we try to use those hymns which have become familiar to people while, also, fulfilling the intentions of the Council. For more information on this topic, please see the Music Director's bulletin inserts included as an appendix to this report.

Please be assured that every comment, question and suggestion were heard, reviewed and discussed amongst the Parish Council. We sincerely appreciate your time in completing the survey and will continue to strive towards meeting you and your family's needs. Please do not hesitate to reach out to me should you have any questions or additional feedback.

Sincerely,

Saint Athanasius Parish Council

Fr. Colarusso	Deacon Neil Sumner	Dino Cuscuna vice-chair	
Jim Dudley	Roc O'Connell	Freddy Santosuosso	
John Barrette	Lisa Tavoletti	Judy Doherty	
Jack O'Brien	Joanne Fitzpatrick	Carmen O'Rourke	Vanessa Santosuosso

From the Music Director

What are Catholics Supposed to Sing?

Two Catholics go to church on Sunday. One goes to a parish where they sing only four hymns: the entrance, the offertory, the communion and the recessional. The hymns are upbeat, with snappy melodies. Everyone knows them and everybody sings. The other Catholic goes to a different parish where, for some reason, the congregation only sings the “responses” and what we commonly call the “Ordinary of the Mass”: Lord Have Mercy, the Gloria, the Responsorial Psalm, the Holy, Holy, and the Lamb of God, but...there seem to be no hymns. First question: which parish is pre-Vatican II and which parish is in tune with the Council? Surprise...it is in fact the first one that is pre-Vatican II, even if the hymns are accompanied by a contemporary Christian rock band.

Believe it or not, in the days before the Council, the Church prohibited the congregation from singing the Ordinary of what was classically called the “Low Mass.” As a result the faithful were only permitted to sing a hymn during the entrance procession, the offertory, communion and the recessional. Catholics could sing the parts of the liturgy if it were a “sung” Mass with a choir, but usually the choir music was too difficult for the average congregation.

The Second Vatican Council wanted to rectify this situation. If you read the Church's primary document on music for Mass, entitled *Musica Sacra*, you will be surprised that hymn singing is low down on the list of priorities, whereas the Mass parts are at the top. The idea is that Catholics should not sing merely *at* Mass through the use of hymns, but that we sing *the Mass* by participating in those parts of the Ordinary that properly belong to the faithful. The most important of these is the Holy, Holy, which is sung in unison with the priest.

This does not mean that the congregation is expected to sing all the parts of the Mass to the exclusion of other voices. The Church gives great importance to the preservation of choirs, her own musical heritage and her liturgical language. However, it does mean that Catholics should sing the liturgy when possible and that we should still incorporate those parts of the Mass that are frequently overlooked such as the Entrance and Communion antiphons.

So, if you are sitting next to someone who doesn't sing the hymns for some reason, but he or she does join in for the Mass parts, that person is actually doing exactly what the Conciliar Church has asked us to do.

Hymn Choices

You might wonder sometimes how I choose the hymns for Sunday? One possibility is that I invoke the Holy Spirit, put all the hymn numbers in a bag, shake the bag and then choose the first four that fall out. Every now and then I do suspect the Holy Spirit nudges me in a certain direction. In most cases, however, there is a little more science to the art than that.

First, it is relatively easy to choose hymns for the four primary liturgical seasons of Advent, Christmas, Lent and Easter. Ordinary time is a bit more complicated. Although many hymn companies have suggestions and guidelines, I prefer to go to the liturgy itself and reflect on the weekly *propers* (rhymes with copper). What are the propers? They are one of the most important and yet most neglected musical dimensions of Sacred Liturgy! Propers are psalm texts set to music that are designed to accompany the priest during the various parts of the Mass. That's why when the priest enters the church, the Introit is sung; as he offers our gifts of bread and wine to God, there is the Offertory; and when he (and then the congregation) receives the Body and Blood of Christ, there is the Communion. In all her documents pertaining to music, the Church insists that the singing of the propers is to be given pride of place because they contain the words of Sacred Scripture. What's more, a careful study of the propers gives insight into the *evangelical content* and themes of a particular Mass and so makes a great tool when choosing an appropriate hymn for that moment.

At Saint Athanasius you are familiar with my singing of the Communion Proper when the priest receives the Blessed Sacrament. With the presence of the choir at the Sunday 9:00am Mass, we are able to sing the Introit Proper when the priest enters the sanctuary. In fact, if you were present at our All Souls' Day Mass, you heard the propers used for the Mass of Christian Burial. While the Church does state that, if necessary, the propers may be replaced with an "alius cantus aptus" (*another appropriate song*), this is only so long as the hymn approximates the meaning of the proper it is replacing. Sometimes it is difficult to find a hymn that accurately conveys the meaning intended. Sometimes it is very easy.

If the propers are so important, then why are they ignored in almost ninety percent of the parishes where we attend Mass? First, when permission was given to say the Mass in the vernacular, musical settings of the propers in English were not yet readily available and so by default we simply used hymns. Secondly, hymns are musically easier and more popular. Conversely, the singing of the propers usually requires a trained choir or cantor that is able to rehearse them because they vary on a weekly basis. Ideally the music at Sunday Mass should be a perfect balance between the congregation singing the Ordinary Mass parts, which do not change from week to week, and the choir or cantor singing the propers, which do.

Does this mean we should not use hymns at Mass? Absolutely not! Hymns add to our Eucharistic piety. For example, once the Offertory Proper has been sung a hymn can certainly follow. However, no matter how beautiful, hymns should never completely replace the Word of God at our Eucharistic celebrations. A congregation which never hears the propers has not heard the Mass *being sung*, which was the intention of the Second Vatican Council. By studying the documents of the Church concerning music we can, as St. Ignatius of Loyola coined, "sentire cum ecclesia" (*think with the Church*) and, thus, know her true intentions when we use our voices to participate at Mass.

The Purpose of a Hymn

If the truth be told, hymns have a rather bad boy origin in the history of Christianity. Hymns were most effectively used in the early Church by the Arians, the heretical group that denied the divinity of Our Lord and whom St. Athanasius spent so much energy refuting. Hymns were for the Arians their own version of MTV that allowed their false ideas to spread in a quick, snappy style. Eventually, under the guidance of Saint Ambrose, the Church began writing her own hymns that upheld the Apostolic Faith. At first hymns found their strongest place in the Liturgy of the Hours, the multiple times of day when monks and nuns had to go to the chapel and pray and sing the psalms. Most of the "Divine Office Hymns" reflected the current liturgical season or particular feast days. By the twelfth century hymns were used at Mass, but only in the limited role as "sequences" for the major feast days. The sequences are sung right before the Gospel; the ones we typically hear today are sung on Easter, Pentecost, and Corpus Christi. The Protestant Reformation restored the bad boy character of hymns by once again using them in the vernacular (the local language of the people) as a way of spreading their ideas. Once the so-called reformers stripped the Mass of much of its ritual and symbolic meaning, hymns necessarily became much more a part of that style of worship.

While all hymns are songs, not all songs are hymns. A song is an all purpose generic word; a hymn is a metrical poems set to music whose main purpose is to give adoration and praise to God. The problem is that the music and lyrics of many contemporary hymns is so rooted in the present secular culture that they are often not theologically correct and, since meant to be appealing to the day, quickly go out of style (though we may not know it). There is an old saying that the church that marries the spirit of this age quite quickly becomes the widow of the next. It is impossible to build a tradition of good participatory music when everything changes every five years.

Then there is the very serious question of the words we sing. So many hymns start with "I" or "We" that we seem to be singing more about ourselves than God, and often only then invoking the Holy Name in order to get something. Also, some hymns inaccurately depict our belief. One very popular hymn sung in many Catholic churches has in its second verse the following: "We bring the bread and wine to share a meal, sign of grace and mercy, the presence of the Lord." The Mass is the Holy Sacrifice of Christ himself offered by the priest in Persona Christi. The Catechism of the Church most often refers to the Mass as the Eucharistic Sacrifice. The meal aspect flows from the first and, therefore, is not the primary reality.

For many Catholics hymn singing has become their primary experience of religious music during Mass, which means that what we sing greatly influences what we believe. An even older saying teaches *Lex orandi, lex credendi*: the law of prayer is the law of belief. In other words, what and how we pray (and sing) has more to do with what we believe than something we may (or may not) have learned once in a class. As a high school language teacher, I feel the same way about hymn singing at Mass as I do about adolescents. Both are wonderful things, but they need to be watched, so as not to get out of control. While it is true that as a music director I prefer music that is deeply rooted in the Church's historic understanding of beauty, I more importantly seek music that correctly proclaims the truths that the Church has passed down us for the salvation of our souls. For all of their seductive and enriching beauty hymns, when allowed into the Sacrifice of the Mass, still need to be watched.

