



Our Lady of the Rosary Catholic Church
1322 Moss Street (*Office*)
New Orleans, Louisiana 70119
Phone 504.488-2659 Fax 504.488-6741
www.ourladyoftherosary-no.org
Email: office@ourladyoftherosary-no.com

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Dear brothers and sisters in the Lord,

As I'm sure you remember, from August to November, several members of our parish hosted a series of Coffee Gatherings to give me an opportunity to meet and to gather with parishioners and to hear your thoughts on our parish. We had a total of eleven Coffee Gatherings and more than 100 people attended them. Thank you to everyone who hosted and attended and shared thoughts and feedback with me.

I have begun to discuss the results of the Coffee Gathering with the Pastoral Council so that we can formulate a plan to bring about the things that you asked the parish to address. But I would also like to share in a general way the feedback that I received from you and your fellow parishioners. There were two general topics of discussion at the Coffee Gatherings based on two sets of questions that I asked. I'll share with you some of the most common and most important answers from each of these general topics.

The first set of questions I asked were: What is Our Lady of the Rosary doing well? What are we known for? The answers to these questions tended to center around a couple of themes. First, our church is known for its beauty. I think it is clear to everyone who comes to Our Lady of the Rosary that we have one of the most beautiful churches in the city. This is why it is no surprise that so many couples choose our church as a sacred place for their weddings. And this beauty extends beyond just the walls and the building of our church. The people of our parish recognize beauty in the way the liturgy is celebrated, in the music and especially our choir, and in the people who make up our parish. And this was the second main theme. Many people commented on how welcoming our parish is. There is a strong sense of community, which has been built up by our ministries and social gatherings; and our parishioners seek to extend that community to all those who join with us, whether they be visitors or new parishioners. We have a strong and vibrant parish family, and we are thankful for this gift!

The second set of questions I asked were: What could we be doing better? Where might God be inviting us in the future? These questions invited people to present their own ideas of what will be important in our future; so, naturally, there were many and diverse responses. Many responses centered on the need for our parish to continue to grow. Our parishioners recognize that we must be a welcoming place for young people, especially. This outreach to youth is something that is called for by the Archdiocesan synod and something that the archbishop

mentioned to me particularly when I became pastor. We have begun to offer new religious education opportunities to youth in our Parish School of Religion (PSR), in our Confirmation preparation program, and in our RCIA classes for children. Continuing and expanding this youth outreach will require the dedicated work of many in our parish; so I encourage you to consider how you may be able to help in ministry to our youth in the coming years.

There was also a strong recognition of the need to provide for our older parishioners. We hope to offer seminars that can provide education on issues unique to these parishioners and regular social activities for those who are enjoying their retired years.

Parishioners also focused on the need for evangelization in our parish. It is clear to see the many new faces that continue to move into our neighborhood, and it is important that we find ways to draw in our neighbors to the joy and peace that we have found as members of the Catholic Church and members of this parish. Existing activities, such as Jazz Fest parking and our fish fry dinners and social events, could become natural ways of inviting people to join us for Holy Mass and to experience the beauty of our parish.

Some parishioners also asked that our parish make a concerted effort to promote the Holy Rosary of the Blessed Virgin Mary. As Our Lady of the Rosary parish, we are uniquely equipped to become apostles of the Holy Rosary to our city and our archdiocese. If we are to take up such a mission, it will mean that our parish must first become a place where the rosary is prayed regularly and faithfully. We will begin planning ways to make this powerful prayer more a part of the life of our parish.

Finally, several people have recommended that the parish become a more accessible place for those with physical disabilities. The parish office and parish hall are completely inaccessible to wheelchairs and even to those who have difficulty climbing the steps. And the church, while it has handicapped access, does not have a designated place for handicapped seating. We will begin addressing these issues in the coming months so that our parish facilities can be a place where all people are welcomed.

As I hope you can see, these Coffee Gatherings were an incredibly valuable way for me to get to know you and to hear your thoughts and reflections about our parish. Once again, I am thankful for all who made these gatherings possible and to all those who shared their feedback with me. Let us continue to hold one another in prayer as we draw closer each day to the Lord our God!

To Jesus through Mary,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Fr. Jonathan Jhemelt', with a large, stylized flourish at the end.

Fr. Jonathan
jhemelt@arch-no.org