The Ascension Parish Project:
An Environmental Scan

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# Table of Contents

## Section 1

- Management Summary 4
- Introduction 8
- Background Information 9
- Methodology 19

### Results
- Survey of Ascension Parish 21
- Housing 28
- Services for the Children and Elderly 41
- Business 49
- Economics, Religious Institutions and Ethnic Groups 53

- Conclusions 58
- Recommendations 64
- Limitations 73
- Bibliography 76

## Section 2

- Appendix I
  - List of Interviewees 78
  - Verbatim Transcriptions 79

- Appendix II
  - Responses to Open-Ended Survey Questions 253
### Table of Tables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Race: Near North and Hennepin County, 2000</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Education and Family: Near North and Hennepin County, 2000</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Area Churches</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Organizations Serving 55411</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Elderly Population Growth</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Survey Results</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Marital Status</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Number of People Per Household</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Children Present in the Household</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Elderly Present in the Household</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Management Summary

The purpose of our Marketing Research analysis was to provide an environmental scan of Church of the Ascension and the Near North Minneapolis area surrounding the parish. In performing this analysis, we examined the following five areas:

- Geo-demographic characteristics of parishioners and attendees
- Housing stock on the North Side
- Services available for children and elderly
- Major businesses in the area and changes they have encountered
- Economics of the neighborhood households

Both quantitative and qualitative research was conducted for this project. The quantitative research consisted of administering a survey to approximately 300 Ascension worshippers at the three masses on the weekend of October 12th and 13th. Qualitative research consisted of interviewing forty individuals from government, business, social service, and housing organizations within the North Minneapolis neighborhood. The qualitative interview process included designing questionnaires, contacting interviewees, scheduling interviews, conducting interviews, tape recording and transcribing interviews.

Background research indicates that the Near North Minneapolis neighborhood has been in transition over the years and faces the following challenges:

- **Housing:** Within the 55411 zip codes, 9,339 out of 10,011 houses are occupied, leaving a 7 percent housing vacancy rate. Owners occupy only 51 percent of the houses compared to the 71 percent owner-occupied rate in the Twin Cities area. There is a shortage of affordable housing vacancies within the North Minneapolis community. There was only a 3 percent vacancy rate for apartments renting for $500 to $600 a month, while there was an 11 percent vacancy rate for the apartments renting at $1,400-plus a month. As of October 23, 2002, there were only 91 Section 8 housing units available.

- **Children:** Since 1990, the North Side population of children under 18 has increased 111 percent, whereas the total population of North Minneapolis has increased by only 12 percent. There is thus a very significant increase in the number of children and teens on the North Side but no similar increase in the number of adults. The family structure on the North Side has also changed from 1990 to 2000. The number of single-parent female-headed households with children under 18 has increased by 2 percent while the number of single parent, male-headed households with children under 18 has decreased by 7 percent. The presence of adult males in children’s households is therefore declining. Many children on the North Side of Minneapolis are being raised in non-traditional households. Grandparents are the most common people in caregiver roles in the absence of parents.

- **Elderly:** Elderly in Minnesota are increasing as a whole. However, the elderly population of North Minneapolis is decreasing. From 1990-2000, there has been a 44 percent decrease in the elderly population of those ranging from ages 75-84, in the 55411 zip code.
Area Businesses: North Minneapolis was once a prominent area for conducting business. During the 1960’s, few businesses survived economic and social changes. The economy of the North Side declined as a whole, along with employment. New businesses in the area are generally not locally-owned but are branches of large national chains or franchises whose owners or managers do not live in the neighborhood. There are limited opportunities for employment.

Economics: Economics for the Near North area are shaped by a variety of elements. Neighborhood demographics, the business environment, social institutions, housing stock, and crime are all key factors in the economic composition of the Near North area. About one-third (31 percent) of the adults in the Near North area report an income at or below 150 percent of the Federal Government Poverty Guidelines. Median income levels are expected to decrease approximately $1500.00 from 2000 to 2006.

We learned the following from the surveys and the interviews:

Parish Demographics: Each mass held at Church of the Ascension has a distinct demographic character. The three masses differentiate themselves in race, language, education, income, profession, and household size.

Saturday afternoon mass: 80 percent were Caucasian, 11 percent African-American, and 5 percent Latino. Over 50 percent of those attending the Saturday afternoon mass were elderly (age 55 or older). English was the primary household language. The majority of worshippers earned between $35,000 and $50,000 per year and primary occupations were those in the professional, technical, and clerical fields. The average household size of the Saturday afternoon worshippers was one or two people.

Sunday 9:30 am mass: 60 percent Caucasian, 20 percent African-American, and 11 percent Latino. English was also the primary household language. Over 50 percent of worshippers at the Sunday 9:30 am mass earned over $50,000 per year, also primarily in the professional, technical, and clerical fields. Once again, the average household size of worshippers at this mass time was one or two people.

Sunday 11:30 a.m. Spanish mass: 95 percent were Latino and Spanish was the primary household language. Over half of respondents earned $20,000 or less in mostly the service or industrial labor fields. The average household size was four or more people, with most families having married couples and renting their homes.

Housing: There is a high percentage of rental units available in the Near North Area. However, there is a strain between the availability of government and corporate subsidized versus non-subsidized housing. Rental housing, in particular dream homes, is one of the biggest issues. These homes are cheaply built without basements or garages and use expensive electric heating. Maintenance of new and existing homes is also of concern. Previous renters who now own houses are having a difficult time maintaining their homes’ value due to lack of knowledge and skills. Unfair lending practices are also said to be occurring and are disproportionately disadvantaging African-Americans.
Children and the elderly: There are a wide variety of programs available for the children and elderly. Organizations focus their programming efforts on those who are lacking resources or whose basic needs are not being met. Programs strive to enhance the quality of life for these individuals. Many organizations rely on outside donations to run their programs. Organizations serving children rely on both corporate and individual donations. Funding is also raised through fundraisers, grants, and other public service agencies. Elderly receive funding through both federal and state funding along with grants and medical assistance programs. Programs for both children and the elderly are faced with several issues of concern. These include: growing budget cuts, lack of transportation, and high volunteer turnover.

Businesses: Crime and the steps necessary to control it are issues North Side business owners face. In an effort to reduce the amount of crime and violence, many businesses have on-site security. There is a call for a change in the employee structure of area businesses. Presently higher paying jobs are occupied by those from outside the area. Larger businesses offering internal promotion opportunities would be ideal. However, businesses have difficulties in finding local employees with advanced skills who speak adequate English. Several local business would also like a stronger connection between the faith and business communities in order to strengthen the community as a whole.

Businesses face a vicious cycle in the area. Many families live from paycheck to paycheck. Children of poor families often drop out of school to help support their families or themselves. As the children get older, they lack the education necessary for higher-paying jobs and the cycle repeats.

Economics: There is a split in opinion as to whether the Near North’s economy is gaining or losing strength. The economic future of the North Side is dependent on the strength and quality of the Near North community. Businesses are hesitant to enter a high-risk business area, and therefore few job opportunities exist. Until these perceptions can be overturned and the cycle of poverty existing in the area breaks, the economy is at a standstill, capable of moving in any direction.

In order to address some of these issues in the local environment, there are many things that Church of the Ascension can do. Some of these include:

- Join with community leaders, non-profits organizations, and local businesses to increase the range and depth of services available to parishioners as well to improve the quality of programs
- Offer programs and services using parishioner and community expertise. This could be crucial in implementing English classes, GED prep courses, home maintenance classes and job training seminars at the parish
- Increase fundraising by applying for grants such as “Catholic Campaign for Human Development” and other similar grants.
• Increase publicity of existing events and programs in the forms of newsletters, bulletin boards, or information cards at mass
• Plan a membership drive such as “Rally Sunday” in an attempt to increase attendance and new membership
Introduction

Background: Ascension is a Catholic parish in North Minneapolis located near I-94 and Broadway. Until about 40 years ago, Ascension’s neighborhood was predominantly Jewish and Irish-Catholic. Ascension was made up of 1,800 parish families, and its private school educated 1,200 students. Most of the parish families were of Irish, German, and Polish descent. During the 1960s Civil Rights Movement, the neighborhood surrounding Ascension changed significantly. Jews who were once only allowed to own homes in certain areas now had the freedom to move to the suburbs, and this mobility, coupled with Civil Rights disturbances, caused many Jews to leave the area. Many of the original Irish-Catholic parishioners also left in response to the nation’s increasing suburbanization and in response to the racial and economic changes. North Minneapolis is now a neighborhood “where the middle class mixes uneasily with poverty, blight, and crime” (Star Tribune, 13 Oct 2002).

The changing demographics of the neighborhood have led to changing demographics within Ascension as well. Today, the parish is made up of only 400 families. One third of these families are older Caucasians who have supported Ascension throughout its changes over the years. Another third are newer African-American families, and the last third are Spanish-speaking families. Today’s school is made up of only 270 students, 90% of whom are not Catholic. Many students at the school come from single-parent families and 87% are students of color (Streit, 12 Sept 2002).

The Ascension parish leaders are interested in looking at their past, determining who make up their current parish community, and predicting what may happen to Ascension in the future. Members of Ascension, along with members of the Jewish
Historical Society, are curious to learn more about this changing parish community. The Jewish Historical Society has done research on changes to North Minneapolis during the 1960s and they are interested to learn about Ascension as well. Unlike Ascension, Jewish places of worship moved along with their members during times of change. Church of the Ascension remained in the neighborhood, which led to its changes in demographics and a decrease in membership.

We look at housing stock in North Minneapolis, services available to children and elderly in the area, major businesses in the area and changes they have encountered, and the economics of the neighborhood households. This information will help Ascension understand why changes have occurred within the parish, and also help link Ascension to outside community resources. We also look at the specific demographics of the parish community to see just how things have changed since the 1960s and we recommend strategies for Ascension’s leaders to take in the future.

**Background Information**

**Demographics.** The composition of the North Side is significantly different from that of the rest of Hennepin County. The North Side has a white population of 19 percent compared to 85 percent in Hennepin County. The dominant group is African-American (56 percent compared to the county’s 9 percent). The presence of whites in the area is predicted to decrease from 19 to 13 percent; blacks will increase from 56 to 60 percent; Asian/Pacific Islanders will increase from 15 to nearly 16 percent; and Latinos will see an increase from 5 to 6 percent. Statistical information also shows that the area will see a rising minority population when comparing the 2000 population to estimates for 2006. This information is summarized in Table 1 below.
Table 1. Race: Near North and Hennepin County Demographics 2000

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Near North</th>
<th>Hennepin County</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian/Pacific Islander</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanics</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(https://www.censtats.census.gov/data/mn/05027053.pdf)

As the number of minorities in the Near North area is projected to increase by 2006, the estimated median income level is expected to decrease from $25,168 in 2000 to $23,608 in 2006 (Clark, 2001 pgs. 161A-161D). The significance of this data can be seen when compared to the Hennepin County median income rate of $46,600 (www.censtats.census.gov/data/mn/05027053.pdf). In addition, approximately 50% of the population has annual incomes at or below $25,000, with almost 85% being below $75,000. ¹ These statistics show that there is an increasing opportunity and need for community assistance in the Near North area.

Residents of the Near North neighborhoods are less educated, more likely to be unemployed, and are younger than members of Hennepin County as a whole (see Table 2 below). Only 15 percent on the North Side have college degrees compared to 39 percent in Hennepin County. Residents of the Near North are far more likely to be unemployed

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¹ We assume that the majority of this number actually lies closer to $50,000 and below. The reason for this assumption is that the second listed quartile was from $25,000 - $75,000. We feel that this income range is quite broad and may not accurately portray the situation in the neighborhood (Clark, 2002 pgs. 5-238-6-238).
as well, with unemployment at 39 percent compared to only 2 percent in the county. The Near North is also a young area, and there are far more children than in Hennepin County overall. Fully 75 percent of the residents of the North Side are under age 44, compared to only 33 percent in the county. Family structure is also significantly different. Thirty percent of Near North households are headed by females compared to only 10 percent in Hennepin County. Of those female-headed households, 80 percent of those on the North Side have children compared to only 6 percent in Hennepin County. These figures suggest why the economy of the Near North suffers so drastically: the population is young, uneducated, and unemployed.

Table 2. Education and Family: Near North and Hennepin County Demographics, 2000

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Near North</th>
<th>Hennepin County</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>College degree</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under age 44</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female-headed household</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W/ Children</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family size</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Near North is also very religiously diverse. This can be seen through the large number of churches in the area (see Table 3 below). In the geographic area directly surrounding Ascension Parish, there are thirty-five churches spanning many denominations. Although studies for the state denote an increase in attendance for Catholic and Lutheran churches, this is not the case for the Near North area (Walsh, Paul, Star Tribune, September 18, 2002), where church attendance, in spite of the large number of churches, has actually declined. According to Jeanette Lieberman, pastor of North
United Methodist, traditional religions have seen a decline in attendance and support due to the predominantly minority population and to the influx of new immigrants.

**Table 3. Area Churches**

**Catholic Churches:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Church Name</th>
<th>Denomination</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>St. Philips</td>
<td>Catholic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Joseph Hien</td>
<td>Catholic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vietnamese Catholic Church</td>
<td>Catholic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visitation Monastery of Minneapolis</td>
<td>Catholic</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Other Christian Churches:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Church Name</th>
<th>Denomination</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bethel Lutheran Church</td>
<td>Lutheran</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bethlehem EV Lutheran Church</td>
<td>Lutheran</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Church of God in Christ</td>
<td>Church of God in Christ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grace Temple Church of God in Christ</td>
<td>Church of God in Christ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He Is Risen Church of God in Christ</td>
<td>Church of God in Christ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holsey Memorial Church</td>
<td>Christian Methodist Episcopal Church</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immanuel Even Lutheran Church</td>
<td>Lutheran</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kwanzaa Community Church PCUSA</td>
<td>Presbyterian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miracle Temple Church of God in Christ</td>
<td>Church of God in Christ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morning Star Assembly of God</td>
<td>Assembly of God</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mount Olivet Church</td>
<td>Church of God in Christ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mt. Vernon Missionary Baptist Church</td>
<td>Baptist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Salem Missionary Baptist Church</td>
<td>National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Minneapolis Christian Fellowship</td>
<td>Open Christian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One Spirit Church of God in Christ</td>
<td>Church of God in Christ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presbyter of the Twin City Rico</td>
<td>Presbyterian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rising Star Missionary Baptist Church</td>
<td>National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Andrews Episcopal Church</td>
<td>Episcopal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Olaf Lutheran</td>
<td>Lutheran</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sisters of Saint Joseph</td>
<td>Covenant and Evangelical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trinity Tabernacle</td>
<td>Assembly of God</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World Harvest Christian Church</td>
<td>Evangelist</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Non-Christian Churches:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>African Wellspring Mission Church</th>
<th>Independent Church</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gods Royal Family Fellowship</td>
<td>Non-Denominational</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jehovah's Witnesses Lake of the Isles Congregation</td>
<td>Jehovah’s Witnesses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masjid An-Nur</td>
<td>Muslim</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Housing**: The trends in the neighborhood that affect housing availability include less vacancy for affordable housing, low-income jobs, new revitalization projects and a higher-than-average rate of poverty. The incomes of the people living in the neighborhood, the businesses that operate and pay taxes in the area, and the social activities that happen within the neighborhood all contribute to the value of the property and homes within the Ascension community.

According to 2000 U.S. Census data (Census, 2002), there are 10,011 housing units in the 55411 zip code. Out of these units, 9,339 (93.3%) of these houses are occupied, leaving the area with a 6.7 percent housing vacancy rate. Out of the 9,339 houses that are occupied, only 4,785 (51.2%) are owner-occupied houses. Compared to the Twin Cities 7-County area, where 71.4 percent of housing units are owner-occupied, the (55411) area code has a high percentage of renter-occupied housing. This is important because people are either not given loans to purchase homes or can’t afford the housing.

With the current increase in housing values, affordable housing vacancies have decreased dramatically. This has left many of the lower-income residents trying to find affordable housing in the neighborhood. Within the North Minneapolis community, lower-income citizens are having a hard time finding affordable rental housing. According to a report prepared by GVA Marquette Advisors, there was only a 2.5 percent
vacancy rate for apartments renting for $500 to $600 a month, while for apartments in the $1400-plus range, the vacancy rate was 10.5 percent (Hopfensperger, 2002). According to Housinglink.org, a Web site that lists subsidized housing vacancies for apartments, single-family homes and duplexes, there are only 91 total Section 8 vacancies available as of 10-23-2002, which is very low in comparison to Section 8 availability in other areas (Housinglink.org, 2002).

**Services for Children:** Based on statistics from the U.S. Census Bureau and the Minneapolis Planning Department, there have been some significant changes in the population of children on the North side of Minneapolis. The population of children between the ages of 0 and 18 has increased by 111 percent overall since 1990, whereas the total population of North Minneapolis has increased by only 12 percent. The greatest increase was in the population of children ages of 10 – 19, who grew by over one third. On the other hand, the population of children under five years of age decreased 0.4% between the years of 1990 and 2000 (www.ci.minneapolis.mn.us/citywork/planning/census2000/1990, October 12, 2002).

In connection with the increase in the child population, there have been changes in the composition of households. The number of households with children under 18 has increased 9.7 percent from 1990 to 2000. Moreover, the average family size has grown from 3.5 to 4.14. Clearly, the number of children living on the North side of Minneapolis is very large and appears to be growing. The family structure on the North side has also changed from 1990 to 2000. The number of single-parent, female-headed households with children under 18 has increased by 1.8% and, as noted earlier, is roughly one-third of the total households. Conversely, single-parent, male-headed households has
decreased by 6.5% (www.ci.minneapolis.mn.us/citywork/planning/census2000/1990, November 17, 2002).

Many children on the North side of Minneapolis are being raised in non-traditional, father-absent households. A common situation is one in which the children are living with and are being taken care of by grandparents. According to the Minneapolis Star Tribune, one in every 27 children in Minneapolis is not being raised by their parents (Star Tribune, 8 Aug 2002). Grandparents are the most common people to take on the caregiver role in the absence of the children’s parents. Although this number is low compared with other large cities in the country, it is still an issue nonetheless. Grandparents placed in these circumstances often require a lot of support.

There are many organizations serving children and the elderly located directly in the 55411 zip code. A listing of those funded in part by United Way appears below.

Table 4. Organizations Serving 55411 (Funded by United Way)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Services Offered</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bethune Park</td>
<td>Recreational Activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic Charities</td>
<td>Childcare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City Inc., The</td>
<td>Childcare, after-school care, rec. activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fairview Community Center</td>
<td>After-school care, rec. activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hospitality House Youth Directions</td>
<td>Rec. activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lao PTA</td>
<td>Rec. and cultural activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minneapolis Urban League</td>
<td>Childcare, juvenile shelter, troubled teens programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Commons Neighborhood Center</td>
<td>Rec. activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northside Family Connection</td>
<td>Expectant parent services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northstar Learning Dev’t Center</td>
<td>Childcare, special needs children services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oak Park Neighborhood Center</td>
<td>Rec. activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oasis of Love, Inc.</td>
<td>24 hour childcare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents in Community Action, Inc.</td>
<td>Special needs children services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plymouth Christian Youth Center</td>
<td>After-school care, counseling, rec. activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reuben Lindh Family Services</td>
<td>Family support, counseling, supervised</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization</td>
<td>Services Offered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Anthony Dev’t Learning Center</td>
<td>Pre-school learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unity House</td>
<td>Crisis nursery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper Midwest American Indian Center</td>
<td>Counseling, support services</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Services for Families:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Services Offered</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ascension Place</td>
<td>18+ women, community living</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIHA Women in Action</td>
<td>Services to women of color, abused women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Families Moving Forward</td>
<td>Temporary housing services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greater Lake Country Food Bank, Inc.</td>
<td>Food services to those in poverty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minneapolis Father Project</td>
<td>Assistance to fathers without custody</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minneapolis Urban League</td>
<td>Legal counseling, self-sufficiency aid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oak Park Neighborhood Center</td>
<td>Youth services, adult self-sufficiency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oasis of Love, Inc.</td>
<td>Victims of abuse or homelessness, support groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pastor Paul’s Mission</td>
<td>Food distribution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Anne’s Place</td>
<td>Shelter for women and children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unity House</td>
<td>Youth services, adult services, job training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper Midwest American Indian Center</td>
<td>Well-being promotion, adoption and foster-care services</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Services for the Elderly:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Services Offered</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hospice of the Twin Cities, Inc.</td>
<td>Services to those with limited life expectancy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meals at Home</td>
<td>Meal delivery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minneapolis Urban League</td>
<td>Training and part-time employment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Olaf Residence, Inc.</td>
<td>Long-term nursing care, short term rehab., grocery shopping program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteers of America of Minnesota/North Center</td>
<td>Rec. activities, adult day care, transportation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Healthcare Services:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Services Offered</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Concordia Care Center</td>
<td>Nursing care, rehab.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minneapolis Urban League</td>
<td>Health education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Memorial/University of Minnesota Family Practice Clinic</td>
<td>Medical services, urgent care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pilot City Health Center</td>
<td>Medical services, dental services, mental</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization</td>
<td>Services Offered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ascension Place</td>
<td>Transitional housing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cecil Newman Resource Center</td>
<td>Services for residents of public and subsidized housing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HousingLink</td>
<td>Affordable rental information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northside Neighborhood Housing Services, Inc.</td>
<td>Homeownership training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northside Residents Redevelopment Council</td>
<td>Affordable housing, block clubs, mortgage/foreclosure prevention, small business assistance, financing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oak Park Neighborhood Center</td>
<td>Housing assistance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reuben Lindh Family Services</td>
<td>Furniture donation/pick-up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unity House</td>
<td>Housing services and assistance</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Housing Services:**

**Organization** | **Services Offered**
---|---
Fairview Neighborhood Center | Job opportunity board
HIRED | Employment training services
Minneapolis Urban League | Training, adult placement, youth placement, welfare-to-work program
New Unity, Inc. | Small business development, temp services
Unity House | Job information, career counseling

(Greater Twin Cities United Way, 2002)

**Services for the Elderly:** The elderly are increasing in total population in the United States and in Minnesota, while the population of elderly in North Minneapolis is decreasing. Looking at the U.S. as a whole, the elderly population has climbed dramatically since the 20th century began. “The number of Americans aged 65 and older climbed to 35 million in 2000, compared with 3.1 million in 1900, and between 1990 and 2020, the population ages 65-74 is projected to grow 74%. The explosion of the elderly
population is a result of impressive increases in life expectancy”

(www.usembassy.de/usa/society-demographics.htm, October 16, 2002). The table below shows the projected growth of the national elderly population in 2020 and 2040.

Table 5. Elderly Population Growth 2020-2040 (Numbers in thousands)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total Population</th>
<th>65 and Older</th>
<th>% of Total</th>
<th>85 and Older</th>
<th>% of Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>179,323</td>
<td>16,650</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>929</td>
<td>5.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>226,546</td>
<td>22,550</td>
<td>11.3</td>
<td>2,240</td>
<td>8.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>248,710</td>
<td>31,079</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>3,021</td>
<td>9.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>274,634</td>
<td>34,709</td>
<td>12.6</td>
<td>4,259</td>
<td>12.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2020</td>
<td>322,742</td>
<td>53,220</td>
<td>16.5</td>
<td>6,460</td>
<td>12.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2040</td>
<td>369,980</td>
<td>75,233</td>
<td>20.6</td>
<td>13,552</td>
<td>18.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(www.merck.com/pubs/mm_geriatrics/tables/2t1.htm, October 16, 2002)

As one can see from this table, people are expected to live longer based on increasing life expectancy. As life expectancy grows, so will Minnesota’s population of elderly. This has not occurred on the North Side due to an out-migration of the white elderly and an influx of a very young minority population. However, services for the elderly who remain are crucial.

Businesses in the Area: The North Side of Minneapolis has undergone a transformation over the course of several decades. It was once recognized as a prominent area for conducting business, in addition to existing as a neighborhood proud of its citizens' religious and ethnic diversity. Many of the people who thrived financially moved out to the suburbs, and the population declined further in the 1960s following race disturbances and the deterioration of the business environment created by the construction of Interstate 94. Few local businesses survived and employment
opportunities plummeted, resulting in a significant economic decline in the North Side area as a whole.

Business owners, Ascension parishioners, citizens of the North Side, and organizations such as the West Broadway Business Association, West Broadway Area Coalition, and the Northside Residents Redevelopment Council are actively working for economic re-development. They are becoming increasingly concerned with the growth of poverty in the area, the increase in crime, the types of businesses that are opening up, and the perceived lack of both eligible employees and worthwhile employment.

**Conclusion of Background Research:** There have been significant changes in Ascension’s neighborhood and parish over the past 50 years. The near north area consists of three main characteristics. The community surrounding the Church of the Ascension is poor, less-educated, and primarily African-American. These demographics are much different from those of fifty years ago. The residents of the area now have a harder time finding jobs that will pay enough to support their families. There is less affordable housing in the area, and the once-prominent businesses of the area have been affected by growth of poverty.

The next sections of the report explain how we gathered information from the parishioners and from experts in the areas of government, social services, housing, economics and business.

**Methodology- Survey of Parishioners**

**Data Collection Procedure:** A survey was administered at all masses offered at Ascension on October 12th and 13th. The survey addressed the following major areas, based on input from Patricia Stromen, Parish Administrator and Melissa Streit, Director
of Development: race, language, income and occupation, education level, home ownership and zip code information, and open-ended questions about attitudes towards Ascension. With assistance from professors in the Spanish Department, we also translated the survey into Spanish to administer at the Spanish-language mass on Sunday morning. To make sure the English version and the Spanish versions of the survey asked the same questions, faculty back-translated the survey for accuracy.

**Methodology- Interviews with Experts**

**Interview Guide:** A set of questions was developed for each topic area, and all interviews followed the same format. Interviews lasted from one half hour to one hour. All interviews were tape-recorded, with the respondents’ permission, and were transcribed. Transcriptions can be found in Appendix 2.

**Sampling Design:** Approximately 40 experts either from the Near North area or directly associated with the area were interviewed (some people were interviewed for two different topic areas). They were selected based on information provided from background material or from recommendations that Melissa Streit gave us. Table 6, below, lists the respondents we contacted.

**Table 6. Interviews**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization type</th>
<th>Organization Name</th>
<th>Respondent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Business</td>
<td>Owner, various</td>
<td>Alfred Babington Johnson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lucille’s Kitchen</td>
<td>Lucille Williams</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Broadway Liquor</td>
<td>Dean Rose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SuperValu</td>
<td>Mike Keely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Univ. Family Physicians</td>
<td>Lori McPherson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Merwin Drug</td>
<td>Buzz Merwin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Walgreen’s</td>
<td>Jeff Olson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Brian Stevenson</td>
<td>Target</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gearty Law Office</td>
<td>Ed Gearty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>US Bank</td>
<td>Mildred Gilbert</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Government
City Council (former)  Jackie Cherryhomes
City Council  Natalie Johnson Lee
City Council  Barbara Johnson

Housing
Local Initiatives Support Coalition  Adriana Abariotes
Housing Resource Center  Jennifer Bergman
Ernest Rhoney
MN Housing Resources Inc.  Dave Engstrom
Green Realty  Emily Green
MCDA  Earl Pettiford
Camden Homes Realty  Deb Wagner
*Mpls Star Tribune*  Steve Brandt

Social Service
The City, Inc.  Pat Ferrer
Plymouth Christian Youth Ctr.  Carl Griffin
Volunteers of America:
  Northside Center  Billie Hardeman
United Way  Kathy Lentz
YWCA  Korey Matlock
St. Olaf Retirement  Tim Meyers
Lincoln Beacon Boys’ & Girls’ Club  Emily Renner
Meals at Home  Sara Schletter
Volunteers of America:
  Day Elders  Diane White
Nghborhd. Involvement Program  Allison Nelson

Economics
Mpls Neighborhd. Planning Comm.  Randell Bradley
Garnett Associates  George Garnet
Mpls Urban League  Jeannette Lieberman

Results of the Survey of Parishioners

We had 262 usable surveys. Data were analyzed using either T-tests, ANOVA, or Chi-square, depending on the appropriateness of the technique for the items being analyzed. On all of the variables shown in Table 7 below, there were statistically significant results between the attendees at the different masses.

**Race:** Table 7 shows that 34 percent (98 out of 261 respondents) of those worshipping at Ascension and completing the “race” portion of the survey were Caucasian, almost all of whom attended the first two masses. The strongest racial
presence that weekend was Latino. Approximately 53 percent, or 138 out of 261 respondents, indicated Latino as their racial background. In contrast to the Caucasians, Latino representation came almost completely from the third mass—the Spanish mass. African-Americans accounted for 8% of worshippers and those classified as Other accounted for approximately 5% of worshippers.

**Language:** Exactly half (119 respondents total) indicated Spanish as the primary language spoken in their home, with 49 percent listing English as their primary household language.

**Income:** Over one-third (36% of worshippers) indicated an annual income of less than $20,000, another third make between $20,000 and $35,000, and the final third earn more than $35,000 annually. Of the respondents who indicated the highest income level, two-thirds attended the Sunday morning mass.

**Zip Code:** The zip codes of 55411 and 55412 were the most frequent responses. Slightly less than one-third (29 percent) live within the 55411 zip code area and 14 percent live within the 55412 zip code area. Most of the 55411 respondents attended the early Sunday morning mass. However, more than half of all respondents are from outside the 55411 and 55412 area codes.

**Education:** Slightly over one-third (35 percent) of worshippers hold a high school diploma and 24 percent had some college or associate’s degree. While 18 percent of the sample had only some high school education, nearly 80 percent of those without a high school diploma attended the Spanish mass.

**Home Ownership:** Nearly all of the Saturday and Sunday 9:30 worshippers owned rather than rented homes. The Spanish mass was evenly split between people who
owned or rented their homes.

**Occupation:** Over one-third (37 percent) of all respondents are either retired (71 percent at the Saturday mass) or unemployed (primarily from the Spanish mass). Most of the people from the Saturday and Sunday 9:30 mass work as Professional/Technical Specialists or Clerical Workers. In contrast, most of the Spanish mass worshippers are employed in the Service Worker or Laborer sectors.
Table 7. Survey Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Saturday Afternoon</th>
<th>Sunday Morning</th>
<th>Sunday Spanish</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>36 (82%)</td>
<td>50 (60%)</td>
<td>3 (2%)</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>2 (5)</td>
<td>9 (11)</td>
<td>127 (95)</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>5 (11)</td>
<td>17 (20)</td>
<td>0 (8)</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1 (2)</td>
<td>7 (9)</td>
<td>4 (3)</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Responses</strong></td>
<td>44</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>261 (100)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language Spoken at Home</th>
<th>Saturday Afternoon</th>
<th>Sunday Morning</th>
<th>Sunday Spanish</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>38 (100%)</td>
<td>76 (94%)</td>
<td>3 (3%)</td>
<td>49.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2 (3)</td>
<td>117 (97)</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2 (3)</td>
<td>0 (0.5)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Responses</strong></td>
<td>38</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>238 (100)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Income</th>
<th>Saturday Afternoon</th>
<th>Sunday Morning</th>
<th>Sunday Spanish</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&lt;$ 21,000</td>
<td>6 (16%)</td>
<td>17 (22%)</td>
<td>54 (55%)</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$21,000 - $35,000</td>
<td>15 (41)</td>
<td>18 (23)</td>
<td>34 (35)</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt; $35,000</td>
<td>16 (43)</td>
<td>42 (55)</td>
<td>10 (10)</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Responses</strong></td>
<td>37</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>212 (100)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Zip Code</th>
<th>Saturday Afternoon</th>
<th>Sunday Morning</th>
<th>Sunday Spanish</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>55411</td>
<td>9 (21%)</td>
<td>40 (49%)</td>
<td>20 (17%)</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55412</td>
<td>6 (14)</td>
<td>5 (6)</td>
<td>21 (18)</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>28 (65)</td>
<td>37 (45)</td>
<td>78 (65)</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Responses</strong></td>
<td>43</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>244 (100)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Saturday Afternoon</th>
<th>Sunday Morning</th>
<th>Sunday Spanish</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Some High School</td>
<td>1 (2%)</td>
<td>9 (11%)</td>
<td>36 (30%)</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School Graduate</td>
<td>23 (54)</td>
<td>19 (23)</td>
<td>45 (38)</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some College/ BA Degree</td>
<td>19 (44)</td>
<td>54 (66)</td>
<td>38 (32)</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Responses</strong></td>
<td>43</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>244 (100)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Home Ownership</th>
<th>Saturday Afternoon</th>
<th>Sunday Morning</th>
<th>Sunday Spanish</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Own</td>
<td>34 (83%)</td>
<td>65 (84%)</td>
<td>43 (48%)</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rent</td>
<td>7 (17)</td>
<td>12 (16)</td>
<td>46 (52)</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Responses</strong></td>
<td>41</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>207 (100)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Saturday Afternoon</th>
<th>Sunday Morning</th>
<th>Sunday Spanish</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>24 (59%)</td>
<td>25 (38%)</td>
<td>43 (32%)</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional/Technical</td>
<td>2 (4%)</td>
<td>12 (14)</td>
<td>13 (10)</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clerical Worker</td>
<td>6 (15)</td>
<td>14 (20)</td>
<td>11 (8)</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laborer</td>
<td>3 (7)</td>
<td>4 (6)</td>
<td>36 (27)</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service Worker</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6 (9)</td>
<td>24 (18)</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>6 (15)</td>
<td>9 (13)</td>
<td>8 (5)</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Responses</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Household Descriptions: We found that 62 percent (161 out of 262) of the worshipers at Ascension are married, while only 28 percent (71 out of 262) are single and fewer than 10 percent have been divorced or widowed. Most of the Spanish parishioners are married and have the lowest percent of divorce of all of the masses. Table 8 below illustrates this information.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>Saturday Afternoon</th>
<th>Sunday Morning</th>
<th>Sunday Spanish</th>
<th>Percent %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>20 (44%)</td>
<td>48 (59%)</td>
<td>94 (70%)</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single</td>
<td>16 (36%)</td>
<td>18 (22%)</td>
<td>37 (28%)</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divorced/Widowed</td>
<td>9 (10)</td>
<td>17 (19)</td>
<td>3 (2)</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total responses</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>262 (100)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 9 below illustrates the number of people present in a household. The Saturday afternoon mass and Sunday 9:30 masses both averaged 2.4 people per household. The Spanish mass’s households averaged nearly 5 people. The overall average number of people per household in the entire sample was 3.27.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of People/Households</th>
<th>Saturday Afternoon</th>
<th>Sunday Morning</th>
<th>Sunday Spanish</th>
<th>Percent %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>11 (32%)</td>
<td>18 (23%)</td>
<td>10 (8%)</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>16 (47%)</td>
<td>30 (39%)</td>
<td>10 (8%)</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>3 (9)</td>
<td>9 (12%)</td>
<td>25 (20%)</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>3 (9)</td>
<td>3 (4)</td>
<td>32 (26%)</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>1 (3)</td>
<td>12 (16%)</td>
<td>32 (26%)</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt; 6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5 (6)</td>
<td>16 (12%)</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Responses</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>236 (100)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Mean Household Size = 3.27

We also found that three-fourths (73 percent) of all the households at the Spanish service have children present in the household, while less than one-third (28 percent) of
the families at the Saturday afternoon and Sunday 9:30 service have children present in the household. Table 10 provides this information.

**Table 10. Children Present in the Household**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Children in Household</th>
<th>Saturday Afternoon</th>
<th>Sunday Morning</th>
<th>Sunday Spanish</th>
<th>Percent %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>6 (16%)</td>
<td>26 (33%)</td>
<td>91 (73%)</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>31 (84%)</td>
<td>53 (67%)</td>
<td>33 (27%)</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Responses</strong></td>
<td>37</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>240 (100)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 11 below shows that nearly all (95 percent) of the households with elderly people are from Saturday afternoon and Sunday 9:30 masses, while the overall sample has only 24% of households with elderly present in the household. The only service in which households with elderly people present in households was the majority was the Saturday afternoon service.

**Table 11. Elderly in the Household**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Elderly in Household</th>
<th>Saturday Afternoon</th>
<th>Sunday Morning</th>
<th>Sunday Spanish</th>
<th>Percent %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>19 (56%)</td>
<td>34 (45%)</td>
<td>3 (2%)</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>15 (44%)</td>
<td>42 (55%)</td>
<td>122 (98%)</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Responses</strong></td>
<td>34</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>235 (100)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Attitudes towards Ascension.** We asked several open-ended questions: why people attend, strengths of Ascension, and what parishioners would like to see in the future. (All open-ended responses are included in the Appendix in verbatim form; Spanish-language responses are all translated.)

Twenty percent of the sample listed the location of the church as the main reason they attend, with 50% of those responses coming from the Spanish mass alone. About a
quarter (26 percent) listed their history with Ascension as being the main reason they attend; that history included being baptized at Ascension, going to school there when they were children, or being married at Ascension. People also responded favorably to the atmosphere of the church. Some verbatim responses from the survey include:

- ‘I consider Ascension “my” parish.’
- ‘Wonderful community of worship.’
- ‘I grew up at Ascension church.’

We also asked what respondents think of as the strength of Ascension Church. The leading responses were: the Ascension community (35 percent), the church’s diversity (16 percent), and Ascension’s location (18 percent). Quite a few respondents noted that they enjoyed the diversity of the church but they did not feel connected to the other ethnic groups.

- ‘Good church officials that care for our needs.’
- ‘Different ethnic groups.’ (Sunday 9:30 mass)
- ‘Rich in culture and diversity.’ (Sunday 9:30 mass)

Finally, we asked the parishioners what they felt Ascension could do to improve in the future. The leading responses were: have more church programs (26 percent), increase future attendance (19 percent), and increase youth participation (12 percent). We also received several strong recommendations for daycare services; all of these requests were from the Spanish mass, at which a large number of young children were present. In addition, some people noted that they would like air-conditioning.

- ‘This service needs daycare during mass.’ (Spanish mass)
- ‘Greater linkage with the Spanish parishioners.’
• ‘Get the young people more involved.’

• ‘Air-conditioned mass.’

**Results of Interviews with Experts**

We look at key issues that affect the North Side and, by extension, Church of the Ascension and its parishioners. We discuss each area separately: housing, business, services for the youth and elderly, and general economic and demographic characteristics.

### 1. Housing

**Vacancy rates:** People in North Minneapolis are concerned that overly-low vacancy rates are affecting the vitality of their community. There are three main issues: the overall trend in vacancy rates, moving from the neighborhood, and the need for more housing.

A vacancy rate is defined as the number of vacant rental housing units compared to the number of rental units as a whole. Various experts noted that a healthy vacancy rate in this area should be at least five percent. However, “the vacancy rates were hovering close to or below 1 percent …earlier in the late nineties, and early 2002 it was really tight. Some of this has loosened up a little bit but only… in the one and two bedroom market” (Abariotes, Local Initiatives Support Coalition). Although the rates are currently low, the respondents were optimistic that a healthier rate is possible in the near future. One respondent explained, “They are low but they’re moving right now” (Engstrom, Minnesota Housing Resources, Inc.); this positive sentiment was also expressed by Jackie Cherryhomes, former City Council member.
People are concerned that they can’t find an affordable place to stay in the neighborhood, so they are moving out of the neighborhood and sometimes out of the area to find more affordable housing. Because of lower vacancy rates and cheaper prices, people are moving to the suburbs to fulfill their housing needs. Many respondents commented on this issue. “People are moving out to places like Brooklyn Center and Coon Rapids where they can find more affordable housing” (Green, PRG; also expressed by Rhoney, Housing Resource Center). However, according to Brandt (Star Tribune columnist,

“…people who have been to the suburbs and come back said ‘I didn’t feel comfortable living out there, I needed a car to go everywhere, they looked at you funnier if you are of color, followed you through the grocery stores and convenience stores, that sort of thing.’ They didn’t feel comfortable, they didn’t feel like they fit in to some degree if they would be living in the suburbs.”

Another disadvantage of moving out of the area is that many people have family or cultural ties to the neighborhood. Therefore, some groups are more determined to stay close to one another. For example, “the…Asian population is more likely to stay in the immediate vicinity of the near north or the farther north side because of clan ties and the family bonds that are very important” (Brandt, Star Tribune)

Many hope that as vacancy rates rise, more housing will become available in the neighborhood and people won’t have to leave the neighborhood to meet their housing needs, which can disrupt family and ethnic ties and can put people in racially-tense situations.

Residents of North Minneapolis feel there is a need to create more housing. A difficult thing for the city and developers to decide is what type of housing will be built and where it will be placed. The loss of the units that were part of the Hollman project
came at a time when the vacancy rates were dropping, adding to the lack of housing. The people who were first driven out of the projects had an easier time finding replacement units, while those who moved out later found it more difficult because the vacancy rates had dropped to an unhealthy level. “There are thousands of units that are needed to fill the need... People are meeting their affordable housing needs by either doubling up or living in crappy housing or living way out of the city and commuting in” (Abariotes, Local Initiatives Support Coalition).

**Affordable housing:** Affordable housing is the main concern among all of the people we interviewed. There are many different issues concerning affordable housing. The sections below discuss the different types of housing, the way to fund the housing and limitations in creating affordable housing.

Natalie Johnson Lee, City Council, sums up the situation in North Minneapolis really well:

“...there was a lot of flight from the area, there were a lot of properties sold, there’s been a lot of transition change that has happened in the neighborhood overall. I’ve seen churches that have had very strong congregations that have been sold because they lost their congregations and housing prices drop and then level off and stay at very low levels for a very long time. Physically, over time the urban renewal has fortunately removed a lot of the poorer structures, there is a lot of land that sat vacant for a very long time and now the neighborhood has improved dramatically. People realize housing values that are there, there’s been some real real-estate growth and I think that the neighborhood in terms of a market is on an upswing. I think its steadily rising, and there’s going to be more and more positive improvements as it stabilizes.”

Programs are in place to help people with low to moderate incomes afford housing. There are public housing units that are available and there is also the Section 8 program. Section 8 and public housing are project based, which means that the building
itself has a subsidy, and if you live in it you pay 30 percent of your income, with a
Section 8 subsidy tied to the building. “Then there is a Section 8, a ‘walking voucher,’
which allows someone to go live in a rental unit and pay 30 percent of your income, but
the voucher is yours and it goes wherever you are” (Jackie Cherryhomes, former City
Council member).

These programs enable participants to pay a certain portion of their income for
housing. Section 8 housing is hard to get because there is high demand for the program
and a low turnover rate among participants. Once people get into the program, they stay
in it as long as possible. Section 8 vouchers provided by the program can be used
towards rent or towards paying off a mortgage.

According a HOME Line survey published in the Star Tribune, there has been an
increase this year in the number of rent vouchers available. Unfortunately, of the housing
units available for rent, many simply were too expensive. Moreover, many landlords
refuse to accept vouchers or require a minimum family income. (Brandt, *Star Tribune*,
Dec. 6, 2002).

Another housing option is through a land trust. A citywide land trust is in place in
many cities around the country, but is a new idea for Minneapolis. A land trust buys up
empty lots around the city, and then developers come in and build housing on the lots.
The housing is affordable because the developers and the homebuyers do not have to
invest in the land because the land stays in the trust.

“The thought would be that across the city, we would apply a land
trust model for housing, one either non-profit of for profit developers
could add units into the land trust. Basically you take ownership of
the land underneath the house, and that helps to reduce some of the
cost. The non-profit organization retains ownership of the land, and
then someone buys the house on top of it at a reduced rate…” The land
trust creates a mechanism for you to be able to retain the subsidy value of the house.” (Abariotes)

Land trusts enable developers to build affordable housing for first time homebuyers. If they decide to sell the home down the road, the house is still affordable to the next person who wants to buy it.

Soft money is used to develop projects and is provided to developers from different organizations, mostly non-profits and foundations. “...Most of the time its hard to get affordable housing projects funded because it’s hard to get the start-up costs funded for pre-development surveys, the architectural fees, the acquisition fees. Banks and lenders really don’t look at you seriously for financing until you have something in place.” (Rhoney, Housing Resource Center)

With the economy in a downslide, there is consensus among everyone we interviewed that there is going to be less money coming in and developers will have a much harder time finding soft money. This means that development through these various means will decline. Engstrom (Minnesota Housing Resources, Inc.) commented, “Foundations [will have less money] because they invest in stock markets. Corporate giving is down, charitable giving is down, and government money is tighter. [There is] absolutely a huge impact.”

Tax credits are used to create funding for developers to build affordable housing. If a developer needs funds for doing a particular project the developer needs to get some sort of funding to create the affordable housing. The government can give the developer a certain amount of tax credits, which the developer can sell to corporations in return for cash. The credits do come with additional requirements
such as what the housing is to be built for and how much they can charge for the housing.

The tax credit is a good way for developers to create additional funding for affordable housing projects, and with a slow economy there are corporations looking for ways to save money. The tax credits are a benefit for both the corporations and the developers. However, in a depressed state economy, it’s questionable how much of this incentive will be available.

The idea of building mixed income housing is to create a more diverse atmosphere, and to try to keep from having too much of a certain type of housing in one area. Some people’s views on the Hollman project before the demolition was that there was too much public housing occupying the area. The thought was that the people who lived there would not have motivation to try and move on; because the projects were the only thing they saw and knew.

A new way of building houses was created to ensure a diverse atmosphere among housing types in the area. The idea is to build housing that spans various income levels, so there is not too much poverty in one area. A mix of housing, ranging from market rate housing to public housing, creates a community based on living together instead of segregating the lower income people from those with higher incomes.

Randell Bradley, the Minneapolis City Planning Commissioner, believes that the high concentration of public housing has a negative impact on the community. “I’m saying that affordable housing is a trend, and poverty is a constant. And what they are not dealing with is poverty: they want to deal with affordable housing. I’m saying that you have got two issues here. If you put affordable housing in a poor neighborhood, you
have created more poverty. Because you are surrounded by it, and that is what you get to see.” Mr. Bradley also believes that this perception is held by the youth of the community as well. He believes that it is this perception that tends to discourage the youth in the area. “There’s a vacant lot, (another) vacant lot, a funeral home, and NAACP, and north of the funeral home is a part of the city’s health and medical neighborhood center, and I’m a sixteen-year-old black kid trying to figure out my future and all I see are buildings that hold non-profits, except the funeral home. . .”

Bradley suggests that the area examine two major problems: affordable housing and poverty. He is a believer in affordable and public housing (as he himself once lived in public housing), but feels that the city needs to move away from concentrating these homes in specific areas. Affordable and public housing concentration will only allow for areas that are poor to remain poor as individuals with stable incomes will choose to buy property elsewhere.

Although Near North seems to have a concentration of affordable and public housing, efforts are currently being made to change the situation. Heritage Park is a 900-unit development area located in Near North. The site used to hold the Public Housing Unit Project, which from the mid-90’s and before was known as the “projects.” The area is now being re-built as a mixed income development. Dean Carlson, Project Director of the Minnesota Housing Development Agency, explained that Heritage Park will offer “some public housing, some affordable housing, but then a lot at market rate…located both north and south of Olson Highway.” By spreading out the affordable and public housing, communities such as Near North would possibly appeal to economically stable individuals with the disposable incomes necessary for economic stimulation.
Maintaining housing: A recurring theme in the interviews was that the housing in the neighborhood was very good, but some of the housing stock was deteriorating because it had not been maintained appropriately. We found that some people did not have the resources or the knowledge to maintain their homes, especially the elderly. The houses that were built in the beginning of the 1900’s are huge old homes that would sell for a lot more money in different areas if they had been kept up. There are groups to help keep those houses intact and still affordable.

- “We have a number of communities that do live in town homes, Park Plaza, and Park Place, all of which are privately owned, but they are subsidized housing, and so over the course of 12 years, we had someone purchase all of those and renovate them, and bring them back to life. …Preserve them as long-term affordable housing in the community.” (Jackie Cherryhomes)

- “The North Side Residents Redevelopment Council own 200 houses. They’ve been trying to rehab or redevelop houses that have deteriorated or build on vacant lots.” (Abariotes)

- “…five years ago you could buy a house for $25,000 in Phillips or Near North or anywhere out there. Now you can’t even buy a house in really rough shape for under $100,000.” (Green, Green Realty)

“Another thing that's helping right now is that there's been a number of factories that start up to do prefab. They're not mobile homes, but they take a blueprint of a standard house and they build it from scratch in the warehouse. They build the walls and they truck them to the site and assemble them” (Engstrom, Minnesota Housing Resources, Inc.). This type of construction is helping keep the costs of building new housing lower.
As for the new housing that is being built, there are efforts under way to try and figure out ways to build houses in a more affordable manner, such as doing prefabrication or building with cheaper materials. However some new housing has been very problematic. Dream Homes are homes that are built on empty lots mostly on the lower north side of North Minneapolis. These houses are built cheaply, without a basement or garage, and some of the bedrooms are almost too small for city regulations. These houses are being developed in the North Minneapolis area at a rate of 300 or more in 20 months.

City Council member Natalie Johnson Lee is concerned about these houses: “The biggest issue in that area right know is Dream Homes. Hennepin County gave them 29 lots over in north Minneapolis. They have been able to put these pre-fabrication houses in with no basements and they have electric heating.” Electric heating is the most expensive heating possible to put into a house. Johnson Lee explains,

“Then they have what you call contract for deeds. People have no clue what there really getting into. And what they’re doing is really preying on the poor because they are desperate for housing so they are excited to be in a house. But, they have no idea of the quality of housing and if they would sell them they wouldn’t be able to sell them for a profit.”

What makes these homes even worse is that they lower the value of the homes in the area and create more density in a community that is already denser then most in the metro area. The homes also create a problem for the owners, because the homes are made so cheaply that they have a hard time retaining their resale value.

We found that maintenance problems were a big issue when dealing with first-time homeowners. They just didn’t have the education to keep their houses in good condition. Around a third of the housing in North Minneapolis (34 percent) is in poor condition. That is the second worst rate in the city only to the Phillips neighborhood, at
about 36 percent. Keeping people informed on how to make sure their houses don’t lose equity is a big issue in the North Minneapolis neighborhood. However, some neighborhoods have addressed this very aggressively. Bergman (Housing Resource Center) notes,

“… people were getting into these first-time homebuyer houses and not having any idea how to do any of the ongoing maintenance, so the Folwell neighborhood requires that anytime we give them money for first time home buyer, is that they have to go to the post-purchase counseling class that the Northside Neighborhood Housing Services has, and if you haven’t been over there, it’s wonderful, places where you can learn how to change furnace filters or bleed a radiator, it’s a great program.”

**Landlords:** A lot of the landlords in North Minneapolis are neglecting the properties they own and in the process are neglecting the tenants and the future of North Minneapolis. Many of the landlords who own housing in North Minneapolis do not live in the area. Since they have no stake in the community, they are in no rush to fix up the problems with their buildings. Moreover, they have to commute in to do any type of maintenance on the houses. Some have full-time jobs and commuting into the neighborhood to take care of a house takes up too much of their free time. Likewise, landlords are often charging high prices for rent because the residents in the area have no other option. This contributes to the poor relationship between landlords and renters. One respondent explained this by stating,

“A lot of the rent here in North Minneapolis is subsidized, so the landlords can get away with charging higher rent. … We have been trying to go at this tenant/landlord thing from a different approach and try to get the landlords and the tenants to come to the table and see how we can make this relationship better, and especially when we’re doing our Neighborhood Revitalization Program funding and trying to program that money, we definitely wanted to do something with landlords and tenants but we could not get them to come to the table for a reasonable discussion. There’s just a ton of animosity between
the two groups. It seems like landlords in North Minneapolis feel like this is a real easy place to own units and not have to do anything to maintain. And if they rented to tenants who maybe had a history of bad rental, it’s kind of the understanding that I won’t bother you if you don’t bother me, so… ...We have slum landlords who do nothing to maintain property and take advantage of tenants, reaping the benefits of our tax dollars in the form subsidized rent.” (Deb Wagner)

We found that everyone agreed that there should be more government regulation on how the landlords do their jobs. A lot of the landlords that own houses in the neighborhood don’t actually live in the neighborhood. People want to get rid of the slumlords, or have them become more involved in the community and the houses that they own. Johnson Lee comments that the North Side doesn’t have enough involvement in housing issues.

“One of the things that other communities have that the north side is lacking is your housing people. They are in charge of what is allowed in the area. The neighbors really become the experts of the housing in their area. In the North Side most of the housing initiatives come out of N.R.R.C. (North Side Residents Redevelopment Council). The way they work is that the North Side for them is divided into 13 different organizations. The housing organizations and any money that flows into the area goes through N.R.R.C. The problem with the North Side is they don’t know who their representatives are. So you have a small group of people making big decisions of housing in the area and a lot of people don’t put their input in. So they could choose what type of housing is allowed in the area but they don’t. The problem is that when they want to build a porch and there is a law saying they can’t, then they get involved when it is too late.”

There seems to be a true lack of community involvement in the neighborhood that really needs it, and is emphasized in the following quote.

“I can tell you that one of the big thing that you will find over in north Minneapolis is that they don’t really know what is going on in the neighborhood. I was an intern in the Phillips neighborhood and they knew where every dollar was. In the North Side they don’t even know who their representative is. They have a block club system that
is really not working. There needs to be good neighborhood organization. My dream is to have a better community involvement in the area. I want them to know where the money is coming from and where it is going, and how they can access the money.” (Natalie Johnson Lee)

To create a community setting in the neighborhood people have to realize that it is their job to create change and without their input people from outside the community are going to keep making changes for them. Once the community realizes this then they can make it possible to help correct some of the housing issues that keep reappearing in the neighborhood.

**Predatory Lending and Redlining:** Some realtors and lenders also engage in predatory lending, according to the people we interviewed. Predatory lending is when lenders prey on those with bad or no credit and offer loans with outrageous interest rates. Most of the people who receive the loans end up defaulting because they can’t afford the high interest rates. Lenders make loans that can’t be repaid, add high fees, encourage repeated refinancing and use other tactics that build debt that eats into owner equity. One respondent explained, “a major thing for us is to try and keep people out of predatory lending [where] interest rates [are] above 8.5 and 9 percent, …a lot of immigrants and minorities fall into that [category of loans] because of credit issues or employment history. Lenders might still let that person borrow the money but it might be at… 15 percent, and that is setting someone up to fail” (Brandt. Star Tribune)

Redlining is another major issue regarding affordable housing. Redlining is when banks and insurance companies, for multiple reasons, outline an area they see as a trouble area and choose not to give loans to people buying houses in that area. Banks don’t offer their services to an area if it fits into the redline category. This type of practice causes the
area to fall apart at a faster rate than usual. Reasons why an area may be labeled as bad include poor economics and race. One respondent stated, “Redlining opens the door for predatory lending and flipping. The North Side had a lot of that happening” (Emily Green).

Many respondents suggested that “flipping” played an important role in creating the current economic and housing situation. In “flipping” a realtor buys a property for a relatively low price and sells it for an inflated price to individuals who are uneducated in real estate and cannot afford the payments. As a result, many properties were foreclosed and abandoned, giving the area a negative look.

Johnson Lee said, “The banks say that they don’t redline. But you can tell that there are not a lot of loans going out… You also find that only 15 percent of African Americans own their own homes in the Minneapolis area. It is a very low rate… African Americans far exceed their white counterparts but they can’t get a loan [while] the whites can.” Although redlining is clearly against the law, several respondents did report that it continues to happen. To try to get rid of predatory lending and redlining, people within the community need to become educated about good and bad loan rates and lending practices and to exert pressure, through legislative means, to enforce laws against these practices. Senator Sandra Pappas, D-St. Paul, is working on legislation to end predatory lending practices throughout Minnesota.

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you have got two issues here. If you put affordable housing in a poor neighborhood, you have created more poverty. Because you are surrounded by it, and that is what you get to see.” Mr. Bradley also believes that this perception is held by the youth of the community as well. He believes that it is this perception that tends to discourage the youth in the area. “There’s a vacant lot, (another) vacant lot, a funeral home, and NAACP, and north of the funeral home is a part of the city’s health and medical neighborhood center, and I’m a sixteen-year-old black kid trying to figure out my future and all I see are buildings that hold non-profits, except the funeral home. . .”

In summary, there is a host of housing problems on the North Side. These include too-low vacancy rates; a lack of affordable housing; unfair lending practices; an inability to maintain homes adequately, and a lack of community involvement in housing issues. We suggest some strategies that Ascension can employ to help the situation.

2. Results: Services for Children and the Elderly

**Programs for Children:** There are a wide variety of neighborhood programs for children. The programs encompass alternative schooling, education, tutoring, and after-school and evening activities. There are also some organizations offering affordable health care to children in North Minneapolis. Organizations providing these types of services include a variety of neighborhood centers and community centers. There are also services available to educate and teach children. They range from pre-school learning to high-school level alternative schooling. Lastly, there are the services available to help troubled children, or children in need. These services include juvenile
shelters, troubled teens programs, programs for expectant or teen mothers, counseling and family support, and supervised visitation centers for divorced or separated parents.

The goal of the programs is provide opportunities for the children that they would otherwise not have. The organizations focus their programs on leadership, social justice, conflict management, life skills, and education. For example, The Lincoln Beacon Boys and Girls Club focuses on enabling “young people to be the best they can be...by creating a sense of competence, usefulness, belonging, and influence.” (Emily Renner, 6 Nov. 2002) The YWCA focuses on unlearning racism and making change in the community as well.

**Programs for the Elderly:** There are a wide variety of programs for elderly offered in the neighborhood. Many of the programs are geared toward keeping seniors out of nursing homes and resident facilities as long as possible. There are many programs that:

- Promote a healthy lifestyle. These programs include exercise programs and the adult daycare program called DayElders.
- Promote independence. These programs include support groups, the senior linkage line, legal assistance, and financial advice.
- Provide services to those who are incapable or inactive. These programs include the grocery shop program and meal services. Through the delivery of meals, the deliverer serves as the communicator between the elderly and their contacts, such as close friends and family. There is also HandyWorks, a “senior program that provides chore services for persons 60 years and older through seasonal chores, minor repairs, and household
chores. These chores are anywhere from lawn mowing and yard work to fixing their leaking roofs or cleaning their house” (Allison Nelton, 29 Oct 2002).

- Provide recreational activities. These programs include field trips to the casinos, apple orchards, or art museums. Organized games such as cards, dominoes, and puzzles, crafts, bingo, and cooking, help in building friendships.

- Provide skilled nursing services and assisted living.

**Funding:** There is usually no cost for the participants of the programs or those utilizing the services. Some organizations may charge nominal fees for certain, more costly, programs, but if the participants and their families are unable to pay, these fees are often waived. Some of the organizations serving the elderly also use a “sliding fee scale,” where the participants are charged based on their monthly income.

Most organizations rely on outside donations to run their programs. One of the largest contributors is the Greater Twin Cities United Way. The United Way collects donations and distributes them to organizations based on need. Donations are monitored and the organizations are observed to make sure funding is being used properly. If results do not meet the standards of United Way donors, the organizations receive reductions or loss of funding. Unfortunately, Kathy Lentz of United Way said, “with the economy, we are looking at a 4 percent loss this year from our contributions… unfortunately, contributions rely on the market” (Interview, 8 Nov. 2002). Organizations will need to find other methods of collecting or obtaining funding. Other organizations also work together; for example an employee at The City, Inc. said, “Organizations like the YWCA
also help us out by paying for all of our camping trips, and Weed & Seed helps to provide food for our meals.” (Interview, 5 Nov 2002).

**Children:** Organizations serving children rely heavily on both corporate and individual donations. Companies donate an amount of money based on a percentage of their profits. Although funding is still available, when the economy is bad, the amount of money that is donated to the organizations is reduced. The director of the Discovery Leadership Program at the YWCA explained, “I don’t think we ever have problems getting money; it just might be the amount. It just depends on where every corporation is at that time, how much they can contribute, but we always have our programming.”

All of the organizations interviewed have an extensive list of individuals who give to their programs. Although it is not known how much these individuals are donating, many people who were interviewed expressed that these donations make up a significant portion of the money they receive. Funding is also obtained through campaigns and fundraisers put on by the organizations themselves, grants, and other public service agencies, such as the Minneapolis Public School System. Although these organizations have multiple ways of obtaining funding, much of what they get is dependent upon the state of the economy. With the state having a $4.5 billion budget deficit, the amount of money coming from the state sources is affected. Moreover, because these organizations are unable to charge participants for using their programs, they do not bring in any direct revenues.

**Elderly:** There are various forms of funding for the elderly programs. Most of the organizations rely on Federal Funding (Medicare), waived funding through Hennepin County, United Way, Metropolitan AAA, and the Minnesota Board on Aging. One
respondent stated, “We have very little money that comes in from individual donations and very little money that comes in from churches” (Sarah Schettler, 5 Nov 2002). Organizations also receive funding for their programs through grants and medical assistance programs.

**Constituencies Served:** The organizations providing services to North Minneapolis neighborhood focus their programming on vulnerable populations (children and elderly). They seek to help those in the community who are lacking resources and whose basic needs are not being met. Many of the participants in these programs are low income African Americans. There are also some Latinos, Asians and some Caucasians utilizing the services.

**Children:** Children using services primarily come from African-American families in the 55411 Zip Code. The children have little positive life skills, so the programs help open them up to more opportunities. For example, a City Inc. employee stated, “On one of our camping trips, most of the kids had never seen horses before… They are great kids who just need a little extra attention. Unfortunately, many of them come here after school because their parents want them out of the house.”

Many of them do not have access to transportation and are only able to attend programs with free transportation. This resource is even scarcer due to recent budget cuts for the Minneapolis Public School System, which provides most of the current transportation for the organizations. Others live close to the organizations providing these programs and can therefore walk.

The children face a variety of challenges including low self-esteem, behavioral issues, drug and alcohol abuse, violence and problems in the home. Many of the students
attending the alternative schools are struggling in school. Racism between the participants is also an issue.

Many children attending the After-School Enrichment Program at The City, Inc. “come from very large families and often attend with their siblings, cousins, and even nieces or nephews in some cases.” (Pat Ferrer, 5 Nov. 2002) The majority are single-parent families where women head the household. Many of the families are challenging because what they teach their children contradicts what the child is learning in the programs. Korey Matlock from the YWCA explained, “We have so many behavioral issues that [the kids] have learned from their parents that we are trying to undo” (1 Nov. 2002). Some of the families are very supportive of their children’s participation in the programs and view these organizations as a resource. Others are not supportive and are not involved in their children’s lives. The families “vary on a scale of 1-10…there are not many tens” (Korey Matlock).

Elderly: The elderly are 55 or older, but occasionally, there are some younger than 55 who need assistance. These elderly are both men and women, and are often widowed, terminally ill, and poor. Many of the elderly suffer from extreme isolation because they fear for their safety and yet want their independence.

“The other issue for this community in particular is the socio-economic challenges” explained one respondent. “This is not Edina; we don’t have people that have the money to be able to build the ramps so that they can wheel themselves up to the house; we don’t have money for other devices that could keep people more independent” (Tim Meyer, 7 Nov 2002).
Program Awareness and Involvement: The recruiting efforts as well as the level of participant involvement differed greatly between organizations providing services to children and those serving the elderly.

Children: Many of the organizations serving children rely heavily on word of mouth in order to attract participants. Participants spread the word about programs through their neighborhoods, churches and schools. For example, the Director of the Lincoln-Beacon Boys and Girls Club explained that the kids “will come and have fun one day, and then they’ll go to their friends and say, ‘hey, guess what I did!’, and then they will bring in their friend the next time they come” (6 Nov 2002).

Recruitment and advertising efforts were minimal in all of the organizations working with children, aside from the YWCA. The Director of the YWCA’s Discovery Leadership Program states, “We do a lot of recruiting. We go out into schools, parks, we tap into girls who have been in the program in the past by sending letters home, and we just make ourselves very visible.” On the other hand, despite the general lack of advertising and recruiting efforts, all of the organizations interviewed believe that getting enough children involved in their programs is not an issue. For instance, programs at City, Inc. and the Boys and Girls Club are currently full without any recruiting efforts. Moreover, there is a waiting list for those trying to enroll in City, Inc.’s alternative high school as well as the Boys and Girls Club after-school programs.

The children are, for the most part, interested in and excited about the programs in which they participate. Most organizations were in agreement that the motivation of the children fluctuates on a day-to-day basis, but the children are generally happy to be part of a program. The Director of the Discovery Leadership Program at the YWCA
explained, “You know how it is when you’re a kid; it might depend on your mood that
day. They might be really into it one day and the next day they might not be into it at all.
I think it just depends on what happens to them during the day.” (Korey Matlock, 1 Nov.
2002)

**Elderly:** While the organizations serving the elderly population also rely on word
of mouth, through nurses at hospitals, emergency assistance, churches and schools, they
take a much more active position in recruiting participants. Because the elderly are
highly isolated from the rest of the community, these organizations must make an effort
to inform people about their services. One employee from the Volunteers of America
stated, “I like to go to people’s homes and talk with them…I try to hand out flyers and
knock on doors to get them [involved]”. Likewise, HandyWorks promotes their
programs through senior centers in the area as well as grocery stores.

Many elderly stay isolated because they are afraid for their safety in the
neighborhood. “A lot of them are afraid to get out of their homes. After dark, seniors
have been robbed going to the store by the ATM machines. There are people watching
them. So safety is big” (Diane White, 12 Nov 2002). When it comes to involvement
from the elderly in recreational activities “it’s like pulling teeth to get them out here. One
lady sits in her chair all day long for 10 years. It’s hard sometimes to get them” (Diane
White, 12 Nov 2002). Most of the time, the children of the elderly call the organizations
and ask them to help get their parents involved. “All we can do is to keep bothering
them. After they come a couple of times they usually like it. Some don’t like it, but most
love it” (Diane White, 12 Nov 2002).
Other Organizations on the North Side: There are numerous organizations on the North side providing a wide variety of services to children and the elderly. Some of the organizations involved in programming for children include the YWCA, Plymouth Christian Youth Center, United Way, Boys and Girls Club, and City Inc. During personal interviews, employees of these organizations mentioned other organizations in the area that also have programs for children, such as The Cookie Cart, YMCA, The Park and Recreation Department, Hospitality House, Phyllis Wheatly Center, Hmong American Partnership, The Upper Midwest Indian Center, and the Minneapolis Public School System.

Some organizations involved in providing services for the elderly include Meals at home, St. Olaf retirement Communities, Volunteers of America (DayElders and North side Senior Center), and the Neighborhood Involvement Programs (HandiWorks). During personal interviews with these organizations, other organizations providing similar services were mentioned. These include Pillsbury United Communities, Pilot City Health Center, and the Senior Linkage Line, which is a good place to call to obtain a more comprehensive list of the programs offered in North Minneapolis.

Undoubtedly the single biggest issue affecting agencies serving at-risk populations will be decreases in state and federal funding, as well as declines in grant and private money. The agencies on the North Side are likely to feel these cuts significantly.

3. Results: Businesses

The issues brought up by most of the business people were the physical presence of the North Side; employment problems, and crime.
Improving the Area: One issue regarding businesses in North Minneapolis is the need for improvement in the physical appearance of the area. Whether this is actually being done, and the extent of improvements to make a significant change in the area’s appearance and desirability as a retail area, is questionable. Some respondents indicated that their businesses were fairly new, and didn’t need renovating; others had updated several times; and other owners and managers saw no need to make changes. Ms. Williams, owner of Lucille’s Kitchen, mentioned that her business was fairly new, and there was no need for changes in appearance. Conversely, Mr. Delmore, owner of Gearty-Delmore Funeral Home, said that the funeral parlor has “…undergone four renovations, the most recent was two years ago…” (11/19/02). Ms. Gilbert, Branch Manager of US Bank, did not see the issue as a simple one. She thought that the change needed to occur with new businesses coming into the area because this brings more employees. Target recently added a fence around the perimeter of the building and the entryway was redesigned. Mr. Stevenson, store manager of Target, said, “Raising their (businesses) standards as how they present themselves as a business, so that they have more pride in their stores…would be a reinvestment in themselves” (11/4/02).

Other people said that they had no intention of updating their building or had no need to. For example, the exterior of the Merwin Drug building is made of brick, so it would be difficult to improve the look of the building. Likewise, Super Valu has not changed since it was first built, with the exception of changing the name on the outside of the store in 1999.

Crime: The North Side has an image as being a bad place to locate a business because of the high rates of crime, both violent, gang-related crime and shoplifting and
vandalism. For most of the businesses, the most common problems regarding crime were shoplifting and vandalism. Managers of Super Valu, Target, Broadway Liquor and Merwin Drug all stated that shoplifting and vandalism were their biggest problems.

There were also instances of more serious crimes. Mr. Gearty, owner of Ed Gearty Law Office, noted that one of his tenants was recently killed. Mr. Gearty mentioned that in addition to homicide, drugs and prostitution are also problems in the area.

However, a recent report indicates that crime in the Twin Cities dropped again in 2002. Interestingly, crime in the Fourth Precinct on the North Side had no increase over 2001. The Fourth Precinct was actually the only precinct to have a reduction in homicides, according to Precinct Commander Tim Dolan. He said, “There is a certain reputation about the North Side, but the numbers don’t support the criticism we hear” (Star Tribune, 12.31.02, p. A1). Unfortunately, although the overall crime rate did decline, some of the most high-profile incidents did occur on the North Side, including the shooting of a boy in August that set off a melee on the North Side. According to the Star Tribune report (12.31.02, p. A1), however, “the start of federal mediation to improve police-community relations remains in limbo.” The perception of the North Side as violent is fueled, in large part, by the gang activity, including a high proportion of the city’s homicides, in that area.

It is likely that police budgets and crime prevention activities will be cut because of the state and federal budget crises. As with budget cuts in other services areas, the North Side might feel the impact of these cuts particularly severely.
A United Community: The businesses in the area expressed a need for a more united community in helping to make the area stronger and to improve the business climate. Mr. Keeley, manager of Super Valu, said, “I think one way to do that would be to do community outreach, especially through the church” (11/14/02). This is a similar sentiment to that of Natalie Johnson Lee, indicating a need for stronger community involvement.

Business Outlook: There are contradictory views about business in North Minneapolis. Some of the business owners and managers view the area as dangerous, “Recovering. It’s been a well-established, lower-income zone for many years,” “typical inner-city” and a “changing, diverse neighborhood [and it is] economically depressed.”

However, there were respondents who see the area much more positively. Mr. Merwin said, “It has improved over a couple of years” (11/29/02). Likewise, the clinic supervisor at University Family Physicians North Medical Clinic stated, “We have a very strong sense of community; there’s a lot of energy in north Minneapolis. A lot of good people doing good things, our neighborhood groups are very active, the business association is very active” (11/8/02). Mr. Olsen, assistant manager at Walgreen’s, mentioned, “You have lots of bad people … but overall it’s a good community… everybody seems to be close and everything” (10/25/02).

Workforce Issues: The majority of hourly employees have a high school education or a GED. The upper level management employees have a college degree. When referring to the level of education of his employees, Mr. Keeley believed that, “95% are high school educated” (11/14/02). The assistant manager Walgreen’s said, “Most are high schoolers and high school grads, you don’t see many college grads unless
they are in management” (10/25/02). The exception was Gearty-Delmore Funeral Parlor. Their employees need to have a Funeral Director’s license from the University of Minnesota. Two of their secretaries also have college degrees as well. Another exception is Ms. Williams, owner Lucille’s Kitchen, who indicated that she did not want people with a culinary education. She said that employees with a culinary education would have to be paid $16.00 an hour and she cannot afford pay such a wage. She would rather “train in people to do what we want them to do” (10/25/02).

Several of the owners and managers don’t require their employees to have a great amount of training. The store manager of Super Valu stated, “Most of the skills they need are just entry-level skills. They need to speak adequate English” (11/14/02). Likewise, the store manager at Target said that employees needed to be able to do basic store functions, but those could be learned during their in-store training.

The hourly employees were from the area, within walking distance, while the management commuted from the suburbs. This distinction suggests that the managers and owners don’t have a strong stake in the development of the area. The employees, since they don’t have the education to move into upper-level positions, are limited to relatively low-skill, low-wage jobs.

4. Results: Economics, Religious Institutions and Ethnic Groups

Interviewees’ economic outlooks of the area were consistently positive, which was somewhat contradictory with background research findings. Respondents have their own remedies to address concerns in the Near North area.

Respondents’ concerns regarding current economic conditions dealt with the lack of job opportunities in the area. Businesses are hesitant to come into the area due, in part,
to the high risk associated with starting a business there. According to George Garnett, market figures in the area do not reflect the current economic situation. “I have been involved in efforts where we have looked at market analysis statistics…income and the numbers come in pretty low, but we know that those numbers aren’t accurate because they don’t tend to pick up a lot of what we call the cash economy or the underground economy.” He feels that the way to resolve the current situation in the area is to “somehow…find a way to measure that (underground economy), factor that in and present that to people who are involved in…franchise locations, investment…”

**Job Opportunities:** Without the big businesses that employ hundreds of workers or the revitalization of commercial quarters in the area, job opportunities are few. With few job opportunities for area residents, household incomes are much lower than average for the city and the county. Most of the larger employers are on the outskirts of North Minneapolis and are in either hard-to-reach locations or do not offer the needed entry-level positions. Although job opportunities in the area’s commercial quarters are convenient, they present only entry-level positions. Although these jobs would not create a living wage, as George Garnett put it, “it would create supplemental wage jobs, and those could be very important.”

**Mental Health Problems:** Several respondents indicated that the area needs additional resources for those with mental health problems. Although there seems to be a lack of participation in current programs, it might be in part because the community has low awareness of these programs. Jeanette Lieberman, Minneapolis Urban League, explained an issue within the Black community:

“There’s a huge stigma in the African-American population that if you have any kind of mental health issues, you give it to God and let God deal with. If you go
to a psychiatrist or anything like that, it’s not well accepted. (It’s) pretty culturally ingrained that if you have a mental illness, you give it to God and if that doesn’t work then you’re not praying hard enough or you deserve the illness.”

In order to increase participation, the community must change the perception that many have regarding help for mental health issues. Mental health issues range from minor cases to major mental illnesses and prevent the person who is ill from obtaining a good job and being a satisfactory parent and member of the community. Because of this, it is necessary to educate people about the repercussions of going without the needed help so that they can either become or remain a healthy partner not only in the community but also in the workforce.

However, one of the biggest problems in the current budget shortfall is the likely cut to health-care, particularly General Assistance. It is estimated that about 5,000 people in the state are likely to have all GA benefits cut; it is unclear how many of them are residents of the North Side, but it is likely to be a significant proportion given the disparities between the North Side economics and that of the county as a whole. This cut in government support can only increase the mental health burdens on those affected.

Public Assistance: Recent restrictions on welfare and public assistance programs are also having a dramatic effect on the Near North Minneapolis area. In 1997, a national policy called TANF (Temporary Assistance to Needy Families) was created to replace the AFDC (Aid to Families with Dependent Children) program. TANF requires that benefits from welfare (cash, food, shelter, utilities, child care and transportation supports, refundable tax credits and other employment related supports) be terminated after five years of assistance. Minnesota’s TANF program is known as MFIP (Minnesota Family Investment Program). As of September 30, 2002, there were 2,340 households in the
Near North community that qualified for the MFIP program. Of those households, there were a total of 7,716 active household members (DHS Maxis Extract, Margo Gillane). The members of the Near North community who qualified for the MFIP program five years ago are now reaching or have reached their cut-off dates. Although these individuals were aware of their own termination dates, this could not have come at a worse time as the country’s current economy is in a state of disarray. As these individuals are left without either the state funding or employment needed for financial stability they will find themselves falling deeper into poverty.

George Garnett, a community partner, suggests that the community members are in need of individual development. “I don’t think the issue is primarily a job situation problem, it’s a human capital development problem. The problem is people who lack motivation, skills, or an ability to see a way to get from where they are to get to where they need to go. And so, what needs to happen is not so much a physical development solution, in my mind, but it’s a human capital investment solution.” The problem then becomes how to develop these skills without sufficient resources.

**Diversity:** “Diverse” is always used to describe the make-up of the Near North area. According to Tim Meyers from the St. Olaf Retirement Communities, the North side is “a neighborhood that has been in great transition over the last several years.” The area is becoming increasingly diverse, most likely due to an increase in immigration. “It is kind of like the immigration all over again that happened in this area 60 or 70 or 80 years ago” (Tim Meyers, 7 Nov. 2002). Most respondents believe that the area will become even more diverse in the future. African-American, Hispanics, and Asian/Pacific Islanders are all expected to increase in population while the white portion of the
community is expected to decrease. Many respondents had mixed views about the impact this diversity has on the community. While some believe it to be one of the positive aspects of the area, others felt that it is the cause of much of the racism and friction present on the North side.

Given the fact that the Near North area is incredibly diverse, describing a “typical” family becomes difficult. There are a significant number of single-family households, with the majority of these households being led by females. Most families in the area have strong ties to the community and tend to stay together, “. . . if there’s any kind of an issue . . . that occurs in the neighborhood, it’s not singled out as an individual (issue), it’s more like it affects the entire community and you’re not put out there by yourself” (Lieberman, Minneapolis Urban League). Ms. Lieberman also described what she sees as a “typical” family: “I would probably say that there’s a single parent, with two children, income below or at the poverty line, she’s working, she’s probably renting, I think that she’s probably connected to the community in some way.”

**Religion:** One of the biggest strengths that kept echoing in a majority of the interviews was the tie that the Near North community has with religion. There is a diverse selection of religious groups in the Near North with thirty-five different churches in area ranging in denomination. Some of the religious groups in this area consist of: Methodist, Church of God in Christ, Independent, Baptist, Catholic, Presbyterian, Monastery, Lutheran, Episcopal, Community, and Non-Denominational.

In order to get different congregations to work together, Lieberman, Director of the Economic Development Division at the Minneapolis Urban League, believes that it
would take leaders from all sides, taking initiatives and being able to recognize the benefits congregations could provide when working together.

**A Community of Challenge and Opportunity:** North Minneapolis is a challenged community in many ways, as the respondents indicate. It is characterized by poverty, low education, crime, violence, gangs, few good job opportunities, a lack of commercial businesses in the area, and a sense from city officials that organizations serving the area don’t work together.

On the other hand, perceptions of the North side are not all negative. “Even though it’s a challenged community, there are a lot of great resources within the community that help offset some of the challenges” (Renner, 6 Nov. 2002. There are many non-profit organizations located directly on the North side serving the community in many ways; there is an urban revitalization; there has been significant housing re-investment; the crime rate has declined somewhat; and there is a strong core of people who believe that the North Side is and will continue to be a good place to live.

**Conclusion**

**Demographics of Church of the Ascension Attendees:** While there is no statistical demographic material available to us from past years, it is appropriate to say that based on information from the parish administration, the Ascension worshipper is distinctly different today compared to fifty, ten, or even five years ago. This shift is particularly noticeable in the race category. Fifteen percent of Ascension’s current members are Latino and about 50 percent of the attendees the weekend of October 12, 2002 were Latino.
Worshippers are traveling relatively short distances. Approximately 75 percent are traveling 10 miles or less to attend mass, while 15 percent are traveling 16 or more miles. Annual income levels are low, with more than a third of respondents indicating an annual income of $20,000 or less. Most (62 percent) were married and 31 percent were 51 years or older. This coincides with previous estimates that Ascension is serving a parish of couples, families, and a large group of retirees. Data also indicated that those attending the Spanish mass are more likely to be married than those attending the Saturday afternoon or Sunday 9:30 mass.

Each mass has a distinct demographic character. The *Saturday afternoon mass* is primarily Caucasian and English-speaking. This group tends to live in homes they own with small families of one or two people, with few children and many elderly in the home. Most respondents fall in the middle to higher-income brackets (although the categories were low, it should be noted), and many are retired.

Those attending the *9:30 Sunday morning mass* are also primarily Caucasian. The strongest African-American representation is found at this mass. English is the primary language spoken in households. Over half of this group makes in the highest income bracket, reflecting a correlation with the large number of those with a partial or complete college education. Primary occupations of this group are in the professional/technical or clerical fields. Like the Saturday afternoon mass, the majority of respondents lived in households with one or two people, with approximately one-third of these households having children living in them and half having elderly.

Those attending the Spanish mass on Sunday morning are Latino and list Spanish as their primary household language. Slightly over half of respondents make less than
the lowest income bracket, $20,000. Approximately one-third of respondents at this mass were unemployed. Those who were employed listed occupations in service industries or industrial labor. This group also distinguishes itself in its family and household structure. Most rent their homes and almost 75% live in homes with four or more people. Only 3 out of 125 respondents have elderly in their homes. Those attending the Spanish mass are also generally married. 

The above information summarizes the characteristics of the mass attendees. We next summarize information about the North Side environment.

**Housing:** Many problems plague the maintenance and growth of the housing stock in Near North, Minneapolis. These problems vary from lack of financing and housing availability to a lack of knowledge about acquiring and maintaining housing.

In the Near North, there are a disproportionately high percentage of rental units compared to the rest of the city. Many landlords do not live within the community, so they do not have the same stake in maintaining their dwellings as homeowners. Some first-time homeowners are having a hard time maintaining the equity of their homes because they do not know how to perform the daily upkeep and maintenance necessary.

Soft money is available to developers to curb beginning construction costs, but corporate donations to the non-profits who provide this money is down. Banks and lenders reputedly participate in predatory lending and redlining, making it hard for first-time buyers to buy the new homes that are being built.

Those that do find financing or assistance through public housing and Section 8 are not faced with many choices. Numerous individuals with federal rent vouchers are being turned away, as landlords either do not accept vouchers or impose minimum
income restrictions. Landlords who refuse to participate cite extra paperwork, delayed
government payments, and damages to property due to large family size as the reasons
they are not involved in the program. The other choice for low-income individuals in the
area is sub-par housing like Dream Homes. Instead of staying in the Near North
Minneapolis neighborhood, many are trying to move to the suburbs where there is more
choice and availability of housing but greater difficulty in getting to work, dissolution of
family or cultural units, and more encounters with racism.

Some are calling for more affordable housing in the area, but others point out that
compared to the rest of the city, there is already a disproportionately high number of
affordable housing units built in Near North Minneapolis. The challenge is to create a
housing market where there is a mix of low- and market-rate housing with vacancy rates
high enough to allow for mobility. This requires a commitment from all parties:
residents, banks, developers, non-profits and the city, to bring the housing stock back to a
more healthy level.
Children and the elderly: Although Near North Minneapolis is challenged in many ways, there are a number of organizations that help to lessen these challenges. More specifically, these organizations offer a wide variety of programs for vulnerable populations such as children and the elderly. These programs strive to enhance the quality of life for these individuals through education, leisure activities, health care and living assistance. The organizations serve as a valuable resource to the community, not only by providing much needed services for children and the elderly, but also by creating a sense of hope.

However, these vulnerable populations are still underserved due to the lack of resources available for programs and services. Organizations serving children and the elderly are constantly lacking the volunteers and funding necessary to adequately provide these populations with the resources they require. There is also a major shortage of transportation in the area, which has limited the ability for many members of the community to be actively involved in the programs offered. Moreover, specific subsets of these vulnerable populations are not being served at all. For instance, there are few programs for infants, toddlers and preschool age children. Moreover, many elderly are not being served because they are afraid to leave their homes.

Area businesses: Prior to the 1960’s, West Broadway was one of the largest retailing sectors in Minneapolis. This has significantly changed since the racial unrest in the 1960’s and the construction of Interstate 94. Since that time, the area has moved from hosting predominantly for-profit businesses to the majority being non-profit. Some of the major for-profit area businesses include Target, Sullivan’s New Market, Walgreen’s,
McDonald’s, and Tires Plus. These businesses provide the goods and services used by this community but they do not draw individuals living outside of the neighborhood.

Although there is currently an abundant amount of traffic passing through West Broadway, businesses are not seeing an increase in sales. The area is not drawing commuters due to the perception of high crime and the lack of business centers, popular retail stores, family restaurants, and coffee shops. This continues to have a negative effect on the community, and there is a lack of entrepreneurs willing to invest the money to create jobs and stimulate the area’s economy.

Due to the abundant amount of traffic passing through the area there is currently a proposition regarding expansion of lanes and removal of several traffic lights on West Broadway. If approved, this will create a pass-thru to Robbinsdale and surrounding areas. Although this plan would increase traffic flow for area businesses, many feel that it will not have a positive impact. Those who refute the proposal believe that this increased traffic will simply pass through without taking advantage of area businesses.

Although some respondents felt that a connection between faith and the business community would have a positive impact on the community, many were unclear about what Ascension’s role could be.

**Overall Community Assessment:** Although this information paints a dire picture for the area, many of those interviewed remain optimistic about the area’s future. The diversity is projected to increase over coming years as an influx of immigrants is moving to the area to take advantage of the affordable housing. Although this affordable housing is a great advantage for individuals who are at or below the current poverty rate, many interviewees examined the repercussions of this trend, feeling that it creates a
never-ending cycle of poverty. In order to improve on this current situation, respondents feel that the first necessary step is to start more businesses, which will create more jobs in the area. Although they feel that many of these businesses will offer only entry-level positions, this is the first step in the right direction. These positions could potentially pull many in the area out of poverty while at the same time allowing economic growth within the community. Though this is a good starting point, respondents feel that a strong emphasis on education is necessary in order to allow for advancement.

While classroom education may benefit the individuals and businesses, it might not effectively bring the community together. Interviewees feel that only with close community ties will the area be able to reach its full potential.

**Recommendations**

We recommend some steps Ascension could take to address both the issues raised for the church itself and for the larger community.

*For the church:*

1. **Conduct a membership drive.**

   Many of the attendees are currently not members. Considering that 56 percent of those who listed themselves as non-members indicated they would be interested in becoming a member, a membership drive seems very reasonable. The benefits of becoming a member must be made clear, however, in terms of outweighing any costs, either financial or personal.

2. **Conduct an attendance drive.**

   Ascension should strive not only to recruit new members, but also to retain its current members. Twenty percent of those responding to the question of what Ascension
can do in future planning listed increasing attendance as a possible goal. An attendance drive such as a “Rally Sunday” could be done a few times annually, along with sending out “We’ve missed you” postcards to help build and maintain church attendance. People indicated that they want to see more regular attendance and a greater feeling of community and involvement; increases in membership and in attendance can accomplish these goals. Visitors who are new to the parish at a given mass can stand up and be introduced, as can new members.

In addition, respondents clearly like the multi-ethnic composition of the church. The membership and attendance efforts can be spearheaded by a committee that represents the parish’s diversity.

A Board of Trustees representative can attend each mass and introduce him/herself and indicate availability after mass to meet with new attendees and prospective members. This is a very small thing to do but one that is quite effective at other religious institutions.

3. Increase publicity of church events and programs.
Several of the open-ended responses to the question of what Ascension could do in future planning included ideas for programs like Bible studies, prayer groups, and pot lucks (please refer to complete listing of responses in the Appendix). Although Ascension already offers these types of programs, worshippers are apparently unaware of some opportunities already in place for them at the church. We recommend a better link between staff administration and parish groups communicating these opportunities and services. Communication to worshippers may include the following:

- a newsletter sent to the homes of current members
- increased event notification in weekly bulletins
- announcements of the upcoming week’s events at a particular point in the mass. It’s a nice touch to have members of the parish who are involved in those events make the announcements as a way to foster identity and connection.
- An information board with weekly, monthly, and on-going events would also be helpful. The administration can designate a location where worshippers can look for happenings on a regular basis. These events can be labeled under certain categories for events for children, adults, seniors, etc. as well as highlighting relevant events in the community.
- An electronic bulletin board with the same information as the paper notices.
  Although not all parishioners will have access, this is an excellent and cost-effective way to reach former parishioners and those who are infrequent attenders.

4. **Organize a ride-share program.**

Many of the attendees on Saturday afternoon were elderly and came alone. They might be interested in creating community through a ride-share program. This can be handled
easily through the above publicity mechanisms. It also is a way to include those who are otherwise unable to travel to Ascension, particularly the elderly or those with physical limitations. Other institutions that have used this report that life-long friendships have been created through the initial ride-sharing of strangers.

4. Consider improvements to the physical plant.

- Parishioners recommended an expanded parking lot. This might not be possible but perhaps additional parking could be found nearby and arrangements could be made with an area business.

- Parishioners recommended air-conditioning. This is probably not even remotely possible, but maybe extra fans could be used in the summer or some additional acknowledgement of the heat could make things more pleasant, such as offering free lemonade at every mass when it’s over 85.

5. Create a partnering program

- New members can be partnered with longer-term members. The “old” member can be asked to host the new member at the old member’s home for a meal and then to attend mass together. Members or households can be matched on demographics or can be mixed, depending on parishioners’ wishes. Simply ask new members to fill out a form indicating the kinds of people they’d like to meet.

- New or recent immigrants can be partnered with native-born Americans, similar to the Russian host-family program used in the local Jewish community.

6. Programs for elderly:

Since the elderly population is still somewhat underserved, Ascension may want to begin offering programs for the elderly through the church. A Bible reading or
weekly Lord’s Prayer might be something to think about. This is currently being done by
the DayElders program and has been very successful. Diane White of DayElders said,
“That brings them together; I’ve noticed since we have started doing it they have been
doing a lot of interaction” (Diane White, 12, Nov 2002).

7. **Funding for programs:**

Without proper funding, however, none of the recommendations are feasible.
There are many different ways in which Ascension can raise money needed. The Church
can do traditional fundraisers such as bake sales, raffles, ice cream socials and cook outs.
On a larger scale, Ascension should consider an application for funding to the Catholic
Campaign for Human Development. These resources can be used for community and
parish organizing activities that could have long-term and significant outcomes.
Information for grant funds can be found in the following three sources:

- Religious Funding Resource Guide 2000
  ResourceWomen
  4527 South Dakota Avenue NE
  Washington, D.C. 20017 ([rswmn@aol.com](mailto:rswmn@aol.com))

- 2000 Guide to Religious Community Development Funds
  available through the National Congress for Community Economic
  Development
  1030 15th Street NW, Suite 325
  Washington, D.C. 20005

- National Parish Center
  Phillip Mirnian, Director
  New York City

*To benefit parishioners in social and economic ways:*

1. **Offer classes in partnership with local businesses, schools, social-service agencies,**
and parishioners with expertise.
- English-language classes. Although the survey didn’t address attendees’ level of proficiency in English, it can be assumed that many people would be interested in English classes. Several people did indicate this issue in open-ended responses. Classes can be run through schools, set up informally as conversation classes using some of the older Saturday mass attendees, etc.

- Job-related classes. These classes can focus on specific skills such as computer keyboarding, software use, etc. or on “human capital” skills such as completing a job application and writing a resume. Again, there are current parishioners who might be very interested in offering these kinds of classes, particularly among the retirees.

- GED-related classes in math, history, etc.

- Acculturation classes for new and recent immigrants in adapting to life in Minneapolis.

- Classes in how to buy and maintain a home and to handle rental issues. (See the outstanding Annual Housing Help Line Roundup, *Star Tribune*, 12.21.02, p. H4, which lists agencies offering housing-related help to consumers. Ascension could partner, could recommend these classes to parishioners, or could offer similar programs on their own.)

2. Offer more opportunities for multi-ethnic community-building.

Respondents particularly mentioned wanting more multi-ethnic opportunities. Ascension currently offers several events but perhaps more publicity can be generated about them to increase participation.
Consider having a structured time before or after mass when people can gather for conversation and refreshments. There was almost no mingling after the Saturday afternoon mass and very little after the 9:30 mass. Members can be assigned in rotation to provide refreshments, perhaps 6-8 at each mass, as done in other churches, and this will increase community.

3. **Provide on-site child-care services.**

- Several respondents indicated that they’d like child-care to be available during mass. Many other religious institutions offer this service at a very low fee and use high-school-age members as paid staffers.
- This service can be expanded to after-school and/or to a day-care. Currently Temple Israel in Minneapolis has an excellent day-care facility available to anyone in the community which might be a model for Church of the Ascension to consider.

**To engage with the broader community:**

1. **Social events to unite the community**

   Ascension could provide a monthly or quarterly place of gathering for individuals in the area. The people in Near North could use Ascension Church as a ‘coffee shop’ type of gathering place where they can socialize and discuss a particular issue of community concern. Issues could be housing, crime, education, mental health, government cutbacks, etc., or the events could be purely celebratory, such as a carnival.

2. **Inspirational speakers for the community**
Ascension can bring in inspirational speakers to give presentations once or twice a year to motivate community members. The speaker should have a background much like that of his or her audience in order to relate to them well.

3. Continue to play an active role in key neighborhood initiatives such as the following:

**Promoting government incentives for area businesses.**

There must be more incentives for businesses to invest in the Near North Area. Due to the current state of the neighborhood, many businesses are wary of opening stores, which causes a cycle of poverty. The most important step is to increase the level of business activity in the area by offering government incentives to incoming businesses. Ascension can use their community standing to encourage the government to increase investment incentives in their community.

**Increasing affordable and mixed-income housing.**

Ascension can be involved in hosting meetings, sending representatives to organizations, etc.

4. **Community improvement efforts**

- **Leaf-raking/garden day**

  Ascension could promote a leaf-raking or garden day to get the community to come together as one, allowing neighbors to get to know one another while at the same time beautifying the neighborhood. This project could be implemented semi-annually with a fall and spring clean up.

- **Painting- and fix-up day**

  Younger parishioners can volunteer to help seniors once a year. This not only creates
community but also improves the neighborhood appearance, pride, and spirit.

5. Volunteering:
   Nearly all of the organizations interviewed were in need of more volunteers. Ascension could help these organizations by making their members aware of volunteer opportunities in the community and the personal rewards that come from helping others. Moreover, Ascension may want to form volunteer groups or clubs so people can go out and volunteer at these organizations together. This is also important as these organizations are in great need of volunteers who can serve as role models for the participants of the programs, especially the children.

6. Transportation:
   Transportation is clearly an issue for the organizations working with both children and elderly members of the community. The organizations lack a safe way of getting people to and from their facilities; therefore many people are unable to utilize the services. Many of the people interviewed said Ascension could help. An employee of United Way explained a partnership being developed with 3M, “All of their leased vehicles are coming to us afterwards, and we are giving them to our agencies. Agencies cover car maintenance and insurance on their own.” This would be a great program for Ascension to get involved in. Ascension could also lessen the transportation problems through a ride program where church members partner with specific participants and provide transportation for these individuals to and from the programs. With a service of this nature however, liability issues must first be examined.

7. Donations and fundraising for community organizations:
   As previously stated, the organizations providing services for the vulnerable populations in the neighborhood are always in need of funding. Ascension parish could
encourage their members to donate to these organizations and host fundraisers through the church. Because the amount corporations donate is based on a percentage of their profits, individual donations make up much of the funding these organizations receive during economic hard times. Making members aware of the important role played by these organizations in the community may promote giving. However, since most of the members of Ascension Parish have a household income of less than $35,000 a year, they may not be able to donate money. In this case, Ascension may want to look into partnering with one or two specific organizations each year and working together to do fundraisers. This way, members of the church who could not afford to give money could instead give their time by working at fundraisers that involve the entire community.

8. Build program awareness:

Although most of the organizations interviewed felt that they did not have difficulty finding participants, utilizing Ascension Parish as a means of recruiting children and the elderly could be beneficial. One individual said that Ascension could “encourage families to get their seniors out into these programs so they can have a better quality of life. A lot of seniors in the churches cannot even make it to church anymore. Some of these members are not even leaving their homes. I know about seniors not ever leaving their homes for ten years.” In other words, the church could encourage its members to get out and utilize the services their community has to offer. Ascension does not necessarily need to advertise and promote specific programs, but rather serve as a resource for their members by providing information about the programs available. Likewise, the church can aid these organizations in relaying the benefits of the programs offered and the importance of community involvement to parishioners.
Limitations

Survey of Parishioners: There were several questions we could have asked more clearly: respondents’ level of English-language fluency; household income rather than personal income; and level of employment (full or part-time).

There were two problems occurred in the administration of the survey. The first was an oversight concerning the structure of the survey; it consisted of both a front and a back. Some respondents at Saturday’s mass answered only the front side. The surveys administered at both of the masses on Sunday made note of the two sides. In addition, respondents were directed to fill out both sides via a verbal announcement. The second administration issue was a possible bias at the Spanish mass. Respondents were asked to think about their replies to the open-ended questions and what it meant to their faith and the future of the church. The open-ended responses coming from the Spanish mass do take on a more religious tone.

Finally, we interviewed attendees on one weekend only. Although that weekend was likely a “typical” weekend, it would have been good to have had information from attendees at another time as well. We did have a fairly large number of responses (nearly 300) and very few people refused to complete the surveys, so our snapshot is a representative one of attendees that particular weekend in October.
Interviews of Experts: There were many people who were either unable to meet with us for scheduling reasons or they chose not to participate in the project. This included key business people recommended to us by Ascension’s administrators. We therefore had a limited perspective on some of the issues.

In addition, we interviewed only one person at each organization or agency. Therefore the information in each interview was from only one individual’s perspective. Because we did interview a significant number of people, we hope we minimized this problem.
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