

# Parish Listening Session

**Materials:** Newsprint and flip chart, four colors of post-it notes, pens for everyone, a deck of cards and a few markers.

**Arrival:** As people arrive hand them a card from the deck.

**Welcome:** Thank people for taking the time to share their views with the pastor and parish leaders today. Today we will share what we cherish and desire most for our parish. All responses will be taken seriously and all will be used anonymously.

**Get Acquainted:** Share name, favorite activity for the season, best thing about living in the city, or primary involvement at church (we did this at our first meeting) or consider doing the Fortune Cookie get-acquainted activity (attached which we played at the second meeting). Just make enough copies and cut out enough slips so that everyone can have at least one).

**Introduction:** This is a significant moment in the life of the church. There is no power equal to what a small group of people can do who have discovered what they care about most. By your presence here you have said that the success of this parish matters enough to you to plan for it. Today, there are significant challenges and opportunities presented to the Catholic Church in the U.S. by a new religious landscape. There are also many blessings. That is our agenda for this meeting today. We would like to ask you to think about our unique strengths, the opportunities, common aspirations and desired results that constitute a vibrant parish in the years ahead.

## **S.O.A.R. Analysis** (Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations, Results)

Step 1: Use the playing cards to mix people randomly (one card from the deck to each person) at four stations – S trengths, O pportunities, A spirations, R esults. Ask people who drew a club to gather at station 1. Ask people who drew a heart to gather at station 2. Ask people who drew a spade to gather at station 3. Ask people who drew a diamond to gather at station 4.

Step 2: Direct each group to select a facilitator/time keeper.

Step 3: Ask each group to brainstorm answers to the question before them (e.g. What are the parish S trengths?) Use one post-it for each answer. Allow the group 3-5 minutes for the first round. (While the group is working draw a SOAR chart on the newsprint pad.

Step 4: Direct the facilitator to remain with the station where they started for the remainder of the conversation.

Step 5: Rotate the other members of the group from station to station to review and add to the post-its.

Step 6: Facilitator shares the question(s) and then names each item already noted on a post-it note. Facilitator then asks the new group to add any response that seems missing. Facilitator stays quiet and takes down any other suggestions that the new group offers.

- Step 7: Repeat steps 4 – 6 twice more until every group has moved around the stations and returns to their original station. Allow approximately 3 minutes for these rounds.
- Step 8: Instruct all four groups to return to their original places.
- Step 9: Instruct the facilitator to read off all the post-its to the group.
- Step 10: Take a short stretch break during which the group facilitators bring up the post-its from their station and place them in the appropriate space on a large SOAR chart in the front of the room chart (newsprint easel).
- Step 11: Invite participants to return from the break and come up to the SOAR chart and put a check next to the one item (post-it) per quadrant that they consider the most significant. Remember: only one check on one item per box (4 quadrants = 4 checks total)
- Step 12: After people return to seats, report the highest scores in each quadrant. Allow a few minutes for comments or questions.
- Step 13: Ask the participants at each station to discuss responses to one final statement: “All this tells me that the highest priority for this parish is...” Let each group report the most significant one or two statements (and record these summaries for the Cluster Planning Team).
- Step 14: Thank everyone for attending and assure them of the value of the information that they so generously shared with the parish and cluster planners. Eventually the leaders will share common hopes that might suggest cooperative initiatives in parish clusters.

# **S** trengths

What resources do we have?  
What can we build upon?

# **O** pportunities

Has anything changed?  
What opportunities have emerged?

What do we care about most?  
Who shares our concerns?

What outcome do we seek?  
How will we know that the goal is achieved?



# **A** spirations

# **R** esults

Stavros, J. & Hinrichs, G. (2009). *Thin Book of SOAR: Building Strengths-Based Strategy* ([www.thinbook.com](http://www.thinbook.com)). This explanation of the advantages of SOAR as a method of strategic inquiry is accessible, affordable and thorough. Used with permission.

# Fortune Cookie Conversation Starters...

By Dennis Mahaney, Office of Parish Life  
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Instructions: cut out the following wisdoms into slips of paper. Feel free to give each person two or three slips and let them pick one that they like most. Pair up people or create small groups. Ask each person to share their name and something about themselves and then read the fortune-cookie wisdom and respond to one of the questions on the slip.

Evangelization is the heart of a vibrant parish.

Do I agree or disagree? How do I live out this conviction? Is this significant at our parish?

People are not afraid that they will come to church and be changed. They are afraid that they will come to church and NOT be changed.

Do I agree or disagree? How do I live out this conviction? Is this significant at our parish?

Reality doesn't change itself. We need to act.

Do I agree or disagree? How do I live out this conviction? Is this significant at our parish?

There is no power for change greater than a community discovering what it cares about.

Do I agree or disagree? How do I live out this conviction? Is this significant at our parish?

The Catholic Church is blessed with a reliable moral compass that guides our actions.

Do I agree or disagree? How do I live out this conviction? Is this significant at our parish?

I can admit that I sometimes make assumptions about others based on first impressions.

Do I agree or disagree? How do I live out this conviction? Is this significant at our parish?

The Church exists to evangelize.

Do I agree or disagree? How do I live out this conviction? Is this significant at our parish?

To succeed we must all be in this together.

Do I agree or disagree? How do I live out this conviction? Is this significant at our parish?

We need each other's help to become better listeners.

Do I agree or disagree? How do I live out this conviction? Is this significant at our parish?

We need to slow down to have the time to think and reflect effectively.

Do I agree or disagree? How do I live out this conviction? Is this significant at our parish?

We remember that conversation is the natural way that humans think together.

Do I agree or disagree? How do I live out this conviction? Is this significant at our parish?

The Church can be messy at times. My job is not to avoid mess, but to explore it for insight.

Do I agree or disagree? How do I live out this conviction? Is this significant at our parish?

I have a particular contribution to make to the success of this group and its mission.

Do I agree or disagree? How do I live out this conviction? Is this significant at our parish?

We have an opportunity to be bold in our efforts.

Do I agree or disagree? How do I live out this conviction? Is this significant at our parish?

People are the solution to problems that confront us. Technology can but we are the solution.

Do I agree or disagree? How do I live out this conviction? Is this significant at our parish?

There are great possibilities wherever others care about the Church as much as I do.

Do I agree or disagree? How do I live out this conviction? Is this significant at our parish?

We do not fear people whose stories we know.

Do I agree or disagree? How do I live out this conviction? Is this significant at our parish?

Success happens when people succeed at listening.

Do I agree or disagree? How do I live out this conviction? Is this significant at our parish?

When we stop pretending that we can go it alone we tap the power of community.

Do I agree or disagree? How do I live out this conviction? Is this significant at our parish?

Humans are naturally drawn to each other. We are hard-wired for community.

Do I agree or disagree? How do I live out this conviction? Is this significant at our parish?

We become hopeful when someone has the courage to tell the truth.

Do I agree or disagree? How do I live out this conviction? Is this significant at our parish?

The way of thinking that creates a problem will seldom produce solutions to the problem.

Do I agree or disagree? How do I live out this conviction? Is this significant at our parish?

Truly connecting with another human being is what gives life joy.

Do I agree or disagree? How do I live out this conviction? Is this significant at our parish?

We have to start by slowing down. We need time to think, learn and get to know each other.

Do I agree or disagree? How do I live out this conviction? Is this significant at our parish?

Hope happens when we act on what we care about.

Do I agree or disagree? How do I live out this conviction? Is this significant at our parish?

“God loves each of us as if there were only one of us.” St. Augustine

Do I agree or disagree? How do I live out this conviction? Is this significant at our parish?

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