Sacred Hour Survey 2011-2012
Reflections on the Results, and Next Steps

The staff in Campus Ministry has carefully considered the feedback offered by 439 respondents to the spring 2012 survey about Sacred Hour and particularly the Common Gatherings that take place during Sacred Hour. Our conclusions are categorized below.

Reactions to the rotation of Common Experiences

On the whole the community affirms either the concept of a rotation of experiences or specific offerings within the rotation. A minority voice a preference for Common Prayer as it existed in the past.

Of those respondents who indicated they do observe Sacred Hour, 74% indicated they had attended a Common Gathering:

- Last Lecture – 79.9%
- Sacred Song – 67.1%
- Small Groups – 23.8%
- Common Prayer – 79.3%

Those who attended a Common Gathering generally indicate they would be interested in its continuing. The following percentages reflect those saying they would want a Common Gathering to continue as it currently is and those who would like it to continue with modifications:

- Last Lecture – 91%
- Sacred Song – 85.4%
- Small Groups – 73.2%
- Common Prayer – 91.3%

Comments/Reactions to Note

1. Among the explanations given for not observing Sacred Hour in any way, the dominant response is busyness: homework (29 mentions), “too busy” (14 mentions), workload (12 mentions) on the job during that time (9 mentions).

2. Among explanations for not participating in Common Gatherings during Sacred Hour, busyness again appears as a dominant explanation: work (20 mentions), too busy (20 mentions), homework (17 mentions).

3. However, the most frequent explanation for not participating in Common Gatherings is a stated preference for solitude, quiet reflection, or personal observance of the hour (29 mentions). This is corroborated by the responses to another question in which people were asked to indicate how they observe Sacred Hour: 34.9% indicated they go for a walk and 33.3% indicated they spend time in quiet reflection/meditation. Together we take this to mean there really are significant numbers of community members acknowledging Sacred Hour, but doing so in ways that may not be observed by others.
4. While there were criticisms of Sacred Hour as a concept, the final question (which invited any other comments the respondent might have) elicited 55 distinct statements of appreciation for Sacred Hour on our campus, and an additional six mentions that Sacred Hour is a unique and positive part of our college’s traditions.

5. We were not surprised to find a divergence in responses about how religious/Catholic/sacred the offerings are, are not, or should be. While we’ll never satisfy the needs of each member of the community, we take the balance in these critiques as an indication we have found a constructive mid-point.

6. Though named by a small number of respondents we agreed with the concern over the relatively small percentage of students engaged in Sacred Hour Common Gatherings.

7. Though articulated most directly by only one person, we discussed the perceived mixed message of being told to observe Sacred Hour in any number of legitimate ways but then feeling that “attendance” is somehow noted by colleagues at the Common Gatherings. This comment, in part, contributes to our planned multiple offerings approach for next year (described below.) But we also read this comment in light of our own experience of seeing Todd Wehr Hall hopping busy at this time, a comment asking why the Bookstore does not close at this time, a comment suggesting there should be a “crack down” on Boyle, Cofrin and JMS at this time, and comments by several reporting they cannot observe during this hour because of the high student traffic in their area during this hour. Our conclusion is that the perceived “attendance-taking” at Common Gatherings is not what we hope for from those experiences, but no doubt emerges from frustration that a significant portion of the community uses the time not for any reflective or spiritual purpose, but simply to get things done.

Next Steps: Last Lecture

1. Last Lectures will continue.

2. We will decrease the number from four per semester to three per semester. This is partly to ensure our ability to line up willing presenters, and more so to provide an added week for Common Prayer (in response to feedback on that offering.)

3. We will select the dates for all Last Lectures in a given year the prior spring so as to ensure they occur in Fort Howard Theatre

4. We note that location of Last Lectures is one example of divergent opinions in the results – an equal number explicitly stated a preference for Fort Howard Theatre and for Old St. Joseph Church for this offering. We choose to continue to utilize Fort Howard Theatre for these reasons:
   a. The seating in Fort Howard in most amenable to listening to a lecture.
   b. Powerpoints, which some speakers choose to use, are most effective in Fort Howard where a sunny day will not compromise visibility.
   c. Last Lectures are posted on the web, and recording quality is most consistent in Fort Howard Theatre.
   d. Some respondents to the survey indicate a disinclination to attend events in a church setting.
5. Finally, we will revisit both our invite letter and our Sacred Hour brochure verbiage to ensure we are communicating consistently about what these lectures are.
6. We celebrate that 107 individuals were suggested as potential Last Lecturers... clearly there are many in our community whose wisdom interests us!

**Next Steps: Sacred Song**

1. Sacred Song will continue, likely three times per semester which was its frequency this year.
2. Some voices expressed interest in Sacred Song being more of a concert experience; perhaps if one or two a year are intended to be experienced primarily through listening, those could take place in a concert venue.
3. A greater number of voices spoke to an interest in keeping Sacred Song prayerful and including opportunities for participation. Thus, we expect Sacred Song to most often take place in Old St. Joe’s and will work with those coordinating to include at least a couple participatory songs and perhaps short readings or prayers to set the context for the music.

**Next Steps: Small Groups**

1. In addition to survey data we also have concrete headcounts for Small Groups which we tracked throughout the year. From both data points it is clear that this opportunity had the lowest buy-in. Our conclusion is to discontinue Small Groups.
2. We continue to explore what to offer in the place of Small Groups. One idea is a book discussion with explicit chapters assigned for each meeting. Another ideas is to offer distinct experiences three times a semester, under the working title “Paths to Contemplation.” Each would be a stand-alone experience, allowing people to select those that interest them. Collectively they could honor the Norbertine value of being contemplative and allow people to explore a variety of contemplative practices – e.g. walking a labyrinth, centering prayer, guided meditation. The hope is that folks might find a practice they wish to continue more regularly.

**Next Steps: Common Prayer**

1. Common Prayer will continue, and we expect to increase the Common Prayer offerings from four to five times a semester. A number of comments suggested that more instances of Common Prayer would be appreciated and that by reducing the number of Common Prayer experiences we reduced the number of people who could lend their voices to prayer leadership in our community.
2. Comments included reminders to keep Common Prayer focused on prayer, not group PR, and to monitor the length which in the past (though not this year) had sometimes run long.
3. Common Prayer is another instance where we can see that preferences diverge within our community. There are comments that suggest we increase liturgical regularity and comments that suggest we vary the format more; comments that suggest we be more attentive to the ecumenical nature of our community and comments that suggest we have more explicitly Catholic offerings.
Next Steps: Other

1. For next year we are actively exploring a pilot of an additional rotation of opportunities during Sacred Hour, working title “Catholic Prayer and Devotions.” This might include offerings such as Liturgy of the Hours, Rosary, or Adoration.

2. In addition, we will attempt to gather information about, and publicize other open groups that meet at this time. Through an expanded Sacred Hour website we can share information about groups meeting during this time for contemplation, Bible Study, or other spiritual practices. We hope these two changes will:
   a. Expand the scope of offerings, so that more of the good ideas voiced in the survey might be offered,
   b. Respond to those who would like to see more Catholic prayer experiences incorporated into Sacred Hour offerings, and
   c. Make more concrete the assertion that there are multiple ways to observe Sacred Hour.

3. We intend to share the survey results with the President’s Cabinet, and suggest that at least some of them read through the full printout of comments (just over 31 pages.) We have done our best to faithfully reflect the majority voice in this report, but the comments all merit consideration, and many reflect campus culture in ways that go beyond Campus Ministry’s responsibility to coordinate Common Gatherings that take place during Sacred Hour.