

A Snapshot of our Urban Neighborhood Vestry Retreat

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<http://stmarys-la.org/lang/en>

Overview

The photo project was designed to give the Vestry the opportunity to take a closer look at our neighborhood. It was not intended to lead directly into strategic planning, but rather to shift our perspective and open our eyes to creative possibilities and creative ways of looking for God at work in our neighborhood and God's call to us as a parish.

We did this in the context of a one-day Vestry retreat. People arrived around 9:00 am and shared some breakfast snacks.

We read Romans 12 together and had a brief reflection using the [mutual invitation](http://www.kscopeinstitute.org/2007-05_Kaleidoscope_newsletter_final.pdf) ([http://www.kscopeinstitute.org/2007-05 Kaleidoscope newsletter final.pdf](http://www.kscopeinstitute.org/2007-05_Kaleidoscope_newsletter_final.pdf)) process.

We then headed out in groups of 2-4, each group with a camera. The groups were invited to make their own routes, take about an hour, not stray too far, and take pictures of anything they found interesting. People who had formerly lived in the neighborhood were encouraged to show their groups their former homes and/or any sites they remembered, and to note what was there now. The groups were invited to pay particular attention to things that were beautiful, ugly, surprising, or poignant. We reminded one another that God is already at work in our neighborhood, and that we are invited into that work.

As the groups returned, someone was available to load their photos onto the computer, who organized the photos into albums by groups. The groups were then invited to take a few moments of silence in the sanctuary to pray and reflect on the experience. This was followed by a potluck lunch.

After lunch, each group was invited to narrate its own slide show.

- Following the slide shows, the Vestry discussed the experience as the slideshows played in the background. Our conversation included:
- Themes that had emerged
- Things that surprised us
- Questions that arose from what we had seen
- Discussion of possible follow up steps to learn more about our immediate community

- Making plans to share the slideshows and our reflections with the congregation

General Tips

Depending on the ages and physical abilities represented in your group, you may want to have one small group designated to travel by car and make a few stops to take pictures.

In a rural or suburban context, using cars to get a wider radius may make sense for all or most of the groups. Our neighborhood has 700,000 people living in 3 square miles, so we've got plenty of people-related sights within close walking distance. All members of our group were able to walk at least short distances.

In general, our consensus was to focus on photographing the local environment rather than people. We had a few volunteers along the way who wanted to pose when they saw us taking pictures, and a few street scenes that included people, but we agreed that it takes skill and preparation that we didn't have to photograph people in our diverse community in a respectful way.

Don't pack the day. This retreat lasted from 9:00 am to 3:00 pm, and the activities described filled the day easily. We could have used another hour for discussion, but in general, things unfolded at a comfortable pace.

Resources and Equipment Needed

For each walking group:

- Digital camera or high-end phone with camera with cords to use to download images to a laptop computer. Please check compatibility of cameras with available computer before using.
- Comfortable walking shoes (important to put this in the invitation to the event)

For slide show:

- Person familiar with downloading photos to laptop, photo sharing software, and creating slideshows
- Laptop computer that interfaces well with cameras (most newer pc's and Macs will do this; some older or very cheap models will ask for a driver to be installed for each camera, which is impractical for this project)
- Picasa or similar software for uploading neighborhood photos to and for creating slideshows Picasa is free and easy to upload.

- Digital projector
- Projection screen or wall

Overall set up:

- Food and beverages as people gather
- Lunch for groups (we opted for a potluck lunch)
- Tables and chairs

Preparation Needed

Test the laptop you're going to use with several different cameras and phones. If it asks for software drivers to be installed, it's probably worth looking for a newer/fancier computer to use.

Set up the projection equipment ahead of time. It will already take some time to assemble the pictures, and nothing kills the mood like AV troubles.