



Why join the FAST ministry?

- 1) It's **FUN**. We take the bus to the Nehemiah Action, the "Big Meeting". This year it will be April 20th at 7:00pm.
- 2) It's **EASY**. Just show up at the **BIG** Meeting once a year.
- 3) It's **ECUMENICAL**. Meet other people of faith and share worlds.
- 4) It's **ONLY COST** is your time. One, 90 minute "Nehemiah Action Assembly" meeting per year.
- 5) It's an **EFFICIENT** use of your time. Meetings start and end on time and look what 's been accomplished, just by showing up.
- 6) It's an **INCREDIBLE** way to see social justice be delivered in front of your eyes.
- 7) It's **KNOWING** that you **MAKE** a difference, when banded with brothers and sisters in faith.
- 8) It's the **DYNAMICS** of the meeting itself
- 9) It's Living your faith by Loving God and your neighbor
- 10) It's **WJD**. (What Jesus DID!)



Introduction to F.A.S.T.

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History and Definition

In 2004, Espiritu Santo parish, under the leadership of Fr. Bob Schneider our pastor and first President, joined a congregation based community organization called FAST. FAST stands for Faith and Action for Strength Together. Based on the principles of justice found in the bible, FAST is a growing, non-profit community organization currently made up of thirty five congregations from around Pinellas county.

Starting from it's humble beginnings In November 2004, 28 churches and synagogues gathered 800 people from diverse backgrounds throughout Pinellas County to form FAST. It's an organization to provide congregations with a tool to do effective justice ministry in dealing with the problems in our community. In 2005, FAST gathered 1200 people to take action on community problems at the "Big Meeting" a Nehemiah Action Assembly. By 2008, the number of people present at the Nehemiah Action grew to over 2400 people coming from 35 faith communities.

The mission of FAST is an ecumenical effort to engage people of faith in a process of listening, education, action, and reflection in order to powerfully address community issues in Pinellas County. The goal is to serve as agents of change, calling for a renewed community by holding public systems accountable to improve the quality of life for all in Pinellas County. To foster and promote community wide interest and concern for the problems of individuals and families, particularly low to moderate income, so that such issues as poverty, crime, sickness, housing, education, and environmental degradation may be lessened, and education and economic opportunities may be expanded.



Accomplishments

Pre-Kindergarten

In 2005, FAST secured commitments from the director of the Early Learning Coalition to provide funding for a full-day of Pre-K for any child whose parents are working and make less than 200% of the poverty level. To date, over 3,000 low-income 4-year-olds in Pinellas County have been able to attend Pre-K because of this funding. FAST was also able to get the Early Learning Coalition to hire two full-time outreach coordinators to ensure that the program is made known to low-income working families. Because of this, Pinellas County was #2 in the state for the percentage of children enrolled in Pre-K programs. Now, low-income working families and their children have access to a full-day of high quality, pre-kindergarten education.

Senior Transportation

In another area, FAST has worked with Mr. Brian Smith, director of the Metropolitan Planning Organization, to create a new one-number system for senior transportation. This new system, unveiled in March 2006, works with the Area Agency for Aging and allows seniors to speak directly with a trained professional who can help them with their transportation needs. There are over 20,000 seniors in Pinellas County who do not drive and now benefit from this new system. FAST leaders have also identified an unsafe bus stop that needed to be moved and 6 areas where bus shelters were needed for the elderly or young children riding the bus. The leaders have worked with Mr. Sweeny, director of the Pinellas Sun coast Transit Authority (PSTA), to be sure these bus stops are put in place. (The phone number for seniors to call is 217-8111)

Since then, FAST has been working on some bigger more difficult issues. Currently, FAST is working on the issues of affordable housing, crime and drugs, and education.