

St. John the Evangelist Parish Council
October 20, 2009 Minutes

The St. John the Evangelist Parish Council met on October 20, 2009, in attendance were Fr. Tom Powers, Sr. Evelyn Ronan, and members Norm Boucher, Mimi Eldridge, Pat Feige, Susan Jablonski, Bob Kelliher, Sally Miller, Mike Racette, Mary Gotgart, Pat McGeary, Julie Pernokas, Mike Holownia, John Salvati, and Joe Tierney. The meeting was called to order at 7:30 PM.

Julie Pernokas and Mike Holownia, were welcomed as new council members, and the meeting began with brief individual introductions by all members. Two other new members have been appointed to the Council, Jim Stokes and Maryellen Denning.

Opening prayer and reflection was led by Sister Evelyn. The reflection reading was titled "A Parable for Today's Church" thereby providing an important link to the joint meeting of the Parish Council, Parish Finance Council, Parish Staff and the Parish Planning Group which was held on the preceding Saturday and utilized the same reflection.

Old Business/Prior Minutes

A motion to accept the minutes of the September 15 meeting was made and seconded. The vote to approve was unanimous.

Nominations to Parish Council

The first order of business was a review of the nominating process from which the four new members were selected. The process generated an increase in nominations, as well as, those willing to serve. Of the total nominees 21 were willing to serve, 6 declined and 4 were not reached.

Pastoral Planning Group

The meeting's focus turned to the prior Saturday's joint meeting of the Parish Council, Parish Finance Council, Parish Staff and the Parish Planning Group, with Mike Racette providing background and summarizing the meeting.

The Parish Planning Council led the meeting to update all regarding their work in planning for the impact that demographic change will have on the day to day reality of parish life and how we can come to grips with such change in order to maintain a flourishing parish.

Mike noted that it had been a very fruitful time together that culminated with the Planning group posing three questions to the meeting.

- What is the best way to engage the wider parish in both the awareness campaign and the planning efforts?

- How do we encourage parishioners to mix among different sub groups within the parish (different mass groups), and with members of other parishes?
- Should the planning effort have a budget, to fund (for example) expenses for speakers and training for lay ministers?

Mike also provided four bullet points based upon the meeting to assist the conversation.

- The “new realities” are not meant to be a secret—and they are nothing to be ashamed or embarrassed about—they are simply realities we need to plan for—so don’t hesitate to discuss with other parishioners to help raise awareness.
- As we all engage with the parish in our own ways, think about how we can increase lay involvement in parish activities.
- As we plan parish activities, consider ways to provide opportunities to interact with neighboring parishes.
- Use the PPG as a resource—ask questions and give us feedback as you interact with the parish on these points.

Each of the questions was given its time for specific discussion and a range of possibilities was introduced from the practical to the more global. Additional background was provided by Fr. Powers concerning the history of the Planning group and their efforts as well as an overview of the structure of the archdiocese and its possible course of involvement.

A particular focus of the discussion centered on the issue of how to engage the Parish in the conversation without creating an aura of fear. The point was made that education is a critical factor and that the terms origins, mission and discovery provided an interesting exposition of how a group moves from a state of wonderment to a grasp of the opportunities that are present. In this light the issue is less a matter of closing parishes than of finding new ways to be a parish.

Thoughts of strategies to push recognition of the issues in a practical manner were suggested, including sharing certain masses. It was noted that the Parish Planning Committee was now planning to meet with other local parishes that had already undergone some amount of change in order to learn from their experience. Meetings were planned with St. Paul’s, St. Bernard’s/Corpus Christi, and St. Julia’s.

Fr. Powers shared a summary of the history of St. John’s noting that its origins pre date the Town of Wellesley. Additional discussion raised the issue of the use of inserts in the Bulletin, the Parish web site and other vehicles to get the Planning Councils work and information out to the broader parish, as well as the use of a town meeting like forum for parish members. Each method would have the same goal, to promote an understanding of the issues to as wide a section of membership as possible.

Questions of the archdiocese role were raised and the point was made that a detailed master plan would not be likely that the process would likely combine some amount of bottoms up and top down planning and decision making.

It was noted that the position of Director of the Office of Pastoral Planning had been filled with the appointment of David B. Couturier, OFM. Cap. A document written by Fr. Couturier, "Developing a Pastoral Plan for Parish Staffing: A Proposal" was distributed.

Towards the end of the discussion, Sister Evelyn brought the focus to the broader issue of a "crisis of discipleship", as perhaps more serious yet than the structural and leadership challenges that we must face.

She emphasized declining mass attendance, the separation between the number of children in religious education programs and those attending weekly mass, etc.. While these numbers may be worse in some areas than in others and worse yet in certain countries, when one "sits with this" one sees a huge disconnect with the person of Jesus Christ, the question of what is drawing people to the church is inevitably raised. This is a huge issue.

Defining Essential Roles of the Pastor

This segment of the agenda was a continuation of the discussion introduced by Fr. Powers at the previous meeting.

The discussion began with questions concerning the position of lay ecclesial ministers which was raised in the Saturday Planning Council meeting. Fr. Powers pointed out that for such a position there would be a formal hiring process as well as a salary requirement and cost is clearly an issue for the parish. A model for such a position is for a delegation of responsibility to essentially administer the parish. To this point Cardinal Sean has not been open to such an initiative, but neither has he closed the door on the possibility.

Fr. Powers also distributed an archdiocesan summary of "The Responsibilities and Criteria for a Pastor" for Council members to read over. Fr. Powers noted that the responsibilities of a pastor re: grounded in Canon Law, while each diocese also translates these into specific practice.

He reiterated comments from our prior meeting that given the priesthood's changing demographics; priests of the archdiocese have been asked to remain in active ministry until age 75, which for Fr. Powers would mean 6 or 7 more years. As a result we need to sharpen our focus on the role of the pastor to determine what the key areas for concentration are, in order to ensure that the parish's needs are met.

November Church Expansion Anniversary Plans

Sister Evelyn explained the plans for the upcoming Welcome Weekend including the dissemination of information about many areas of parish life the school, external ministries, Arise, help for new parishioners, etc.

The new format is focused upon participation and new beginnings with the result being a warm welcome to all. We will apply a critical eye to the day with the intention of understanding what possible improvements can be made in the future.

Within this discussion Fr. Tom brought up the idea of the blessing of homes.

November Anniversary of Church Expansion

Continuing the discussion from our September meeting each Sunday in November will have a different focus on the theme of rededicating and renewing. An insert will appear in the bulletin tracking the movement of the entire month.

The first Sunday would focus on a remembrance of all parish members who have been buried in the past ten years, with a ritual “way” to bringing these forward into a “blessing box.”

The second is the actual anniversary that falls on Friday November 6. We will use a simple ritual to rededicate ourselves through a special blessing prayer.

The third will focus on a renewal for the future, with pictures of baptisms and the use of lighted candles and praying together to “pass on the light of faith”.

On Sunday the 22nd, the fourth weekend there will be a focus on thanksgiving, with a ritual to allow everyone to write something for which they are especially thankful. November 26 is Thanksgiving with mass, and the season of Advent commences on November 29th.

Within this discussion the publication of a Family Photo Book for the parish was taken up. Copies of the most recently published book were distributed and the decision was made to move forward and explore the production of one.

Eyes and Ears

Several points were addressed among them that the Arise program was doing well; also there were 66 baptisms and 114 confirmations over the past year in the parish.

It was noted that the “blessing of the animals” was a wonderful event.

A further point was raised about the November celebration plans suggesting that this might be an opportunity to raise funds for the continued “care and feeding” of the parish. Bill Kelliher in his role as liaison was authorized to take this idea to the parish Finance Council.

An announcement will be made through the Parish Service Committee that the weekend of December 11 will be devoted to coats for infants, kids and adults. Coats should have been cleaned and several distribution sites will be provided. Warmth is the key factor.

Regarding Advent, the Christmas wish list should be out soon and Trees and Trimmings will be held primarily on the Saturday of the first December weekend.

An important note regarding technology and the Parish was made with the announcement that Mark Pytlick has volunteered to provide assistance on the communication issue. Joe Tierney volunteered to get with Mark to move the initiative forward. This led to relating the further development of the Parish web site as a tool for communication on any and all of the issues the Parish is facing.

The meeting adjourned at 9:06 PM