

St. John the Evangelist Parish Council
November 17, 2009 Minutes

The St. John the Evangelist Parish Council met on November 17, 2009, in attendance were Fr. Tom Powers, Sr. Evelyn Ronan, and members Mary Ellen Denning, Mimi Eldridge, Pat Fiege, Pat Garity, Susan Jablonski, Sally Miller, Mike Racette, John Salvati, Jim Stokes and Joe Tierney. The meeting was called to order at 7:30 PM.

Opening prayer and reflection was led by Sister Evelyn.

Jim Stokes and Mary Ellen Denning were welcomed as new council members, and the meeting began with brief individual introductions by all members.

“Words and Thoughts”

The first order of business was a request to the three outgoing members to share their thoughts and wisdom at the conclusion of their terms.

Pat Garity began by noting the gravity of the dearth clergy and the need for the parish and the church to rise to the occasion to face an issue that is not going away. Pat also noted how impressive it was to understand the breadth and the impact of volunteerism in the parish, as well as the needs that remain; “so much needs to be done” he noted.

Sally Miller concurred with Pat’s comments, and added her new understanding of how broad the pastor’s job is, and how small an idea most parishioners have of the breadth of its responsibilities. She further commented the question of how to help out is a pressing one.

Joe Tierney commented on how easy it is for all of us to come to a meeting still absorbed in our own preoccupations and how the opening prayer led by Sister Evelyn acts to settle him and call him back to what is out there in terms of need that seems to be never ending. Joe continued noting that the council discussions aided him in comprehending the needs and formulating our responses to them. Joe concluded by wishing all remaining members the best in continuing the council’s work.

At this point Pat added that any words and thoughts from the outgoing group would be remiss in not recognizing the contributions, commitment and work of Jane McDade who died this past summer.

Father Tom moved to focus on the future posing the question, “What will the major task of the Council be in moving ahead?”

Each of the three members responded with Joe emphasizing the need to gain financial footing in light of the times being crucial to our foundation. Looking at Fr. Tom Pat highlighted, “figuring out how to replace you”, adding that he formerly thought that a pastor could focus on one thing, a thought which now runs against the breath of the ground that needs to be covered, he emphasized the need for “passionately driven leadership.”

Sally stressed keeping the lines of communication open thereby insuring that each of the parish’s many groups is aware of what issues each is facing individually and is working on.

Fr Tom summarized his and Sister Evelyn’s sense that this senior class” has set a wonderful tone, bringing a great direction to things but carrying it lightly focusing on key issues. This is the single place where we are able to focus on the parish as whole, and it is particularly helpful to look forward to something and learn from it. Fr. Powers added that he often wonders how many pastors actually look forward to going to a council meeting; this has been true at St. John’s for many years, a truly wonderful parish.

He further remarked that the outgoing member’s words had taken us into the deep end of the pool with issues of finance, leadership and communication and added a commentary on each. Concerning leadership he noted the creation of the Planning Council which is doing well and that the notion of leadership in general is difficult because of control or the lack there of, however we can do a lot to shape the discussion.

In terms of communication, he emphasized the need to move toward youth which the Council has done on occasion with the inclusion of high school aged members.

Toward the finance issue, he commented that the Finance Council met last evening and while we have achieved stability, in order to remain in that state we will need to acquire more funding than we currently have.

Scheduling

It was noted that by adhering to our every 3rd Tuesday norm our next meeting would be during Christmas week. In light of this it was moved to move the meeting to January 19, 2010. The vote was approved.

Prior Minutes

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

Pastoral Planning Group

As the Councils liaison to the group, Mike Racette reviewed his discussion with Mike Nilles.

The Planning Group has been in existence for two years gathering information to formulate options for the parish over the next five to ten years in order to maintain a flourishing parish. As part of the process the recognition of the need to move the question of the essential duties of the pastor was recognized with the resulting need to get a descriptive document to the Parish Council.

Research has been done into the issue of non ordained leadership, degree requirements, costs, roles, etc.

Mike reported that the group was open to a parish forum focused perhaps on what the group has learned and a period of questions from the larger parish and responses from the Group.

The Group will initiate interviews with pastors of neighboring parishes in Wellesley and Newton to review experiences, particularly in terms of the best way to prepare a parish for such change.

Among its next steps will be a centering on getting the word out to the parish as a whole, Mike use the analogy to the Arise program as an opportunity for dialogue that parishioners have seized.

Fr. Powers commented that an increasing number of pastors are dealing with more than one parish in a single parish, multiple worship site models. He noted that the clerical point of view will benefit from other points of view as a balance is sought. Sister Evelyn commented on the sense of urgency that is part of the effort and brought the group back to the recent Saturday morning convening of multiple parish organizations for a PG presentation. She noted this open forum format with a set agenda as a fruitful one.

The discussion moved to the specifics of defining the purpose (raising the issue, giving direction, how will input be taken, what will the model of the meeting be, a framework of listening and pondering, etc) the best timing/venue (centered on masses).

Susan noted that whatever route we chose transparency, inclusiveness and communication would be critical to achieving a successful end.

Fr Powers circulated copies of the Prebysterial Council update of October 19, 2009 and spoke particularly to the Skills for Pastoral Planning section and the Demographics contained within it. He again emphasized that the future direction will depend greatly on the local level in general giving the advice to “forge ahead”.

He further developed this noting the applicability to a certain degree of the principle of ‘subsidiarity’ as well as noting the appropriate points of Cannon Law and Cardinal Sean’s position regarding non ordained leadership being not yet open to it, but also not finally opposed either.

Other issues being addressed at the cabinet level at the Archdiocese include the declining number of woman religious, dropping more rapidly than the priesthood numbers, and the need to address the youth gap.

Parish Photo Book

Mimi and Pat volunteered to work with Father Tom on getting out a new edition of the book.

November Anniversary of Church Expansion

Sister

Evelyn commented that November's weekly anniversary celebrations were giving the month the feel of several months rolled into one, noting particularly the past Sunday's family mass being notable for its "use of the candles"! Variations from the norm were the occasion for learning and by the 5:00 mass on Sunday it all worked smoothly.

Eyes and Ears

This regular segment of the meeting is a time in which any member is encouraged to raise any issues or comments that we have heard from the parish at large. Joe reminded everyone of the Christmas schedule of masses and the resulting need for assistance in seating and general crowd control issues. Pat noted the continuing awkwardness of not shaking hands, in the flu season, to extend the message of peace, suggesting that perhaps a re-phrasing or reminder of the issue might be of help. Mary noted that someone had been put off by the listing of Arise participants in the bulletin, the person suggesting such a listing was exclusionary.

Next Agenda

Fr. Powers made note that the next agenda would include "how we approach the conservation of energy and re-cycling".

With thanks to all the meeting adjourned at 8:55 PM