

St. John the Evangelist Parish Council Minutes 5/18/10

The St. John the Evangelist Parish Council met on May 18, 2010, in attendance were Fr. Tom Powers, Sr. Evelyn Ronan and members Norm Boucher, Maryellen Denning, Mimi Eldridge, Pat Feige, Mary Gotgart, Mike Holownia, Julie Pernokas, Mike Racette, John Salvati, and Jim Stokes. The meeting was called to order at 7:30 PM.

Opening prayer and reflection was led by Sister Evelyn.

Following the reflection a motion to approve the minutes from the April meeting was offered and the minutes approved.

Appreciation Weekend

Following on the question posed at the April meeting, "... is this the time to refocus the event making it fresh, breaking the routine of recent years..", the conversation centered on the preparation and plans as well as new or refreshed ideas for the upcoming weekend of appreciation.

Particular attention was paid to recognizing and celebrating the unique dimensions and multiple facets of the ongoing work of the parish being performed by a wide range of parish organizations. This likely would be done in the context of the homily, asking people from the multiple groups to stand, etc., thereby creating a powerful effect and personalizing appreciation as well.

Prioritizing the Needs of the Parish

Building on the discussions of prior meetings, stressing the need to come to agreement on both long and short term priorities and goals as well as to integrate the work of the Parish Planning Group within the Councils recommendations, Fr. Tom contextualized the process and issues to provide a framework within which decisions could be reached.

He began by noting that there were multiple angles of vision on what were similar or even the same questions. An important step will be a second joint meeting (first meeting held in October 09) on June 8th with members of the Parish Council, Parish Finance Committee Parish Planning Group and others invited to attend. The Planning Group has been charged with providing a discussion document that would enumerate the most critical long term issues to be faced. It was pointed out that these as well as the near priorities will each carry a price tag and therefore cost becomes one of the several issues to be reckoned with. In reference to the cost issue Mike noted that the Finance Committee is also reviewing the needs of the parish in developing the parish budget and that it might not be too late to integrate these priorities into the budget process.

The short term or “practical” parish needs emerging from Council discussions over the past several meetings will need to be integrated with the longer term planning needs, there by beginning to concretizing the “culture of planning” advocated by the Cardinal.

Most Council discussion seems to have been focused on Youth, Homebound Parishioners, and the intersection of St. John’s capacity in Technology and Communication.

Youth Ministry

In our preceding meeting Mimi had taken the responsibility to review certain existing Youth Ministry programs in other parishes particularly that at St. Joseph’s in Medford. Maryellen also made note of her desire to be heard on the issue.

At of prior meeting we had also thought to open the discussion possibly by invitation to younger members of the parish to insure their input would be heard.

The St. Joe’s model is centered within its religious education program. Among other observations were the following.

- St’ Joe’s benefits from a college senior, as their teen minister, who may be incorporating his work into his college program (from Merrimack College which has a concentration in youth ministry), who has an excellent rapport with both teens, filling the critical and unique role of the catalyst, and the religious education program and who is a paid staff member
- Teen as utilized as teachers within the religious education program, grades 7 through 10, coordinated with the religious ed. leader
- St. Joe’s celebrates a “teen mass” where teens “do it all”, confirmed students are Eucharistic ministers
- Social nights are periodically held that begin wholly as social events and over time a spiritual focus is woven into the program that include the stations of the cross, retreats a mardi gras party centered on sacrifices and a service component, as well as a passion play
- Presently there are two people both Part Time at St. John’s who are responsible for retreats and peer ministry.

While the role of the teen minister is central, it appears that the real driver of the program is the religious education coordinator. Questions were raised concerning how did the minister surface? What training was provided? What succession planning is being done? How would this position fit into a table of organization? How could St. John’s reach out to local colleges?

The point was made that their may be less in the details surrounding the position and its role than there is in finding the catalytic element in the particular person or perhaps some other facet of the program that pulls it together as an effective program.

Maryellen noted the experiences of other parishes (St. Bridget's, Sacred Heart) that she had recently had occasion to view, including their bulletin, with a stress on community. These Parishes share a pastor and are struggling to evolve a new structure. The parish has a youth ministry and holds youth masses, the majority of which seem to take place at Sacred Heart. She noted that over the years St. John's has undertaken a number of the initiatives that were being discussed, including that involving high school students assuming a teaching role.

Mike pointed out the importance of demographic change that could have us pulling priorities in multiple directions. He also suggested that in general the teen events could be transformed from a "have to go to" into a "want to go to" if each event had something different about it, such changes could be small but important steps. He particularly liked the mass notion, as being something special without necessarily being exclusivist. The issue was then raised that a teen centered mass would need to take into account the availability of a group not always in control of their schedules.

It was recommended that a sub group be formed to look into this issue and develop recommendations to the Council.

Homebound Visitation

A second discussion item that has emerged pertains to the parish's visitation program. Data regarding the present effort was provided in the preceding meeting and it was noted that while improvement was always possible it would require additional staffing to go beyond this level.

It was also noted that in part the challenge is awareness or creating a method to keep the parish and staff aware of just who is home bound, defining the scope of the issue.

It was suggested that in light of the various issues pressing on the parish, as well as the likelihood of staffing needs to fulfill any of them, this particular issue would not move into priority status.

Adult Faith Formation

Another area to move into was identified as Adult Faith Formation, which given our current focus of "Disciples on a New Road", will require a personal change in orientation from members to disciples. The priority has some history and is a recommended area of importance to the Parish Planning Group. An article on "Adult Faith Formation: a Catholic Vision" by Edmund F. Gordon was given to members by Sister Evelyn.

Technology/Communication

Fr. Tom noted that the preceding Parish Council had been very strong on communication and technology as a priority and those issues continued because of a lack of technological capacity in the current array of parish resources.

Fr. Tom made it clear that the role of the Parish Council was to establish priorities for the Parish, and that it was the role of the parish Finance Council to evaluate the cost of these. While any number of other issues could be introduced it was decided by vote that Youth Ministry, Technology and Communication, and Adult Faith Formation would be the priorities and that each would be put into a clear proposal format which could in turn be priced.

It was suggested that these could be introduced to the parish via the bulletin as a strategy for moving them forward, developing the specificity necessary for each and identifying a person or persons to take hold of the issue.

This would essentially set the agenda for the Fall, with integration occurring between these near term priorities and the longer term needs identified by the Planning Group.

Officers/New Members for 2010-2011

The officers for the forthcoming year are President Mimi Eldridge, Vice President Norm Boucher, and Secretary John Salvati.

Administrative Matters

Father Tom updated the Council on the status of the development of the parish budget. The Finance Committee has met and the budget for this year will generate a surplus that will allow for the replacement of the church boiler and elimination of lead paint in the garage area. These two items will exhaust funds available from the current year's operating budget.

Other issues to be considered within the forthcoming year are the repair and maintenance of wood work within the inside staircase leading to the lower church. A fall report will be sent. A second issue to be followed up on by seeking cost estimates is the creation of a small park in the current "cut through" area between Glenn and Ledyard. If this proved feasible, it was suggested that a fund raising effort similar to that for the organ be undertaken.

Confirmation Ceremony

A point was raised concerning the scheduling of the Confirmation Ceremony on a Tuesday Evening in light of the difficulty of assembling family members who wish to attend at that day and time. It was noted that while the weekend mass schedule and 67 candidates (this year's number) conspire to make an alternative time difficult, consideration should be given to the issue, however, the date for next year has already been set.

Thanking Those Serving in the Military

Mike suggested that in addition to the listing of names in the bulletin we consider some additional way of special recognition for these parishioners, perhaps a once per year reading of the names aloud during Sunday mass.

Adjournment

With thanks to all the meeting adjourned at 9:10 PM

Note: Planning Group Update

On June 8, 2010 at 7:30 p.m., members of the Parish Council and Finance Council met with the Parish Planning Group to discuss the their Preliminary Report to the Pastor and the Parish Council.

Each of the 10 listed areas summarized in the document were discussed in some depth.

The meeting seemed to crystallize its focus on two critical pressures.

- What does a parish need to do to become an effective and affecting community
- What does a parish need to do to adapt to the shortage of clergy

From these two poles, a rough consensus emerged that the stronger the community the more creative it will become and while this creative strength would benefit the parish on its own, it would also make a further claim on whatever clergy resources do exist.

As stressed in the Parish Council meeting, prioritization, integration and cost are three important factors that will have their role in moving the process forward.