

St Thomas Pastoral Council Meeting Minutes: Sept 27, 2016

Present: Fr Bill, Fr Todd, Frank Lum, Dcn Jim, Paul & Joann Thiefels, Dave & Marie Williams, Cathy Dowling, Rod Gauvin, Moira Cullen, Bill Cavnar

Absent: Mary Cavnar, Paul J., Naomi Corera

Guests: Fr Francis, Beth Spizarny, Barbara Grant-Yopko

Minutes from August meeting were approved.

Funeral Notifications. Notifying parishioners about deaths and funerals should be possible through the MyParish smartphone app. Rob H. will explore the possibilities. We have at least one parishioner who is involved with the funeral luncheons and who is also comfortable with computers who would be a good candidate to manage this service so as to spread the administrative load.

Social Justice Outreach: Barbara Grant-Yopko visited our meeting on behalf of a newly-formed Social Justice Outreach group. Years ago, St Thomas had a Social Justice Committee with a Respect Life subcommittee. Over the years, Respect Life advocates from other parishes have gravitated to St Thomas, while Social Justice advocates have gone to St Francis and St Mary's. Our Respect Life Committee feels we need a cross-parish group for all social justice issues, including Life. They are currently running announcements in the bulletin with the title "Social Justice through the Lens of Faith." Interested persons can contact Barbara. In the group's early meetings, various social justice concerns were presented and discussed. Then the group voted on the priority for investing effort in the different issues, with the result that poverty was ranked at the top. That led to the St. Thomas-hosted multi-parish event last year to show the movie *Poverty, Inc.* This event produced a good turnout and a positive response. The focus of the group will be educational, especially with regard to the social justice teachings of the Church. This will happen mostly through bringing in speakers and movies. An upcoming talk on Dec. 3 will be by Fr Tad Pacholczyk, a bio-ethics expert, focusing especially on "difficult" pregnancies and euthanasia. The next topic for this group will be human trafficking. The MI Bishops will also be sponsoring a conference on this topic. A key issue to this Social Justice topic is that the Church's teaching must always be primary. Much of the controversy on all of these topics is caused by certain terminology being hijacked by some groups.

Marketing St Thomas School: All parish families with school-aged children will be surveyed for their opinions, with a special emphasis on those families who do not send their children to St. Thomas. We need to build closer ties between school families and the parish, with a view to identify and remove obstacles that prevent these families from sending their children here. Fr Bill points out that an easy way for school families to know him and the parish is simply by attending mass every Sunday at St Thomas. The school is currently attempting to identify other ways to improve communication with school families. For example, we will have one member of the School Advisory Committee join the Pastoral Council which will help

in coordinating parish activities with the school's needs. A specifically marketing-oriented idea is for the school to advertise on WDEO. Another idea to increase enrollment in the school is to provide a daily van/bus to nearby towns like Dexter and Saline where there are no Catholic schools since transportation is a big issue for families outside of Ann Arbor.

Evangelization Update: The Alpha course promotion is going well. Twenty people signed up for the “Come and See” introductory session, but seventy-four actually showed up. Attendance included many in the 18-35 year-old age group. Beth Spizarny described many of the attendees as “seekers”, i.e., people who are not Catholic or even Christian, but who are honestly seeking to learn more about God and our faith.

The Diocesan Assembly, “Called By Name” will be held near Lansing October 21-22. The Bishop is promoting a lay movement for evangelism, especially directed toward lapsed Catholics who have left or drifted away from the faith. Thirty five from our parish are attending this meeting on how to share our faith and invite people into our community. The entire diocese was invited to help support this assembly through a Divine Mercy Chaplet novena in the days leading up to the assembly.

Hospitality Ministry: Beth reported that the first month went well. The 7:30am mass is not well covered, and coverage for the 9am & 6pm masses are a little stretched. There were many positive comments from parishioners. Moreover, hospitality ministers themselves continue to be enthusiastic about the ministry.

RCIA update: Beth described this year's class as a good group, with about 15 people participating, many of whom are younger.

Witness to Hope Campaign: Fr Bill's “porch parties” are going well. There has been a good response so far to the campaign. Bishop Boyea is coming to the parish on Wed, Oct 12 to lead a presentation about the campaign. He is also coming for a mass on Sunday, Oct 30 to talk more about it.

Parish Outreach Mission: At Fr. Bill's invitation, Fr Francis arrived around 8:20pm to spend a little time sharing with us about needs in his parish. These range from urgent and immediate needs to long-term needs that will take years to answer.

The greatest of the immediate needs is anti-malaria medications for the 2 rainy seasons each year, March—May and October—November. The medication supplies in the government clinics always run out well before the rainy season ends, and that leaves the private pharmacies as the primary source for the medication. (In his presentation on Sept. 20th, Fr. Francis mentioned that on a good day during the rainy season, only 5 parishioners die from malaria, while on a bad day it might be 15 or more. We will include the power point slides from this presentation with these minutes.)

Also, although he did not mention it in our meeting, on other occasions Fr. Francis spoke of the need for preventive measures for mosquito control. In particular, mosquito netting would be crucial, especially for the children and pregnant mothers. So would educational efforts to urge the parishioners to eliminate standing water and to clear brush, in which mosquitos hide during the day, away from their homes.

Another near-term need is safe water. St. Joseph parish covers some 20 villages, but only 2 of those villages have safe water wells. The other “wells” are little more than stagnant water ponds, where water both seeps up from the ground and flows down from the surrounding hills, carrying animal and human waste with it when the rains are heavy. These wells are full of all of the usual water-borne disease agents. Up until now, the only way to protect these water supplies is to dig them out, and then construct covered cisterns where the water can safely accumulate from below-ground sources. Such cistern structures cost roughly \$3000. Although some families using such wells do know to boil their water before using it, many of the people, especially the children, are not mindful of this, and simply drink the available water when they are thirsty.

One very important mid-term need is for school construction and repair. Many of the village Catholic schools in St. Joseph parish are in bad shape or were not even fully completed. On the other hand, the local Muslim communities, financed by money apparently from Saudi Arabia, are building very attractive schools in the region. Those schools will draw some of the St. Joseph students because their parents will want their children to go to the “best” schools. Thus the parish schools will likely start losing students to these Islamic schools.

Another thing that the schools are completely lacking is textbooks. Instead, the teachers write material on the chalkboards, and the students write it down. When they go home to study, all they have to read is their own hand-written notes. Importing books into Africa is very expensive, so it would be extremely useful to find ways to print inexpensive books locally. Fr. Francis also wants to build a library for the entire parish, and has made a modest start at that.

Another important mid-term set of needs have to do with agriculture. Most of the parishioners in St. Joseph are farmers. They all use classic slash-and-burn type agriculture: when their lands stop producing, they pull up stakes, and go find another piece of property that is not in use. They then cut down the trees on that spot, and burn back everything before starting to plant. These farmers know nothing about crop rotation or alternative crops that they could be growing. Fr Francis feels that an agricultural advisor who could teach the farmers about those improved practices and alternative cash crops that they could grow would make a big difference in the productivity of their yields. Improved farming practices would also help to make in-roads against deforestation, which is a problem for the entire country. A single agricultural advisor, methodically moving from farm to farm through the parish via motorbike, could start having an impact almost immediately.

Another acquisition which could be a big asset to the entire parish would be a tractor. There are a number of things such a machine could do, including: clearing and plowing land, hauling produce to the markets, and crucially, help in fixing the worst spots in the roads. Nearly all of the parish is served by dirt roads, which turn to mud with every rainy season. Fr. Francis got a quote on such a tractor to see what it would cost, and the total, including a couple of basic trailers and implements would run \$45000. There may be ways to finance this amount.

When Fr. Francis concluded his comments, he left the meeting, and we returned to the larger topic of how St. Thomas parish could support all of the different mission outreaches we have already begun. We returned to the “St. Thomas Parish Mission Outreach—Suggested Comprehensive Program” proposal which Bill C. presented at our August meeting. This proposal was the product of some meetings and email discussion between Marie Williams, Naomi Corera, Meghan Fiebelkorn, Mary Cavnar, and Bill Cavnar over the course of the summer. The text of this proposal is contained as an addendum to these minutes. The main elements of the proposal are these:

- Identify a set of missions that our parish would take on.
- Work with the administrators of these missions to develop prioritized lists of mission needs.
- Work with the Barnabas Almsgiving Fund (BAF) to establish projects with at least the first three (St. Joseph, St. Francis Xavier, and the street children mission) to fund long-term projects. (The BAF, like Children Waiting Everywhere, is a 501c3 that is already supporting Catholic outreaches around the world. Using these channels would allow parishioners to make direct one-time or recurring gifts in support of the different missions.)
- Create web pages for both the St. Thomas website and for the BAF website to describe all of these projects.
- Create displays (probably bulletin boards) in visible places in the church and school.
- Coordinate with the school's administration and teachers to promote the missions.
- Regularly publish articles in the weekly bulletin with links to the relevant websites, especially encouraging donations.
- Give homilies and talks about almsgiving, solidarity with the poor, etc.
- Pursue other ways to deepen interpersonal relationships with the missions.

We then had a lively discussion about all of these mission-related topics. A key first step for St. Joseph parish will be the development of a prioritized list of needs, with projected costs and times, which Bill C. will start developing with Fr. Francis. Several people felt that teaching about and encouraging mission support would bear a lot of good spiritual fruit for our parish, especially for our children. Another council member pointed out that the needs we were discussing all included in the broader social justice issue we had discussed earlier. The needs that Fr. Francis expressed

also stimulated a lot of ideas among the council members for creative ways to meet these needs. For example, there are some existing resources already available in Africa through different aid agencies (USAID and the Gates Foundation, to name two) that we might be able to tap. Cathy Dowling offered to contact Catholic Relief Services to explore what kinds of grants or other support they might have. Another member suggested we consider having semi-regular fund-raising dinners.

We concluded the meeting, as we always do, with Fr. Bill leading us in praying the Canticle of Simeon from Night Prayer. Several people expressed interest in having the text of that prayer so that they could more readily join in. You will find that prayer on the last page of these minutes.

St. Thomas Parish Mission Outreach Suggested Comprehensive Program

Let's propose the following series of steps for St. Thomas:

- Decide on a set of missions to suggest to the parish as worthy of support. We would be effectively 'adopting' these as our missions. (See the Catholic Relief Services Parish Partnership Manual.)
 - St. Joseph Church, Kyamatanga, Uganda (Fr. Francis Muhenda)
 - St. Francis Xavier's Church, Tamil Nadu, S. India (Fr. Selvam)
 - Fr. Christopher Owczarek's program for caring for street children
 - Children Waiting Everywhere (CWE)
 - Others? Sr. Priscilla's orphanage?
- Work with the administrators of these missions to develop prioritized lists of mission needs
 - We have already started this with Fr. Francis.
 - We need to do the same with Fr. Selvam and Fr. Christopher.
 - Naomi already has well-developed projects and plans that just need some publicity for support.
- Work with the Barnabas Almsgiving Fund (BAF) to establish projects with at least the first three (St. Joseph, St. Francis Xavier, and the street children mission) to fund long-term projects
 - In particular, set up ways for people to make both one-time and recurring donations.
- Create web pages for both the St. Thomas website and for the BAF website to describe all of these projects.
 - Describe the various past, current, and future projects.
 - Keep these web pages up to date to show progress toward goals.
 - Provide links to the BAF and CWE donation pages.
- Create displays (probably bulletin boards) in visible places in the church and school.
 - These displays would probably go in synchrony with the web pages.
- Coordinate with the school's administration and teachers to promote the missions:
 - Arrange visits by people related to the missions to give talks to the children (and parents!) about the projects. (It would be ideal to do that for St. Joseph Kyamatanga while Fr. Francis is here.)
 - Arrange (or at least encourage) study projects by the children about the various missions.
 - Arrange (and encourage) fund-raising for the projects by the children and their parents, perhaps as a Lenten observance.

- Regularly publish articles in the weekly bulletin with links to the relevant websites, especially encouraging donations.
- Give homilies and talks about almsgiving, solidarity with the poor, etc.
- Pursue other ways to deepen interpersonal relationships with the projects:
 - Establish pen-pal programs, both for children and adults.
 - Arrange visits by parish representatives, and then have those who make these trips give presentations.

Notes from Catholic Relief Services *Parish Partnership Manual*

- Catholic Relief Services has written a comprehensive guide for how parishes can support mission work abroad. The following list of broad principles comes from the Introduction chapter of this manual, and provide useful guidelines for how we ought to be thinking about our mission outreach efforts.
 - Principles of solidarity-based partnerships:
 - Emphasize Relationships As Well As Resources
 - Respect Local Church Organization and Planning
 - Practice Mutuality and Equality
 - Support Responsible Local Leadership
 - Promote Transparency and Accountability
 - Work to Promote Greater Justice and Peace
 - Seek to Give and Receive, Learn and Teach
 - Deepen Our Faith by Experiencing the Universal Catholic Church
- You can find the full text of this manual online here:

<http://uspartners.crs.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/manual-for-partnerships.pdf>

Canticle of Simeon

Fr. Bill always prays the following prayer at the end of our meetings. Several council members expressed interest in having the words to this prayer so that we can more readily pray with him. The text comes from the *Liturgy of the Hours*, Night Prayer:

GOSPEL CANTICLE

Antiphon: Protect us, Lord, as we stay awake; watch over us as we sleep, that awake, we may keep watch with Christ, and asleep, rest in his peace.

*(Luke 2:29-32
Christ is the light of the nations and the glory of Israel)*

Lord, + now you let your servant go in peace; *
your word has been fulfilled:

my own eyes have seen the salvation *
which you have prepared in the sight of every people:

a light to reveal you to the nations *
and the glory of your people Israel.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, *
and to the Holy Spirit:
as it was in the beginning, is now, *
and will be for ever. Amen.

Antiphon: Protect us, Lord, as we stay awake; watch over us as we sleep, that awake, we may keep watch with Christ, and asleep, rest in his peace.