

Pastoral Council Meeting Minutes 01-24-2017

Present: Fr. Bill, Fr. Todd, Beth Spizarny, Bill & Mary Cavnar, Cathy Dowling, Francis Lum, Naomi Corera, Rob Hohler, Paul Jackowski, Larry Nienhaus, Marie Williams

Minutes from the December meeting were approved.

Parish Finances Update by Rob Hohler

Overall, we are a bit behind our budget for this point in the fiscal year. There are a number of factors contributing to this:

- We have less miscellaneous income and rental income than we normally do at this time.
- We purchased new copiers. (Over the long-term, this purchase will improve our financial picture.)
- There were lots of heating and plumbing problems that needed repair and service.
- We have a small increase in staff, and there were some additional costs because of staffing transitions.

Overall, we are \$112K behind where we were last year at this time. On the positive side, the general checking account is ahead by roughly \$100K. Also, the Heritage Fund is ahead by \$43K. However, because of the way the calendar fell out for December, we had one fewer Sunday collection this year than we normally do. Also, the *Witness to Hope* campaign probably had an impact on collections.

We are expecting our first Diocesan disbursement from the *Witness to Hope* campaign. If it is delayed, we may need to ask for a zero interest bridge loan from the Diocese until the disbursement comes through. One good sign is that our Sunday collections are still strong. Of course, we are also expecting to start a major roof repair project this summer.

Witness to Hope Update by Larry Nienhaus

We are somewhat uncertain of our current status with the campaign because we are not getting very timely updates from the Diocese. The staff handling all of this new financial processing is not very big, and so is having to play catch-up.

According to the most recent figures, we are close to reaching \$2.5M of our \$3.0M goal. We have reached this point through the donations of only 285 families, whose average gift is almost \$9000 per family. To be almost 85% of the way to our goal this soon in the campaign is very good. There were quite a few 5-figure gifts. There is plenty of reason to be optimistic given that so many families have not yet made any gift. We may actually be in better shape than this because the slowness of the Diocesan reports on on-line giving keeps in the dark.

The new Legacy Society is officially in place. This is a mechanism by which donors can make bequests in their wills for cash, appreciated stocks, IRAs, etc. There are 6 financial advisors and attorneys who are available to help with setting up a bequest.

St. Thomas School Update by Michelle Jahn via Larry Nienhaus

The annual school open house will be held next Sunday, January 29, in observance of the start of Catholic Schools Week. There is a full set of activities planned for the day, including an open house for the preschool.

Members of the St. Thomas School marketing committee have been busy reaching out to nearby parishes that do not have their own schools. Ten of those parishes have agreed to publish announcements about the open house in their Sunday bulletins. Moreover, four of those parishes have also agreed to allow year-round announcements about the school.

Cathy Dowling brought up the issue of attrition in the higher grades. Some families transfer their students to other schools after the fifth grade and higher in an effort to help their students make the transition to high school by attending other junior high schools. Cathy notes that we should actively work to keep these students, and find ways to satisfy their parents' concerns. Further discussion brought up the fact that we likewise need to work harder with pre-school families to encourage them to keep their children at St. Thomas after pre-school.

Discussion continued on how to increase both the recruitment of new students and the retention of current students. One point is that we need to have a thorough exit interview process to find out why families are leaving, even for pre-school students' families. The school community has already connected with 9 area pre-schools to provide info to the families who might want to bring their students to a Catholic kindergarten. The informal speculation is that this might bring in an additional 15-20 more students. The key will be constant communication with pre-school families both to bring them to St. Thomas and keep them here.

We also discussed some of the transportation issues that out-of-town families have. One idea would be for current school families who live in other towns and cities to host neighborhood parties to reach out to families who are neighbors of those current school families.

Yet another possible helpful strategy would be to encourage parishes which do not have their own schools to help provide stipends to help subsidize their parishioner families in attending Catholic schools elsewhere.

Evangelization

The current Alpha course is very full, with 62 attendees currently signed up, and 10 more wait-listed. We are trying out a new venue, Glasshouse Brewing, located at 2350 W Liberty St. in Ann Arbor. The team running the course are half returning leaders, and half first-time leaders. There was a dry run on Saturday January 21st, and it went well.

There continues to be much interest in the topic 'what comes after Alpha?' Among the possibilities that people have talked about are:

- Alpha 201, another video-oriented short course put together by Fr. John Ricardo and the Our Lady of Good Counsel parish
- Recruiting people to serve in the new Hospitality ministry for weekend masses
- The 'Ask Anything' events, in which attendees pose questions about Catholicism to a panel (usually Fr. Bill, Fr. Todd, and Monica Pope)
- The Great Adventures Bible Study, put together by Jeff Cavins and published by Ascension Press
- The Neo-Catechumenal Way

There are probably other things as well, and no well-defined path decided upon.

The Diocese of Lansing is giving a *Called and Gifted* workshop at St. Thomas on February 10-11. This is a program that helps Catholics do a self-assessment of their own experience, and begin discerning what charisms that God has given them for the good of the whole Church and the local parish in particular. So far there are 110 registrations, with a cap set at 200.

We discussed running some sort of small group study for Lent as we have in previous years. There are numerous possible sources of material including that from CFM and Formed.org. However the consensus is that that our schedule is already very full and that there is not much time left to set up such a thing. Instead, we would be better off looking for a more long-term plan for such programs.

We also discussed a couple of special events that are scheduled or in the planning stage:

- On Saturday, March 4th at 7pm, we will hold a *The Mass Explained* event in the church. This will be a full mass, but structured in such a way so as to provide opportunities to explain many of the details of the liturgy that many people do not know or appreciate.
- On Friday May 12th and Saturday May 13th we are currently planning on holding a Marian Conference in observance of the 100th anniversary of the events at Fatima. The idea is not yet full developed. It may take a form more like a special Adoration.

For the Fatima event, Naomi strongly urged that the event have provision for children and whole families. Beth also suggested the possibility of continuing the Fatima event in June, July, August, September, and October also as a way of commemorating the events that continued on the 13th of those months 100 years ago. Monica Pope is urging that we do a book study based on the book *Fatima for Today: The Urgent Marian Message of Hope*, by Fr. Andrew Apostoli.

We also briefly discussed the possibility of other events, such as the “small stones” prayer services, and different family-oriented celebrations.

Fr. Bill told us about *Cross & Light*, a multi-media dramatic presentation about the Passion of Christ, performed in a highly artistic and musical way. The presentation was the idea of Kelly Nieto, a well-known Catholic speaker, who was strongly led to develop it as a way to present the Gospel in the post-modern world. It has earned my highly positive reviews, both by clergy and laity. There is a touring company who give this presentation across the country. The current possibility that could involve St. Thomas would be an inter-parish presentation at St. Francis Church but supported by all of the local parishes during Lent 2018, on March 14-16 of that year. In order to schedule this, our local group of parishes would have to put down \$10K to reserve a spot in the calendar for us. The total cost would be \$64K for 6 performances. The priests will discuss all of this at the next vicariate meeting, which will be on Feb. 10, with a decision shortly after.

Parish Mission Outreach

There is now a Mission Outreach page on the parish website. (Go to the Ministries menu, and look down it about 2/3 of the way. That page currently has a brief writeup on Fr. Francis Muhenda and his work at the St. Joseph parish in Kayamatanga, Uganda, and also a writeup about Naomi Corera and Children waiting everywhere. The writeup on St. Joseph parish also links to a second page with pictures and more information about the work there, and how parishioners can support that work. Likewise the writeup on Children Waiting Everywhere links to the CWE website. There are plenty of other ideas for how to increase our parishes

awareness and support of these ministries, and there will be further meetings to discuss how to move that forward.

Wrapup

One of the Pastoral Council members asked about doing a Vacation Bible School this year. Beth responded by saying that everyone seems to really like the idea of doing a VBS, but it was very difficult to find anyone to take on the role of VBS coordinator. Every VBS is a very intense week, and takes months of planning and preparation, and a large group of volunteers. Given all of the other activities already going on, it does not look like that can happen this year.

Also, there was a final question about communal penance services in Lent. Fr. Bill reported that once again St. Francis will be hosting an all-day event for confessions. Last year's event like this was very successful.