

## Parish Council 8-22-2017 Meeting Minutes

Present: Fr. Bill Ashbaugh, Dcn. Jim Miles, Kathy Grisdela, Beth Spizarny, Rod Gauvin, Frank Lum, Marie Williams, Paul Thiefels, Mary Cavnar, Bill Cavnar, Tim DiLaura

Guests: Jim Gajewski - Catholic Social Services, Mark Irwin – Universal Church Directories

Minutes from the April meeting were approved.

**Note: There are several items in these minutes which are action items for all Parish Council members. These will be marked with 'Action >>>' in the text.**

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Jim Gajewski, the new President & CEO of Catholic Social Services (CSS) of Washtenaw county ( [www.csswashtenaw.org](http://www.csswashtenaw.org) and [jgajewski@csswashtenaw.org](mailto:jgajewski@csswashtenaw.org) ) introduced himself to our parish. Jim has a strong background with Catholic

charities over the years, including time as the CEO of the Catholic Charities in Houston, TX. Jim is a member of Christ the King Parish.

Jim will be re-directing and re-branding the CSS of Washtenaw to better implement the direction set out in Bishop Boyea's pastoral letter on evangelization, especially with regard to the diocese's need to reach out to the "Court of the Gentiles". The principal mechanism for that is through corporal works of mercy. This new direction also comes out of one of Pope Benedict's encyclicals which emphasizes the role of practical Catholic Social Services, especially the need to maintain a professional approach to their work, but to do so **in partnership with parishes** (emphasis mine).

Jim is visiting local parishes to better coordinate CSS services with those of all the parishes in the Diocese. As Jim says CSS's motto should be "we don't want to step on toes, but we do want to fill gaps."

In looking at the parishes in our county, Jim has been impressed with the vibrant Catholic presence in the whole area, and indeed in the unusually vigorous Christian activity in our area. Jim looks forward to making further and deeper contact with all parts of the various parish groups and organizations already in place.

In response to that, Marie Williams noted that our own SVDP society serves the same type of clients as CSS. SVDP has a good relationship with several Christian social service agencies in AA (Friends in Deed and Hope Clinic). St Vincent would love to work with CSS of Washtenaw and Jim expressed interest in the same.

After his introduction, Jim excused himself from our meeting.

Our second guest was Mark Irwin, representing Universal Church Directories, which provides picture directories and other related services for parishes. Here are the basic details of the UCD offer:

- UCD will come to the parish on a set of agreed-upon days. Parishioners will sign up to come in to take one or more pictures. After taking a set of pictures, the family gets a chance to look at the resulting images and pick one for the directory.
- There is no cost to the church for taking the pictures or producing the directories.
- Every participating family gets a complimentary 8x10 photo, and a complimentary picture directory.
- Typically, about 60% of the participating families also buys a set of pictures, which is how UCD can continue offering this arrangement.
- Previous photo directories published by UCD usually had two parts in a single volume: the picture directory proper, and a second section with all sorts of photos and other information related to the parish functions, structure, staff, etc. Recently, UCD has decided to offer the ability to print

- these two different types of publications as separate volumes rather than in the traditional single volume format. The aim is to produce the photo directory quickly, and get it into the hands of parishioners, while giving the parish time to decide just what kinds of information should go into the second part. That seems to take a surprisingly long time. The two different sections can be in different form factors, too, with different physical sizes.
- UCD also provides the directory in electronic form, which could be downloaded from the parish website as a PDF.
  - UCD also provides an online version of the directory, accessed through an app, for 4 years after the photos are taken. It also provides a free way for the parish to make updates to the online database. There is also a way to request printed copies of the updated directory (for money of course), with a minimum order of 100 copies.
  - UCD's experience is that the 80-100% of parishioners who give regularly will participate.
  - UCD staff can also call parishioners who do not respond to the initial offers. The parish staff does not have to do any of this processing.
  - Typically, UCD requires only 4 weeks to send proof photos after the pictures are taken. Moreover, typically it only takes an additional 4 weeks to deliver printed directory books. The informational volume delivery depends more on how quickly the parish gathers and organizes the information to be included.
  - When asked what are some typical purchases by parishioners, Mark replied that single 8x10 or 5x7 photos run \$25. There are discounts for each additional photo purchased.

One important bit of history that was on the minds of a number of Pastoral Council members is the very unpleasant experience we had with the company that did our last directory. Those photographers used high-pressure sales tactics to try to shame or otherwise cajole parishioners into buying expensive package deals. None of us who went through that want anything to do with a photography process like that again. However, Helena Heffernan, who is our parish office manager, told Fr. Bill that her experience with UCD was completely different from her experience last time with the previous vendor. There has been no pressure, and the UCD staff approach everything in a very friendly, no-pressure way. When this was brought up with Mark, he mentioned that the photographers all get a salary plus a commission, which greatly reduces the need for photographers to put on the hard sell just so they can get paid. Besides, customers who are pressured into buying something will be unlikely to want to go through that process again, greatly reducing the possibility of repeat business.

Mark also made a couple of other interesting observations. With the advent of high-quality digital photography for everyone, pretty much all of the big name portrait photography chains like Olan Mills have fallen on hard times. UCD has recognized this situation, and has tried to provide a mix of services that provide more value (e.g., the online app) and a more pleasant customer experience as a way of remaining competitive.

After Mark left, Fr. Bill asked us to think about UCD's offer and to get back to him as quickly as possible with a recommendation.

**Action >>> Email Fr. Bill with your recommendation about the UCD offer.**

Our next topic was parish finances, and in particular the Witness To Hope campaign and the different parish projects financed by the parish's portion of the \$3M that was pledged. Kathy Grisdela reported that only \$21K remains of that \$3M to raise, which is very good news. Even better, several of our major projects have come in well under the initial estimated costs:

- The roof came in at \$430K instead of \$600K. Moreover, the roofing company did a very thorough and professional job.
- The parking lot replacement was completed for \$85K instead of the previously quoted \$118K.

Kathy also noted that there has been a great deal of interest in the church beautification project. We have also already received over \$100K earmarked by the donors for beautification, and there is the possibility of an additional \$100K for that purpose from other donors. Given that kind of support, and the overall encouraging state of our fund-raising campaigns, Fr. Bill's prayer is that we can complete the proposed beautification project by Easter 2019. Kathy also showed us a draft of this year's annual report, which will be completed soon.

Kathy noted that in a typical year, the parish in-come and out-go were balanced at about \$2.5M each. This year, it is again balanced, with both numbers at about \$2.6M.

One bit of good news for the school is that the school staff received a 2% raise. This is the first increase they have had in several years.

On a related note, the school enrollment is at 162, after coming back from a low of around 150. We are hoping to pick up a few more as the school year gets underway, and families make last minute changes. Even with this, the school is still \$100K to \$200K away from being self-sufficient, and so needs a hefty subsidy from the parish every year.

The council members also briefly discussed additional ideas for improving this situation. These ideas included such things as:

- An "adopt-a-student" by which a parishioner with means would help pay the tuition for a student who would not otherwise be able to attend.
- Adding a daycare service for very young children.
- Focusing on marketing out pre-school and kindergarten programs, since these are definitely feeder systems for the gradeschool.

The next meeting topic was a report on the parish evangelization efforts by Beth Spizarney. Many of the ideas she covered were the fruit of a series of meetings over the summer by the 14-member Evangelization Team. Together, they created project timelines for different initiatives focusing on these 7 dimensions of evangelization:

- Prayer
- Welcoming Environment
- Encounter Opportunities
- Small Groups
- Witness
- Invitation
- Accompaniment

Much of this effort will be directed to several key evangelistic moments:

- The Welcome Back events in September, directed at lapsed Catholics
- Christmas
- Ash Wednesday/Lent
- Easter

The Evangelization Team composed a prayer directed at asking God's help for lapsed Catholics to return to the Church. This prayer will be part of the prayers of the faithful at masses in the months ahead.

Beth discussed the challenge of providing worship experiences that were both reverent and welcoming. This is particularly difficult when some people wanting to be prayerful in church are distracted by all the welcoming, while those needing welcoming feel ignored by all of those concentrating on their personal prayer. We will be continuing our series of monthly 'Welcoming Challenge of the Month' in the bulletin, each of which invites parishioners to reach out to others in some different way.

Other upcoming evangelistic activities include:

- A new Alpha series starting in September
- The Great Big Potluck, which is another event along the lines of the old Parish Life Nights, St. Joseph's Table, and Vine events.
- Starting a new series of small group meetings for Lent
- Making better use of social media, including Facebook and Instagram, and possibly a parish blog
- Reworking the parish website.

Beth noted that the Alpha team consists of 17 people, 10 of whom are new to participating in these kinds of activities. We are hoping to have 80 attendees each week.

The first Great Big Potluck event will be on Sept. 30, 5:45pm – 7:45pm. It will include childcare and games for younger children in the gym, and a more serious presentation for teens and adults. The latter will feature two brief videos from the *Altaration* video series on the mysteries of the Mass. (The word really is spelled with 'altar' as the first part.)

Beth also mentioned that there is a Diocese-level Evangelization Marketing Plan. This plan will focus on a dozen or so Pilot Parishes, of which St. Thomas is one.

Fr. Bill mentioned that with the departure of several Parish Council members whose terms came to an end, we are in need of some new members. He asked current members to prayerfully consider this, and make recommendations for people that he can ask.

**Action >>> Pray about other parishioners who might make good Parish Council members, and then email your recommendations to Fr. Bill.**

Fr. Bill mentioned a particular book that he would like all Parish Council members to read in preparation for the next parish Pastoral Plan:

*Divine Renovation -- Bringing Your Parish from Maintenance to Mission*  
by Fr. James Mallon

Among the places you can get the book are [Twenty-Third Publications](#) and [Amazon](#). Fr. Bill also mentioned that he would try to get some copies.

**Action >>> Obtain a copy of *Divine Renovation* and read it as soon as possible.**

Bill Cavnar asked about the current state of the parish youth program, since the youth director position is again empty. Fr. Bill replied that he and Fr. Tony were going to use the [YDisciple](#) program with a couple of pilot in-home small groups of teens. The materials for this program are also on Formed.Org.

Bill Cavnar also gave a very brief update on the Parish Mission Outreach. With the death of Fr. Francis Muhenda in June, we are now in need of reformulating a big part of our mission outreach efforts in Uganda. In connection with that, we sent nearly \$10K through the Barnabas Almsgiving Fund to pay for Fr. Francis's medical bills. After paying for his bills, which were about \$3500, the remainder will go for the ongoing medical needs of priests and religious in the diocese. Bill reported receiving a very warm letter of appreciation from Bishop Robert Muhirwa of the Diocese of Fort Portal in Uganda for this great outpouring of financial support which our parish provided. Bill mentioned that we needed to respond to this letter. (In a conversation after the council meeting finished, Fr. Bill decided that he should write this response, which he did send the next day.) We also need to update the parish website's mission outreach pages, which still refer to Fr. Francis.

Marie Williams also reported on behalf of the St. Vincent de Paul Society at St. Thomas parish about the state of the store, which has been out of commission since the fire back on May 8<sup>th</sup>. The landlord has finally approved the plans for rebuilding the portion of the building where the store was. Marie says that the Society hopes to have the store back in operation by December. Although the store is not functioning, Marie said that the different collection points are still in operation as a way of maintaining a presence in city and to help sustain the flow of donations. However, since the store is not functioning, the collected goods are currently being passed on to other charitable organizations in the area.

