

Parishes' Pastoral Council

St. John the Evangelist & St. Joseph's and the Church of St. Mary

March 7, 2017 at Church of St. Mary Parish Center, St. Raphael Conference Room

Meeting Minutes

Council Members in attendance: Judy Buono, Chris Desany, Patricia Englund, Fr. David LeFort, Deacon Greg Mansfield, and Rita ZenZen

Council Members not present: Dave Hans, Rick Harbeck, Steve Buono, Lora Santilli and Kane Malone

Opening Prayer: Patricia Englund

•• **Main objective of meeting: “Evangelization – what it means and why/how we do it”**

•• In order for us to be true evangelizers, it’s good to acknowledge the breadth of the meaning of our term. To evangelize, we first must have an authentic encounter and developing relationship with the Lord Jesus. Once He has ‘captured’ us with His love, we then want to acknowledge this and proclaim it.

As an example, when we meet a person and begin to really encounter and become engaged with that person, that friendship is exciting...it’s something (and really someone) we want to share with others. Then after some time and the friendship begins to blossom into something even more, say “finding a potential spouse”, we share that person more boldly and with passion and excitement. An engaged couple then proclaims their joy and compatibility with engagement rings as an outward sign of a desired commitment. This is not dissimilar to the process of evangelization: Jesus is at the core and center of it all. He invites us into union with him, and some of us get it right off the bat: we come into the Church and immediately find His message is true, righteous and filled with life. He in a sense changes us into disciples and sends out as missionaries in all aspects of our daily lives. It is most natural and good for us then to begin to share the good news of our encounter with Him, our friendship with God and the life His Church bears for us. This is at the heart of Evangelization. We encounter the One who calls us, we are markedly changed by our encounter with Him in the Church, and we go forth announcing and sharing that news with all others.

Once we understand and accept this mission of discipleship and evangelization, we really have to ask the question, “what are we inviting others to experience?” If we want them to experience the Lord in at least as beautiful as the way we have experienced Him, we must be willing to be most welcoming. Naturally this begs the question: “are our worshiping communities really welcoming?”

We really need an honest and open dialogue about “welcome”. Fr. David has been involved in some way or another with Pastoral Planning in our diocese. Not once has a parish ever acknowledge that they may not be as welcoming as they ought: on the contrary, every single one has said that they are very welcoming. But while that’s their own self-image, that may be very far from the actual reality. He then visited one such parish *incognito* for a weekend liturgy. Arriving 15 minutes prior, he walked to a door that was admittedly not the main door (but who would know coming to a church for the first-time what door he or she was “supposed to use”?) and found it locked. Going the largest entrance, he went in to find the church dark, several dozen ‘regulars’ there in the large vestibule talking amongst themselves, giving no mind to anyone ‘outside’ their regular group, he found a worship aide and went to a pew. A few minutes before the liturgy, the lights came on (kind of like at the opera or some such thing) and the

liturgy began. Immediately after the sign of the cross, all present were told to turn to those around them and greet them. This was at odds with what we were supposed to be doing, it felt very much contrived: our 'greeting' was forced and unnatural.

To put greater emphasis on this, let's consider an issue in our own parishes that does not project "welcome" for weekday Mass-goers. The first weekday Mass Fr. David went to celebrate at St. Mary's ten years ago: he arrived in the church only to find no one there nor any lights on. He knew the Mass was at 7am and that cars were in the lot, but had no idea where to go. Even if he knew that Mass was in the Chapel of St. Joseph, where was that? Lo and behold, he heard voices in the Parish Center and, after wandering a bit, found all to be set and ready.

At St. John's/St. Joseph's we advertise Mass at Our Lady's Chapel. So when a visitor comes for 12:10pm Mass and seeks to go to Our Lady's Chapel, which one might presume is in the left transept of the church where the statue of Our Lady is, one would find every door locked...no Mass. Then they might hear that the chapel is actually in the McManus Center...wherever that is. Then, if one finds the McManus Center, where then? Karaoke with Elvis on the right side of the hall with other seniors? He shares these anecdotes not to insult or defame, but rather to allow us insight into what may or may not be truly welcoming.

Some of the members shared their personal experiences in finding a place to worship, after moving into our area, and what they observed in the churches they visited. Note that each of us is unique, different, and may experience 'welcome' differently. For the introvert, overt expressions of welcome may not actually be welcoming, rather, they may desire a simple form of acceptance that they are there to pray. For some, asking their name when they first arrive is shocking/off-putting...it may be like someone proposing for marriage after just casually meeting over coffee at the first day of orientation for a new job! When we seek to be welcoming, this is going to require us to be prudent, very much aware of the other as "another", seek to be hospitable and warm. Read reactions to our gestures and be gentle and natural. We always hope for hospitality ministers to be natural at this, but many people are not self-aware to the point of reading cues. But we can't relegate welcoming to a set of ministers: each worshiper has the opportunity and the invitation to be hospitable and welcoming. If a new-comer makes it as far as a pew without incident, only a few minutes later to be told, "that's my pew", all our efforts of 'welcome' are gutted. If all our members would consider how they occupy a pew, for example, they might be able to self-evaluate how they are perceived as welcoming: in other words, if our regular members all sit at the ends of pews, there is no welcome for another; but if all move into the middle of the pews, there's a felt invitation to "come, sit with me".

We see better the challenges that we must now consider. What do we consider "welcoming" and what things might hinder or erase "welcome" in our parishes?

Before our next meeting: Would each member visit one or two other parishes for weekend liturgy? Please take this opportunity to reach far and wide...venture across the mighty Hudson River or maybe even above the great Mohawk River! Let sense be receptive to what signs point to 'welcome' and what things might signal its lack. Our next meeting will be mostly anecdotal...with self-evaluation to follow.

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Next meeting: May 16, 2017 at 6:30pm at St. John the Evangelist/St. Joseph's Parish House.

Closing Prayer - all

Respectfully submitted: Judy Buono, Secretary