

Minutes of the Parish Council
St. Vincent de Paul Church
September 9th, 2008

Present: Fr. Richard Lawrence, Colleen McCahill, Dennis B. Moore, J. Edmond Guy, Lorna Patterson, Anne Marie Freeburger, Ray Heil, Pat Ball, Joan Campbell, Audrey Rogers, Mary Kate Fries, Jim Casey, Maureen Fitzsimmons, Joe Cronyn and Graham Yearley

The meeting was brought to order at 7:37pm by our President, Colleen McCahill, and prayer was offered by Lorna Patterson.

A. Pastor's Report

Church operations went smoothly for the most part during the summer months. There were a series of break-ins into the rectory and the undercroft. A back-up audio system was stolen from the undercroft. Fr. Lawrence intercepted one burglar and "arrested" him until the police arrived. Larry has been reinforcing every place where break-ins occurred.

B. Finance Report and Budget Approval

Maureen Fitzsimmons, chair of the Finance Committee, submitted the annual budget of St. Vincent's for the Parish Council's approval. After noting the tightness of the budget and some questions about certain aspects of the budget, it was approved.

C. Proposal of the Social Action Committee

Ray Heil and Joe Cronyn offered to the Council a proposal to lease our park to a developer experienced in housing for low income residents to construct a building with some thirty possible units to house the homeless in our park. There have been buildings on the site in the past, so development is not without precedent. It would offer real shelter to the residents of the park, particularly in the cold months, and it would be a step towards solving the problem of homelessness, rather than simply providing a space for homeless to camp. Neither the cost of the construction nor the management of the building afterwards would be St. Vincent's responsibility.

One immediate obstacle to the proposal is that, by the agreement that set up the park, construction on the site is forbidden. Concerns about "creeping responsibilities" on the parish by such a building and aesthetic compromises were raised. Fr. Lawrence offered four points: 1) the easement on the property that began in 1963 prohibits vertical construction. The Maryland Historical Trust holds the deed. Would they permit such a dramatic change? 2) "Creeping involvement" by the parish is inevitable. Can we handle it? 3) This proposal substantially revises our commitment to the homeless. Instead of ministering to the bottom rung of the homeless, we would be housing those who are prepared to handle the responsibility or the "highest rung" of the homeless and 4) Fr.

Lawrence, while advising against the proposal, stated he would not stand in the way of the proposal if it is the will of the parish council to proceed.

A lengthy discussion on several issues connected to the proposal made it clear that the Council had not reached consensus and it was decided to revisit the proposal at the next meeting.

D. Committee Reports

1. Peace and Justice Committee

The committee will meet on September 19th at Sylvia Eastman's home to discuss their budget and other activities.

2. Education Committee

The new co-chair of the Education Committee, Mary Kate Fries, gave a report. The number of children signed up for Faith, Fun and Fellowship has dropped and another teacher is needed. There will be a series of discussions in the fall, starting with John and Audrey Rogers speaking on St. Paul. Another series based on Elizabeth Johnson's Quest for the Living God will start before Lent, run through it and continue afterwards. Copies of the book will be sold for \$10 and are available currently. The Parish Retreat will be held May 15-17 at the same location, but in a different building. The topic will be announced at a later date.

3. Liturgy Committee

The September meeting on Saturday the 20th will discuss the theme for Advent. The November 15th meeting will firm up plans for Advent and Christmas.

4. Social Action Committee

The Emergency Services ministries, particularly the Men's Clothing Program, have served the poor for many years. Currently, the women running the Men's Clothing Program feel the space under the sacristy does not secure either the clothing or themselves and ask for reinforced doors and windows. Fr. Lawrence agreed to meet with them and discuss their concerns.

5. Park Working Group

The PWG meets on the second and fourth Thursdays of the month; the meeting on the fourth Thursday includes representatives from City government. Forty donors of food and clothing to residents of the park have been identified. The meeting of September 27th will focus on how we can better work with them.

E. Old Business

1. Colleen McCahill reminded the Council of the plan of council members to visit other parishes, both Catholic and of other denominations. Some council members have already made visits and others signed up to visit parishes. These visits will provide the source material for a future discussion on how we may better fulfill our mission.

2. The Liturgy Survey Report: the discussion on this report which has been worked on for several months had to be postponed due to lack of time.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:37 pm with the saying of the Lord's Prayer.

The minutes are respectfully submitted by

Graham G. Yearley, secretary of the Parish Council