

St. Vincent de Paul Church President's Report 2010-2011¹

Introduction

This parish has been worshiping since 1840. We praise God and we minister to one another. We allow everyone to participate and we hold each other accountable. Our liturgies are worship and they are celebration. We help each other and we help our neighbors. Everyone is given an opportunity to contribute. Word, liturgy, and social action are all important to our community.

Much of what follows is about keeping St. Vincent's operating. But the point isn't to keep this institution, our church, operating for its own sake. We operate to keep the community going. And the community is for worship and ministry.

Highlights

Here are some highlights of the past year:

- ❖ Chris McCullough became pastoral associate.
- ❖ The archdiocese instituted an ongoing program to solicit views from the laity about future responses to the priest shortage.
- ❖ St. Vincent's joined the Basilica, St. Alphonsus, Corpus Christi and St. Ignatius in forming a coalition of downtown parishes.
- ❖ We instituted a new committee structure.
- ❖ We redesigned our web site and the weekly bulletin.
- ❖ Along with the rest of the Church, we began using the translations from the Roman Missal, Third Edition, for our responses at mass.
- ❖ We lost our air conditioning for much of the summer
- ❖ In the course of one week, lightning struck St. Vincent's and we experienced both an earthquake and a hurricane.
- ❖ Archbishop O'Brien was promoted to being the Grand Master of the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulcher of Jerusalem. He will act as a caretaker until a new archbishop is appointed.

¹Article VII (3) of our constitution requires the council president to submit a report to the council at the September meeting following the conclusion of her/his term. This is my second report.

Chris McCullough

Chris was chosen as pastoral associate after a search process which lasted for most of a year. On behalf of the parish, I am extremely grateful to Gerry Fialkowski and her search committee for all of their work. That work paid dividends. Chris is an excellent pastoral associate. He will work closely with Father Lawrence for the next two years in all phases of ministry at St. Vincent's.

The parish has developed a plan for a successor to Father Lawrence when (and if) he retires. The plan is to have a parish life director take on many of the day to day responsibilities while Father Lawrence continues to say the weekend masses and to administer the sacraments. If all goes well, Chris will become a candidate to be the Pastoral Life Director position. Only the archbishop can decide whether to use a pastoral life director model. If he does choose that model, only the archbishop can decide who will be appointed as a Pastoral Life Director.

Archbishop O'Brien

The appointment of a new archbishop will have an impact on the plans for a parish life director. No one knows how receptive the new archbishop will be to any of our ideas. We hope that all of our preparation will be persuasive.

Archbishop O'Brien has indicated that he will be moving forward on his initiatives in his caretaker role, much as he would have moved forward in his archbishop role. The archdiocese has convened some of the laity of its parishes to consider alternatives for dealing with the shortage of priests. The discussed solutions include closing parishes, "twinning" parishes, and staffing parishes with parish life directors. Archbishop O'Brien made it clear that chosen solutions will not include women priests or married priests.

Many parishes fear that this process will lead to the closing of parishes which cannot sustain themselves. They fear a replay of the school closings. The Archdiocese wants lay input, but it wants realistic input. There are only so many priests, so not every parish can be fully staffed. The diocese can subsidize some parishes, but nowhere near the number of parishes which are unable to fully support themselves.

The Downtown Parishes

St. Vincent's has been meeting with four other parishes to take the initiative in determining our future direction. The Basilica, St. Alphonsus, Corpus Christi, and St. Ignatius are our partners. The group has already shared information about each parish's finances, mass attendance, mass schedule and staffing by priests and others. They have discussed points of similarity and points of difference.

The downtown parishes are meeting to develop plans which meet the needs of our parishes. We want to propose solutions to problems facing the Archdiocese rather than except solutions drawn up by others who are not very familiar with our parishes. St. Ignatius will continue to be staffed by Jesuits. Four priests are assigned to the other four parishes at this time. The group is planning for contingencies. What will be our response if the Archdiocese can only assign to these parishes:

- A. Three priests and one half time priest?
- B. Three priests?
- C. Two priests and one half time priest?
- D. Two priests?
- E. One priest and one half time priest?
- F. One priest?

How will we schedule masses if the same priest says masses in different parishes? How will we deal with funding problems? How will the parishes prevent the loss of some of the characteristics which make each parish unique?

Committees

St. Vincent's instituted a new committee structure two years ago. That new structure became operational this past year. The committees are:

- ❖ Liturgy
- ❖ Education and Enrichment
- ❖ Social Action
- ❖ Facilities
- ❖ Finance
- ❖ Communications and Outreach

The chair of each committee attends parish council meetings. Those meetings operate by consensus. Each committee assigns a person to keep the web site up to date for the activities of that committee.

Finance

There is good news and bad news. The good news is that we met our day to day expenses last year. The bad news is that we face several extraordinary expenses for items we have designated as priorities. The parish council is considering whether to meet those needs through triage, delay, fund raising or some combination of those options. The items in question are repairing the windows on the South side of the Church, installing a baptismal font and repairing the air conditioning. St. Vincent's has a long tradition of limiting requests for funds, particularly during the liturgy. No one wants to see that tradition change. No one wants to give up any of the listed projects either. The parish council invites all parishioners to weigh in on this discussion.

Long term, little has changed. A quote from last year's report remains true. Our financial future is not stable. For years our budgets have been helped by low pay to Father Lawrence. We have also been helped by staff members filling more than one role. As we move into a PLD model, the parish's expenses will grow. Much of our support now comes from relatively few people. To meet future needs our support will need to be both wider and deeper. If we can get that support we can maintain the St. Vincent's tradition of asking for money as little as possible. If not, we will have to cut positions or start asking for donations more often. Frankly, the only way we could cut positions would be if volunteers provided services now provided by paid staff.

Liturgy

A parish is many things, but word and sacrament are at the center of all we do. Our liturgies and related celebrations are strong points for this parish. This year we prepared for the introduction of the Roman Missal, third edition. I recommend reading the explanation provided in the liturgy section of the web site at stvchurch.org. Taizé services have not been well attended, but they have received high praise.

Education and Enrichment

Faith Fun and Fellowship was revamped. It now meets on Sundays after the 9:30 mass rather than its previous time on Saturday mornings. Early feedback is that most families prefer the new arrangement. Some in the parish are meeting in small groups to discuss *The Holy Longing* by Ronald Rolheiser. The book has influenced my thinking.

Social Action

I don't know all of the things this parish does in the area of social action. Some of the programs and activities are:

- ❖ Distributing clothes and toiletries through the men=s program
- ❖ Friday night meals in the undercroft
- ❖ Participating in anti-death penalty work
- ❖ BRIDGE
- ❖ Habitat for Humanity
- ❖ Alcoholics Anonymous
- ❖ Chopping vegetables at Our Daily Bread
- ❖ Beyond the Boundaries
- ❖ San Juan de Limay
- ❖ Working with our neighbors through the Jonestown Planning Council
- ❖ Helping Sts. James and John School
- ❖ The Resource Exchange

There was some fear that the committee structure might hinder some of these programs.

So far it looks like there were no adverse effects.

Facilities

Volunteers have given many hours cleaning the Church, the rectory and the grounds. In addition, parishioners have cleaned the park and roused its occupants on weekends throughout the year. Their efforts are much appreciated. Anyone interested in helping would be warmly welcomed. The addition of the baptismal font, the repair of the windows on the South wall and the air conditioning have been addressed earlier. There were additional repairs due to break-ins, mold, lightning and earthquake. Some alterations were and are needed for Chris McCullough's office.

Communications and Outreach

This is a new committee which has gotten off to a great start. The committee has given the bulletin a cleaner more readable format. They have redesigned and greatly improved the web site, trained editors for each mission sector, and distributed contact information. They have redesigned the process through which new parish members are registered and engaged.

Conclusion

St. Vincent's faces challenges from the air conditioning repair, to planning for a day when we do not have a full time priest, to dealing with the "greying" of our parish. We have responded with hope and with faith and with love. Chris McCullough has added a great deal to this parish. We look forward to a day when he can show us more fully his leadership skills. The coalition of the downtown parishes shows we can plan thoughtfully for our future rather than merely reacting to crises. We have made important advances in communications. We have done much. We have much to do.