



WORD



SACRAMENT



SERVICE

## August 2023

Dear Sisters and Brothers of St. Vincent de Paul parish family,  
Greetings and happy summer.

You haven't heard from me for a while because the Parish Council (PC) did not meet in July. We did meet for our regular meeting on August 8<sup>th</sup>.

This letter is a bit longer than usual. In addition to being a summary of what happened at Council, I have taken the liberty to share some information about how the Parish Council would hope to operate because of some questions that have come up.

I urge you to read the minutes on the website for more in-depth information about all of the proceedings of the meeting.

We had an interesting meeting where we began to explore some important topics for the Council's future proceedings and the Parish's planning for the future.

Here are some of the topics that were discussed at our August meeting.

1. CHAP (Commission for Historical and Architectural Preservation) provisionally approved our plan to replace the bell tower louvers with aluminum, pending final shop drawings. However, there is a 17-week lead on manufacturing the louvres.
2. To improve the participation and dialogue at PC meetings, the Council heard some good suggestions about ways to make it "good practice" for members to contribute to discussions, and how to ensure we know what agenda items are for decision or discernment. The agenda does already indicate that, but we can do better in the future.

One suggestion that really does involve the whole parish is that we move to the top of our agenda each month any concerns, questions, or ideas that we hear from the community. Most of the time no one has anything to report. So, I am indeed moving this to the top of the page. And it is important that you speak to anyone of us on Council if you want us to address any concerns, questions, or ideas. And be assured that your input is anonymous – your choice. Kate Volpe has put a box by the center doors of the church for anything you might want to share in writing.

3. The Council considered a proposal and presentation by Anne Maura English to be the facilitator of all Council meetings so that the running of the meeting be carried out by a non-Council member (an “outside objective” person), who can facilitate all voices being heard. Questions raised included: What then would be the role of the President? If the facilitator was someone from the parish and from a committee, how could that person be “objective”? How would we benefit from Anne Maura’s own views and opinions if she only facilitated and didn’t have a voice on the issues?

This agenda item was not for decision. It will be taken up at the September meeting. I encourage you to read the minutes to get more of a flavor of the discussion and Anne Maura’s thoughts. Please speak with any Council Representatives if you are interested in learning more about this.

4. As you know, Council has been working through the various ways we might move forward with the development of what we have been calling a “strategic plan” to get us to our Vision and Mission over the next 5-7 years. The need for what I would call a “road map” to our future was decided, as you might recall, at the PC retreat in March.

Yes, I know, this is August, and we haven’t moved very far on this. Please be patient and bear in mind that as a small community many of us are doing many things, wearing many hats, and other Parish priorities, the liturgical calendar, elections, and summer can slow us down. Having said that, we have been considering several ways of moving forward that would be right for this community at this time. We also have been trying to bring new PC members up to speed on both the history of “strategic planning” at St. V’s and why and how we arrived at the decisions that have been made.

We expect to have a longer meeting in September at which I am confident that we will move this agenda item along. Your prayers for the Spirit to guide us would be great!! And again, please discuss with any of us on the Council.

5. Finally, one question that came up and has come up before is about the role and participation of committees on the Parish Council. According to our Council Constitution, the chairs of the [standing] committees – Finance, Liturgy, Facilities, Social Action, and Education – are members of the Council, with full voice in deliberations. They are to send their Chair or designated representative to each meeting of the Council to render a report on the work of the committee.

The PC working group that is revising/updating the Constitution and creating bylaws will soon be giving its report and recommendations to Council that may or may not change, clarify, or enhance these provisions. In the meantime, guided by our Constitution, the Parish Council has put into place some operating procedures. We feel these are in the best interest of the community, the workings of the Parish, and the Council:

- Committee representation and participation is twofold:
  - Via the PC deliberations and decisions, committee work is reported to and affirmed by the wider community; and
  - Committee representatives bring back to their respective committees the wider concerns, interests, decisions of the community, as discussed and decided by Council for attention and action in the committees.
  
- Committees report to Council their work by report, and also as an agenda item if there are any proposed activities that might require Council consideration or approval. These might include external action being done in the name of St. Vincent's, for example an advocacy letter, or fundraising that requires fiduciary responsibility. Another example would be a liturgical theme for the year that would benefit from all other committees being on board.
  - **Why:**
    - We have greater impact if we are all rowing together for the same purposes.
    - Legal and reputational risk consequences for the Parish.
  
- Elected representatives ought not to also represent Committees at PC meetings.
  - **Why:**
    - We want more and diverse voices around the table.
    - Elected representatives serve the parish at-large: representing the particular interests of a given committee could be a conflict.
  
- Ideally, the committee representative to Council should be the same person every month.
  - **Why:**
    - Continuity of relationships and discussion and discernment are very important for making good decisions. If a different person attends every month, time should be spent bringing each new person up to speed on what transpired previously. That doesn't happen and is not practical anyway.

I am sorry that this is a long letter and I hope that at least some of you will find this helpful.

Please trust that we strive very hard on Council to be constantly open to the Spirit and what God is calling us to do. Often that comes from your wisdom so please let me and all of us know what you are thinking and needing.

Blessings and peace,

**Geri Sicola**

Parish Council President