

**Parish Council Meeting Minutes**  
**September 5, 2023**

**In Attendance:** Anne Freeburger, Mary Hennigan, Lindsay Dierkes, Geri Sicola, Catherine Mundy, Ray Heil, Mark Palmer, Colleen McCahill, Graham Yearley, Denny McMullin, John Gontrum, Jill Huppert, Denny McMullin, Rita McMullin (representing the E&E committee), Kevin O'Reilly, Jim Casey, Kate Volpe, Maureen Daly, Kevin Daly, Fr. Ray

Absent: Anne Maura English, Aidan Helie

Meeting began with prayer from Fr. Ray.

August minutes were approved.

Geri prepped us with a quick review of the agenda for tonight, with the addition of a Finance report.

**Pastor and Pastoral Associate**

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**Fr. Ray:** We received notification that we are up for our next Archdiocesan audit (done by an outside firm) focusing on internal issues, including financial and procedural issues; preliminary surveys have been sent to us. Audit will take place on November 6 and 7, with a subsequent meeting regarding any actionable items that need to be addressed. This is a routine audit that happens usually every 2-3 years.

The Archdiocese is discerning how to respond to the new law regarding victims of child sexual abuse. They are considering bankruptcy—but not to liquidate the diocese. More information is to come about the nature of their Chapter 11 choice and why they may respond to the anticipated lawsuits to come this way as well as how this impacts those people who were affected by the abuse and the implications for each of the parish communities. **More information is to come and this should be added as an agenda item to keep all of us updated.**

We have incorporators, and we are in the process of working with them to utilize them more to make sure that the parish is being responsible and held accountable to all state requirements for a corporation.

**Proposal for Facilitator**

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Anne Maura has since withdrawn her offer to serve as a potential facilitator. Geri opened the proposal up to further exploration. Catherine shared that she still saw the conflict as facilitator vs. president being reason for NOT having a facilitator. The matter was considered closed.

## **Parishioner Feedback**

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Maureen Daly requested naloxone/Narcan training and CPR training. She would also like to do an outreach to the younger generation (those that have grown up and gone away) and learn more about why those whom we have “raised” have not returned. Mary H. shares that a pool of information on that exact group is available due to the synodal/vision processes. Maureen would like a one-on-one approach with them as well as the younger generation that currently attends to discuss their leadership in the parish.

She added that she would additionally like to approach those who have left since Covid, the sexual abuse scandal, etc. Mary H. shared again that there were focus groups with those people (surveys, etc) to explore as well as Maureen’s one-on-one desired approach.

Fr. Ray noted that her suggestions may be part of the Strategic Plan process.

Kate V. shared the request of two parishioners—the QR code and coffee klatch.

Mary H. shares that she and others note the sound of the music online is awful. Perhaps part of the SP could be improving the sound system. Jill H. reassures us that our stream is of higher quality than most; Catherine M. did offer St. Ignatius as a comparison as their sound system is higher quality. Geri S. added that the diversity of music continues to be an issue for members of the congregation as well as their reluctance to join the choir. Maureen asked if the Liturgy Committee chooses the music; members responded that Sherry needs a better relationship with the committee but is unable to attend their meetings.

John G. expressed concern about what we do with these comments: what are the next steps and how do these issues get resolved? Geri responded that for this specific issue, Colleen and Ray will need to personally discuss with Sherry as she does not report to council; she is a staff member. Also, Colleen and Ray are looking at reinstating the “number board” as suggested at a previous meeting.

One member requested volunteer opportunities for our tweens and teens. (See the green team proposal below).

## **Finance Committee**

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Mark shared the financial statements for June 30th (12 months) as well as the Archdiocesan doc about investment options.

Regarding the financial statement: The parish is in very solid financial condition. A deficit of \$50,000 had been anticipated for special projects that were undertaken (lighting, primarily) and so there is a \$160,000 surplus for the fiscal year than what the budget anticipated—the largest portion coming from a quarter of a million bequest (this was the final disbursement of the bequest). Also, one the regular major expected yearly gifts of \$270,000 did not actually come yet. It was merely a timing question—this disbursement comes from a foundation that works on a calendar year— and will come in the next fiscal year (perhaps even 2 portions). No gift was given this fiscal year; the timing is out of our control.

We spent zero dollars on special projects (those that required Archdiocesan approval were put on a temporary halt as “Seek the City” announced a 2 year moratorium on all capital projects).

Mark added that the ArchBalt gives to the parish a “rebate”/Annual Appeal for Catholic Ministries. We had budgeted around \$40,000 for that but received closer to \$67,000. Council formerly designated this rebate to education projects

Regarding the balance sheet: we are in excess of 1.3 million, and the IPLF where excess cash is invested has a current rate of return at 3.5%. Council is considering whether some of those funds might be invested elsewhere to a greater benefit to the parish.

Regarding the investment options: The ArchBalt allows the parish to invest with any additional resources. The Finance committee has had lengthy conversations about making further investments or more sophisticated investments other than the IPLF. Option A represents a mutual fund. At previous meetings, Council deferred this question due to concerns about the Congressional decisions about the country’s debt limit but the committee is now ready to move ahead. About \$300,000 will be used to begin the investment, spread over a few months. Of the choices available, two options are “socially responsible” and two are not (i.e., screening for Catholic-values). The Finance committee has landed on the preference for Christian Brothers—they apply Catholic values in a balanced way. The PNC balanced fund (the other socially responsible choice) is operated by PNC bank and translates the bishops’ guidelines. Christian Brothers is more nuanced and whole, and so it is the recommendation of the Finance committee. Kevin D. spoke with reps from each of these firms and offered to answer any questions anyone has. John G. asked about the upcoming special projects that WILL be occurring, and have we accounted for that in the next fiscal year. Mark assures that the \$300,000 is a cautious amount, and these are investments that can be withdrawn if needed. When opened to council, council voted to allow the committee to invest in their choice.

### **Other Committee Highlights**

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Ray H. for the Green Team: They would like to pursue a program of gradually incorporating indigenous plantings onto our property along with an educational program to restore God’s creation here as part of the national movement—HomeGrown National Park—to support indigenous insects, pollinators, etc. They ask for \$500 to begin. Geri suggested they create a proposal to solidify the initiative. John G. suggested we approve the \$500 so that they can begin planting during actual planting season; this was seconded. Fr. Ray shared that the spotted lanternflies are on the property. It was noted that this initiative would be a terrific service opportunity for our teens and tweens.

Rita reminded us that Dinner for 8 is restarting.

Jim C. shared that the Constitution subcommittee has almost finished revising the constitution and should be able to present at the next meeting. Also, the Committee on Church Reform sent out a letter. This new information prompted Geri to share that such actions taken by committees should be presented to the council first because of possible liabilities. Geri will put this on the

agenda for the next meeting. John G. suggested that the executive committee (part of the new bylaws) could make these kinds of decisions that require prompt action rather than waiting for the whole group to gather. Maureen shared that the Peace & Justice committee send letters without permission and that they do not want to ask for that permission. Geri reshared that this will be on the next agenda.

### **Route to Our Vision and Mission**

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Why do we need a strategic plan or “road map” to reach our Vision?

Fr. Ray: We come from different generations and to continue to meet the needs of people.

Mary H.: For stewardship purposes. A strategic plan honors the resources with which we’ve been gifted.

Lindsay: We are at a changing point, and we need to put into action what people have shared needs changing.

Catherine M.: We’ve created a vision statement, but we need a plan on how to take it forward.

Kevin O’: We should be gentle on ourselves. A lot is going well here, even with dramatic changes that have happened. Lots of things are going right.

Geri S.: This is not for problems. It provides vision and direction. It sets overall goals and a plan to achieve them.

Catherine M. queried if we are keeping a narrow focus on just the parish and moving it forward, or keeping it in place of the greater church. Jill H. said it’s both. John G. suggested the true question is why the SP is important *now* as a reminder of what motivates us. Fr. Ray added that the young people dropping out of the Church does create a sense of urgency—with what issues are they grappling that acts as a call to us? Geri added that we need to be solid in our foundation in preparation for what the Seek the City initiative may create. Maureen added that she hopes our priorities are to lead the church.

Our synodal process has created four calls. Geri asked if these remain our calls—that they guide our direction and guide in a spirit-led framework. Colleen added that we also have our Finding Our Why and Vision Statements. As a parish we have produced much material; Geri confirmed that this data/information will be part of the process. Lindsay said these seem to not be concerned with our little church and are more about our relationship with the Archdiocese and the global church. Fr. Ray said that the seminal docs we’ve created should inform and guide the process. Others concurred.

The rest of the meeting was concerned with the following items (discussion has been edited for time and clarity):

#### *Decisions we have already made:*

Geri suggested we don’t re-litigate unless new information is provided.

#### *Decisions to be made tonight:*

Scope of plan checklist

Make a final decision on an external consultant, PM, and/or working group

Timeline

Implementation oversight team  
Budget

Colleen shared that GLP did provide a 3 part proposal which included the 3rd part of a SP and there is a dollar amount attached to that for estimator consideration.

Mary H. shared her research on what other parishes have done with SP.

Geri then went into the checklist for a scope of plan, some of which we have done (or what it should include).

4-7 Questions/Domains/Themes/*Focus* Areas to be Addressed of the Current Reality

Make sure we have achievable goals

Plan for the next five years, but as a living plan, it should include feedback and adjustment. (In 5 years, we won't have to plan afresh.)

What it should be:

It needs to be user friendly.

It needs to be for the whole parish.

Fr. Ray: The *Plan and Process* should continually inspire and motivate the community (heart);

Jill adds it should have annual reporting (head).

Establish guiding principles of this entire process

Scan the current reality:

AD is putting together a dashboard of demographics which will be useful.

Mary H. clarifies it should be an internal and external reality.

We can take out per household giving.

What do we need to do this:

Consultant or PM?

Working Group or no?

Council has decided on an external consultant to facilitate us in drafting the plan, with an internal PM to act as liaison during the process, and then the working group (a small collection of parishioners chosen by PM and approved by Council) to enact tasks/processes that come forthwith. We remain flexible during the process to allow for communications with the full council or for the need of more/further working groups. The finished plan will come to council for approval. Some concern over how frequently council needs to be involved/reported to remains in discussion. Colleen and Mary H. will craft the scope of work for both project manager and the consultant. The draft will be presented to Geri, Ray, and John G. for approval before the next committee meeting.