

Parish Council Meeting Minutes
January 9, 2024
Meeting via Zoom only

In Attendance: Lindsay Dierkes, Denny McMullin, Rita McMullin, John Gontrum, Leah Mank, Geri Sicola, Mary Hennigan, Mark Palmer, Jill Huppert, Catherine Mundy, Kate Volpe, Jeri Delambo, Kevin O'Reilly, Fr. Ray Chase, Jim Casey, Colleen McCahill (as of today a grandmother!), Graham Yearley, Peggy Meyer

Absent: Anne Freeburger, Ray Heil

Meeting began with prayer from Rita McMillan.

December minutes were approved.

Parishioner Feedback

None at this time

Pastor and Pastoral Associate

Fr. Ray: Regarding the AoB's Chapter 11 webinar session, the AoB mentioned we would be moving into a time of healing and reconciliation. The court has determined May 31st as the time for proof of claim (anyone seeking restitution must submit by then). As already shared at the last meeting, we have parish-wide responsibilities of due notice; that procedural information will be sent to us soon. Resources continue to be shared via the AoB website, etc. The total sum for the two lawyers is \$275,000; our assessment for the retainer is \$2500, to be paid all at once by the end of January or in two separate payments. Other council members attended the webinar and shared some key takeaways: Jim C. added that three different committees will participate in the negotiations and Jeri D. added that a trust fund will be set up for the victims. At present, there is a "stay" regarding lawsuits against individual parishes. What is expected to happen is that any lawsuits against parishes will be "channeled" into the Chapter 11 proceeding with the Archdiocese. Once compensation is paid out, an injunction against past lawsuits for past abuse would be placed; moreover, the expected outcome is that once parishes pay into this fund, individual parishes will be safeguarded from lawsuits. By law, restricted funds may not be used for the settlement; this has eased concerns about protecting the social services which the church currently provides. Fr. Ray said the majority of the money for the fund will come from the insurance company: approximately 45% will come from AoB "sole" and the remaining required amount will be assessed to the parishes. If new cases of abuse arise after May 31, those will be dealt with separately from Chapter 11.

Regarding updates about the gentleman who recently damaged the back of the church: the peace order has not yet been served. An arrest warrant was issued prior to the trial, but the man did not appear for the trial. A bench warrant is now in place. Andy Flood met with Fr. Ray and Colleen and put a focus on electronic protocols—lighting, cameras, etc. Mr. Flood will be

making a visit to the parish to assess doors, etc. Other issues need to be discussed with Tony, our facilities chair.

The Seek the City process will be completed by the end of June.

Colleen: Regarding the recent audit: AoB representatives, including Jason Geisinger (Director, Internal audit of the AoB) visited and shared what the auditors found that was less than perfect—some was missing material and others were issues of which we were already aware. (She reminded the council that the AoB hires an independent auditing firm.) The final report will be produced, to which the parish will respond, and then a copy will be sent to Council (probably in the next two months). Mark P. recommended that the final suggestions and responses be reviewed with the Finance Committee before going before Council; Council President suggested the Council should see suggestions *before* it goes before a separate committee. Several members disagreed due to task-heavy agendas and committee-specific ability. Colleen added that quick action will be necessary as only 30 days are given in which to respond. **Council decided that Finance will view suggestions, and then it will be shared at the following Council meeting.**

Committees

E&E: Rita shares that they have not met recently. She thinks the “interviews” with committees (as an educational and community-building tool) is supposed to continue, but she is unclear about why the committee has not met and furthered this agenda.

Social Action: The security guard on Friday nights has been informed about the impending peace order, etc. and everything seems good on that front. See appendix for individual committee notes.

Facilities: They will be meeting on the 18th at the rectory dining hall at 6pm to discuss security.

Other: Geri proposed that we need an agenda item for council about how we engage with the community about committees. Mary H. commented that the presentations done by E&E are good, but that we need a bigger discussion about informing newcomers and visitors. Lindsay reminded that the new constitution calls for a Parish Engagement committee which could take on the details of this. **Lindsay moved to discuss with a smaller group before presenting to Council for discussion; this was seconded. Geri added that we need to do more due diligence on projects committees are taking on in the name of the parish on a long-term basis.**

Seek the City

Over 130 people were present for the recent workshop, and according to attendees, it was a real working session allowing participants to propose what a.) services/ministries the Church needs to provide b.) to map where those should be provided and c.) where worship should happen.

Geri asked for reflections from those several council members who were there. Peggy M. shared mixed emotions from her table; some were positive but some thought the AoB had

already decided what churches would close and that the activity was a waste of time. It was also an information overload with so many maps to consult, and it was difficult to make choices. Mary H. shared that in listening to other parishes, she determined we are more alike than different. However, the presenters were trying to get attendees to work with data that was unclear and to make decisions about where things should go, instead of capturing what are the needs that can bring churches together. She was impressed with how alike St. V.'s is to other parishes and how it would be good to get to know them better.

Kevin took away the sharper statistics from the meeting—that there are only about 5000 Catholics in 50-60 churches. He felt that the AoB was trying to get our buy-in rather than our part in the process.

Geri S. felt that Bishop Bruce and Geri Byrd really believe that we are making this decision together. Whether that's true of the entire Archdiocese is a question. She agreed the process was flawed and unrealistic unless given more time. There was not enough time for in-depth analysis and this perhaps made it disingenuous. This leads to the conclusion that they already know because it is impossible that they could figure it out from what participants did during that session. Mary H. added that they didn't address the flight out of the city and whether those people are attending Catholic churches. Also, the analysis was about today's data but, without containing any future projections, was supposedly to be used for the future. Fr. Ray was also concerned about their looking at the present church rather than where things seem to be going. He had a conversation with G. Bryd about that, and she responded that they are drawing some of those projections in, but he does not know how far ahead, etc. Catherine M. wondered if they have help with any of those future plans; Geri answered that yes, they have outside consultants. Jill H. asked if the number of Catholics cited taking into consideration the migration of Catholics across city lines. Colleen shared that the AoB website has all the numbers, including Jill's question about Catholics living in the city, etc. She added that Ayers Saint Gross, a local design firm, is the outside consultant, and this process of looking at maps and deciding where things are is a pattern they have had at several meetings throughout this process.

Constitution

Discussion began around whether comments that were made after the "deadline" should be included.

Issue 1: Decision-making through consensus

This issue is controversial as it can be a challenge to keep working toward consensus as opposed to the quicker action of voting; consensus does not allow for an "out". Denny Mc. asked for the pros/cons of both. Jim C. shared that consensus has the advantage of not being a political system; we don't want caucuses, etc. We all need to work together and be willing to give unless our conscience says otherwise. At other times, you may not agree, but you can step back. This has been the process and it has worked well until now. The con is that it takes time and sometimes a decision needs to be made more quickly. The other argument is that if no consensus can be reached and trust is broken, council must seek external mediation—this is currently not explained in the constitution but should be in the by-laws. Voting elicits "winners and losers" which is something consensus deeply wishes to avoid. Geri argued that even in consensus decision-making there are people with louder voices, and that voting may be the only

way that others have of participating/making their voices heard. Also, in consensus there is a way to come to compromise; she asked that we find a space to accommodate the ways in which people are comfortable. She mentioned that the old constitution had both pieces. Ray shared a hope that we would get beyond any issue of winning and losing. He added that there is probably a process of consensus of which we should be aware and that we need to have a diversity of voices and honor those who have different opinions. When consensus becomes difficult, the council should rely on turning to God and asking for help to move forward. Colleen added that consensus isn't a matter of convincing; it is about valuing diversity of community as Ray said; the last thing you want in this process is for someone's opinion to be changed. Consensus is not unanimity, and that is one of its values. She clarified that the current constitution says the most critical issues would be by consensus, not voting. She suggested that we make some issues more important than they need to be in order to reach consensus. John G. mentioned his trouble with remembering these constitutional issues month-by-month. For example, he assumed that the new constitution states that officers come from the council—not a general parish election. He requested we take a specially-called meeting to review one particular issue rather than revisiting it month after month among a full agenda. Geri S. agreed that we can do that with the big issues. She also drew attention to the fact that the same voices share opinions; Jim C. said one way to address this is for everyone to share their opinion before we discuss. Kevin O'R. suggested that if we have a history that demonstrates our process works, why change it? Mary H. made the motion that we spend a Saturday and look at the constitution. Jill H. agreed with a special session, and that we go section by section, only moving on when consensus has been reached.

Other Issues:

Geri S. has heard several comments regarding safety and security. Brainstorming solutions are needed and Fr. Ray's consultation with Mr. Flood seems not to have been as comprehensive as needed. She considers that changes in our physical environment have perhaps contributed to security issues. Lindsay asked for clarity about what those might be to which Geri responded: increased number of people bringing things; Fr. Ray himself is cleaning streets; during Mass in the parking lot there have been boom boxes and sales; materials and food are strewn about—all to create an environment that doesn't convey respect for the sacred space. Mark P. agreed and said that we've become a "hub" and within the last decade these sorts of things have become the norm for our location. Geri agreed that it opens an environment for activity and behavior unconducive to the space. Mary H. concurred and added that the parking lot is a legality, and any distribution on the sidewalks require permits. She suggested we begin with asking what our liabilities are and how we work with them to avoid legal headaches. Fr. Ray shared that before Covid we did try to address donors and we did have someone willing to assist, but there are so many groups; some are unwilling to listen and some are responsive, but addressing all the individuals who come has been a problem. Jeri D. asked whether we have security cameras on the parking lot, which was affirmed. Geri S. noted that we need to continue to welcome the homeless and be welcoming to others, but we also need to feel safe and secure at the same time. Colleen shared that several ad hoc groups of parishioners over the years have dealt with "park-based" challenges but there is nothing current to tackle this issue. She added that enforcing and engaging is a real challenge, and she noted that the issues of trash and

overabundance of outside donors have been much worse in some years. She also clarified Mary's point that you can serve food and clothing without a permit, but you cannot block the sidewalk. Colleen added that engagement with the homeless is separate from engagement with donor groups, and that consistency in any area is very helpful. Mary H. volunteered to create a plan on how to examine this situation—Fr. Ray and Jill H. both offered to join the group. Fr. Ray shared areas of focus which will be reviewed next month. Denny shared that Joe Y. would be a good resource as he did a lot of this work before with Mike Kelly.

Meeting closed with the "Our Father".

APPENDIX

Green Team Minutes 12/5

Welcome
Land Acknowledgment
Opening Prayer

Recap of recent events at the parish

- Restoring Creation with Ray Heil - native plants were planted in October.
- October 1 we did the Climate Mass, it went pretty well
 - We need to keep the kids involved!
- St. Vincent Craft Fair - Green Team had a table for the first time. The dryer balls were a big hit. Starter plants, twig Christmas tree ornaments, and flyers as well.
 - We need more creative ideas, and more dryer balls, for next year :

We expressed that it is a challenge when parishes do not talk about environmental issues/what the pope is saying.

Legislative updates:

- Advice for contacting reps about issues/legislation: email is preferred method. If you have others who agree and would like to express the same comment, cc them in the email and put their names & addresses in the body of the email. This makes it easier on the staffers as well as on us.
- mgaleg.maryland.gov now has a tab now for racial equity impact of bills
- Bethany forwarded emails from Bob Simon of Maryland Catholics for our Common Home regarding environmental advocacy for the new legislative session. Please see those emails for save the dates and other info.

Recap of other events attended by members:

- Sep. 11-15 - there was a week-long environmental justice seminar. Peggy attended 3 sessions. www.epa.gov/environmentaljustice
- Sep. 12 - Poor People's Campaign event. Poverty kills 800 people/day. 49 Republicans & 2 Democrats voted no to raise minimum wage to \$15/hr.
 - Robin Morris-Collin, keynote speaker, POC are now the majority in the U.S., but many don't vote. People in power use racism to create fear, make money, and maintain power. We need to educate ourselves to build the future we want.
 - People from different states named problems they face and how they are solving them

- Justice 40 Initiative from the Biden administration - 40% of certain federal funding streams is earmarked for disadvantaged communities.
- Sep. 14 - Dr. Sara Via lecture on native plants & insects. The World in Data is a good site; unknown species contribute to stable ecosystems; many things we use are from natural resources, such as penicillin and aspirin.
 - Indigenous people think of humans as part of nature, no one species higher than the other, interbeing; whereas western culture thinks of humans as at the top & outside of nature.
- Oct. 3 - Beyond Plastics put on an event called Endocrine Disruptors in Plastics: State Policy Options. Speakers were from Endocrine Society, which is 70% practicing physicians and 30% green scientists. PVC toxicity is causing disease. Petition to ban PVC was in St. V e-newsletter.
- Oct. 30 - BOEM public comment meeting for offshore wind in Maryland. Peggy sent in written comments beforehand, and Bethany and Katie spoke in support of the project.

SOCIAL ACTION COMMITTEE (SAC) REPORT FOR PARISHIONERS

The SAC committee works 52 weeks of the year with many volunteers to keep our service ministries alive. After worshipping together, hearing the WORD and receiving SACRAMENT, we next receive strength from each other for SERVICE. Please consider sharing your talents and joining a ministry! There is a task for everyone.

Afghan Family: Faithful volunteers help the family of six towards self-sufficiency, especially English competency. Two teenage boys are in high school, the five year old is in pre-K and the two year old is verbal. The parents are in ESL classes. Communication has been difficult. Volunteers take them to doctors' appointments, shopping and on outings. The family fears for their two eldest children still in Afghanistan and under Taliban control. Please pray for them!

Breaking Bread with the Hungry: We have partnered with Our Lady of the Fields parish in Millersville for over 20 years as they provide hot meals that we serve to about 130 hungry people each Friday. If you have read "Deacon's Doodles" in the e-news, you know it is not just food but love and care we give, that they don't usually receive on the streets. Just calling people by name when you see them around church gives comfort. We begin setting up at 3:30 pm, serve from 5 - 6 pm and close up about 7 pm. If you work and can't get here until 6 pm, don't worry you can collapse tables and mop floors!

City Springs Classroom Assistants: Parishioners volunteer at City Springs Elementary and Middle School assisting the teachers with Reading and Math. The school serves predominantly students in public housing. We all value education and appreciate the needs in underfunded city schools and our mentoring builds relationships. You may work out a schedule with your teacher. Others donate truck loads of books to the school library and mittens, hats and scarves through the "mitten tree".

Food Program: With your donations to Emergency Services, we provide grocery bags of food for healthy meals to those in need, on Mondays. Volunteers shop and pack grocery bags and get to know those they serve because each recipient may obtain food twice a month. The program also provides over 200 Christmas baskets filled with a turkey and all the trimmings to our regular guests, families in the Family Recovery Program, City Springs School families and those in public housing for elderly and persons with disabilities.

Green Team: We foster pro-environmental actions to support sustainable practices and partner with other non-profits to promote environmental restoration. We educate ourselves and the parish through videos, discussions, climate masses and legislative advocacy. We lead tree plantings, recommend tips for effective recycling, distribute reusable bags, promote community solar and secure commitments for reducing our carbon footprints. We replaced grass with native plants, beginning St. V's creation restoration. We follow Pope Francis' call to restore creation, one action at a time.

Men's Clothing Program: Donations to Emergency Services also fund this program. We provide clothing, toiletries, fruit and snacks to about 30 men on the 2nd and 4th Tuesdays each month. Getting to know the men is a bonus. Donated items are inspected and sized and shoppers supplement with purchased items. Cold weather increases the need for warm jackets, hats, gloves, shoes and long underwear. Toiletry bags supply good hygiene items for greater comfort.

Peace & Justice Committee: For 40 years we have worked on local, national and international justice issues. We call/write City Council members, State and Federal legislators to influence public policy and legislation. Praying during Peace Walks, standing on corners with Black Lives Matter signs, participating with Beyond the Boundaries, BRIDGE (Baltimore Regional Initiative Developing Genuine Equality), SURJ (Showing Up for Racial Justice), Maryland Catholic Labor Network and Pax Christi, all keep us busy. We collaborate on transit, affordable housing, immigration, death penalty and LGBTQ+ issues. We previously supported those now suffering in Limay, Nicaragua and hope to continue relationships with our friends there. We work to keep our parish informed and prepared to be social justice and peace activists.

Racial Equity Group (We Have a Dream: A World Without Racism): We began to gather monthly in 2020 to study our church and country's history, and our own biases, all of which have supported racial inequity through systemic and structural racism. (Our yellow fact sheet on what we learned the first two years is in the gathering space.) We discussed books and webinars and our guest speakers enlightened us on topics like Baltimore's Black Butterfly, White Supremacy and American Christianity, Maryland lynchings and Christian Nationalism. Realizing that black neighborhoods matter and have been underserved, we partner with South Baltimore Community Land Trust (SBCLT) as they work for permanent affordable housing. They are amazing.

The Resource Exchange: Since 2011 TRE has provided furniture and home goods to people moving into stable housing, many with nothing. We partner with Health Care for the Homeless who supplies the list of their clients in need and who continues to provide social service agency support. We have storage units to hold gently-used donated furniture picked up by teams or purchased at discount stores. We store home goods at the rectory, both donated and purchased. Volunteers shop, pick-up, pack and deliver everything needed to make a "home" for two clients each week, serving over 1300 households since we began. We are funded by individual donors and charitable organizations.

As you can see the need is great, but many hands can make light work. If you see a ministry that entices you please let the Social Action Committee know by emailing pa.meyer@comcast.net. We would love you to join us! To donate to any ministry just make the check payable to St. Vincent de Paul Church and put the name of the ministry on the memo line. Thank you to all our faithful servants!