

**St. Vincent de Paul Church, Baltimore**  
**Parish Council Minutes**  
**January 14, 2025**

Attendees: Pat Ball, Corinne Agren-Barnes, Barbara Bowles, Mary Catherine Bunting, Jim Casey, Fr. Ray Chase, Gerry Fialkowski, Mary Forrester, Ray Heil, Mary Hennigan, Colleen McCahill, Dan McCarthy, Catherine Mundy, Mark Palmer, Connie Phelps, Bob Reuter, Audrey Rogers, Geraldine Sicola

**The meeting was called to order at 6:02 pm**

Barbara Bowles offered a reflection to begin the meeting. The first poem reading was about setting goals and how the unexpected can influence the direction a goal will take. The second poem reading spoke of God's call and guidance as we go through our lives. The reflection ended with a prayer to the Holy Spirit to enkindle in us the fire of love and creation.

The minutes for the December 10, 2024, meeting were approved.

The agenda for this evening's meeting was approved.

**Parishioner Feedback**

The parish council suggestion box had an anonymous notecard that offered an idea to have more concerts and events to draw more people to St. V's.

**Parish Report from Colleen and Fr. Ray**

Per Fr. Ray there is nothing pressing. The communications person they were expecting to hire took another job but did not let St. V's know. Subsequently, the second-choice person was offered the position, he accepted, and is hired. This position is part-time, 12 – 15 hours per week. He is in the process of completing the new hire requirements: finger printing, Virtus training, paperwork, etc. His tentative start date is 1/27/2025.

A new St. V's website will launch in concurrence with the new Communications person. Bob R. asked if the new website will be fully accessible for all users. Colleen said the new site will be accessible just as the current site is.

Colleen applied to have St. V's approved as an agency site for a Jesuit volunteer during the next volunteer year. This application has been approved by the Jesuit Volunteer program. Time will tell if someone applies to be a volunteer here.

The position for cantor has been advertised for a couple of months on the AOB job website, Facebook, and Indeed. No nibbles from any applicants. Informal networking has not turned up any nibbles either.

**Liturgy Committee**

Pat Ball reported that they will be meeting next week. They will review the recent past activities, plan for Lent, and discuss the inclusivity questions from Ted Miles.

## **Social Action Committee**

### **TRE (The Resource Exchange)**

Ray Heil reported that after many years of service Joe and Peggy Cronyn are stepping down from leading the TRE program. Peggy Meyer will be Peggy Cronyn's replacement for arranging the moves. There is not yet a replacement for Joe Cronyn for furniture pick-ups. TRE has aging volunteers doing furniture hauling. They are looking for some solutions to have some younger people do this. Some discussion of possible solutions ensued. Some ideas: Write up a job description and blitz it to the parish; pickup furniture donations on the weekends when younger people may be more readily available; look outside of the parish to our partner, Health Care for the Homeless; ask the Catholic Review to do an article on TRE and its history including Peggy Cronyn; and to broaden our outreach ask for volunteers in the Catholic Review's weekly newsletter. Over the next three weeks Ray Heil will approach the Catholic Review for these two items.

## **Finance Committee**

Mark Palmer reported that no meetings have occurred since the last Parish Council meeting. They will meet again in the next month or two. They will decide whether to invest more funds in the Christian Brothers Investment Fund.

## **Church Reform Committee**

Jim Casey had nothing new to report. Their next meeting will be Monday, January 20, 2025.

## **Education and Enrichment Committee**

Barbara Bowles reported that they will be meeting via Zoom on January 21, 2025, at 7:30 pm. They will be planning a Lenten Discussion and sharing of the book Fr. Ray has been distributing, Fear and Faith. Also discussing a possible half-day Lenten retreat. They will be resuming the Wait, Wait DO Tell Me sessions with the Choir as our first "sponsor." The spring retreat dates are May 30 -June 1, 2025 at Priestfield Retreat Center in WV about two hours from Baltimore. The facility has a reliable internet connection but is more expensive than Camp Nawakwa of previous years. They will begin answering the inclusivity questions from Ted Miles.

## **Facilities Committee**

Bob Reuter reported there had been no meeting since the last parish council meeting. The loop for direct transmission of the services was broken during the Christmas decorating. Colleen said it has been repaired but Bob thought there was still a problem this past Sunday. Colleen will doublecheck that it is working.

The outside ramp railing near the top is broken again. People like to stand and sit on it. This is the eighth or ninth time it has broken. The previous repairs that they thought would be a permanent fix were not. They are investigating a permanent fix.

Bob has stickers for highlighting the cutouts for handicapped access. The question is the positioning of the stickers. Colleen and Bob will determine if floor or back of pew placement appears more effective.

## **Seek the City Internal Task Force**

Corinne Agren-Barnes reported that they met on January 7, 2025. They revised the questions on inclusivity. These were sent via email to committees, ministries, and groups for their answers and input.

The information from these questions will be sent to Ted by February 28, 2025. The task force will read the answers then determine implementation of the next steps forward.

The members of the task force are Kate Volpe, Chinasa Ekweariri, Fr. Ray Chase, Colleen McCahill, Kevin O'Reilly, John Gontrum, Corinne Agren-Barnes, and Ted Miles.

Their next meeting will be February 4, 2025. They will review their scope of work. They are thinking of interviewing former parishioners to ascertain their reasons for leaving and their perceptions of St. V's. There was much discussion on pursuing this line of investigation.

### **Seek the City Interparish Task Force**

It has taken some time for the members of each parish to get to know each other and to form a working relationship. There are five members from St. Leo's and five from St. V's. The process has been a learning experience for all. They have been planning for the January 26<sup>th</sup> Day of Discovery which is one event in the Discovery Phase. It is a time to discover each parish's values but not discussing the future. As we progress through the different phases of Appreciative Inquiry everyone is being asked to dream big and bold. Communications with the two parishes are being written jointly. Training for the small group facilitators will take place on Thursday, January 16. Parishioners will be given questions for consideration ahead of time so there will be time for thoughtful answers. The idea was presented that some people may need transportation to St. Mary's Seminary on the 26<sup>th</sup>. Colleen will investigate if this is needed. As of the afternoon of today's meeting the number of signups is 118 St V's parishioners and 63 St. Leo's parishioners. Not included in the 118 and 63 signups is an additional count of 18 children.

### **Growth and Retention: Prioritizing and Coordinating Ideas, Actions, Activities**

Mary Hennigan started the discussions with the idea of coming up with a definition of priority. One idea is that the church be accessible fully to people of all abilities. In these uncertain times we need to grow the number of people in the parish. To be welcoming we need to know what people's needs within our geographical boundaries are. One observation is that over time we as a parish have gone from a producer mentality to a consumer mentality. We need to have more people to become more engaged. What will it take to be able to keep our parish? What do the AOB criteria demand? This has been unclear and uncertain. We need to define who we want to come to our community. What are we willing to accept? Absent from our congregation are teenagers and young people. A multi-age parish is preferable and possible. First things first: find out what we need to do to remain open. Live who we say we are. Stay alive and thrive. Emphasize our commitment to share the Gospel of Jesus. With spirituality comes social justice. We need benchmarks, specific goals from AOB for failure or success. Interparish task force is the best of both communities. Perhaps the AOB is looking at numbers such as 500 – 700 parishioners. This is unrealistic as time goes by. An initiative of 1 to 1 replacement would be feasible. Roots and relationships within parish boundaries as well as without. The scientific measurement of how a parish replaces itself and/or grows is needed. Pushback to AOB that there is a need for a place for people to have a liturgy that is intentional. There is room for both/and for growing within boundaries and outside of boundaries. St. Leo's questions their identity as the Italian parish as this becomes less true over time. Send out St. V's informational flyers to transient locations such as Ronald McDonald House, hotels, B&B's, etc. Small Christian communities are growing.

**Action Items**

1. Colleen and Fr. Ray to decide on continuing with the Jesuit Volunteer Corp for a next round.
2. Ray H. will reach out to the Catholic Review regarding an article on TRE and an ad and/or an announcement for additional volunteers.
3. TRE will develop volunteer descriptions and infrastructure to ease the way for more volunteers.
4. Bob R. and Colleen will determine the placement of handicap stickers at pew cutouts.
5. Dan, Ray H., and Ted will synthesize action item suggestions during the next week to eliminate duplicates and set implementation priorities for action items.
6. Colleen will check need for transportation for some parishioners to get to St. Mary's Seminary on January 26.

The next Parish Council Meeting will be via Zoom on February 11, 2025, at 6:00 pm.

With the saying of the Lord's Prayer the meeting adjourned at 7:53 pm.