

Charlotte/Greece/Hilton Pastoral Planning Task Force Meeting Notes

Tuesday, August 29, 2023

ATTENDING: Holy Cross/Our Mother of Sorrows: Fr. William Coffas, Fr. Justin Miller, **Our Mother of Sorrows:** David Witkoski, **St. Charles Borromeo:** Fr. John Firpo, Gina Reeder, David Steklenski, **St. John the Evangelist:** Paul Parkman, Nick Verdino, **St. Lawrence:** Fr. Lee Chase, Steve Amico, Jeri Rombaut, **St. Leo the Great:** Father Joseph Catanise, David Jones, Barbara Surash, , **St. Mark's:** Deacon Frank Pettrone, Peter Blind, **Facilitator:** Karen Rinefierd, **Minutes Scribe:** Maryanne Sutton, **Guest:** Fr. Aaron Kelly

EXCUSED: Holy Cross: Joseph DiVincenzo, Ryan Snyder, **Our Mother of Sorrows:** Marc Boeh, **St. John the Evangelist:** Fr. Peter Enyan-Boadu, **St. Mark's:** Kimm Wesley

Welcome to Fr. Justin Miller, Parochial Vicar at Holy Cross and Our Mother of Sorrows

Opening prayer (Matthew 16:21-27): Faith sharing, intercessions, the Lord's Prayer

Collaborative Initiatives

Vocations: This group will start meeting sometime this fall once we have full membership named. We still need representatives from Our Mother of Sorrows and St. John the Evangelist. Members already identified: Lorraine Vancour (St. Mark), Dcn. Ed Giblin (St. Lawrence), Mary Ann DeLucenay (Holy Cross), Neil Combs (St. Leo), Mark Stechshulte (St. Charles).

Shared Website: The committee met last night, and Karen will send out notes once they are finalized. Brendan Parker from the diocese will be designing the website and working with the committee. We need to choose a domain name and a logo. The domain name should be short—the one suggestion already is WestsideCatholics.org. Some of our parishes previously had a logo including a lighthouse and a cross. Karen will send an email to Task Force members asking for additional suggestions to share with the committee. Before this meeting she asked Dave Witkoski if he might help with design, and he agreed.

Feedback for the 7-parish Evangelization Team based on the questions they sent to the Task Force

- Yes, the direction (helping parishioners deepen their faith, helping parishioners talk to others about their faith without criticizing or judging, reaching out to members of our parishes that pulled back during Covid) is in line with what the Task Force wants. The Evangelization Team is on the right track.
- First and foremost is for our people to have a relationship with Jesus.
- Good job!
- Suggestion: Our current parishioners are mostly older. We would like to see a focus on younger generations and middle-aged people.
- One item mentioned in the Evangelization Team minutes was good homilies. It would be good to speak with priests who are the main preachers.
- It was mentioned that parishes are looking to improve evangelization at funerals. Karen shared that those who come to one of our parishes for a funeral had been considered as a possible target audience, but it was not one of the top three and is not a focus right now. The Evangelization Team also is a vehicle for members to share best practices from their parish.
- How do we get people to Mass?

Charlotte/Greece/Hilton Pastoral Planning Task Force Meeting Notes

Tuesday, August 29, 2023

Continuing the work begun on 4/25: preparing for the priesthood of the future, keeping the mission of our parishes at the center while trying to relieve our priests of some responsibilities.

Comments about the document "Canons Related to the Role of a Pastor"

- HR issues, people issues, personnel issues, important to work with Pastoral Center
- Financial rules are in place to protect staff and parishioners. It is important to work with finance directors and the diocesan finance office.
- Reminder that the Pastor oversees the stewardship of the goods of the parish.

Pastoral leaders: What does a typical weekday look like for you? (Compilation of the responses of all of the leaders)

- Pray daily for the parishioners and staff, deceased, for the diocese.
- Listen to the staff and their concerns.
- Encourage staff to make decisions and take responsibility.
- Make connections with members of the councils and committees.
- Build relationships with parishioners.
- Show gratitude to the staff for the work they are doing.
- Attend parish meetings, make sure the right people are on the committees and at the meetings, then trust their decisions.
- Keep things in the big perspective.
- Make sure the parish is following the necessary procedures and practices.
- Telephone can be a very valuable pastoral tool; will call parishioners and touch base with them.
- Will send out an email thank you note to different parish teams.
- Write prayers of the faithful.
- Forming a parish life committee.
- Meet with parishioners on personal problems.
- Call parishioners to check in with them.
- Be with the people of the parish.
- Scheduling a wedding and meeting with the engaged couple.
- Loving and accepting people--try to bring them to the church.
- Work with staff members; trust in staff members.
- Making people feel welcome.
- Visit the sick.
- Be there for people who have serious illnesses.
- Be able to rest and care for self.
- Having an eye on what is good; we are people of the gospel.
- Preaching of the gospel/teaching the faith/salvation of souls.
- Preparation of the Sunday homily/weekday homilies.
- Finding/using new tools.

Fr. Coffas: How have you handled building a bridge between Holy Cross/Our Mother of Sorrows? How has staffing evolved and how have new ministry efforts been created?

- Be open and say yes when asked to step-up.
- Set up a Build a Bridge to Christ theme.
- Need full support of staff/had to step away from some staff members.
- Moved slowly, did not try to change the cultures of each church.

Charlotte/Greece/Hilton Pastoral Planning Task Force Meeting Notes

Tuesday, August 29, 2023

- Made simple tweaks.
- Developed shared celebrations slowly. Began with one Mass on Thanksgiving morning which rotates between Holy Cross and Our Mother of Sorrows.
- Combined the Pastoral Councils into a shared council.
- Grieving with Great Hope group a new, combined ministry including both parishes.
- Slow, deliberate and try to be present; write bulletin article every week for the shared bulletin.
- Moved from “cluster” language to “The Community of Holy Cross and Our Mother of Sorrows.”
- Be sensitive and aware of both parishes.
- Be a step ahead/reach out to experts at other parishes (example: garage sale advice)

Karen: what we’ve learned from leaders, staffs, and parishioners about best practices in clustering parishes

- While working in the diocesan Pastoral Planning Office, I was a part of the parish restructuring of over half the parishes in the diocese. More recently I’ve provided some guidance to Holy Cross and Our Mother of Sorrows and facilitated the coming together of Church of the Transfiguration (my own parish) and St. Catherine of Siena.
- The terminology of “clustering” has been used in the Diocese of Rochester to refer to two or more parishes sharing a Pastor/Pastoral Administrator. The first cluster, a joining of four parishes, was created in 1984. The parishes remain individual parishes under church law and separate corporations under civil law. Sometimes the parishes remain clustered over time; sometimes they move to merge (joining to become a single parish under church law and a single parish under civil law). Whichever direction is taken, the relationship between the parishes involved includes developing a shared identity as well as maintaining and honoring the unique identity of each.

Preparing for clustering

- Ideally the communities should know that they will soon be sharing a pastoral leader—at least 6 months ahead of time—but this is not always possible.
- Form a transition committee including the leaders and parishioners from all the affected parishes—important to have lay involvement and leadership from pastoral leaders.
- If a new Mass schedule is needed, use the template provided by the diocesan Planning Office.
- Communication is critical:
 - Consider various stakeholders: parishioners, staff, pastoral and finance councils, the wider community.
 - Educate parishioners about reasons for the change.
- Importance of prayer:
 - A common prayer, intercessory prayers at Mass.
 - Encourage individual prayer.

Challenges/issues for leaders

- coming to understand and appreciate the cultures of the various churches
- dealing with negativity and resistance of parishioners/staff having difficulty dealing with the changes
- establishing trust among people
- managing time because of the sheer volume of work
- coordination and balance of time between the parishes

Charlotte/Greece/Hilton Pastoral Planning Task Force Meeting Notes

Tuesday, August 29, 2023

- getting people (parishioners and/or staff) to work together
- helping parishioners feel that they are part of one community of faith and not “losing” their parish
- finding enough lay volunteers

Advice for pastors newly assigned to lead multiple parishes

- Tend to own personal and spiritual wellbeing through maintaining a strong prayer life, taking adequate time off from work, and finding a mentor among experienced pastors
- Relationships with parishioners: get to know people, learn as much as possible about each congregation, demonstrate concern and love, educate people about new possibilities, eventually challenge them to grow
- Delegate and involve both parishioners and staff
- Need to develop a practice of intentional pastoral presence at each church

Challenges/issues for staff

- They are in a unique position—they may be having difficulty adjusting to the changes underway and yet they have a critical role in helping parishioners adjust to new circumstances
- Tension is possible when the shared pastor previously led one of the parishes of the cluster and seemingly favors one of the parishes
- There is often considerable turmoil on staffs (differences in how quickly or if people can adjust to change, loyalty primarily may be to fellow staff from original parish)
- Increased responsibilities
- May wonder if another staff member is a threat to their employment if finances are tight
- Pastor’s level of skill and experience in collaboration/resolving conflicts/communication

Top three successful strategies once cluster is formed and the parishes share a single pastoral leader

respecting uniqueness of communities—understand history and traditions of each community involved-- helps to appreciate where people are coming from, honor their traditions and be patient

- Celebrations of unique traditions of each church
- Important to balance uniform practices with respect for the identity of the individual communities—in all aspects of community life but particularly in liturgy

creating new events/shared traditions, groups, and ministries—not associated with any of the communities, help people get to know one another and be part of something uplifting

- Shared RCIA process, sacramental preparation, and other faith formation programs
- New social events
- Single pastoral council

regular, consistent communication

- move to one bulletin and website
- having primarily the same announcements and prayers of intercession alleviates communication problems
- particularly important is preaching which links faith and theology to the changes parishioners are experiencing

Charlotte/Greece/Hilton Pastoral Planning Task Force Meeting Notes Tuesday, August 29, 2023

- need good communication from leader but also from staff and chairs of committees and councils--particularly finance council
 - parishioners need to know whom to call with various questions and needs
 - regular joint staff meetings (possibly coupled with staff meetings at each church)
 - use bulletin (especially the leader's column) and other methods to share ways that collaboration and a sense of unity are building among the parishes of the cluster
- The pace of change is more art than science—it can't be too fast or too slow—involving parishioners in the changes, offering invitations and choices helps—important to keep moving forward in creating a unified community.

Initial thoughts about the priesthood of the future: if future pastors/pastoral administrators have responsibility for more faith communities, what could they delegate? Where do they need to focus their energy? What support/training would they need?

- Deferred to next meeting.
- Karen would like Ryan Snyder from Holy Cross to be here for this discussion. In his job he works with entrepreneurs moving from the initial stages of creating a company to growing it. Different skills from the leader are needed for each phase.

Next Task Force meetings and locations:

- **Tuesday October 3rd @ 6:30 pm @ St. Lawrence (Deacon Hall, room 3)**
- **Wednesday, November 8th @ 6:30 pm @ St. Charles parish center (in the school building)**