

**ST. THOMAS MORE PARISH &
ST. BERNADETTE PARISH
UNIFIED PARISH COUNCIL MEETING
Wednesday, June 22, 2011**

St. Thomas More Council Members in Attendance: Fr. Bill Wagner, Vic Ivers, Kathy Hornschemeier, Jim Conrady, Larry Bush, and Neil Kamphaus, Jr.

St. Thomas More Council Members Absent: Janet Tate, John Duncan.

St. Thomas More ~ Others in Attendance: Mike Gennett (STM Business Manager), Jane Myers (Facilitator).

St. Bernadette Council Members in Attendance: Fr. Bill Stockelman, Tim Geers, Paul Justice, Janet Davis, Charlie Quehl.

St. Bernadette Members Absent: Kathy Waldeck, Donna Thompson, & Mark Zurlinden.

The Parish Councils of St. Thomas More & St. Bernadette met at St. Thomas More Parish. The meeting was called to order by Fr. Bill Wagner, Pastor of St. Thomas More Parish, at 7:00 PM EDT. Fr. Wagner opened with a prayer.

St. Thomas More Council President Vic Ivers made the opening remarks. Everyone introduced themselves and Vic commented the last meeting was very productive. The objective of this meeting was to meet with Jane Myers, a facilitator, about possibly securing her services to assist with this project. Both councils agreed at the last meeting this would be the next step. This would include discussing the role of the facilitator, the cost, and rendering a decision if we wish to hire her.

Vic then introduced Jane Myers, an experienced facilitator that works for the diocese.

Jane gave some information about her background. She has a long background working in ministries. She has worked here and in South Carolina. Currently, she is working with Fr. Len Wenke at the diocese to help develop the Pastoral Regions. Since last fall, Pastoral Regions have been implemented for a variety of reasons. Jim Brown, the facilitator mentioned at the last meeting, currently is booked and cannot assist us. Jane Myers is available.

Jane passed out a number of handouts. The first document was very broad in scope and covered as little or as much as a pastoral region might need to do to be ready when the day comes they share a Pastor. Each region is different and the parts applicable for that region are determined as necessary to prepare that region. This could mean as little as a single parish region with two or more parishes sharing one Pastor all the way to a completely merged region. Everyone present agreed that the single parish region sharing a Pastor was applicable to our situation: one Pastor assigned to both parishes yet each parish retains their identity and staffs.

The second document laid out the Pastoral Region Planning Committee. That is generally composed of three people from each parish plus the two Pastors and the facilitator. In our case, this committee would focus on the Mass schedule and some of the other issues such as marriages, baptisms, reconciliation, anointing of the sick, funerals, etc. Pastoral Staff members would not be on this committee but would be consulted from time to time as needed. Once the committee came up with a recommendation, it would be presented to both Parish Councils for approval. The next step would be to submit the final plan to Archbishop Schnurr for his approval.

Everyone agreed these documents would not be distributed and only used internally as needed.

Jane said she understood there was already a collaborative effort with the two parishes (along with St. Veronica Parish) in areas such as Youth Ministry and the football program.

She also said the Archbishop does not want to close any parish as long as the parish is fiscally solvent and pastorally complete in all the usual ministries. The bottom line was there are going to be only 100 Pastors

available for 230 parishes. 100 regions have been established. There will be only one Pastor per region. She also noted the four inner Cincinnati city parishes that were merged into one parish last summer were a result of their own plan and not that of the diocese.

Vic Ivers stated the lists go far beyond what we need to do. Everyone agreed the documents should not be released because they were so broad in nature and not applicable to us. Jane again pointed out that the documents cover a broad range of issues and each region only needs to do what is right for the future of their region when the time comes the parishes have to share a Pastor. Jane further stated that there are experiences from other planning committees that we could make good use of. Some regions have been successful and others have not. Communication is the key and is crucial to keep the rumor mill in check.

Tim Geers asked about the kind of results that can be expected by using a facilitator. Jane said each situation is different. She further discussed other engagements. Also, a Pastoral Administrator might be considered as part of the plan. This is someone with pastoral and administrative skills that may or may not be an ordained Deacon but understands liturgy. Regardless, the administrator is the representative of the Catholic Church in that region.

Jane further stated that the schools are tabled and not part of this discussion. The diocese is working on a master plan for all the schools with more information available in September 2012.

Jane felt the next move would be to identify the members of the working committee and then go to work.

Fr. Stockelman stated he favored hiring a facilitator. But what if we don't? Then, what if 10 parishioners leave and stop donating because we didn't spend the money to hire a facilitator and do this right?

Fr. Wagner said what if we fail on our own and then have to hire someone? Time would have been lost. We really do not need to go down the road as far as noted in the documents. Both parishes already have a staff in place and programs that work.

Tim Geers is concerned about the workload of the Pastors. Fr. Stockelman visits the sick and once the region is implemented he will have three times the visits. Fr. Wagner responded it is time to stop thinking the Pastor "is it". He says we have a full staff and he expects them to do their job. Pastoral Associates can visit the sick as well. Also, the Pastor's style to manage a parish varies by the individual.

Kathy Hornschemeier stated she is concerned about collaboration between Business Managers and DREs. Fr. Wagner responded he does not want to over collaborate. Jim Conrady added we might look at some other small areas we could share and work together.

Fr. Wagner stated our two parishes are NOT in decline (as other areas of the county are). We should not plan for a declining future. Jane answered that only the pieces considered as needed for the future or just not working need to be brought to the table. Call this a "Futures Plan". The biggest issue will be the Mass schedule.

Fr. Wagner said he has been assigned to learn how the seminary assigns the priests. Today, it appears they go where they want rather than where the need is. He is going to urge the new Rector to review the assignments. We could get some assistance from the seminary.

The structure of the task force in utilizing the facilitator was discussed. The committee would meet on average two times a month, for no more than two hours a time over a period of 8-12 months. The average cost for a facilitator would be \$5,000 with each parish paying \$2,500. It could be more or less depending on how the process proceeds.

Vic Ivers asked what happens when a new Pastor is appointed and decides not do what the plan states? The response was the plan is "the will of the people" and allows a potential Pastor to look at what has been written. It shows a more professional approach than having no plan at all.

It was agreed that both councils need to be kept up to date and approve the final plan. Monthly progress reports need to be released.

Tim Geers asked about having town hall meetings. Jane said they work as long as they are structured (with limited numbers).

Jane left the meeting at this point so the councils could discuss the potential of hiring Jane Myers to facilitate.

Fr. Stockelman said this is more than just a document. We need a plan as brothers and sisters; better Catholics. How we can come together. We could wake up one day and be a region. 33 priests are nearly at the retirement age of 70. 100 pastoral regions could even be reduced to 75 in just a few years. The bottom line is you want a plan that is going to attract a quality Pastor.

Fr. Wagner said he sees some possible issues for the committee to discuss:

- 1) Establish a Mass schedule
- 2) Agree to limit council meetings to five times a year at each parish so the Pastor can attend each of the 10 meetings
- 3) Don't force collaboration where it is not warranted. The next Pastor, once he is settled, may make these and other changes that he wants
- 4) The plan needs to be run by the Archbishop. He gives the plan to the new Pastor and says this is the plan you will follow

Fr. Wagner stated he wants a facilitator. They bring good experience to us and the process is suggested by the diocese.

Fr. Stockelman stated we need to find a night when Jane is available and the pick the best three representatives from each parish to work on the project (that hopefully are also available at the same time).

Fr. Wagner added that the fees are not all that high. Those that object to spending this money are those that don't understand the business element in today's church.

Jim Conrady asked if we were all in agreement.

Neil Kamphaus said we need to go back to the facilitator and ask for a contract. Tim Geers said he wanted to read the contract as did other council members. It would be emailed to them. Fr. Wagner said he would get in touch with Jane, ask for a contract, see if she is available starting in September, plus what night of the week she might be available.

The next step would be for each parish to determine who their three members would be.

Fr. Stockelman stated he felt we would get about three months notice before the region was implemented.

It was also stated this was the last joint meeting of the two Parish Councils for a while.

The meeting adjourned at 8:47PM.