

Parish Council Retreat January 15, 2022

Present: Melanie Ernst, Justin Lorenz, Shelly Kurtz, Marcia Koester, Jennifer Hoffman, John Gozdziński, Erin O'Connell, Andrew Viragh, Mariah Byrne, David Gaillardetz, Donna Zuroweste, Fr. Jack Schuler, Diane Gozdziński

Absent: Clare Bass, Mary Ward

Opening Address: (Melanie)

Purpose of Retreat:

This retreat has the purpose to get us ready for the upcoming year serving for Parish Council (PC). We aim to get ready (1) in community, by getting to know our fellow PC members through the Emmaus walk and the questions we discuss with each other. (2) We want to get ready organizationally, by discerning our chair and co-chair for the year as well as distribute the meeting tasks (<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/13hcrDHSMZhN0LK6vuLi1my70CKJ90dBUcSeb48tD454/edit?usp=sharing>), fill committee chair positions, and set our goals for the next year. (3) Most importantly, we aim to get ready spiritually by prayer, discernment, contemplation, and listening to the Spirit throughout the retreat. We want to take time to invite God in our midst to not only rekindle and deepen our personal relationship with God but also to hear God's voice in the questions we are discerning throughout the retreat. We want to temporarily leave behind the usual distractions of normal business throughout the year for a time long enough to allow for an inner change to occur: the ongoing conversion of heart that is critical to deepening faith.

Expectations of participation:

To allow for a successful meeting, we ask you to (1) show up on time and come prepared; (2) stay mentally and physically present; (3) treat all meeting participants with the same respect you would want from them; (4) participate to your comfort level but let everyone participate; (5) respect each other's thinking and value everyone's contributions; (6) stay on point and on time; (7) attack the problem, not the person.

(adapted from <http://meetingsift.com/ground-rules-for-meetings/>)

Explanation of Council:

The Parish Council's purpose is to advise the pastor and assist him with the administration and the operation of the parish. The council is composed of 9 – 12 parishioners. Meetings are also attended by our Pastor Father Jack Schuler, our Pastoral Associate Diane Gozdziński, and our Pastoral Administrator and Facilities Director Mary Ward. Three to four parishioners are elected to a 3-year terms each calendar year. The terms are staggered over three years for continuity. Members of the parish may serve successive terms.

Some of the functions of the PC are:

- Develop a simple parish mission statement in keeping with the overall Archdiocesan mission. This is currently published on the front of each Sunday bulletin along with the names of the Council members.
- Establish annual goals and objectives for the parish and priorities for their implementation
- Coordinate all parish-related activity with the parish staff and ensure that the stated goals, objectives, and priorities are implemented and maintained.
- Promote meaningful dialogue and decision making to fulfill our parish mission statement.

- Identify and encourage the use of the gifts and talents of the members of the parish.
- Implement directives of the Archbishop of Saint Louis.
- Cultivate and solicit nominees to offer to join the Parish Council
- Dialogue and communicate with Parishioners as needed.

The Parish Council normally meets for 90 minutes each month. One meeting is set aside early in the year for a day-long retreat to set and prioritize goals and objectives. The December meeting is a brief one, as needed, as part of a social gathering for Christmas.

The Council maintains an email list for communication among members.

Opening Remarks: (Fr. Jack)

Fr. Jack will be on vacation for the next two weeks. Fr. Gerry will have the weekend Masses. We will see what happens regarding the COVID surge when Fr. Jack returns and make decisions with the advice of the Health Task Force.

Fr. Jack looks on the Parish Council as a group of people who work together with God for St. Cronan Parish. He values our lay ministry and listens to our advice. We will be receiving a questionnaire from the Archdiocese as part of the “All Things New” program. Please complete it.

Emmaus “walks”

Emmaus Questions:

A synodal Church, in announcing the Gospel, "journeys together."

- How is this "journeying together" happening today at St. Cronan?
- What concerns/apprehensions might hold you back from “journeying together” as member of St. Cronan, or being part of the Catholic church?
- What steps does the Spirit invite us to take in order to grow in our "journeying together"?
- What gifts do you think you bring to Cronan as a parishioner and/or as a council member? What hopes do you bring?

The group was randomly divided into pairs to share questions and get to know each other better. Pairs then shared some of what they learned with the entire group.

Guest Speaker: Michael Meehan “Pain Point Moments of Religion: Good Trouble”

What we're called to do as Catholics, as Christians is to live as good and decent human beings and trying to understand a complex world, as God would have it.

Michael based a lot of his talk on a book by Pope Francis: Let Us Dream , in which Pope Francis talks about how we navigate this time. The Holy Father's thoughts on how we navigate this complex time has to do with his reflections on the pandemic and the opportunity to recreate the world in a way that integrates all people's voices and to do things differently. Pope Francis is theologically conservative, but is pastorally a Jesuit. He has initiated the Synods of Synods – listening and exploring.

Michael's Background: he was not raised in the Church and became a proud agnostic in his teen years. During his college years at Loyola University, he felt called to the Catholic Church in the Jesuit environment, by the call of service for others and being made to pour ourselves out. He became a clinical psychologist, working with much empathy in child psychology.

In talking with Father Jack about pain points we're at this critical juncture I think and maybe it's one of many. The history of the Church and the history of Christian faith tradition is a long Arc and there have been critical junctures throughout, and I think that this is probably one of them, certainly in my lifetime i've not seen this much acrimony and this much polarization and this much division. Not merely in larger society, and then the world but in our own church - faithful Catholic people screaming at each other and saying horrible non Catholic and Christian things to and about each other.

Today, there is a great deal of acrimony and division in society and in our Church. Two particular pain points are abortion and gender and sexuality. "The Church is preoccupied with pelvic issues." These issues are related to other things that cause division and polarization, such as immigration, the poor, the virus – masks and vaccines. Much of Christ's work is done through us – we are His Body.

Pope Francis outlines the path. He admits his own rigidity – where he screed up, and looks at Covid Moments in history and in the Bible. He outlines 3 steps:

1. Emerging– lean into difficulties and listen. lean into it immerse yourself in it and listen go to the margins, is what he says so don't don't go where you're comfortable specifically go where you're uncomfortable. Go to the margins where you are uncomfortable, allow it to change you. "Mercy is a willingness to enter into the chaos of another" - James Keenan, SJ.

And so, he talks about his own experience of doing that leaning in of going places where he was uncomfortable places he didn't understand things he had preconceived notions about. And then, allowing the spirit and other people and the world to impact him and saying yes to allowing it to change him.

2. Discernment – listen in all humility, to the Spirit, people in your path, yourself, and go to places that are hard. that are different and then you think you don't come to a rapid conclusion. Pope Francis says, over and over, if you go in with your mind made up you've already lost. And if you make your mind up quickly or even if, after this discernment the endpoint is, now I am absolutely certain, it doesn't work. Always leave discussions open-ended.

Pope Francis said embracing what often appears at first sight to be contradictory truths, and trusting in the kindly light to lead us, we will eventually come to see the greater truth that lies beyond us. I like to think that we do not possess the truth so much as the truth possesses us, constantly attracting us by means of beauty and goodness, this is an approach to truth quite distinct from the epistemology of post truth which demands that we choose sides. So he he says we go in and when we see these things that seem mutually exclusive, these answers that seem in direct polar opposition, we don't pick one. We immerse ourselves in it and then through reflection try to figure out what's the larger truth that really unites those things that in our tiny human brain seem mutually exclusive.

Embrace the contradictory truths and look for the large truth that writes these. God keeps introducing us to new people – that is how God calls us to reconcile previous knowledge and experience with what we learn. Doctrine is not static – it continues to grow. We live and learn from the signs of the times

Pope Paul talks about tradition not being a museum or a freezer. Doctrine is not static but grows and develops like a tree that remains the same and gets bigger and bears evermore fruit. There are some who claim that God spoke once and for all time. Some hear the word “discernment” and worry that it’s a fancy way of ignoring the rules or a clever modern ruse to downgrade the truth. However, it’s quite the opposite.

There is no contradiction between being solidly rooted in the truth and at the same time being open to greater understanding. Discernment is as old as it is as old as the church that follows from the promise Jesus made his disciples that after he was gone. The spirit will guide you into all truth. This time of listening is going to be scary for some, particularly those who he said, are allergic to uncertainty. Because it challenges the truth is that they that they know, but what Francis says is that's a truth that they fled into it's a fundamentalism. And then it's not healthy. It's fear driven and it's a place we go to try to simplify in our hearts and minds complicated issues, and then we get a little full of ourselves, so he talks about how even pieces of our own Catholic Church that becomes so convinced that they have cornered the market on the truth that there they've made it their mission to save the church itself. And he talks a bit about that and about what that means, and that it's not healthy. It's not of God. It's not what we're called to. When we try to oversimplify a complicated seeming contradiction and when we make God really small and that's not how God is, but we also don't solve the problem, so if we fool ourselves if we delude ourselves into thinking that there are only two solutions. And I think it's a poverty that we find ourselves in these polarized places and we hunker down in some sort of bunker mentality, because the issue is too complicated so i'm going to pick a side and i'm just going to do that, rather than engage in dialogue.

This is a time of synodality – This is a time of listening and Pope Francis says it will be scary for some, particularly those who are allergic to uncertainty. It challenges the truth that they know they know and thus they flee into fundamentalism. We tend to hide in our own rigidity when the truths we know are challenged. Fundamentalism comes from fear. It is not healthy and indicates a fleeing from the complications of life. He talks about even pieces of our own Catholic Church that becomes so convinced that they have cornered the market on the truth that there they've made it their mission to save the church itself When we oversimplify, we make God small. We need to look for more than two answers to reconcile contradictory ideas – some bigger truth is at stake. How do we do this as “us – the Church”? We reconcile the Church’s teaching and live out the commandment to Love our neighbors. As Fr. Greg Boyle states: the Circle of Compassion is ever expanding to and beyond the margins. When we form the circle of compassion, we make it wider and wider and wider until, no one is outside the circle that's what we're called to.

Fr. Jack said In an article by Tobin, he states that refusing to deal with complexity is a form of heresy. It is a weaponizing of faith – to denigrate and to tell certain others they are not welcomed.

Fundamentalism as a means of assembling thought behavior as a refuge that supposedly protects a person from crisis. fundamentalist mindsets offered a shelter for people from destabilizing situations in

exchange for a kind of existential quiet. it's a fleeing from the complicated ness of life and helps us become calm at a time when we shouldn't be we shouldn't be calm. They offer you an attitude and a single closed way of thinking as a substitute for the kind of thinking that opens you to truth. Whoever takes refuge in fundamentalism is afraid of setting out on the road to truth, he already has the truth and works and deploys it as a defense so that any questioning of it isn't is interpreted as an aggression against this person. So we hide in our rigidity and then we use it as a shield, but sometimes we use it as a weapon, and that has been for me at least one of the most discouraging things that i've seen. In recent years, within the Catholic Church and Catholic social media Catholic circles, is the weaponization of faith. I can't think of anything that is more un- Christian than using Christianity to hit people over the head or to denigrate them. Or to tell them that they're not welcomed or not needed.

To elaborate, it is difficult not to fight fire with fire. We find ourselves tired of being in the fight or flight mode, but we need to fight with love rather than fire. And we have trauma in our church and you've experienced trauma because of our church because of your church and that shouldn't be so, how are we to respond to that. Fight or flight is an appropriate response to the trauma we face. It changes the brain structure so that we are acting out of our primitive basic brain and not the prefrontal cortex. We are being exactly who God wanted you to be. To be genuine to who you are but also not to protect the other people so that they are comfortable. Don't allow people to sit in their existential quiet ISM. Be exactly what they think you're not.

Some of the Church's beliefs don't reconcile with science – we need to integrate, not flee from. We need to give witness and challenge over-simplification.

We need to build a Church that is innovative. Think about Jesus and the woman at the well. Jesus says “go and sin no more’ to all of us. Be Jesus at the well – love always – be you! He loved her with everything that he is so part of it is that we need allow God to work through us to be his hands and his heart his eyes his face in the world, because we are that. That's the miracle of the incarnation. It wasn't just that God became human in this moment in time and in Jesus he's in all of them. And so, part of the gift of the incarnation, is that if we say yes we're in his face, we can be Jesus at the well with our brothers and sisters, particularly those who are at the margins. So how do we do that, and some of that is just by being you. Also, bear that witness – when we're rejected like the person at the well or Jesus at the well, do not settle for existential quietism.

How can we be Jesus at well for those at the margins, how can we lean in to the tension and the messiness and a complicated this and not settle for existential quiet ISM , and I think to how do we not. How do we not become precisely what it is that we are frustrated with simply at a different place on the continuum.

We're not cornering the truth, either. We work for a dialogue that is compassionate and loving – trusting in God's calling. St. Philippine DuChen said, “I'm submissive but not indifferent.” Bishop Odanda claimed that reconciliation equals nonviolent resistance – to peacefully march down streets. In our local Church, it is concerning how the dismissals of three women were handled. We should hold ourselves to a higher standard rather than be unkind. The Archdiocese is so concerned about scandal, they do something scandalous. We force people to contend with the fact that we are what God created and reconcile that.

There is a clause in church contracts that the employee is not permitted to hold a view that contradicts Catholic Social Teaching. Jesus likened love of neighbor with love of God. How are we to reconcile prohibition in the Church with love of our neighbor? How do we wrestle with this? We do it but we do

not do it quietly. We don't flee from the tension of inherent contradictions. "Comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable." How do we become a church God would recognize as a Church?

A sense of certainty is a delusion – if you are certain you have the answer, that is the sign you don't have the answer. Ask yourself, who would benefit if that were the truth? Fr. James Martin says "compassion begins with listening." We need our hearts broken open and have it change us. We need to promote voices with the pews that resonate for change.

So I think we continue calling, and we continue. loving and we continue to to live out our faith and in all of its fullness and the way that we experience it it's a daunting task frankly to love people, the way that I feel like God is love me.

The opportunity is in the synods. A voice is given to people at the margins so they can speak for themselves. We need to stand with those in the margins and not speak for them. In St. Louis, the synod will be dovetailed with the strategic plan.

Review of Parish Council Goals for 2021

1. Seeking to become an Anti-Racist Parish: (reported by Andrew Viragh)

We are moving toward this and are committed to the long-haul. We will continue the goal and define the next step. The Parish will define a group to pursue this as a subcommittee with Parish Council and parishioner members. We are developing a survey that will request participation to start an Anti-racist committee. Measures of success will be to formalize the committee, re-engage to continue the work.

2. Adult Faith Formation

suggest that we change it to "Adult Faith Development." Small groups continue, but need to develop episodic opportunities. Look who is on Cronan Talk or not – opportunities to engage the community to be more intentional. Retreats: The White House offers parish retreats, Vision of Peace is available for individual guided or independent retreats, Mercy Center has the time and space and is developing retreat compass kits. Mercy center offers days of recollection. Might be time to develop something. We have men's and women's retreats – may want a parish retreat.

3. Volunteer Appreciation – seems to be going well -will continue

4. Fundraising – met goal

this year, Jennifer and Helen will work together. We need to put efforts into creating a sub-committee and ideas for fundraisers.

5. Themed Masses and Services

Aim to have a Covid Victim Memorial Mass – March 11 – will discuss at the next Parish Council Meeting.

6. Inclusive Church Community

Actively including all – we need to improve wording and shape focus of the goal. Tell the story of what we are actively doing, and do more to give us something to tell about. Re-shape the language. Maybe separate the doing from promoting. Have a subcommittee to look at the language, liturgical implications, etc. There is a value in making it more focused. David G. is interested.

It was decided to form a working group to go through the goals and refine them. Narrow to what is feasible and keep it in-house. Question continues: how do we do it in the Pandemic? Committee will work on these and we will approve the goals at the next Parish Council meeting.

Committee: Melanie, Mariah, Justin, David, maybe John

Leadership

Chair – Melanie

Co-Chair – Erin O’Connell

Fundraising: Jennifer with a committee

Hospitality – liaison for Parish Council to work with Christine Lakey: Erin O’Connell

work to get others involved to promote community involvement

Meeting tasks: Each meeting we have a secretary, someone to lead an opening prayer, someone to lead a closing prayer, and someone to be task-keeper. Please sign up for those roles for the various meetings here:

<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/13hcrDHSMZhN0LK6vuLi1my70CKJ90dBUcSeb48tD454/edit?usp=sharing>

Compassionate St. Louis Project: Fr. Jerry Stookey invited St. Cronan to be a part of this: making St. Louis a compassionate city. Fr. Jack will send the information to Melanie who will send it on to the Council. The council will vote within the week and Diane will let Fr. Jerry know our intentions.

Closing Prayer: Justin