

**Minutes of the Saint John Pastoral Council Meeting - March 9, 2026**  
**The Meeting was in person and held in the Conservatory of the Church.**

**Attendance:**

Rev. Sam Scott and Rev. Karol Ksiazek  
Jean Benitez, Chairperson  
Natalie Alini  
George Benitez  
Nicole Brennan  
Brad Bushell, OCIA, Ambassadors  
Virginia Dwyer-Aoyama, Bereavement Ministry  
Madilyn Greene  
Chris Hussey, Finance Council  
Greg Peeke  
Ray Slavin  
Deb VanCura, Parish Secretary

Not Present:

Ed DeVyllder  
Scott Tuck

Opened with prayer from Fr. Sam

**Open Discussion:**

Fr. Sam and Jean started with topics on the agenda:

1. Our alignment with our mission statement
2. Grace-filled Roman Catholic parish community, where all are welcomed.

**Fr. Sam and Fr. Karol** started with our Parish mission statement draft which came from a 1970s vintage, “All are welcome to Saint John Parish. We are active and diverse catholic community united by the love of Jesus Christ as the center of our lives and by our care and concern for each other as family.” After discussion around suggestions as: “to make Christ known, good news of Jesus Christ, Eucharistic community, alignment to diocese of Bridgeport mission.”

**Saint John Parish Mission Statement:**

“All are welcome to Saint John Parish. We are a Roman Catholic Eucharistic community united in mission with the Diocese of Bridgeport to share the Good News of Jesus Christ in Word, Sacraments, and service.”

**Brad** reported on the OCIA (Order of Christian Initiation of Adults), Ambassadors, the Young Adult Ministry Initiative, and ecumenical initiatives. On OCIA we have seven people in total with 3 Catechumens (unbaptized) and four candidates (baptized). Brad noted the excitement on formation and that Bishop Caggiano recently referenced 560 people are in OCIA this year throughout our Diocese vs 250 last year.

**Brad** reported on Ambassadors hosting Pre-Jordan workshops, we have prepared thirteen parents for baptism of their first child this year, thus far, and we had a total of fifty last year. Grace-filled opportunities arise from these workshops, such as introduce the young couples to each other to foster friendship, promote St John Preschool programs and our faith community. Fr. Sam noted he has observed the young families within walking distance to Church and Brad mentioned families also are from Stamford. Brad also suggested a future social event for the young families to spark further faith community building. Brad reported on the Young Adult Ministry and the success of the weekend with Fr. Charles Rooney, O.P., with sixteen participants going to confession at the event. He noted participants were also from other parishes and suggested we need young adults to step forward if we are to build and grow a true Young Adult Ministry. There are diocese events coming up for young adults and a May retreat. On ecumenical initiatives, discussion on meaning which are collaborative efforts between different Christian denominations aimed at fostering unity, mutual understanding, and shared mission. Further, Christians share oneness in baptism, while holding that the full, visible church subsists in the Catholic Church. Fr. Karol mentioned Fr. Sam is the Vicar of Ecumenism for our Bishop. Fr. Sam seeks a Parish recommitment around this starting in October and further opportunities with three events including a guest theologian, involve lay people and promote grassroot ecumenical initiatives. Fr. Sam noted the annual wreaths across America at Grove Veteran cemetery, our participation and community building.

**Jean** reported on the Women's Retreat which returned after a two-year hiatus and the renewal of liturgical ministries. Jean noted twenty-two women participated on February 28th, was pleased with the spiritual and depth of females and grateful for Deb's leadership and other helpers. Our guest speaker, Dr. June-Ann Greeley of Sacred Heart University was fabulous and well versed. This is the second one-speaker retreat, and the more streamlined planning process has proven effective and works well as a model moving forward.

On liturgical ministries, Jean commented on traction of the Ministry of Communion to the sick and homebound with three volunteers added with Fr. Sam validating they are in good standing and asked the council if anyone is interested and ready as folks in need come up. Greg commented that the Knights are interested in volunteering. Brad mentioned our excellent work at local nursing homes of Atria, Maplewood, and Selleck Woods. In addition, Fr. Karol serves at Mass every second Monday of the month at Atria and on March 9th and anointed ten participants. Next mass is April 13th at Atria. On ministries, Fr. Sam would like to see an Ushers Ministry renewed, as we have a lack of ushers, especially at certain masses like 5pm on Sunday.

**Natalie** reported on Youth Ministry with service projects, clothing drives, shopping for the New Covenant Center which culminated with a Valentines Day event. Natalie mentioned the Lenten Fridays at St Thomas More with Mass then eggs and cheese. The next event is March 22nd with stations of the Cross which St John will host three events this year vs two last year. The youth will participate in a June event in Jamaica for service project. Fr. Sam and council thanked Natalie.

**Nicole** reported on Faith Formation with 176 in our program this year vs ~200 last year. We are pleased with the spiritual growth of those in the program. Nicole mentioned that for Confirmation we partner with Saint Bridget of Ireland Church in Stamford which is good as it

allows for Confirmations each year though it limits attendance for Confirmation with our Bishop. Nicole will ask for two Confirmation events with Bishop Caggiano for extended family members can attend. On youth in Formation attending Mass, Natalie mentioned the challenges of our sports kids' families thou with effort, planning, and commitment, possible. Discussion on music at the different masses, prior choirs. Natalie and Fr. Sam mentioned a new Vicar / Director of Youth, Fr. Sam Kachuba, will be coming onboard which can help our Youth programs.

**Virginia** reported on a new Bereavement Ministry initiative with a vision of accompaniment and companioning the bereaved with Church and community assisting and supporting. Discussion unloaders in the past that assisted during funerals. Fr. Sam mentioned that the funeral home personnel are sometimes over scheduled and can neglect the families in need and through this Ministry can help fill the void. This should include appropriate readings, guidance on "words of remembrance" with emphasis for the devout vs secular commentary. In addition, simple guidance such as how to participate in Mass, where to sit and follow the celebration of Life. Virginia also mentioned a future Mass of Remembrance for those who passed away in the prior year.

**Chris** reported on financial state of the Parish. In Parish finances, cash flow is important and reported we are in acceptable position there. A couple of years ago, we moved half our funds to the financial market using Merrill Lynch in Westchester. Comfortable with investment and Catholic prudence in investing. We are down 3% in offertory so far this year, and our reliance on bequests in range of \$100K has not happened this year. We cut spending \$48K and gave \$50K of bequest funds to charities. The finance council supports a capital project campaign in the fall. While we still have \$204K from the "We Stand with Christ" campaign, our mission needs estimate will be greater. This is early in process and Fr. Sam asked for Council support as the campaign develops.

**Fr. Sam** discussed establishment of a Discernment Team. The mission of the Discernment Team is to receive names of potential candidates from the Parish community at large, which will help in the process of recruiting, vetting, and recommending candidates to serve on the Parish Council in the future. Fr. Sam and Jean will lead the group and ask for three Council members to volunteer and contact Jean in the near term.

**Fr. Sam** touched on the Parish Survey presented in the Bulletin. Use of professional surveys is being contemplated and how we follow up, and receive feedback, make a strategic plan and track results, is the topic of a broader discussion, and Council members asked for a separate meeting to discuss further this topic in April.

We ended with a prayer by Fr. Karol.

### **Proposed future Meetings - 2026**

April 20th

May 4th