

Minutes of the Saint John Pastoral Council Meeting – April 20th (The meeting was in person and held in the Conservatory of the Church).

Attendance:

- I. Rev. Sam Scott and Rev. Karol Ksiazck
Jean Benitez, Chairperson
Natalie Alini
George Benitez
Ed DeVylde
Nicole Brennan
Lisa Ioli
Brad Bushell, OCIA, Ambassadors
Virginia Dwyer-Aoyama, Bereavement Ministry
Greg Peeke, Knights
- Not Present:
Madi Greene
Drew Greene
Ray Slavin
Scott Tuck

Opened with prayer from Fr. Sam
The March 9th Council meeting minutes were approved.

Open Discussion:

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

Fr. Sam started with the Parish mission statement is now on our website:

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.

We continue to align and are patiently rebuilding a grace-filled Roman Catholic parish community where all are welcomed and engaged in the mission of the Church. Fr. Sam expressed appreciation for those who responded to the survey he included in the Bulletin in his column on a year in review.

Fr. Sam discussed the Parish questionnaire and discussed the need for an objective professional survey to truly assess the pulse of our Parish.

Jean discussed a 2-page summary on her research with Fr. Sam regarding a future survey tool and narrowed the different offerings from DMI (Disciple Maker Index), CARA (Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate) and Holy Cow CAT (Congregation AI Assessment Tool). They each bring a slightly different approach, insight outcomes, and implementation. Fr. Sam has seen recent success with Holy Cow CAT, and Jean mentioned that Kevin Keating, who has experience in marketing and surveys, will assist in the process of getting to next steps and a survey framework underway. There was discussion on the need to re-register folks in the Parish to ensure we have useful information and contact emails. Also comments on the value of surveys, what answers do we seek, to not over-complicate and timeline. There was reflection on how Church life was in the distant past, with active participation, volunteering, music program, volunteer choirs and contrasting this with recent observations of a new-normal of less of this and how to best move forward. Observation around parents not being present at recent first confessions of youth and lack of volunteers at some Masses like Sunday 5 pm. This proposed survey format will take several months and discussion on can our community as a Parish do in the meantime. Several topics came

up such as a special monthly Mass (first Saturday of each month) to honor the recently deceased, offering contemporary music at the 5 pm Sunday Youth Mass by getting a volunteer with piano/guitar talent from the high school. Darien high school has a music director, and students seek opportunities to volunteer for service credit, encourage small group formation and organic growth.

Virginia reported on a new Bereavement Ministry initiative with a vision of accompaniment and companioning the bereaved with Church and community assisting and supporting. Virginia discussed procedural process updates under way and reflected on recent funerals in offering welcoming, directing attendees, helping immediate family to help ensure worship and thanksgiving. The local funeral homes have not been sending their advance team to Church in a timely way, and we will need to work with the local funeral home on this going forward.

Brad reported on the OCIA (Order of Christian Initiation of Adults) and recent success. Locally and nationwide, there is an upswing on Catholic conversion. Some of the candidates have complicated situations and Brad, Fr. Sam, pleased we are welcoming and trying to collaborate with them. Brad noted that social media is helping drive interest with prominent Catholic influencers like Fr. Mike Schmitz and Bishop Barron.

Lisa reported on recent service at the preschool on getting a new director and assisting with the need to staff nine of the seventeen positions. This was a team effort and Lisa thanked Virginia as well. Our new preschool director, Lauren Sabini-Rill, and team are having a successful year. There will be a memorial plaque dedication for our prior director, Deborah Moran, who passed away last May. The dedication will take place on Saturday, May 30th at 10 am to honor, remember and celebrate her works. This will be open to the entire Church community and coordinating with members of St Aloysius Parish. Lisa mentioned the need for our community to help promote our preschool.

Natalie reported on Youth ministry and is finishing the year a week before Memorial Day. She emphasized the need for a St John middle school, sixth to eighth grade, youth group. It is an important age group to engage and help in their ongoing formation in living an authentic Christian life. Fr. Karol commented on his experience to help ensure kids are having fun with three out of every four meetings being fun and then one on religious formation. Excitement on the opportunity of youth groups.

Nicole reported on Faith Formation and the recent success of twenty kids receiving the Sacrament of Confirmation with Bishop Caggiano. Faith Formation wrapped up on schedule before Easter. There was discussion on pairing with St. Brigid Parish and what the future may bring in terms of multi-parish Confirmation ceremony. At St John, we will have thirty confirmation candidates next year and continue to be in a steady state there.

Fr Sam and Jean discussed the status of a Discernment Team to help in identifying future council members. Fr. Sam's original intention was to have the election of those nominated for the open seat on the Parish Pastoral Council on Pentecost Sunday, but the date will need to be changed due to extenuating circumstances. Natalie and Nicole agreed to be part of the Discernment Team.

Fr Sam offered an update on campus building and grounds. We have contracted with Doyle Coffin, an architecture engineering firm in Ridgefield, to do a thorough structural review to prioritize the needs of our campus. This effort included locating and sharing with Doyle Coffin the architectural drawings going back several decades.

Fr Sam discussed a future Capital Campaign recommended by the Finance Council to address the necessary capital improvements to our buildings and grounds and how we can drive a successful campaign as well as increase our weekly offertory. Fr. Sam reflected on Michael Ward's book, *Abundance: Creating a Culture of Generosity*.

We ended with a prayer by Fr. Karol.

Proposed future Meeting – 2026
May 11th