

## **St. George Pastoral Council Meeting Minutes**

October 25, 2020, 6:30 pm, Church Hall

### **Attendees**

- Clergy: Fr. Stephen Sledesky, Fr. Dennis Vincenzo. Trustees: Margot Burkle (via Zoom), Bill White. Members: Elaine Carter, Sarah Celotto, Yolande Eldridge, Maureen Fuest (via Zoom), Diana Harris, Joyce Ippolito, Laurie LaTerza (via Zoom), Valerie LeShane, Criona O'Brien, Johnna Sullivan. Peer Minister: Bobby Haig (via Zoom).
- Absent: Deacon Bob Tartaris, Debra Falvey, Harold Hutchinson, Andrew Wang.
- Visitors: Cara Correll, Jim Kenefick (via Zoom).

**Opening Prayer/Reflection:** Fr. Stephen led the opening prayer.

**Welcome/Acceptance of September 27 Minutes:** Sarah Celotto opened the meeting and asked for a motion to accept the minutes of the previous meeting. Valerie LeShane made a motion to accept the minutes, Criona O'Brien seconded, and the minutes were accepted unanimously.

**Peer Ministry Report:** Bobby Haig gave the Peer Ministry report. He said he hadn't been able to reach Claire Nichols in about a month, so not much has been happening. The peer ministers had their first meeting the previous Monday, a mass for the 10th graders, and that the 9th graders would be having a mass this coming Monday. Confirmation classes will be 90 minutes long and will involve speakers and subsequent discussion; there will be a virtual option for those who are not comfortable attending in person.

**Survey Monkey:** Father Stephen spoke about the need for us to create a survey to be sent to all parishioners. We broke into small groups for discussion.

Upon returning to the larger group, Laurie LaTerza reported that her group had discussed getting updates from ministries. Some have been operating, and it would be helpful to know what activities they are able to do during the pandemic. Calls were made to the ministries over the summer, but it would be useful to do follow-up calls now. We may want to push out information to let parishioners know what our ministries are doing.

Valerie reported that her group discussed the possibility of sending the survey out with this year's Christmas letter, perhaps sending the letter early this year in order to get the survey out. Questions posed by her group included: Is there anything we could do that would be helpful to you? Would virtual events be of interest? Do you have access to a computer or tablet? Would you like a buddy or to be a buddy or a penpal? Would you be interested in picking up a small lunch once a month? How might St. George assist you? Do you have specific needs for this Christmas?

Diana Harris reported on her group's discussion. They discussed the need to ask ministry heads what they are doing. Ask parishioners what we are doing well, what we could do better, and what we are not doing but should. She asked if we knew whether emails and phone numbers are up to date. Their group thought it might be a nice idea to send parishioners an advent calendar with 24 messages of hope to help them feel connected to the parish.

Sarah said that her group had emphasized the need to pay special attention to our youth during this time. It would be nice for youth to be able to gather if they would like to. They thought a weekly blog with prayer would be useful. Possible survey questions they thought of included: Do you think your needs are being met? What would make you be more comfortable to come to mass? Are you feeling disconnected from the church?

Fr. Stephen said that he was envisioning the Survey Monkey questions to be more yes/no questions rather than open-ended questions—perhaps one or two, but not too many.

Cara Correll said that the survey might identify things that students needing service hours could help with. Kids in the confirmation class would have a difficult time getting service hours this year.

Diana brought up the issue of confidentiality for the survey. Respondents want to be assured of confidentiality.

Sarah asked what our next steps should be. Valerie volunteered to organize the calling of ministries. Sarah, Criona, Maureen, and Yolande agreed to help with those phone calls. Yolande Eldridge and Joyce Ippolito volunteered to write the survey questions.

**Just Faith Program:** Laurie presented to the Council on the Just Faith program. She said that she, Francine Wainer, Joe Nelly, and Tony Sicignano had attended a seminar on the Catholic social ministry in March. The Just Faith program is another Catholic social justice program that has several different modules on things like hunger, homelessness, and racial equality, all framed in terms of the Catholic faith. She, Diana, and Margot implemented the module on racial equality and faith over the summer. The program itself focuses on both history and current events, asking “What can we do to help those who are marginalized? Laurie said the program gave her an opportunity to understand things from a different viewpoint. She felt it is empowering as a church to look at things we might not have been aware of, and think of ways to help people feel more welcome.

Margot spoke about how it is important to try to address issues because of our faith; it is expected of us. There are issues we are dealing with in our communities, workplaces, and schools. She understands the sentiment of not wanting to do this, but she feels it is important to address these issues. She said if we are weary, consider those directly affected by these issues. She feels we owe it to them to step up and make changes. She suggested we take time as a council to delve into the topic of racial equality, perhaps reading a book from the program and discussing it as a council.

Elaine Carter asked why this topic was chosen, and expressed concern about the particular books chosen. Margot replied that the topic was one of the Just Faith modules, and that the books suggested to the council via email were part of the module. Eleanor said that she was concerned about painting an entire group with one brushstroke, and that she found certain statements about white men offputting. Laurie said that reading *White Fragility* was an education for her, and she didn't feel it was pitting one group against another. Racism is a systematic problem that has existed for years.

Johnna spoke next about the challenges of being a mother to a black son. She has a problem with telling white people they are racist. She stated that she is heavily opposed to the Just Faith curriculum.

Fr. Stephen spoke about the need to avoid equating the Just Faith program with the Black Lives Matter movement. The module on racism is one small part of the program. He said that as Catholics we are

called to social justice based on the gospel, and it is *not* political. Catholic social teaching is part of our faith. It belongs to everyone on our church. Fr. Stephen feels strongly about teaching this program.

Maureen Fuest asked about the session of the program that will be taught in November in our church. She asked whether, rather than reading a book as part of the Council, we should encourage members of the Council to do the program itself.

Laurie said we might think about watching a video as a Council for discussion. Margot said that their intention was to introduce the Council to a small portion of the program. Sarah said she was confused about what was being asked.

Fr. Stephen asked us to consider how the Council might share in the program without taking it. He said that reading a book might be too much. He suggested the Bishop's pastoral might be better, or Brian Massengill's book *Racial Injustice in the Catholic Church*.

Laurie said that we always talk about bringing people into the church, so we need to think of ways as a community to move forth. She emphasized this program is about listening.

Fr. Stephen asked Johnna to suggest something for us to read in order to understand her perspective. He said we need to find the balance between both sides, but wasn't sure where to go for more information on her side. Margot also said she was interested in reading another perspective.

It was decided that reading a book is too much to ask of us right now and the discussion was tabled.

**Pastor Report:** Fr. Stephen gave the Pastor Report, saying that the religious education program is now under way. Teachers are working through the challenges of Zoom classes. He further reported that the church is now open to 200 people if it's possible to keep them socially distanced. Mass attendance has been averaging around the mid-80s to just over 100 people. He reported that people are cooperative in terms of wearing masks and following social distancing rules.

He also reported that our finances have dipped a little, but overall we are on good footing. More people have signed up for online giving, and most people have been keeping up their contributions.

**Closing comments/prayer:** Maureen asked if anything had come of the banner discussed at the previous meeting. Fr. Stephen said it's on hold for now. Margot led the closing prayer.

**Next Meeting:** The next meeting will be held on November 22 at 6:30 pm via Zoom only.