

Diocesan Pastoral Council Report for the Tri-parish Pastoral Council Meeting

February 7, 2017 at Sacred Heart of Jesus Church

What is the Diocesan Pastoral Council?

It is a consultative body made up of lay representatives, clergy representatives, the Bishop and Vicar General. The DPC will help the Bishop in making decisions or recommendations to better serve the needs of all Vermont Catholics, and to help build a healthy and more vibrant Church in our State.

It should be noted that Bishop Coyne emphatically stated that the DPC is not convened for determining parish closures or consolidations. Any such decisions would "come from the Parish itself rather than a directive from above. We don't want to lose people in the process while at the same time trying to bring people to church." (from the Minutes of the September 17th meeting)

Up to this point, three sessions have been held, May 7th, September 17th, 2016 and January 7th, 2017. There has been much brainstorming and suggestions from small groups, and demographic data provided by Monsignor McDermott with regards to the state of our churches and clergy.

Some highlights from meetings so far include:

1. Homily enrichment training for our priests which Bishop Coyne has begun to institute
2. Formation for our Seminarians will be at Mount St. Mary Seminary in Maryland starting in the Fall and St. Meinrads in Indiana for Philosophy. Mt. St. Mary's prepares our seminarians better for the more rural make-up of our Vermont Parishes and will be a better fit (Fr. Naples' Alma Mater!)
3. We are beginning to form foreign priests in our seminaries in the US, then after a year home, they will return with the promise of some years of service to our Diocese. This should eliminate some of the cultural misunderstandings that have occurred along the way and improve their language skills and understanding.
4. (See Comparative Stats given by Msgr. McDermott at the 9/17 meeting.) We received more detailed info at the 1/7/17 meeting and will be using that info to discuss how best to use the clergy we have with the parish needs. I presented a proposal based on the 1/7 meeting info provided by Msgr. McDermott that will be discussed with the larger group at our March 18th meeting. (See proposal for discussion January 7, 2017)
5. The Bishop wants to appoint Lay Representatives to several Diocesan Councils and Committees. These representatives will be drawn from DPC membership and serve as liaisons.
6. The DPC members gave many amazing and candid observations, reflections and recommendations from the Lay Catholic perspective. All the comments were recorded for viewing by the DPC. Personally, I was heartened to see the action of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of the faithful, who desperately want to see the Church vibrant and relevant again in the lives of the Catholic Faithful, and hope for those who do not know the faith.

Are you willing to help me in this work?

Bishop Coyne has asked the DPC members to share what we are talking about with our pastors and other lay faithful. He desires that we reach out and feel the pulse of our local Churches so that needs can be met. I put together a three-question survey that George Piette, DPC representative from Mater Dei and I will be using to gather Mass Preference Data that we will need for our March 18th, 2017 meeting. We will be addressing other groups within the Orleans/Essex County area and are especially eager to let our brothers and sisters know that their voices will be heard. Our hope is that we can adequately represent as many Catholics in our area as possible, and to begin to fulfill their spiritual needs for individual as well as parish growth.

Copies of the Survey are provided. Please take a moment to fill them out, or if you need time to reflect upon your answers, take it home and return it to me either personally, in the collection basket or mail to 71 School Street, Westfield, VT 05874.

Thank you for all you do,

Theresa McAvinney

DPC Representative, SHJ- Orleans Deanery