

***St. Joseph Catholic Community, Sykesville, Maryland***  
***Parish Pastoral Visit Report, April 15, 2011***

**Parish Pastoral Council Report on Recommendations**  
**January 2012**

On April 15, 2011 Bishop Mitchell T. Rozanski, with several of his staff, came for a pastoral visit. A number of recommendations in the report of that visit sent to the parish, "*St. Joseph Catholic Community, Sykesville, Maryland, Parish Pastoral Visit Report,*" (April 15, 2011), required action by the St. Joseph Catholic Community (SJCC) Parish Pastoral Council (PPC). This report documents the actions the Parish Pastoral Council took to address those recommendations. The report also covers items from at the meeting held with Dr. Thomas Little and staff on April 15, 2011.

Beginning in Summer of 2011 the PPC spent the majority of its meeting time addressing one or more topics. Virtually all topics required considerable pre-meeting investigation and compilation of data from PeopleSoft and other databases, historical files, as well as external data acquired from the Archdiocese, US Government census data online, and surveys PPC conducted. We thank Dr. Little for facilitating requests for data and helping us understand it.

This work was time-consuming and challenging. The PPC learned a great deal about the parish, our community and other parishes in our region. Knowledge previously held by a few gained wider distribution. We hope this makes us stronger and better able to serve the parish in the future. We have resolved a number of issues but others are still ongoing efforts to which we are committed.

**Regarding the Religious Formation Program: (pg.4)**

**4. I recommend that the staff and pastoral council invest some effort and time in a strategic planning effort to reconsider how to rebuild the parish's Small Faith Communities initiatives which had been so successful in the past in the parish but have recently fallen on more challenging times.**

**Regarding the collaboration of collegial groups and Pastoral and staff leadership: (pg. 6) (partial)**

**6. I encourage the council members to continue to discuss and pursue the issues that were discussed during the evening session together. These include.**

- Re-establish and revive small Christian communities that were prevalent and successful years ago;**

In November 2011, the PPC heard a presentation and discussed the history of Small Christian Communities (SCCs) in our parish. Although some SCCs formed based on common background (young mothers, seniors), most formed based on the times people were available to meet. The common foundation is faith and desire to learn more about the Gospels.

Expanding the present model by launching a large-scale effort to begin many new groups was judged inadvisable at this time since the effort to find leaders, obtain resources and provide support to new groups would be too much of a strain on staff already stretched with other Adult Formation responsibilities. PPC recommended trying to start small groups during Lent when the desire for spiritual renewal is high. This recommendation is still a work in progress.

**Regarding the collaboration of collegial groups and Pastoral and staff leadership: (pg. 6)**

- 2. I recommend that there be a review and discussion by the corporators, pastoral council and staff of the diocesan data indicating why over a thousand people living within the parish boundaries are choosing to align with other Catholic communities or to worship elsewhere. I also recommend that a plan of action to address this issue be developed from this discussion. Dr. Little or Deacon Hiebler of the vicariate staff is available to help facilitate this discussion. Report the outcome of this action to Dr. Little by January 30, 2012.**

**Regarding the collaboration of collegial groups and Pastoral and staff leadership: (pg. 6) (partial)**

- 6. I encourage the council members to continue to discuss and pursue the issues that were discussed during the evening session together. These include.**
- Surface and address questions which separate people from the parish.**
  - Reclaim people who have left the parish**

At the PPC's request, Dr. Little provided the Business Manager data on parish boundaries, numbers in our boundaries registered elsewhere, numbers outside our boundaries registered at SJCC as well as maps to visualize the dimensions of the topic. To that, parish staff added data for those in SJCC databases who moved out of the parish, as well as the reason, if one was given.

PPC discussions noted while there are 1,056 families in SJCC boundaries registered elsewhere, there are also 719 families living outside the parish boundaries registered here. The difference between the two is 337 families – that is, there are nearly as many families living outside our borders registered in our parish as there are families living inside our borders that are registered elsewhere.

To better understand why parishioners leave, each person who left in the past year for reasons unknown to the parish was called. Most moved out of parish boundaries (31); died (16); or children attend religious education but decline to register (20). That last group is interesting because they have no wish to register at any parish, not specifically SJCC. An additional 25 changed parish affiliation for a variety of reasons including: children attending Catholic schools which require registration to get parish rates, another parish is closer, are not Catholic but attended SJCC missions or camps.

The phone survey of those who left the parish showed no large problem to address. Most surveyed were sorry to leave SJCC and would return if conditions (schools, jobs) were different. The Archdiocese of Baltimore implementation of a uniform policy on school tuition vis a vis parish registration should remove the need for families to register out of parish.

The boundaries of this parish are a factor. Those living in the southern and northern areas are geographically closer to other churches. Some of those surveyed reported it is faster for them to get to another church given the nature of roads in this county. Given the price of gas and the occasional road jams, this is out of parish control.

How to reclaim those who do not contact the parish office when they leave is an issue needing to be addressed. There is anecdotal information of why some people leave. Finding a means to reach out based on second hand information is problematic, but does provide some insights. Often the information is received very late, so it is unrealistic to effectively address issues which might have existed.

We continue to work on being welcoming, identifying how to be more visible in the community, and are staying alert to what separates parishioners from us that is within our control.

**Regarding the collaboration of collegial groups and Pastoral and staff leadership: (pg. 6)**

4. I recommend that the pastoral council members request assistance in their process of re-visioning, re-configuring and re-growing the Pastoral Council's configuration. I assure the Council that the vicariate staff, in particular, Deacon Charlie Hiebler will be glad to provide assistance. Communicate your progress in this matter with Dr. Little of the Vicariate staff by the end of January, 2012.

FY11 was a re-building year for the PPC. A Nomination and Discernment process was used to recruit new PPC members for FY12. Over 200 people were nominated. Of these, about forty attended the first information session, and seven went into the discernment process. Five people were discerned to join the PPC. At the February, 2012 meeting, PPC formed a Selection Subcommittee to guide the same discernment process to fill vacancies for the FY13 year.

In January the PPC held a discussion to ascertain whether the expectation that all four Commission chairs be present at every PPC meeting was reasonable. The outcome was a clear affirmation and renewal of the protocol expecting Commission chairs to be involved.

Two PPC Commissions were re-established: Christian Formation and Service, Justice and Life. It is intended these Commissions will improve and make more effective the parish's efforts in these areas.

**Regarding the collaboration of collegial groups and Pastoral and staff leadership: (pg. 6)**

5. I also suggest the council members refer to the publication "Called To Serve, Gifted To Lead - The Ministry of the Parish Pastoral Council" which can be provided by Deacon Hiebler to support them in the reconfiguration efforts.

PPC read, discussed and reflected on "I Like Being in Parish Ministry - Pastoral Council" during the FY2011 council year. This was recommended reading for FY12 PPC members as well. PPC members were reminded several times throughout the year about reading the publication "Called To Serve, Gifted To Lead – The Ministry of the Parish Pastoral Council."

**Regarding the collaboration of collegial groups and Pastoral and staff leadership: (pg. 6) (partial)**

6. I encourage the council members to continue to discuss and pursue the issues that were discussed during the evening session together. These include.
- Hospitality;
  - Finding ways to improve adult faith formation in the parish;
  - Develop an inspiring vision for the council;
  - Need to listen and support people in the upcoming changes in liturgy to take place in the Fall;
  - Training for people who have volunteered for ministries;
  - Share minutes of staff and commission meetings to keep all better informed;
- Please communicate your progress in this matter to Dr. Little of the Vicariate staff by the end of January, 2012.

- **Hospitality**  
Efforts to be more welcoming have increased. The Marian charism of welcoming has always been a part of the parish. Time is usually taken at the beginning of each Mass to welcome those new or visiting. Bulletin announcements remind those in the pews of how to register and the benefits. Coffee and donuts are served on a regular basis, forming a pleasant way to share fellowship with fellow parishioners, priests and staff. The Parish and Community Relations committee has implemented 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday Breakfast that is served after 2 Sunday morning mass as well. Attendance is growing as promotion for it increases at Mass and in the bulletin. PPC discussions were the impetus for a new quarterly welcoming event for new parishioners. The Temporary Administrator sends each new parishioner a personal letter welcoming them into the parish and inviting them to a specific Mass. At the Mass, they are recognized, blessed by the community, and welcomed at coffee and donuts afterwards. Families attending were very happy to have time to learn about the parish from the Temporary Administrator, parish staff and PPC members who sit with them, learn about them and based on what they hear, steer them to matching parish services, as well as answer all questions.

- **Finding ways to improve adult faith formation**  
PPC is addressing this through the effort to build up Small Christian Communities during Lent. Improving awareness of events already offered is also underway.

The parish supports and is increasing the awareness for existing programs such as: Perpetual Adoration and the RCIA topical sessions open to all. The Christian Formation Commission is expected to focus on this topic.

- **Develop an inspiring vision**  
At a spring meeting, the PPC will identify the most important parish issues which can be addressed before the end of the council year.

The parish participated in a pilot survey conducted by CARA and our Pastor-on-sabbatical, Fr. Terry Weik, S.M. The survey results are expected to inform and guide the Parish Pastoral Council's vision and work.

- **Listen and support people in upcoming changes in liturgy**  
This task was delegated to the Liturgy Commission which reported to PPC regularly. They did excellent work. Preparations for the changes started well in advance with bulletin inserts, parishioners were taught the new music early, and at Sunday coffee and donuts, there was a DVD playing every week for three weeks. Presentations before Mass were encouraging and incorporated some of the feedback and thoughts reported from parishioners. Cards were in the pews with the new translation for Advent. The Liturgy Commission also prepared the priests well, and Masses went smoothly. Most importantly, the changes were presented positively, not as something that had to be done, but as a wonderful opportunity to be as one with the Church at large. As with all parishes, work continues to learn, understand, embrace, and interiorize the new translation.
- **Training for people who have volunteered for ministries**  
The EQUIP program begins in March 2012 to train volunteers. The Pastoral Associates are actively promoting the Equip program. We are also hosting a series of classes at SJCC.

○ **Share minutes of staff and commission meetings**

Staff meeting minutes are shared with the PPC Executive group. Not all commissions have minutes. The Finance, Facilities and Liturgy Commissions will be sharing their meeting minutes with the PPC. New Commission leaders have been notified their minutes need to be shared with PPC as quickly as possible. Commission chairs saw the benefit to them and the parish. This is a work in progress.

**Regarding Parish Outreach and Evangelization: (pg. 7)**

- 1. I recommend, as I mentioned in the attached letter, the staff join with various groups within the community to study and devise a plan to address a ministry initiative to the growing number of Hispanic persons in the area (according to the 2010 census) who seem are not yet involved in the life of the parish.**

**I entrust the work of addressing this situation through the pastor to the Parish Pastoral Council, and to the Evangelization and the Social Action Committees (Welcoming, Bereavement, and the Social Activities) and to the Liturgical Commission. I also ask that you include in this reflection those others in the parish who have committed to explore their participation in the Marianist charism. This is an important process to better focus and addresses the parish ministries to these persons and communities within the parish. I look forward to learning what you discover.**

While there are growing numbers of Hispanics in South Carroll, the most recent census data continues to show the majority of the Hispanic population is still located in the Westminster area. South Carroll's population is 2% Hispanic while that of the Westminster area is 6%. Nonetheless, the December 2011 PPC meeting demonstrated that SJCC has an underserved population. Fr. George Onida, S.M., a guest for this topic, brought with him nine people who are in our parish but attend Masses in Spanish elsewhere. They would like to attend Mass here and have Bible study for adults in Spanish. Their children can, and do, use the existing programs as they are English and Spanish speaking. How to staff these services is problematic. Fr. George has been providing needed English language services at SJCC and Spanish language services at other parishes. Dr. Little was also a guest for this meeting. He observed that the Archdiocese is seeing several parishes with the same need, and noted that the Archdiocese may wish to consider how it can support Spanish language Masses at the diocesan level, rather than each individual parish attempting to meet its needs alone.

**Regarding the liturgical practices in the church: (pg. 7)**

- 1. The topic of "reverence" in the worship space continue to be addressed through available instruction opportunities, including, announcements and pulpit instruction that exhort and support appropriate behavior among the parish members and that enlightens members' awareness of the worship space in the church as a sacred and shared space.**

Bulletin inserts, commentary before Mass begins, friendly reminders during the announcements by the priests, improving the crying area (for parents with restless children), have all helped somewhat. In August 2011, the tabernacle was moved to a more prominent spot behind the altar.

Additionally, the statue of the Blessed Mother moved from the back of the main church to the right, front alcove. The changes gave the church a more traditional Catholic identity and may also have contributed to parishioner awareness of it being a sacred space. While incremental progress has occurred, more can be done and will be done.

The Parish Pastoral Council enjoyed working on these topics and will continue to address open issues while going forward with new areas the parish needs to address.

Submitted by:

*Arlene Klair*

Arlene Klair  
Chair, on behalf of the Parish Pastoral Council