



General Minutes from Lake/Geauga District Meeting

January 13, 2020

Prayer/Lunch/Welcome from Gina Rensi, District Chair (We had 56 members attend. 15/20 parishes were represented.)

Luann Sowers- Crisis Pregnancy Ministry

- Director of Development for the Bella Women's Center in Youngstown, Ohio
- Working to bring a new center to Lake County
- Luann's background- worked at Birthright in Lake and Geauga for about 20 years. Began in this ministry because a family member in a crisis pregnancy had come to her for direction and she wanted to be able to share resources with her.
- Birthright is a Pregnancy Resource Center who primarily help with material support- diapers, clothing, formula. Also offers emotional support for those in crisis pregnancies.
- This time last year, God put a call on my heart to do more and to get involved more with abortion-minded women. She reached out to the folks at Bella Women's Center to find out more about what they do and how she could get involved.
- At the same time God was also putting the call on some other people's hearts in Lake County to bring a Center to Lake County.
- I reached out to Tia Ciferno, Executive Director of the Bella Women's Center. Tia had a dream about saving 400 children using the antibodies in her blood, two days before Luann contacted her. This shows that God does have a hand in this venture.
- Found that in Lake/Geauga County about 400 women a year choose abortion. The graduating class of Willoughby South High school is about 300, so that's an entire class and 1/3 of the Junior class lost each year in our community. We need to do more.
- Here is how we can do more: Support the Bella Center
- Primary patient that comes to the Center is Abortion-Minded. Our primary goal is to "meet her where she is at" just like Jesus met the woman at the well.
- The clients are in the crisis mode, they are in fear and confusion and feeling pressured.
- Therefore, we can't look "pro-life" or "Christian." Our marketing and presentation to her are very neutral. One that is filled with love and compassion and allows her to take a breath.
- 70% of women who have abortions, say that they were coerced.

- What brings her to us? We offer ultrasounds that are required by law prior to getting an abortion. We check the viability of the baby and allow the mother to see the baby.
- We provide STD testing and treatment.
- All services are offered free of charge and we want to offer these services in her “backyard.”
- We do not offer abortions or referral for abortions and this is very clear in our literature, website and initial information that we provide to the clients.
- From the moment she comes to us or makes the phone call she hears a calming voice.
- Our centers have a spa-feel and are very calm and welcoming. Helps to take the fear away and she is initially greeted by a compassionate staff member.
- We offer all of her options which is not information she would get at an abortion clinic. We hear time and again “I didn’t know about that. No one told me about those options.” We talk to her about the abortion procedure but not from a scare-tactic point of view but from an educational clinical point of view, so that she gets the facts. We offer her options about parenting. We talk to her about adoption. Bella has had up to 10 women per year choose adoption instead of aborting.
- We talk to her about another organization in Middlefield called “Holding Time.” This organization connects women with that need adoption services, foster services, respite care. She would not get this information anywhere else.
- We offer post-abortive care. Abortion clinics do not offer this.
- One of the saddest things we hear is “I wish you were here 10 or 20 years ago.” But we are here now and we can offer her healing for the choices she makes.
- We are blessed to be in a community that has a Birthright so that when she chooses life we can offer her resources. We also have Hannah’s Home if she needs a place to stay.
- We also offer her spiritual care. We look at her holistically including her spiritual being. This past year, Bella had 30 women come to Christ.
- How effective is this?
 - In 8+ years, they have had over 1200 abortion-minded women walk in their door and choose life.
- Assessing risk level
 - Abortion-Determined woman- abortion is the only option. 35-40% of the abortion-determined women choose life.
 - Abortion-Minded woman-maybe considering life but is definitely leaning toward deciding on an abortion. Of these women, 65-70% choose life.
 - At Risk- thinking of having the baby but they have a lot of risk factors in their life. These risk factors include young age, still a student, in a volatile relationship. Any of these factors might change their decision. Of these women, 100% choose life.

- Unfortunately we do have some women who walk out and choose abortion but we have planted seeds and they may return with a second pregnancy and choose life because they were not judged, coerced or pressured.
- During counseling we don't offer contraception or birth control.
- We have 2 websites: the Bella Women's Center is the patient website and Bella Team is the donor website. On donor website are more testimonial videos. Patient website is marketed to the abortion-minded woman.
- In next few weeks we will be getting a name for the actual center in Lake County . Right now the project is called "Project SOS." We will be operating under a licensed medical physician who will act as the Medical Director. We will have licensed nurses on staff, a licensed RDMS who will be doing the ultrasound and patient/family advocates.
- We need your prayer and we need to build awareness. I have a few other speaking engagements to build this awareness at churches and youth groups.
- This is 100% community support funded. There is no government assistance for this.
- Since July/Aug 2019, we have raised over \$350K. The community wants this for their daughters, and nieces and is supporting us.
- We are having a banquet on April 30th and May 1st to raise funds at LaMalfa Party Center. Banquet is free and it is a focused effort to raise funds for the Center.
- We are looking for Vision Hosts-someone to get 8-10 people to the banquet.
- We have a FaceBook Page for Project SOS and monthly Prayer Meetings on the 2nd Saturday of each month at various locations.
- We have a building on Tyler Blvd in Mentor. Hope to sign the lease by the end of the month.
- My email is luann@Bellaswomenscenter.com if you have any further questions.

Q and A

- 1) How often does a partner come to the center? About 50% of the time she brings someone with her and the advocate with speak with the partner while the woman is in the back receiving counseling.
- 2) Is it correct that Birthright of Lake County is not set up to handle crisis pregnancies? That is correct they offer material support once life is chosen. Hannah's Home sees girls in crisis but their crisis is that they have no place to go. So we really all three work together.
- 3) What does your youth presentation look like? Focus is on letting the youth know what is available so that they can refer their friends to the center. Young girls are going to go to their friends first in a crisis, so we want youth to know what resources are available.

Jen Ricard and Fr. David Stavarz Theology of the Body, Cleveland

- Theology of the Body (TOB) is education on what it means to be human. To be able to help us understand this truth so that we don't end up in a crisis situation.
- We want to share with you my own story of coming to understand TOB and what is happening in our own diocese with TOB.
- We will share an overview of TOB and then also share with you the nonprofit that was just incorporated and lastly some events that are coming from that nonprofit.
- Fr. David Stavarz introduced himself. He was exposed to TOB in seminary training and then in November 2019 he attended the Institute in Philadelphia.
 - Weighed more on my heart by going to the Institute. It was a head and heart immersion experience. TOB is coming from the sense of encountering information in your head and heart. TOB expands our understanding of who God is and who we are.

Jen Ricard gives quick overview of TOB.

- John Paul II wrote a book and prior to be chosen Pope he was going to publish it. He was advised not to publish the book as a Pope and instead decided to share his book verbally. Over five years (1979-1984) he delivered a weekly catechesis. There is a series of 129 talks that have been accumulated into this one education in what it means to be human.
- I was introduced to TOB in 2005 because I was struggling in my faith. I was volunteering with the youth ministry and teenagers can see right through you and sense authenticity. Associate Pastor was Fr. Damien who helped me to know that "Christianity isn't about figuring everything out but rather it is a journey. If you're willing to walk with me, I'm willing to walk with you." He slowly gave me books and articles on the church teachings that I disagreed with. The common thread is that we are created by God in his image and likeness. I totally fell in love with our Church. I saw our church as a Mother wanting to embrace her children and bring her children to her son. I understood who God was and who I am and I trusted the church and its teachings. The Institute allowed me to embrace my faith.
- Throughout TOB, John Paul II just keeps proposing truth to us and invites us to enter in. When we make the journey of our heart and we can change our lives to live in truth we will be filled with peace. The peace that comes to us is given to us in prayer and the sacraments. I continued to study at the seminary and received my Master's Degree in Theology and I finished 8 courses at the Institute and got certified.
- TOB is a two part catechesis.
 - First part answers: What does it mean to be human?
 - Our origin
 - Our history
 - Our destiny

Each section starts with scripture and is scripture based.

- Second part answers: How do I live my life to find happiness?
 - Celibacy for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven
 - Marriage as a sacrament and vows of entering freely, totally and fully
 - Sexual Union as the physical sign of the marital union
- John Paul II begins with the whole creation story and God has Eve under his arm preparing to give her as a gift to Adam. Not good for man to be alone. The purpose of our lives is to learn how to love. The animals are not sufficient as a compliment to man, so God made woman. Man and woman are complimentary and equal. John Paul II says that Adam and Eve are naked and not ashamed and have “the peace of the interior gaze” (intimacy). Story of Original Sin in Genesis is relevant today when we think we know better than what God wants. The beauty of the Paschal Mystery is lived out in our daily lives when we struggle there is usually a resurrection. Our destiny is the resurrection of our bodies.
- There is a false impression that TOB is against a lot of things as opposed to being an education on what it is to be human.
- The complimentary nature of men and women is why life goes on in the world. If we could just teach our youth the simple truth that sex is for babies and for bonding, that could change everything. And this all makes sense to us as Christians because of the mystery of the incarnation. Our God became man and took on human flesh and dwelled among us to teach us what it means to be divine. Fr. David is going to give us a reflection on celibacy for the sake of the Kingdom.
- TOB and the Christmas season we just celebrated reminds us that Jesus became human. We have an incarnational faith, TOB is known in our experience. TOB highlights what we feel and what we go through as human beings. People of all faiths can agree that we all have a body and live a bodily existence. God has put within us desires; desires for things, vacations. And God wants to fulfill our desires. Well thinking about priesthood, what does a priest have to say about sex. Well I am a human being, and so I was reflecting on my initial call to the priesthood. One of the obstacles of the call to religious life is this reality of celibacy. At the beginning of my seminary years one of my prayers was to make my journey authentic; to still be who I was and not give up my desires for friendship and intimacy with others.
- Throughout my years of seminary I more deeply understood that priesthood and marriage are two sides of the same coin. In the sense that we are all called to love and are called to sacrifice, and are called to intimacy. Priesthood is a life of intimacy just as marriage it. Even if priesthood is a life without physical sex, we are also called to intimacy, even just through deep friendships. Christopher West breaks apart the word “intimacy”-- into me see. Each one of us has God at the core of who we are, that’s what makes us human beings (we have a soul). It’s all about coming into reality with that. After going to TOB, I have been praying the words of the mass a little differently. “This is my Body, This is my Blood” has more

meaning now. Even though, I don't have sex in my life, my life is still meant as a gift to other people. Literally as a priest, it has been amazing how much I have given myself to others. The Lord has lead me to give myself away. Celibacy is the sign that "here is not everything." We are meant for so much more, we're meant for something else. Marriage is another reality of how your life is poured out in love, sacrifice and beauty. Defining love as a Christian love that is specific. It is a love that is total, that is free, that is faithful and it is fruitful. That is for every human being and for every occasion.

- Our kids have a lot of questions and they want to know who am I and how am I going to live life well? Diving into the teaching of TOB is how we help our kids answer these questions about life and about their fulfillment. I continue to pray with TOB and not only learn it in my head but allow it to affect who you are.
- Jen Ricard shares story of teaching her 10-year-old that sex is for babies and for bonding. Sex is for life and Sex is sacred because life is sacred. A new life is begins that will live forever with God. This is the truth of John Paul II states and sexual union is a sign of marriage. Our hope is to be with God forever.
- TOB CLE was incorporated in September 2019 and got our non-profit status in October 2019.
 - Our first events are coming up soon. We are hosting one day courses on January 25th-St. Bernadette in Westlake, February 8th- Holy Family in Stow and March 14th – St. Robert and William in Euclid. Courses are for teachers, PSR teachers, parents and anyone that wants to understand more about the beauty of the body and the beauty of God's plan and what he wants for our lives.
 - In the summer we will offer a three day course with the emphasis on educators and we will also offer a retreat. In the Fall, we will have a conference.
- Bishop desires that we have this in our schools as it already is and it is coming to our PSR programs and to our high schools.
- Had flyers and brochures for distribution. Check out TOBCLE.org for more information.

Gina Rensi shared that the diocese has incorporated all of the TOB curriculum into the schools. Diocese is working on Programming to get TOB into our PSR programs.

Announcements:

- Kelly Davis thanked everyone for participating in the Christmas Card Signing Campaign in December. They wrote out 4,300 cards and distributed them to every nursing home in Lake and Geauga County that our parishes work with and also in Cuyahoga and Summit County. Also went to the homeless, battered women's shelters. Next year, hope to sign over 5,000 cards.
- Rice Bowl Campaign starts soon. Every parish will have to put in an order for their Rice Bowls this year. Every year, you usually receive your Rice Bowls without ordering, but

every 10 years or so, each institution needs to place a new order. Just have to go on CRS Rice Bowl website to re-order.

- Peace and Justice Dinner will be April 24th, 2020. Flyers will be coming out very soon.
- Sandra from the ADAMHS Board will be speaking at a future meeting about Suicide Prevention. I am on the Leadership Lake County Community-Builders Board this year and we are focusing on Suicide Prevention. My sub group is working on senior citizen suicide prevention and what we found was that the group most likely to commit suicide in our county is white men between ages 51-65 y.o. We will be sharing some more information with your parishes and some training opportunities in the future.
- Mark Crowley from Lake Catholic announced that the Lake Catholic Gala will be on February 15th, 2020 and the honorees will be the Christ Child Society of the Western Reserve which serves Lake County and Deacon Bob Grgic from St. Gabriels.

Next Lake/Geauga District Meeting is Monday, March 23rd, 2020 11:45 am – St. Noel, Willoughby Hills