



General Minutes from Lake/Geauga District Meeting

November 14, 2022

St. John Vianney was hosting parish

We had 50 members attend.

Fr. Tom Johns from St. John Vianney welcomed the participants and offered an opening prayer.

Gina Rensi also welcomed the participants and outlined the meeting. Last meeting began discussion on priest availability and sacramental availability and how that affects us as a church. A subcommittee was formed to address these needs and they have begun working. Fr. David Stavarz will give a review of the recent priests' convocation and then he and Mary Pat Frey will present their findings on the recently formed subcommittee looking at the priest availability in the district.

Fr. Stavarz recapped the Priest Convocation Meeting that occurred in Oct 2022 at Sawmill Creek Resort. This was his first convocation and the first one held in the last three years for the Diocese of Cleveland.

There were three speakers:

- 1) Deacon Greg Kandra who writes the blog *thedeaconsbench.com*. His message centered around "being servants and joyfully telling the story" of your faith. He gave three separate talks.
- 2) Bishop Michael Woost spoke on "Priest as Pilgrim, Prophet and Presider." He shared his life since ordination as a Bishop and the holy vulnerability of the priesthood.
- 3) Dan Cellucci- Founder of Catholic Leadership Institute (DMI) presented "Made for this Moment- Priestly Ministry and Parish Life in Times of Challenge, Chaos and Incredible Opportunity."
 - a. He presented demographics of Catholics and some of the survey results from the DMI.
 - b. He also shared a witness to his own fatherhood.After these talks priests began to talk about a Vision for the Future of the Diocese and District Mass Scheduling Planning

In our own district we started discussing the vision for our area.

- A) There is a need for Surgery- gave anecdote about Fr. Fred needing back surgery, but first he needed heart surgery to prepare himself for the back surgery (structural repair). In our own district there are some structural things that need to change and also some spiritual things that need repaired, maybe even before the structural things.
 - a. According to Dan Cellucci's data: 73% of Catholics age 18-35 years old agreed "somewhat" or "strongly" that they could be a good Catholic without going to Mass every Sunday. This is just one of the things that makes up the spiritual climate we live in.
- B) The Church of Today versus The Church of the Future-
 - a. We are blessed with a collaborative district and pastoral planning is a matter of responsibility and charity and we need to bridge the gap with our people who are unaware of the things we are headed for statistically.

- i. When we come up with a plan to address Mass restructuring we need to make sure that we are A) doing something well and B) doing something together.
- C) Opportunity for the Eucharistic Revival -Mass restructuring is a chance to enter into Eucharistic Revival

The Proposed Vision/Strategy – the 20,000 ft. view to address the structural and spiritual needs of the district

Step 1: Gather regional data via a google form survey and also used DMI (Disciple Maker Index) to collect information from the district parishes.

Step 2) Form a Guiding Document to address a) education on the stats for our area b) Catechesis-what is Eucharist?, what is Mass?, what does it mean to worship God? c) Proposed changes

Step 3) Use the District meetings for Collaboration and Feedback on the findings

Step 4) Hold Focused Parish Listening Sessions with parish council, key parish leaders, average parishioners, etc. to get their reactions for what we are proposing.

Step 5) Develop an intentional and well-done media campaign to flesh out the information from the Guiding Document. Campaign would include flyers, videos to get the message out to people.

Develop a vision and timeline and discuss how to combine this with Eucharistic Revival.

Fr. Dave Woost and Mary Pat Frey have done work on collecting the stats and beginning to explore this topic. In the absence of a priest how can we function as a church?

Mary Pat presented the demographics slide (used census data) regarding population growth in Lake and Geauga Counties, racial and ethnic diversity numbers, age distribution, and Google Form responses from the participating parishes.

The priest Demographics came directly from the Clergy Personnel Office- projection of losing 40 diocesan priests (net difference retirement vs. newly ordained) over the next 4 years.

Also included are a few of the slides that Dan Cellucci presented at the Priests' Convocation Meeting

- 1) The "people shortage is greater than the priest shortage." This may change what is being expected in the church.
- 2) Mass attendance has suffered- it has been a struggle to get Mass attendees after COVID
- 3) Map of US depicting Number of Priests relative to number of parishes
 - a. Dark green = # of priests > # of parishes. Cleveland is currently in this category. Dan Cellucci mentioned though that he expects the dark green areas to go straight to red and not have a gradual slide through light green, yellow, etc.
 - b. Red = dramatically more parishes than priests.
 - c. Fr. Liebhardt also pointed out that you must consider not only the number of parishes but also the size of parishes must be considered when looking at the data. For example, the parishes in LA are much, much larger than in the parishes in Philadelphia.
- 4) Parish Identity Crisis- our Parish Life is based on assumptions that aren't true anymore
 - a. For example: we were thinking that the people shortage was not as great as the priest shortage, but this may not be true.

- 5) We have too much stuff and we can't take care of it all. "Less may be more...if we do it right."
We can make changes that are hard to make, if we do it right.

Opened meeting up to discussion to explore at each table.

- 1) What does this say about us as a church?
- 2) What does this mean for parishioners?
- 3) How do we continue our Catholic life, Catholic ethic, Catholic spirit in the midst of these changes?

These reactions were shared:

- a) We can do better- we can take things from catechesis and move it into evangelization and have people have an encounter with Christ.
- b) We can do more and this is a hope-filled statement.
- c) It seems that the current generation has been sacramentalized but not evangelized.

What can we do to help ourselves as parish leaders to help our parishioners be prepared and participative in the changes?

Ideas- develop a "Center of Excellence" for a particular ministry and have the priests focus on sacraments and hire facility managers to run the facilities of the parish.

Small Parish Model Presented by Mary Pat Frey with Parish Trends 2019-2022 for Divine Word used as an example. Divine Word hosted a Pilot Listening Session to hear what the parishioners are thinking and what their needs are.

Mass attendance is down 19% vs. before COVID. DW has taken mass counts throughout the Fall. We have a slight increase in recent weeks.

Age range distribution-larger percentage of young adults and the older population as compared to county numbers. This is helpful information as we consider the needs of the parishioners.

Baptisms are up as well as funerals.

Four Parishes in the district do not have Mass 7 days a week (usually priest has one day off). May explore complementary Parish Pods based on location.

We did host a Pilot Parish Listening Session at Divine Word. The following were reactions from the Listening session:

- a) "We're not surprised." Mary Pat shared that she would like people to be surprised and points out that more education is needed in this area. Wants participants to be surprised by the data and also be part of the solution.
- b) Participants idea was to just find more retired priests to move to CLE. But this is not realistic and points to need for more education.

- c) Participants do see hope in the younger generation. They see families in the pews that need support and encouragement. Want to say to families “it’s so great you’re here.”
- d) Participants appreciated being informed
- e) Wanted to know, so what is the outcome of this? Answer: still working on this as a district but will develop a plan

Some questions that came out of previous district meeting for this project:

- 1) What are the requirements when there is not a priest available? We always want to direct the people to seek the Eucharist. First reaction should not be “let’s just have a prayer service.”
- 2) What happens with unused Mass intention? Divine Word is starting to explain to those who call that their Mass intention may need to be moved if there is not a Mass said that day.
- 3) What fulfills Mass obligation? Is there a nearby parish you can attend?
- 4) How can offertory be handled without Mass? Encourage automated giving or forward envelope to intended Parish

Suggestion from the Subcommittee- A) Create a Model for a Large Parish B) Encourage Parish Listening Sessions- a chance to both listen and catechize C) Eventually draw up a district plan/document to guide the parishes through this process.

Table discussion occurred next on these questions:

- 1) What are the negatives that have to be overcome in relation to the Sacramental Availability of Priests?
- 2) What strengths can we rely upon to help us move forward?
- 3) What tangible outcomes will come of this at your own parish?
- 4) What are your next steps?

Maureen Dowd shared- We’re one church with many sites. We have to get away from being too parochial. We don’t need to do more at each parish. Let the parishioners know that it is okay to attend Mass at a different parish. What people seek is the Eucharist. She also mentions that we need to do a better job of educating our people and we want to have fuller celebrations for what the Eucharist was supposed to be.

Mary Pat shared - this discussion effects all the laity and not just priests. The laity are part of the solution.

Teresa Speelburg shared that we are one church and Deacon Larry shared that his RCIA candidates want more. Education is key to bringing them back each week. Deacon Phil shared that we have to figure out what is going to bring them back next week and it seems we are always competing with sports. We have to stop trying to be everything to everybody.

This discussion will continue at our January District Meeting. Mary Pat collected the notes that were taken at each table. PowerPoint slides will be made available to help you plan your listening sessions.

Announcements:

- 1) Greg Coogan from the Office of Catechetical Formation at Diocese announced that there will be QPR training specifically to address the needs of young people. The objective is to equip catechists and parishioners with the skills to address mental health crises and suicidal tendencies. Training session is on Monday, Feb. 13, 2023 at St. Anselm in Chesterland from 6:30 to 8:00 pm.
- 2) Fr. Marty Dober- interest in reviving Young Adult Ministry in the District including sharing resources and events. He would like to begin hosting Theology on Tap in our district and collaborating the Young Adult Ministry among the parishes. Please contact him if you are interested in assisting and joining the planning. frdober@sjvmentor.org
- 3) Joanie Klemens from Matre Dei Academy announced that they are hosting a drive through Xmas Light Display called "Light the Night" beginning 12/16 and will be open all season. They are asking for a box of cereal donation for their food pantry. Display is narrated via a radio station and includes a 3-story tree on the front lawn.
- 4) Fr. Greg Schaut- Lake Health Systems Chaplain- last year they collected 1800 Xmas cards for the staff at the hospitals in the area and they are hoping to do the same this year. He has sent a request to each parish and has also reached out to the protestant churches in the are to provide cards. Please forward him the signed Xmas cards by December 9th.
- 5) Deacon David Chojnacki from St. Mary Painesville announced that Lake County Jail is open again to accept ministry visits. Please contact Fr. Alex Spenik at St. Mary Painesville to coordinate a visit. aspelik@stmarypvl.org

Deacon Dominic from St. John Vianney offered closing prayer.

Next Lake/Geauga District Meeting is Monday, January 9th, 2023 11:45 am – St. Gabriel