

St. Thomas More Pastoral Council Minutes for July 24, 2019

Members Present: Fr Frank Baumert, Betty Piskorski, Liz Fox, Karen Fogarty, Abby Skradski, Monica Mora-Handlos, Travis Washington, Barb Boettger, Connie Gewinner

Members Absent: Joe Pesek

Guests: Seminarian Minh Tran, Deacon Matt Wolbach

Opening Prayer: Fr. Frank opened the meeting with a prayer.

The secretary read the minutes of our final meeting with Fr. Norman Hunke listing the Council's accomplishments and goals; things yet to achieve. We need to evaluate where things are at and continue moving forward.

Fr. Frank asked us about the different committees here at St. Thomas More. He suggested we invite someone from each committee to the council meetings to give us about a 2 minute talk about what they are doing. A report from each committee would suffice. As Parish Council we need to be willing to go to the other organizations meetings as well.

OLD BUSINESS:

Parish Photo Directory is something Fr. Frank wants to see happen.

Fr. thinks it's a positive move having our Festival now in October.

Fr. Scott Hastings is leaving and going to St. Peters. His last day at STM is Aug. 12. He has been at STM for a year.

NEW BUSINESS:

Mass Attendance Declining: Regular attendance at weekend Masses is 25 – 30% of our total parishioners. There are approximately 640 total over the weekend. All Catholic churches, as well as other denominations, are struggling.

Saturday 5:00pm	190+
Sunday 8:00am	180
Sunday 10:30am	240+

Fr. talked to us about our Deanery, the South Central Deanery and the shortage of priests. He used the rural parishes as an example as to what can happen to us with our declining numbers. The changes made in the rural parishes are the result of an ongoing pastoral planning process to address the decline in the number of priests and population decreases. A five year reality check of this deanery is in progress. Fr. also used North Omaha as an example. How many priests do we need to continue to operate as we are with the number of priests retiring and the number being ordained?

St. Thomas More has pluses. This neighborhood keeps generations living here. Several of our council members are generational families. Our hope is to capitalize on this. Some of the families are here but not active in our parish. It is our job to bring them into the fold.

Our School is booming: The school is a benefit for us. We have 530 students from Preschool - 8. We need to “Grow – Thrive - Survive.” People know this place. We need to have our school families get involved in the parish. Some have no tie to the parish only to the school. Fr. referred to them as “School Catholics.” We want our “School Catholics” to become “Parish Catholics.”

Mass Change Possibility with having only one priest:

- 1) One possibility is to bring back the Saturday morning Mass and drop the Monday 7am Mass.
- 2) Leave as is and get a sub for Monday.
- 3) Communion service as a possibility for Monday.

We need to wake people up to the reality that “things will change.”

Question was raised – When did attendance start declining? Fr. said back in Pre-WW1 era – 1970’s and every couple years. 99%, 80%, 50% now 25%.

Fr. told us about the book he is writing about the Kingdom of God and how he was inspired to write it. “Kingdom, The Word We No Longer See.” Minh Tran has read it. He gave us a positive review of it. Due to the critical priest shortage and desire to give our parish the boost it needs to be well, vibrant and growing, we need to get back to the Kingdom we no longer seek.

Sound System: It was brought to our attention that some people in the congregation are having a problem hearing or understanding the speakers at the ambo. It is especially hard to hear in the back third of the church. Fr. will address the sound system issue in his weekly letter to the parish.

Other items discussed were the church’s roof – missing shingles, removal of the spruce trees along 48th St. by the rectory. Fr. has a low bid on the tree removal.

Our next meeting will be Wednesday, Aug. 21 at 7:00pm in the rectory basement.

Respectfully submitted,
Connie Gewinner