

PASTORAL PARISH COUNCIL UPDATE

In June 2007, for the first time in St. Cletus's history, the parish undertook the task to formulate a comprehensive long-range advancement proposal to plan for the future growth and development of St. Cletus Parish. This effort involved the Pastoral Parish Council, the staff of St. Cletus, the Pastor and associate pastors and the parishioners of St. Cletus. Working together, in June 2008, the Parish crafted a long range advancement proposal that included five major challenge areas to be addressed as part of planning for the future of the parish. The Pastoral Parish Council, along with all of the Parish Ministries and its Commissions has continued to work on addressing the five major challenges as part of implementing the long-range advancement plan. In order to keep the parish apprised of the ongoing efforts to meet these challenges, each week a Pastoral Council member provided an update on the actions taken in response to each one of the challenges.

Challenge No. 1: How can the parish ensure that our financial planning, spending and priorities reflect and support the mission of the parish and that money is spent effectively and efficiently?

In order to meet this challenge, Father Clark and the Parish Council have supported and instituted a policy of transparency and fiscal responsibility when it comes to the financial condition of St. Cletus. Major expenditures or projects of the parish or the commissions or ministries are reviewed and discussed by the Parish Council and recommendations are made to Fr. Clark. Additionally, the Parish Finance Committee members present monthly reports to the Council about the financial condition of the parish that includes a comprehensive oversight of the monies collected and the expenditures made by the parish. Parish Council meetings are open to all parishioners.

While the response to this challenge is still a "work in progress," significant steps have been taken to insure that all members of the parish have the ability and opportunity to stay informed about the financial condition of the Parish.

Challenge No. 2: HOW DO WE GET THE TEENS COMMITTED TO A YOUTH PROGRAM IN WHICH THEY WILL TAKE OWNERSHIP?

One of the main ways we have met this challenge is through the formation of the Youth Ministry Board. This is made up of both adult and teen members of the Parish who work together in hosting a variety of both service and social activities. The Board looks at surveys filled out by current and past Confirmation candidates to determine which activities are most appealing to the teens of the parish. Teens from the Parish are also involved in Kairos retreats, and participate in Archdiocese wide teen outings. One of our most successful programs is the summer mission trip. These trips have been steadily increasing in popularity, thus bringing teens into a more active role in Parish life.

Challenge No. 3: How can we ensure accountability and transparency with our parishioners' money including regular two-way communication with parishioners?

The parish ensures accountability and transparency with our parishioners through publishing in the Canticle our weekly budgeted needs and informing the parish of the amount of money collected each week. The parish also publishes financial statements in the Canticle twice a year, once in March, for the first six months and a final report for the fiscal year in the fall. Father Bob and the chair of the Finance Committee supplement the written report in the fall by providing an oral presentation of the financial results at all masses. Father Bob, the Finance Committee Chair and members of the Finance Committee are available to answer questions after those masses. The parish has an active Finance Committee that meets regularly with Fr. Bob, the business manager and the bookkeeper that prepare the parish and school budgets and financial

reports. The Finance Committee reviews and suggests improvements to the budgets and financial reports. The committee has observed and approved of the parish's revised collection procedures. The Finance Committee discusses and suggests improvements to the internal controls of the parish each year. The Parish follows the "best practices" established by the Archdioceses of Chicago. This includes policies and procedures for handling collections, budgeting, and reviews of purchases and bank transactions.

CHALLENGE NO. 4: How can we ensure that St. Cletus offers activities and programs for all age groups?

In order to meet this challenge, the Parish Life Commission was formed by volunteers from several of the different Parish Life Ministry organizations. The Parish Life Commission is a ministry committed to planning social programs and activities that will provide opportunities for the Parish Community to meet and interact, and to share our Christian faith. Over the past year the Parish Life Commission has sponsored several Family Game Nights, the St. Cletus Parish Picnic, The Kelly Miller Circus, the St. Cletus Pot Luck Dinner, Co-ed Basketball Gym Night, and a Book Club that meets every other month. The Parish Life Commission, together with a variety of social and community organizations (Christian Family Movement, Cub Scout Pack 83, Girl Scouts, Holy Name Society, Leisure Loafers, Welcoming Committee and the Women's Club), provides fellowship opportunities for parishioners of all ages. Please check the weekly Canticle for upcoming programs and activities.

Challenge No. 5: How can we get more parishioner involvement in the Social Concerns Ministry?

This is the challenge that has spurred on the Social Concerns Commission these past two plus years, to build further on an already strong commitment on the behalf of St. Cletus parishioners towards Social Justice. In all our endeavors we strive to be true to the Mission Statement we developed early on: As members of St. Cletus Parish and the Body of Christ, we strive to answer God's call to "act justly, love tenderly and walk humbly with God." (Micah 6:8) We do this in Christ's name by enlisting the time, talent and treasure of our faith community to respond to human needs here and throughout the world. Below is a summary of the actions our Commission has taken to both expand our ministry to those in need in our community and beyond, and to invite parishioners to share in this ministry.

- In the Summer of 2008, we sponsored the first annual parish **Rummage Sale**, to provide start-up funds for a Society of St. Vincent De Paul Conference at St. Cletus. This effort appealed to all parishioners for items to donate, brought together intergenerational volunteers from all parish ministries, and raised about \$9,000.00. The 2nd annual parish Rummage Sale involved even more volunteers, brought in more donations, raised about \$12,000 and created awareness of our SVDP.
- In the Fall of 2008, we initiated a **Society of St. Vincent de Paul Conference**, to address the financial needs of those struggling in our community. As the result of the informational, organizational, and subsequent monthly meetings, our parish SVDP has a solid base of active volunteers, and elected officers. Through person-to-person contact, our volunteers have been able to help in many ways, i.e. assistance with rental, mortgage, utilities car repair, school tuition, transportation vouchers, gas cards, clothing, eyeglass repair, etc. We work in conjunction with other service providers in our area to not only help people bridge the gap in one-time emergency situations, but also discover and redress the causes of the situation.
- We joined **Interfaith Community Partners**, a faith-based alliance of 13 local congregations, dedicated to helping older adults and physically challenged people maintain independence, well-being, and connection with others in their communities. Some of the services provided by trained volunteers include personalized assisted transportation, friendly visitation, telephone reassurance, and a caregiver support group. St. Cletus has hosted several training sessions, recruited volunteers and served parishioners. We have a presence on

the ICP Board of Directors, and on the newly formed ICP Church Advisory Council. We continue to encourage parishioners to volunteer and to use the services provided.

- In collaboration with St. John of the Cross and St. Francis Xavier Parishes, St. Cletus initiated an **Employment Ministry**, Interfaith Career and Networking Group (ICNG), a fellowship of men and women with a common desire to become employed or seek career advancement through a Christian forum. There are no dues or fees for membership. A group of volunteers, many of whom are Human Resource Professionals, spearhead this ministry which is dedicated to providing the following resources to those who are seeking employment in a timely manner: Christian Fellowship and Support, Job Networking Opportunities, Career Skills Presentation, Resume Preparation and Critique, Interviewing Preparation and Techniques. The 1st Baptist Church of La Grange and the First Presbyterian Church of La Grange have joined forces with us to provide these services. In the present economic atmosphere, the need for this ministry and the number of people it supports continues to grow.

- **The Respect Life Ministry** continues to offer education and opportunities for service in its efforts to transform society into a Culture of Life where every human being is valued and protected from the moment of conception until natural death. The very successful “Baby Bottle Collection” for the Woman’s Care Center in Berwyn, which provides services to expectant and new mothers in our area, has been added to the yearly roster of Respect Life Activities. This past September we were honored to host the annual archdiocesan “Mass for Life” with Cardinal George, at which time all archdiocesan coordinators were re-commissioned to continue pro-life activities. This year there was increased attendance at the St. Cletus Life Chain in October, but we still need more volunteers here, and in the other Respect Activities, to join the present small, but mighty, core.

- For the past two years, we have hosted a **BEDS Plus** volunteer recruitment meeting, which has resulted in more parishioners becoming involved in this local organization, which has been providing overnight shelter, meals and essential services to the homeless men, women and children of west suburban Cook County since 1988.

- We have collaborated with the Worship Ministry in implementing and publicizing the last three **Lenten Almsgiving Projects**: 2008 African Well Project, 2009/10 Operation Rice Bowl, and the first Lenten Soup Dinner in 2009. • We initiated and organized a **special appeal** for the benefit of Cedar Rapids Flood Victims in All Saints Parish, as a response to an immediate need shared by a parishioner.

- Our **Food Pantry** continues to grow in number of families who need our help each month, the number of volunteers involved in this ministry, and the number of community schools, churches and organizations outside our parish, who support us with food drives and monetary contributions. Working with several Boy Scouts on their EAGLE Projects has resulted in involving more high school volunteers, as their projects provided Easter Baskets, cleaning supplies, laundry detergent, and school supplies to our clients. St. Cletus School students and Religious Education students have initiated service projects to provide groceries to the pantry.

- We have become members of the **Greater Chicago Food Depository**, and also have established a set time each month for 10-15 St. Cletus Volunteers to go as a group to volunteer at the GCFD. Our relationship with the Food Depository provides us with another means to affordably keep up with the demand for supplemental groceries, as well as offering more volunteer opportunities to our parishioners. Our Food Pantry receives \$5 credit per hour per volunteer. Volunteer hours thus far have paid for the groceries we purchase from the Depository.

- We have collaborated the past two years with the Countryside Jewel Store in providing prepared Thanksgiving and Holiday Dinners to some of our food pantry client families. Volunteers either deliver the dinners or provide pick-up at the Church, as the recipients choose.

- Last year the Food Pantry received a generous donation from the First Annual Empty Bowls Project sponsored by the La Grange Business Association. This year the Second Annual Empty Bowls Project will be on Thursday, April 22, with our Food Pantry again being a recipient of some of the proceeds, and a group of our Confirmation Candidates will be involved as volunteers.

- Our long established **Advent Giving Tree Outreach** continues to provide holiday gifts and food baskets to a growing number of needy families in our community. Total Parish involvement with volunteers from all age groups and ministries increases each year, as does the need. We are successfully collaborating with the Hispanic Ministry in this and our other outreach activities.
- We use the Canticle, our parish e-letters, school and RE newsletters, Ministry Fairs and the website to keep parishioners informed of our activities, and to invite them to become involved.
- Although we have managed to creatively use the current space available to provide our outreach services (in particular our Food Pantry and Advent Giving Tree project), we have reached our capacity. Looking to the future realistically, we need more space to successfully continue our mission.