

**ST. THOMAS MORE PARISH
PARISH COUNCIL MEETING
Monday, December 12, 2005**

Council Members in Attendance: Fr. Bill Wagner, Vic Ivers, Michelle Stultz, Jim Conrady, Duane Bradley, Doug Young, Kathy Hornschemeier, Ralph Bedel, and Janet Tate.

Council Members Absent: John Duncan.

Others in Attendance: Mike Gennett and Jim Romanello, seminarian.

The St. Thomas More Parish Council meeting was called to order by Vic Ivers at 7:02 PM EST. Fr. Bill Wagner opened the meeting with a prayer.

Fr. Bill introduced Jim Romanello a seminarian who will be visiting us from time to time. Jim is from Holy Trinity Parish in Norwood. Fr. Bill also stated we will be seeing seminarian Tony Tozzi and Scott "Scooter" Steinke who will be preaching at St. Thomas More soon. Cameras will be set up to record Scooter's sermons. He is scheduled to be ordained this spring.

Minutes of the Previous Meeting: The last council meeting was held on Monday, November 7th. Vic asked if there were any questions regarding the minutes. Mike Gennett stated there had been no feedback.

Kathy Hornschmeier made a motion that the minutes be accepted as written. Duane Bradley seconded the motion. Council voted 8 to 0 to accept the minutes.

Business Manager Report: Mike Gennett gave the report.

Current Finances – The current finances for the parish are on track for this year. The entire staff is doing an excellent job in controlling expenses and should all be complemented.

However, there are some issues that continue to grow. Our Sunday collections are going to drop \$70,000 this year if there is no change in the current pattern. We did exceed plan the last two Sundays and we hope this is the beginning of a turn around. The good news is the school tuition continues to be paid as scheduled.

On the expense side, through November 30th, Health Care is up \$6,822, the mandatory Catholic Telegraph subscriptions is going to cost us over \$35,000 this year since we will be paying for two years, utilities are already up \$3,567 and we have not seen the impact of winter yet. Plus we have loaned Bingo \$8,037 to start up.

And speaking of Bingo it has been a big disappointment so far. The group that brought it back did an excellent job. However, after 13 weeks, the average weekly income before expenses is only \$181.93. Bingo has earned \$2,365.09 to date which converts to \$9,460.36 on an annual basis. At this time we will not be able to count on Bingo in our future budgets.

2006-7 Budget – We will not be able to operate next year without some reductions in both payroll and non-payroll. Our Sunday collections are down. Health Care is going to rise another 10-15%. Two more employees want to enroll and will qualify during the open enrollment period next spring. The diocese is looking at some potential policy changes that would save us some money, but the “diocese education lobby” continues to demand fully paid health care for everyone. It is doubtful there will be any changes to the plan other than the normal cost increases. Also, we do not wish to raise tuition to cover all our operating costs. It can no longer be passed onto the school families.

The diocese school office is also asking for a 6-7% salary increase which is not realistic. A list of potential budget cuts for next year has been prepared and will be reviewed with Fr. Bill.

Fr. Bill stated that he will be reviewing these proposed eliminations with Parish Council at their January meeting. Council will need to prioritize the reductions so we can achieve a balanced budget.

Janet Tate questioned the \$432.00 expense for Lector Workbooks. She suggested that maybe the Lectors should be asked to pay for the book or buy their own at Innervisions. Fr. Bill stated this concern needed to be forwarded to the Worship Committee for their review.

Doug Young stated the diocese keeps sending conflicting messages regarding finances.

Fr. Bill stated the second plan to address our debt will be sent downtown just before Christmas. He also stated that the diocese has taken our old \$55,000 in unpaid High School Equalization from the 1960's and 1970's and added it to our debt and are now charging 7% interest on the amount due. The issue of our debt and interest will impact our future budgets in a major way. Kathy Hornschmeier stated she thought the old High School Equalization had been paid at the time the parish expansion was being planned in the mid-1990s.

Mike also asked if everyone saw the article in the December 4th Cincinnati Enquirer about our energy conservation plan. Many council members reported they had not and copies were passed out. (A copy of the photo and article follow at the end of the minutes.) A few council members thought maybe the collections had exceeded plan the last two weeks since the article ran because the parishioners felt we were not wasting their money. Duane Bradley said he spends a lot of time here and he can attest that money is not being wasted.

Group Reports - Vic Ivers asked if any groups filed a report for this meeting. Mike Gennett stated no group had filed a special report. Vic stated each organization will need to file a report as scheduled prior to the January 16th meeting.

Future Meeting Dates – Because Fr. Bill’s meetings at McNicholas High School are held on the second Monday of each month, our Parish Council meetings need to change. Fr. Bill asked if anyone had a preference if the change was to either the first or third Monday. Most stated the third Monday would be the best. It was pointed out that the Parish and School were closed on three of the upcoming third Mondays (Martin Luther King Day, President’s Day, and Easter Monday) and yet no one felt that was an issue.

The meetings will be held in 2006 as follows: January 16, February 20, March 20, April 17, and May 15. Tentative summer dates would be June 19, July 17, and August 21. However, meetings have not been normally held in the summer in the past.

Pastor’s Report – Fr. Bill gave his report.

Fr. Bill stated he is now a member of the Archdiocese Presbyteral Council. This Council works like a Parish Council in that it advises the Archbishop on matters pertaining to the archdiocese. This committee is working on the Priest’s Convocation for 2007.

Fr. Bill stated he is now “officially retired” from the US Army Reserve as of 3 December 05 after 28 years of service.

The financial situation for the parish is very serious and we all need to be concerned about the future.

The latest in our Deanery....even though the pastoral regions have been approved, some are unhappy. Each region was set with a school. Since we are with Holy Trinity in Batavia, we have a right to market our school in their boundaries. Both St. Louis in Owensville and St. Bernadette in Amelia are upset. They want to market their schools in the Batavia area. Fr. Bill said he reminded everyone that this was their plan when the structure was put into place....each cluster would have a school. St. Mary’s in Bethel and St. Peter’s in New Richmond are not happy about clustering with St. Bernadette. Some think a plan with one priest for these three parishes is not workable.

St. Bernadette has a sizeable debt that has accumulated over the years from not paying their bills. On the positive side, they have a large amount of capital in the bank to build a new church. Their parishioners are upset because they did not know about the debt and that the diocese taxes their donations for building projects. All their debt and the price of the church have to be rolled into one number. The parish is also not paying all their bills and the parish does not want to sell any of their land. No one really knows where all this will end up.

Fr. Bill reminded everyone we do pay all of our bills and are in better financial shape than many parishes. We owe no one other than our recent building debt. However, we will need to address some issues in the future if we want to retain a balanced budget.

St. George/St. Michael has opened a school that will be free for two years. They are using the money that was donated to them for this project.

St. Mary in Hillsboro has financial problems they will need to address very soon as will St. Louis in Owensville.

Fr. Bill reminded everyone that Duane Bradley is our representative to work on a plan with Holy Trinity in Batavia to someday share a Pastor.

Fr. Bill stated he is taking a hard look at the Holyday Mass schedule. He is thinking about adding an early morning Mass without music at 7:00 AM to accommodate those going to work and maybe moving the 11:30 AM Mass to 12:10 for the lunch crowd. The Worship Committee will be reviewing this soon.

Our energy program is underway. We dropped the temperature in the school over Thanksgiving weekend and in the church the following week. We were not able to reduce the heat in the church last week because of the two reconciliation services at night and the Holyday. The temperature stayed up today because the carpets were cleaned. It will be lowered Tuesday through Thursday of this week.

Vic Ivers asked if there was a motion to adjourn. Duane Bradley made the motion and Janet Tate seconded it. Council voted 8 to 0 to adjourn.

The next meeting will be as scheduled on Monday, January 16, at 7 PM.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:00 PM. Fr. Bill led with a brief prayer.

Bundle up before going to church

High energy costs force many to lower thermostats

By Kevin Osborne
Enquirer staff writer



Maintenance manager John Osterling checks the thermostat in St. Thomas More Church in Withamsville on Wednesday.

Many places of worship in Greater Cincinnati and Northern Kentucky will be praying for a mild winter.

With record-breaking increases in natural gas prices, some congregations are lowering thermostats, shutting auxiliary church buildings and scaling back activities.

Although not yet dealing with frozen baptismal fonts, some churches are bracing for days when parishioners have to bundle up during services.

"We're projecting a \$40,000 to \$50,000 increase in our heating bills this year," said the Rev. William Wagner of St. Thomas More Church in Withamsville. "That is a very big hit."

So St. Thomas More is turning the sanctuary thermostat down to 55 degrees from Sunday afternoons through early Friday mornings. As a result, the church has rescheduled its Friday school Mass and weekly adoration.

The heat in the main sanctuary will be turned up only to accommodate special events like weddings and funerals.

Darren Belcher, senior minister at Batavia Church of Christ in Clermont County, said his congregation hopes that installing a more modern, high-efficiency furnace earlier this year will offset some of the rising costs.

"It may come out as a wash for us," said Belcher, who estimated the church spends about \$1,200 each month on heat.

"We're keeping the church as cold as we can during the week and just heating a small area," Belcher said.

The spike in natural gas prices might spark the Adath Israel Congregation in Amberley Village to update its 1960s-era heating system.

"We have not scaled back any activities, but we're being super-cautious with our equipment and things like turning out lights," administrator Rob Festenstein said.

Even before the current crunch, some churches were installing more-efficient storm windows over stained glass windows and installing fans or vents to push warm air at the top of tall cathedral ceilings back toward the floor.

Tri-County Church of the Nazarene in West Chester Township has been whipsawed by the energy market. Three years ago, when the church built its education wing, the entire facility converted from electrical heating to natural gas as a cost-cutting measure.

"Now, we're experiencing the gas increase," said Pastor Dan Walters. "This might not have been the best thing for us to do."

The warm November has helped delay the pinch, but the church increased its heating budget by 4 percent this year and still expects to allocate more money later, Walters said.

Cinergy, the region's energy provider, offers a special electrical rate for schools and churches from October through May that can shave 15 to 30 percent off their electric bill, said spokeswoman Kathy Meinke.

Schools and churches that use natural gas can request a "load management rider," she added. E-mail kosborne@enquirer.com. Reporter Feoshia Henderson contributed.