

**ST. THOMAS MORE PARISH
PARISH COUNCIL MEETING
Monday, September 21, 2009**

Council Members in Attendance: Fr. Bill Wagner, Vic Ivers, Kathy Hornschmeier, Larry Bush, Jim Conrady, and Neil Kamphaus, Jr.

Council Members Absent: Janet Tate and John Duncan,

Others in Attendance: Mike Gennett.

The St. Thomas More Parish Council meeting was called to order by Vic Ivers at 7:00 PM EDT. Fr. Bill Wagner opened with a prayer.

Business Manager Report: Mike Gennett gave the report.

The 2009-2010 edition of the parish Guidebook was updated over the summer and is at the printers. It should be in the homes soon. We added all the email addresses to the directory we had on file for the first time this year. Additions and corrections should be reported to the Parish Office.

The new parish web site was launched July 24th. We have received positive feedback. Key parishioners and most of the staff looked at the new site during the development stages and made a number of suggestions and enhancements.

We opened the school year with 297 children or a reduction of 19 or 6%. Many other schools reported an enrollment decrease. St. Veronica is the only school in the area that has confirmed an increase in enrollment.

The school teaching staff levels with one exception are the same as last year. We have two teachers per grades 1-8 as well as the same staffing levels for music, art, gym, etc. We have a full time science teacher this year in lieu of a part time teacher last year. Computer Lab is receiving

additional funding from the PTO. The only reduction is ½ of a teacher for Kindergarten. Financial aide granted for proven need was over \$46,000, a record high. The cost of educating each child this year has risen to \$4,287.

The final state aid reduction is 13.3%. We have been informed the administrative cost reimbursement per student will be reduced by \$34-\$45 per student. The combined reduction is approximately \$50,000, but only \$16,000 impacts the budget directly. The difference is a reduction in auxiliary funds.

Jarrod's Law has been repealed by the state but Hamilton County is informing schools they will continue to enforce it except for the radon tests. Clermont County has stated there will be "enhanced" health inspections but what that means has yet to be identified. We had a surprise health inspection last week and passed with flying colors.

We eliminated some expenses including Sunday Parish Office hours, Sunday Nursery and other PSR payroll although these PSR programs will continue and will be staffed by volunteers this year. One employee voluntarily reduced their hours. There are no capital projects planned this year.

We budgeted our debt and interest payments to the Archdiocese at the previous annual rate of \$100,000 per year instead of the planned increase to \$120,000. We continue to make our monthly payments at the rate of \$8,333.33. This may be an area we may have to cease or reduce payments if our income to operate the parish begins to seriously decrease. The diocese is going to reduce the interest rate on the principal balances due for all parish loans from 7% to 6.5%.

Our Festival sales this year were \$143,449.44 and the expenses to date are \$92,915.61. Sales dropped and but expenses dropped even more. Our profit stands at \$50,533.83 with one invoice still not received for payment. As of now, this is a profit increase of 6% and is good news. Many Festivals have reported a low single percent sales decrease to as much as 15% down. Our pre and post Festival sales for Grand Raffle and Bid'n Buy were very strong while the event itself was down. Saturday was the slowest night. Casino and Beer dropped here and at other locations this year.

Neil Kamphaus stated that special recognition needs to be given to Lisa Evans for doing an outstanding job with Bid'n Buy.

There appears to be a scare tactic being used regarding issue 3 on the Ohio gambling initiative. Opponents to issue 3 say that church casinos will not be possible if it passes. Issue 3 proponents say that is not true. We have not received any official word on this matter. The 2010 license application is not filed until November.

We received a surprise in July when we learned our school copier was over our contract by 305,859 copies or 72.6%. The result was an unexpected charge of \$2,600. We have never experienced any overage this high in the past. The in-machine numbering system was not universally followed so we can not pinpoint the problem(s). We have installed a new metering system that will place a ceiling on the number of copies by individual. Everyone is being encouraged to use email and the web sites for communications. Kathy Hornschemeier reported this is a normal operating procedure in the public schools.

Flexible Savings Accounts and a Wellness Program are being offered for our employees this fall. Neither have any cost implications to the parish.

At this time our operating deficit is over \$60,000 when you add in the Sunday collection shortfall to plan. Thru September 20th, the collection deficit for the fiscal year is \$13,915 and we are down to last year by \$4,909. We are not experiencing any "bump" from the start of school and PSR as we normally do. The last time our collection was down to the previous year was in June 2005.

Because of the financial issues previously discussed, a mini-contribution fund drive will be launched this weekend. The last time we did this was in April of 2004 and we utilized a consulting firm to conduct the process. That effort was very successful. We combined those three mailings into one letter and did the work ourselves to save the expenses. Fr. Bill will discuss the need for additional financial assistance at all the Masses the weekend of September 26-27. A copy of the mailing follows the minutes.

We have not started to work on next year's budget. Without steady or increasing enrollment in the school and operating expense relief regarding diocese expenses, the challenges of funding the parish "as is" will become more challenging. There are a few school board members looking at different ways to structure the school in the longer term if enrollment does not increase. This is the time of the year to do this.

Pastor's report: Fr. Bill gave his update.

Fr. Bill continued the discussion regarding the Stewardship Sunday letter. He stated we are going to make a push this weekend. He pointed out the following points regarding our operating budget:

- Payment reductions on our debt may be next
- Deacon John Convery is now working 1/2 time
- Our Youth Minister works 75% of her time teaching in the school and 50% of her time as Youth Minister – far beyond a normal day
- Our DRE is paid for only four days but works far beyond five days a week
- Weddings, Funerals, and Annulments take an extraordinary amount of time of the Pastor and Deacons
- The Principal continually is on site many nights after the school day
- The secretaries in both the Parish and School office are already stretched
- Our Maintenance staff continually makes a lot of repairs which keeps the parish in good working order. For example, all the decking has been repaired and stained this year.

The bottom line is we are NOT living "fat & happy". Money is not being thrown into the wind.

Archbishop Schnurr has announced two decisions that will continue once he is installed. That is, the priest retirement age in this diocese will remain at age 65 and the Pastoral Regions that have been planned will continue.

He feels the work on the Pastoral Regions was well thought out and is better than in many other dioceses.

No one knows when the Archbishop transfer of power will take place.

Dr. Sam Geonetta has agreed to chair a task force to look at the parish communications. The Mens CHRP group has submitted a list of individuals they would like to see on this committee.

The school year has opened smoothly.

Our parishioner Matt Feist has entered the seminary and we are very proud of him. This is our third parishioner that is currently in a seminary.

No new Business was brought up.

Vic Ivers made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Kathy Hornschemeier seconded the motion. The meeting adjourned at 8:00 PM. Fr. Bill led the group in a prayer.

NEXT MEETING - MONDAY OCTOBER 19TH

St. Thomas More Church

Fall 2009

Dear Parishioner:

This past weekend I spoke to you from the pulpit about the need to increase our Sunday collection offering. On the back of this letter is an explanation regarding the continuing need of the parish for improved financial support. Any additional support will depend on your willingness to share what you have with others, even if that sharing means making a special sacrifice. I am asking you to make that sacrifice for your parish family.

I strongly believe that if we all do our best we can continue to meet the temporal needs of the parish during these troubling times and maintain the level of spiritual services that we provide for our parishioners.

I am asking you to participate. **An increase of 15% to 33% in your weekly contributions would greatly improve the status of our parish finances.**

For many of you the decision will call for a real sacrifice at a time when it is difficult. However, I ask that you think positively and act generously as you make this decision to improve your support for our parish. I am asking you to commit yourself to an improved personal level of offertory giving for the next year.

As you decide upon an appropriate response regarding your weekly offertory giving, please keep in mind that the cost of operating our parish, like the cost of running your household, continues to escalate. Rising costs reduce the purchasing power of the dollar and in turn brings about deficits if the rise in costs is not offset by a similar rise in income. I might add we have not added any significant budget items in the past eight years and yet have added numerous programs that our staff has willingly added to their responsibilities. We have also made some reductions this year. Again, please see the reverse side of this letter for more information.

I understand that there is a limit to what some of us can do, but I have great faith that, with sufficient prayer and commitment, each of us can do something more for our parish.

Included with this letter is a Payment Card. Please complete the card by indicating your willingness to assist St. Thomas More Parish with a one time contribution or a charge over time. "Or you may just increase your normal contribution and not return the card." If you return the card, you may do so in the Offertory collection, by mail or drop it off at the parish office. Please use the enclosed envelope. I ask you kindly to consider this request as soon as possible.

We have many parishioners who use a credit card or have electronic withdrawals from their checking or savings account used as a means of making offertory contributions. If you are interested in participating, please complete the appropriate side of the enclosed form and return it in the envelope. Those who contributed electronically may also want to consider an increase. Please complete the correct form (checking/savings account or credit card) noting the new amount.

Thank you for accepting this challenge and for acting generously and sacrificially in response to this appeal. Please continue to pray for the success of this fund drive and for God's continued blessings upon St. Thomas More Parish.

Gratefully yours in Christ,



Rev. William C. Wagner
Pastor

Enclosure

PS: If you wonder why your letter is not personalized and sent first class, we mailed this appeal to you utilizing our non-profit permit. Our address files are regularly updated with a CASS & NCOA certification to ensure accuracy and enable us to use a postal delivery bar code. The costs savings are tremendous. The cost is 11c a letter utilizing our non-profit permit instead of 44c: **a savings of 75%.**

The Facts Regarding Parish Revenues

The financial life of any parish depends on participation of their parishioners to make sacrificial offerings during the celebration of Sunday Mass. Those unable to attend because of illness, vacations and out-of-town visitations, etc., still owe allegiance to the parish from which you expect services. You are encouraged to join our credit card or bank ACH method of contributing, or you may mail your check or drop it off to the parish office.

- § Currently, there are 1,550 households on our parishioner list. There are another 135 households that occasionally attend Mass at our parish and contribute from time to time but are not registered.
- § On average during the 2009 summer months, only 443 or 28.7% of our registered households contributed each week. The average collection was \$13,434.62. We *missed* our Sunday contribution budget by \$19,046.05 during the summer of 2009 and fell below what was contributed the previous summer.
- § From September 2008 thru mid-May 2009, 511 or 33.1% of our registered households contributed each week. The average weekly collection during these months was \$15,020.07. We *exceeded* our budget by \$4,818.72 during this 8 ½ mo period and increased from the previous year. If everyone attended Sunday Mass during the summer who attends during the school year, our financial needs would be satisfied.
- § Even though there are some people who give on a bi-weekly or monthly basis, a typical weekend indicates that 67%-72% of our registered parishioners did not contribute. Loose money accounted for 5.4% of our income. 90 households contribute electronically and are included in our totals.
- § If parents do not attend Mass and/or contribute, what message does this give our children? Stewardship also involves greater participation in both ministry and parish life. Many times, children imitate their parents and we hope that they, too, will participate in parish life by celebrating the sacraments of the Church.

Please evaluate your position as a parishioner. You owe allegiance and support to the parish in which you are registered.

Our Parish Situation

We, as a parish, face the same financial problems as individual households. Every parish that serves its people is facing the same issues during these difficult economic times:

- § Our parish is facing a potential \$50,000 plus deficit this year which does not include any emergency funding.
- § Health care costs for our employees will be \$240,000 this year. This is a four fold increase during the past ten years. As for all parishes, our health care benefits are determined by the Archdiocese. This represents the largest increase in expenses by far.
- § Our utility costs continue to consume a large portion of our budget. Water, electricity, and natural gas costs for 2008-9 were \$97,415. We continue to reduce energy costs when appropriate.
- § Pension costs have risen 20% in the past year at the direction of the Archdiocese.
- § The Archdiocese assessment not long ago rose from 5.4% of contributions to 8.7%. We also pay the costs for the background checks to meet the diocese Child Protection program.
- § We no longer have a Bingo; our volunteers worked hard to revive it. Bingos are having a difficult time in many other parishes. Our Festival remains sound, but like most other Festivals, is not growing.
- § We have a mortgage. Our parish building debt is \$873,216.63. Plus, the unpaid interest on our debt is \$579,732.78, and grows each year by \$60,000. Continuing to reduce our debt is important for our future.
- § We froze all salaries this year. We eliminated or reduced funding for some programs. We have not replaced every staff person who left while others have voluntarily reduced their hours.
- § There are no capital improvements planned for this year due to the lack of funds.

It is obvious that, with a drop in contributions and increasing operating expenses we must generate additional income in order to meet our obligations.

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