

# RENEWING PARISHES InFormation

**News for Pastoral Planners and Those Making the Plan a Reality!**

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## *Vital Parishes* *and the Cycle of Planning*

**Have you ever wondered** .... Does our parish have vitality, is it doing all it can do to be welcoming? According to reports from many pastors of parishes across the Archdiocese over 63% are asking that very question. In fact they are enlisting the help of parishioners and Parish Pastoral councils. They are measuring vitality using the readily available tool "Characteristics found in Vital Parishes" (Found on line in English at <http://archphila.org/pastplan/PDF/rpgppc.pdf>

in Spanish at <http://archphila.org/pastplan/PDF/rpgppc%28spanish%29.pdf>  
or by calling 215-587-3694)

This booklet asks the questions Are we:

- A. A Worshiping Parish?
- B. A Welcoming and Caring Parish?
- C. A Witnessing and Proclaiming Parish?
- D. An Educational and Formational Parish?
- E. A Parish Responsive to Others?
- F. An Effectively Administered Parish?
- G. A Gifted Parish, Living Responsibly?

But it doesn't leave you there. Each characteristic is explained and examples are given on how

to achieve the desired characteristic. This is also an excellent way to evaluate the Parish plan annually as all parishes are encouraged to do. This cycle of making a plan, taking action, reviewing what happened and revising the plan is an important part of the life of Parish and the work of the Parish Pastoral Council. This practice helps to uncover opportunities that may have otherwise gone unnoticed and keeps the Parish Pastoral Plan current. By carefully considering each fundamental area which delineate the normative aspects of Parish ministry, and specific possibilities within each area, all the parishes of the archdiocese of Philadelphia can grow in their ecclesial mission in and through Christ Jesus.

*This article was written by Ron Lill with excerpts from Characteristics found in Vital Parishes*

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for the use of Parish Pastoral Planners and

those who implement those plans.

Suggestions for future articles should be directed to Ron Lill *editor*

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These suggestions are encouraged and welcomed

### Population Continues to Move Around in the Archdiocese and the State

Pennsylvania has four counties among the 100 largest nationally in 2005: Philadelphia, 22nd (1,463,281), Allegheny, 30<sup>th</sup> (1,235,841), Montgomery, 67th (775,883), and Bucks, 95th (621,342). Philadelphia, Allegheny, and Montgomery are now the heaviest populated counties in the state.

Since the year 2000, Chester (+40,526), York (+27,050), and Montgomery (+26,896) counties have gained the most residents, while Philadelphia (-54,265), Allegheny (-45,825), and Luzerne (-6,389) lead counties in the state of Pennsylvania in population loss.

Since 2000, the heaviest net in migration has occurred in Chester county (27,219), and Philadelphia (-83,693) had the largest out migration. The heaviest net international migration during this period occurred in Philadelphia (30,151), Allegheny (11,311), and Montgomery (8,411) counties.

Source: Pa. State Data Center Research Brief, March 16, 2006



## Commentary

# Planning for a pastoral region in Cincinnati, Ohio

In our town of Milford, about 29 minutes and 25 miles from downtown Cincinnati, the talk is getting heavier, both in amount and intensity.

Our neighboring parish, St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, is our partner in the newly established archdiocesan plan of pastoral regions.

Together we must plan for the day when we will have only one priest-pastor between us. We do have a history together, although that brings complexities as well. Seton parish is our "daughter," having its beginnings in St. Andrew. For several years now, she has been our constant companion and friend, as movements toward a future together have taken place. With the two pastors in close contact, our parishes have met at the staff level and in joint pastoral councils sessions.

We already share one school, one youth ministry and one athletic program. We enjoy a joint social action commission, and we are beginning a joint parish renewal program. In many ways, we either work directly together or invite each other in. But the questions continue, and the future before us is still vague.

Our staff level committee is called, "Milford Catholic Churches Co-Laboring." The staffing and the financing of our school, youth ministry and athletic program are clear. It is less clear with other budding areas of cooperation, such as the Social Action Leadership Team, Christ Renews His Parish and Vacation Bible School. This committee is talking about who will staff these ventures and how we will pay for them. As always, matters seem to get a little more tense when parish monies are involved.

Our joint "deanery pastoral regions planning committee" is looking closely at a number of issues, including the most significant one: the availability of Sunday Eucharist. It is also among the hotter topics, for it involves something that touches everyone: the Sunday Mass schedule. While being assured of at least one priest as a pastor for the two parishes, but assured of only that so far, how do we best make Sunday Mass available for a combined number of 2,785 (1,550 and 1,235) regular attendees from the two parishes, knowing that one church building has seating capacity of 600 and the others 400?

We all get used to things as they have been and as we like them. Any thought about a change in "my Mass time at my parish" is difficult to swallow. One quickly wonders how convenient and how much farther away will Sunday Mass be for me.

In any moment when I get flippant about, "They'll just need to adjust," I try to remember that I am 56 years old and have hoped to ride out the next nine years until my retirement right where I am. I don't particularly get energized by thinking of the possibility of moving away from Milford and out of the pastor's home that I love so much here at St. Andrew.

August 12, 2005

**The Catholic Telegraph,  
Archdiocese of Cincinnati**



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## Trivia Box

**In the city of Philadelphia how can I  
find the nearest Catholic school?**

*Go to Page 4 in the answer box*

**Has your parish or Cluster entered into a  
Planning Process?**

**Do you need a professional Facilitator?**

**The office of Research and Planning maintains a list  
of trained and experienced Resource people.**

Contact us at: *The Archdiocese of Philadelphia*

*222 n. 17th Street Rm.216*

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# Parish Pastoral Councils

Written by Mark Fischer

## Impoverished and Enriched Agendas

Published in Today's Parish 37:7 (Nov./Dec. 2005), 14-15.

Many workers in the Church, volunteers as well as professionals, suffer from poorly planned meetings. In such meetings, no one (whether committee members, parish staffers, or pastoral councilors) comes prepared. No one knows precisely what the meeting is meant to achieve. No one knows how long to allow this topic or that, so the meeting often runs longer than scheduled. When the meeting is over, participants exit dazedly or angrily, quipping about what the meeting could have achieved were it better planned.

Such poorly-planned meetings may well have had a prepared agenda. But an agenda offers little help if it is only a list of topics. A list implies that participants are supposed to do something with the topics. Participants may share information, brainstorm, plan, evaluate, or decide. But a list of topics does not specify which is to happen. And if the agenda does not say what will take place, if it does not explain how participants are to prepare for the meeting, if it does not indicate how long an agenda item is expected to take, then it is insufficiently planned. I call it an "impoverished" agenda.

### Easter Vigil at Santa Cecilia

Let me give an example from a parish pastoral council meeting that I recently attended. The council of (what I will call) Santa Cecilia Church faced a crisis about scheduling the Easter Vigil. Santa Cecilia, one has to understand, is a parish with different language groups. In past years, there was a 7:00 PM "vigil" in Vietnamese, a 9:00 PM "vigil" in Spanish, and a midnight vigil in English.

Korean parishioners, however, had no vigil in their own language. They complained about this to the pastor, Father O'Dowd. He offered to let them celebrate the vigil in Santa Cecilia parish hall (if they could find a Korean-speaking priest). Many Korean parishioners were dissatisfied with this response. They felt snubbed, they said, because the Vietnamese, the Spanish-speaking, and the English-speaking were allowed to celebrate in the Church, while they were relegated to the parish hall.

So Father O'Dowd got the good idea to consult the parish pastoral council about the matter. It is wise to consult. But it is unwise to consult while using an impoverished agenda. Father O'Dowd's agenda looked poor:

#### Example of the "Impoverished" Agenda

Santa Cecilia Parish Pastoral Council

Agenda for the Meeting of February 23, 2005

Santa Cecilia Hall, 7:30 – 9:30 P.M.

1. Gathering and welcome.
2. Opening prayer.
3. Minutes of the January 26, 2005 meeting.

4. Report from the Pastor (Father O'Dowd).
5. The Needs of the Korean Community (Mrs. Sung Lee).
6. Discussion.
7. Next Steps.
8. Responsibilities for the March 23, 2005 Meeting.
9. Adjourn.

As you can see, the agenda stated that Father O'Dowd would give a report. But it did not say what the report was about (and the report was not distributed in advance). The agenda noted that Mrs. Sung Lee would present the needs of the Korean community, but said nothing about what those needs were. The agenda included time for a discussion, but did not define the topic or state how long the discussion would take. In short, the agenda was impoverished.

The consequences of an impoverished agenda can be dire. They certainly were at Santa Cecilia. Father O'Dowd was defensive. His report explained why the parish could not accommodate the Koreans' request to use the parish church for the Easter vigil. That inflamed Mrs. Sung Lee. She ranted for twenty minutes about how the most recent immigrants (i.e., the Koreans) are treated shabbily. And during the discussion, councilors fell into opposing camps, either urging Father O'Dowd to be more compassionate or suggesting that Mrs. Lee and the Koreans could be more flexible.

### Making the Agenda Richer

As I left Santa Cecilia, I felt sorry for Father O'Dowd. He had made an effort to consult, and the effort had backfired. This is regrettable. Consultation enables leaders to gain wisdom. It helps them facilitate the work of the entire community. It helps create a sense of teamwork. Such consultation, however, requires planning. Before a meeting, leaders have to ask themselves what they want the group to accomplish in the time allotted, and how the group members should prepare themselves. Such planning leads to a better-planned agenda, an "enriched" agenda. Would the meeting at Santa Cecilia have ended differently if the agenda had been enriched?

#### Example of the "Enriched" Agenda

Santa Cecilia Parish Pastoral Council

Agenda for the Meeting of February 23, 2005

Santa Cecilia Hall, 7:30 – 9:30 P.M.

- 7:30 1. Gathering and Welcome.
- 7:35 2. Opening prayer on the theme of needs of the parish community.
- A. "To whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life" (John 6:68). *Continued on Page 4*

B. Reflection: How does Christ help us build up the community?

7:50 3. Approval of the minutes of the January 26 meeting.

7:55 4. Report from Father O'Dowd (see the handout in your packet).

A. Our growing parish population, especially the Koreans.

B. The strain on our facilities.

8:00 5. The needs of the Korean Community (Mrs. Sung Lee).

8:10 6. Brainstorming: "In what ways can Santa Cecilia respond better to the needs expressed by the Korean community?"

8:40 7. Break.

8:50 8. Provisional Summary (Chairperson): ideas generated during the brainstorming.

8:55 9. Invitation to share responsibility (Father O'Dowd). The areas discussed need further work. Who would be willing to refine them for the next meeting?

9:05 10. Discussion of the next steps. What are they? Who will do them?

9:15 11. Review of responsibilities for the March 23 meeting.

9:25 12. Evaluation of tonight's meeting.

9:30 13. Adjourn.

Consider how an enriched agenda might have improved the Santa Cecilia pastoral council meeting. The first thing about it is that every agenda item has a specific number of minutes. In the example, the agenda gives Mrs. Sung Lee ten minutes to sketch the needs of the Korean community. With an enriched agenda, Mrs. Lee would have known that she had a limited amount of time. She would have had to be more economical with her words.

This is not meant to turn the leader, facilitator, or chairperson into a timekeeper who rudely blows a whistle when people exceed their allotted minutes. But it does enable the leader to accurately gauge the progress of the meeting. If it becomes clear that the group will not have enough time to get to every item, the leader can draw the group's attention to the clock. The leader can say, "Since we will not have enough time to accomplish everything we hoped, I propose that we postpone one topic on the agenda until the next meeting." That will help participants at the meeting feel that the leader respects their time.

Another feature of the enriched agenda is that it helps participants to prepare. In the case of Santa Cecilia, the pastor provided councilors with a report. It described the growing parish population, especially among the Koreans, and the strain that the growth put on the parish facilities. Councilors who took the trouble to read the report would know something about what Mrs. Sung Lee was going to say. They would be prepared to brainstorm about what the parish can do for the Korean community.

A clear purpose is the third feature of the enriched agenda. At one point in the agenda, the council is to approve the minutes of a previous meeting. At another point, it receives information from the pastor and the Korean community. Later, it is to brainstorm responses and reactions. After that, the pastor invites members to volunteer to study those responses and refine them. At every step in the enriched agenda, participants know what is expected of them.

Would such an agenda have prevented disruption at the meeting of the

Santa Cecilia pastoral council? Would it have kept Father O'Dowd from becoming defensive? Would it have defused Mrs. Lee's anger? We will never know. But I bet that such an enriched agenda would have improved the meeting.

### Improved Meetings, Greater Respect

Better preparation, more productive meetings, and greater satisfaction – enriched agendas lead to all of the above. Leaders who invest time in planning their meetings have a better chance of achieving their goals. By indicating what participants can expect, by alerting them in advance that they will be asked to commit themselves, and by inviting them to evaluate and improve future meetings, leaders involve participants in decision-making. They are relying on them to help the group accomplish its goals.

Above all, the enriched agenda shows respect. It emphasizes that the contribution of participants to the meeting is important. It underlines how much the leader values their time and their gifts. The enriched agenda expresses the Christian doctrine of human dignity. And it cuts down on carping when the meeting ends.

Many thanks to Mark for allowing us to reprint this article Questions? Mark Fischer would love to receive mail from you. Send him a note! [MarkFischer@stjohnsem.edu](mailto:MarkFischer@stjohnsem.edu)



## Prayer for a Meeting

### PRAYER BEFORE A PARISH COUNCIL MEETING

God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, You have called us to be the servants of Your servants- our brothers and sisters in the parish. We meet here as their representatives, and so we ask for the Grace of Your Guidance.

Help us to truly represent them and not simply ourselves.

May the true needs of our parish and the common good of all be our concern.

And above all, may Your Will in these matters become our Will.

Help us who serve in this elected position to remember that all of our concerns are aimed at the spiritual transformation of our parish community.

May the material aspects we shall discuss not blind us to the primary work of our parish: the holiness of all its members.

May the Holy Spirit, who inspired the Pentecost meeting of the apostles, visit us and grant us the light of Divine Wisdom.

We ask this through our Lord, Jesus Christ, who lives with You and the Holy Spirit, forever and ever.

**Amen**

## Answer Box

Go To <http://citymaps.phila.gov/citymaps/> Click on Nearest Facilities at the top of the page. Then type in any address in the city. You'll find and map the location of the nearest Catholic School.



***“And passing by the sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew his brother, casting nets into the sea for they were fishermen. And Jesus said to them: Come after me; and I will make you to become fishers of men. And immediately leaving their nets, they followed him.”***

For 20 years Tom Lewis patrolled the streets of the nation's capital as a District of Columbia police officer. He saw the grandeur of the monuments and the brightness of the Capitol dome, but he also saw the crime and poverty that plague the city's residents. He saw some people living in the shadows of these universal symbols of freedom who were, as he put it, "...trapped in tombs of illiteracy, hopelessness, and addictions." He was especially moved by the plight of the children he encountered.

Instead of settling into a restful retirement, Lewis embarked on his most ambitious effort yet to protect and serve his community. With the support of his family, Lewis established the Fishing School-an after-school program in which children receive guidance that enables them to become self-sufficient adults.

When the Fishing School opened its doors in 1990, five children regularly attended the after school program. Today 125 children are enrolled in this year-round safe-haven that is a model of how faith-based and community organizations can support the nation's mission of ensuring that no child is left behind.

An approved provider of supplemental educational services (SES) for Washington, D.C., public schools since 2003, the Fishing School's formula for success is a curriculum that combines self-esteem and personal motivation training with academic tutoring. Jackie Walls, executive director of the Fishing School, points to a dedicated staff of 11 employees and 30 volunteers who bring this curriculum to life for the students.

In the 5 counties of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia, we estimate that there are about 163,000 Catholic elementary school age children. Almost 65,000 of these attend parish schools or other Catholic schools and another 53,000 attend their parish religious education program. This still leaves almost one of every three Catholic elementary school age children receiving no formal religious instruction. Perhaps our parishes need to become more creative in developing "schools" that could reach these children as well?

**School Dropout Rate**  
**NEW YORK, FEB. 4, 2006 (Zenit.org).- A National Catholic Educational Association report found that Catholic schools in the United States have a lower dropout rate (3.4%) than both public (14.4%) and other private schools (11.9%)**

## **A Change in Staff @ the Office of Research and Planning**



**Frank Donnelly**  
 Assist. Dir. Office  
 of Research &  
 Planning

We join together to wish Frank and his bride Julie all of God's best as they embark on a new life together as they finish their graduate studies at the University of Washington in Seattle. Frank was only here a short time but had a major impact on the office. He upgraded our mapping program and changed our data base system making it easier to serve our clients and helping us to be more productive.

**Thank you Frank and our best to you and Julie!**



**Tom Denton**  
 Assist. Dir. Office  
 of Research &  
 Planning

Tom started September 21, 2005. Join with us as we welcome Tom into our family here at OR&P. This past fall Tom came on board as the new Assistant Director. He has a B.S. in Agronomy and Environment. And has earned his Masters in in Geography and Planning from West Chester University. Prior to joining us he was employed as a project Manager with an Engineering firm in Bucks county.

**Tom is a great addition to our group and we anticipate a wonderful synergy!**