

IN DEPTH EVALUATION OF SAINT MARTHA PARISH LIFE

Completed June 2012

Introduction

In the Fall of 2011, then-Archbishop Justin Cardinal Rigali issued a pastoral letter which called upon the parishes of the Archdiocese of evaluate themselves in several areas, with emphasis upon the “super-priorities” of the Eucharist, Reconciliation and Vocations. Upon his arrival as new shepherd of the flock in Philadelphia, Archbishop Charles Chaput directed that the process for in-depth evaluation move forward. From Fall 2011 until June 2012, St. Martha’s Pastoral Council has engaged the process and the work of the Council is presented in this report.

Areas of Evaluation

As set up by the Coordinator of Archdiocesan Planning Initiatives, Msgr. Arthur Rodgers, seven areas of parish life were to be considered. They are:

- A Worshipping Parish: Prayer and Sacramental Life
- A Welcoming and Caring Parish: Family and Community
- A Witnessing and Proclaiming Parish: Invitation and Evangelization
- An Educational and Formational Parish: Initiation and Faith Formation
- A Parish Responsive to Others: Pastoral Outreach and Social Justice
- An Effectively Administered Parish:
Leadership & Care of Facilities, Personnel, Finances
- A Gifted Parish, Living Responsibly: Stewardship Formation and Practice

For each area, a survey was distributed. From the discussion which followed, strengths and challenges were noted, and priorities for the future set.

The Results

A Worshipping Parish: Prayer and Sacramental Life

Strengths: In this area, our parish excels. The Sacraments are celebrated with great care and reverence and according to liturgical norms. Ministers are drawn from all age groups. Preaching is well prepared and catechetical. Music enhances the liturgical experience. The fullness of the Rites are celebrated for Funerals and Baptisms. The homebound are visited, not only by special ministers but also by Pastoral Staff and their priest(s). The Liturgy of the Hours is celebrated frequently. Catechesis for Sacraments for children is thorough and includes instruction for the parents.

Challenges: As in every parish, the challenge is to engage those who, for whatever reason, are not practicing their faith. While we have seen some improvement over the years, there are far too many who do not obey the Third Commandment of the Decalogue. We are still experiencing fallout from the generation of high school teachers who downplayed the centrality of Sunday Mass, and from the clumsy handling of the abuse crisis by the Archdiocese.

Priorities and Action Steps: The continued faithful and reverent celebration of the Liturgy, as well as frequent exhortation to “bring someone home with you” is the only effective action to take. No “program” can replace personal invitation, and the effectiveness of the rituals themselves.

A Welcoming and Caring Parish: Family and Community

Strengths: Guided by the example of our heavenly patroness, Martha of Bethany, our people are extremely warm and welcoming. The pastor himself greets the people at every Mass, and the people do look out for each other and enjoy each other’s company. The Children’s Liturgy of the Word is celebrated weekly at the 10:00 Mass. Planning of ministers’ schedules is done in such a way to keep families at the same Mass. The “family rosary” goes home to a different family in each classroom and PREP room nightly. Our parish and school web sites as well as a phone call alert system keep families informed and included. Opportunity is provided several times a year to socialize after Sunday Masses.

Challenges: The question is, “Do people who may feel marginalized, such as separated or divorced people, *know* that they are part of the family?” As part of our revitalization of the Home and School, we hope informative presentations and experiences will reinforce to all that the parish is their home and they are all part of God’s Family. We do not have a parish visitation because of having one priest, and do not see that as a priority, since the pastor is present in the people’s homes at times of trial or tragedy, and as a minister to the homebound and ill.

Priorities and Action Steps: Good News International has been contracted to preach the Mission this Fall. It is hoped that the inspired words of lay evangelists can begin some dialog and movement in the hearts of those who feel at the fringes. Otherwise, we will keep doing what we are doing, only better and with more attention.

A Witnessing and Proclaiming Parish: Invitation and Evangelization

Strengths: The Council found some of the questions in the survey for this area confusing and even leading. Despite this, we discerned that we do the following well: we run a very fine RCIA program, we reach out to convalidate marriages with some success each year (reaching people through children’s sacramental prep), and keep the issue of the discernment of vocations in the forefront. We occasionally offer programs about scripture or issues of Faith. We utilize Missions and the annual Forty Hours, as well as the ebb and flow of the Liturgical Year itself to evangelize and help people grow in spirituality, and offer retreat days to Confirmation and Eucharist candidates, and eighth graders about to graduate. After several faltering steps in this direction, we currently do not have ecumenical outreach to congregations (and do not see this as a priority), but do include some non-Catholic spouses as part of our “family.”

Challenges: As hard as we work at constantly evangelizing and “converting the baptized,” there are still those who need to be somehow touched by God’s grace. Programs do not do this; people do. We also do not have a formal “program” for young adults; rather, we publicize Theology on Tap and other programs from OYYA.

Priorities and Action Steps: Be on the lookout for any young adult outreach which might suit our needs. Utilize such gatherings already extant such as Home and School meetings as opportunities for catechesis and re-evangelization.

An Educational and Formational Parish: Initiation and Faith Formation

Strengths: Our parish has a Middle-Sates accredited Catholic School which teaches the children to make God their first Priority in their lives and strives to assist the parents in their role of first teachers of the Faith. We have worked the parish percentage of subsidy down over the years, cutting it by 2/3 over the years. Difficult right-sizing this past year as well as physical additions, curriculum strengthening and classroom renovations will help strengthen the school in its mission. A newly constituted Home and School is committed to assisting the pastor and administration in their mission and being a strong vehicle of communication. A new director of development will work hard at maintaining enrollment and raising the funds needed to help our parents and the school. Our CCD program is well run, staffed by trained and qualified catechists and responsive to the needs of our children and their families.

Challenges: The adjustments made to staffing should help the parish to continue to sponsor the school with a subsidy which is not an exorbitant burden. However, this will require constant monitoring. Tuition costs must in time rise, and this will affect many families and their ability to pay for Catholic education.

Priorities and Action Steps: Revitalization of the Scrip program, appointment of a Director of Development, appointment of a renewed Home and School Board, rightsizing of the faculty.

A Parish Responsive to Others: Pastoral Outreach and Social Justice

Strengths: We set aside our entire Poor Box offerings to service our people in need. We have a Parish Services Director who does a tremendous job at outreach and assistance to those in need. We are the site for food and clothing collections during the year. Our Director of Youth and Family Ministry is a trained counselor and has resources and referrals available for those in need. Our people respond to diocesan collections and special appeals for tragedies.

Challenges: We do not engage in dialog with non-Catholic groups, nor feel the need to do so in our situation. We need to engage enough of our people in tithing that we can soon “tithe the tithe” and share our resources regularly with those who are in need.

Priorities and Action Steps: Faithful preaching of the spirituality of the tithe and receptive hearing of this biblical message will put us in a position to help even more of our brothers and sisters.

An Effectively Administered Parish: Leadership & Care of Facilities, Personnel, Finances

Strengths: We have adequate and well maintained facilities, for worship, social activities, offices, clergy residence, and recreation. Our maintenance staff is helpful and effective. Our offices are staffed by welcoming and organized personnel. We have sufficient who excel at their jobs. A Business Manager relieves the pastor of some of the time demands caused by temporal matters. Our Pastoral and Finance Councils are

constituted according to Canon and diocesan law and take pride in doing their jobs well. We follow all diocesan policies and procedures and government regulations regarding finances, and make full disclosure annually to the parishioners. Most of all, we adopted the spirituality of tithing three years ago.

Challenges: We have not paid diocesan bills on time, but are at the end of year one of our five year plan to get back on track. Our income has risen because of the steps we have taken, including restoring the “block collection,” rightsizing school staff, and running several major new fundraisers. We are on the right track and by the end of year two will be a fundamentally different parish financially.

Priorities and Action Steps: The constant reinforcement of tithing, the only true solution to money woes (despite what certain “office priests” think), and the steps outlined above.

A Gifted Parish, Living Responsibly: Stewardship Formation and Practice

Strengths: The gradual acceptance of the McKenna Tithing spirituality, with its emphasis on proper sharing of treasure, time and talent, is having its effects. The biggest is a change of heart which sets God as our first Priority in life. Because of this spirituality, the parish has many who share time and talents in ministry, and an increasing number (including school age and high school age children) who make their weekly tithe to the Lord. The call to tithing (much different from what the diocese calls “stewardship”) is reinforced in some form every year, and all new parishioners are taught about it when the pastor personally registers them. From this spirit came a horde of new volunteers who came forward to help us implement our five year fiscal plan.

Challenges: The challenge is always to keep getting the word about tithing out in various ways. The pastor speaks of it not only at Mass but at parents meetings, school gatherings, any where he can. He also tries to live as a tither, but there are still those who resist this life-changing spirituality, because it is life changing.

Priorities and Action Steps: Renew tithing yearly and never, ever stop preaching about it.