

Parish Council Meeting Minutes
February 23, 2025
6:00 PM – 8:00 PM

The Parish Council meeting on Sunday, February 23, 2025, began with a blessing from Father Toner followed by our Chairman, Steve Thieken calling the meeting to order. All council members were present as follows: Father Pat Toner, Rob Gabel, Debbie Crecelius, Annette Schwartz, Jason Utt, Kyle Hilgefert, Rachel Taylor, Cathy Bennett, also including our newest members, Ana Garcia, Joe Stevens, Christine Ellerbrock and Jose Perez. This meets our 12-member requirement. A quick individual introduction was given by each member sharing their personal history and connection to St. Mary. In accordance with our open meeting forum there were approximately 10 parishioners present at this meeting.

Steve gave a summary of how the parish council began back in September 2024 with Father Toner appointing an eight (8) person task force along with himself to begin revising the parish council constitution and establishing the existing parish council.

A brief review of how the meeting would flow in accordance with the provided agenda. Father Toner was given the floor to explain the State of the Parish (A copy of the Parish Impact Report can be picked up in the back of the Church or by stopping at the parish office). Currently phase 2 of the beautification is fully funded and is estimated to begin in May based on the availability of contractors. This will include painting the nave, hanging of our newly fully funded crucifix which will replace the existing chandelier, and repairs in the choir loft. During this renovation there will be scaffolding within the church, but it will not interrupt mass schedules or other liturgical events. Father went on to ask Council to consider the idea of placing a moratorium on funds for beautification and allow the flexibility to use the funds for building and maintenance. Moving forward 10% of the offertory funds will be set aside for necessary maintenance, which Father believes will cover ongoing building maintenance as they are needed.

A review of the second quarter Impact report was given like Father's presentation after each mass this weekend February 22-23, 2025. Anticipate next year the parish in the black. Additionally, a report of the school deficit being cut by 50% this year and that the goal is for the school to be self-sustaining in two (2) years. Allowing the church to run a surplus of \$350K at today's offertory level.

A question was asked about the \$208K still on the books which the bishop had indicated he would forgive. Father reported it is still going through the diocese process. He also indicated there was still the bridge loan of \$190K on the books.

In addition, Father asked the council to consider discontinuing all the various separate funds held by individual groups/ministries and allow the parish access to these funds to be used as needed for the overall good of the parish. As an example, if the flower fund was made available the parish would still provide flowers as needed during all occasions within the liturgical calendar year. Bottom line, all groups would be taken care of by the parish. In this same vein Kristin Story and Father advised there are fall too many fundraisers doing on throughout the parish and school. So much so they are getting on top of each other. After some discussion it was agreed to take this under advisement and table it until our next March council meeting.

The meeting was opened to the attending parishioners for comment.

- Liz Curtis from St. Vincent New Beginnings presented that they were putting together a Capital Campaign for a men's shelter to be opening in the Fall which would provide a transitional housing program, a safe place for men to continue to make positive changes in their lives. They advised that the house across the street from St. Mary, 59 E. William Street, was going to be the potential home for these men. The reasons why below:
 1. Location within walking distance of downtown.
 2. No more than 5, five men at one time living in the residence.
 3. Staff 24 hours per day.
 4. In addition, an acre of land outside of town has been generously given to build a future designated home.

After much discussion and concerns about the best way to present the message to our school parents and parishioners. Such as – a mailer asking for or against, a parish bulletin notice, school letter from SPO and a letter from the principle, Eric Pfeifer. It was agreed the best course of action is to work with the Knights of Columbus to set up a table at a Lenten Fish Fry to educate attendees about the project. The New Beginnings board was advised to communicate directly with the school principal to determine the best way to engage with the school and parents.

Our final discussion was focused on “How can we be more welcoming” as this seems to be a concern from our parishioners who attended the potluck open parish council session. Rob felt that a donut Sunday would be a great way to start with booths for ministries. Many agreed, but no game plan was established as to how or when to get this started. Ana stated the Spanish community wanted to be more connected with the parish and not remain separate. She spoke about the event which was held shortly after COVID when we had an outdoor picnic “Homecoming” and suggested we put together a multicultural potluck. A discussion regarding our current ushers being welcoming before and after mass, but there is a need for more ushers. After a brief discussion on how to go about getting more ushers it was suggested bulletin notices, and announcements after mass. Cathy Bennett advised there have been previous bulletin notices with very little response and that future notices will go out again. The council will continue this discussion at the next meeting with the goal of identifying some (5 or so) actionable items to enhance the “welcoming” of our parish.

Father noted that there was a scheduling conflict in the Commons for the March 9th Council meeting and it was decided to hold the meeting on the 3rd floor of the Parish Office.

Secretary Cathy Bennett indicated that she could not attend the March meeting and Kyle Hilgefert volunteered to assume Secretary duties for that meeting.

Respectfully submitted,
Cathy Bennett, Secretary