

St. Monica Parish Meetings
Saturday, April 21 and Sunday, April 22, 2018

Attendance: Saturday: 17 ; Sunday: 85

Purpose: The meeting is informative: a) **To update the progress of the St. Monica 2020 Growing the Parish initiative** and to invite parishioner questions, suggestions and comments. b) **To explain Fr. Ray Fleming's role as pastor** at Immaculate Conception / St. Bridget which is in addition to his role as pastor for St. Monica / Emmanuel Church of the Deaf.

The meeting was presented by the Facilitation Team (parish council) with presenter Bob Boyd as guide. Fr. Ray introduced new Facilitation Team member Connie Chau and then opened the meeting.

A. St. Monica 2020 Growing the Parish: Starting back in 2013 there was an unsuccessful effort to develop a Stewardship Committee to study parish sustainability and whether a capital campaign was needed at St. Monica. The effort did not have broad participation and was plagued with scheduling issues. Additional financial challenges emerged. During the summer of 2015 parishioners pushed to address parish sustainability in a creative manner: "*Saint Monica 2020 Growing the Parish*" focused on increasing membership and individual participation in parish ministries and activities. We asked ourselves, "How can we better live out our Parish Vision and Mission Statement?". We needed to look from today to the future.

We developed a model based on the following "building-blocks": **1) Spiritual Growth of our Community; 2) Social Aspect of our Community; 3) Recruiting (Evangelization); 4) Communication and Marketing; 5) Care for Our Common Home (ecological stewardship) and 6) Living Our Mission Outside of Our Church.**

Bob Boyd summarized information from the November 2017 Parish Data Sheet listing Households (364 in 2017); Church attendance (364) ; staff (3.7 FTEs); Funerals (26) and Baptisms (12 in 2017).

We have, indeed, shown growth since St. Monica 2020 began. The best measurement is found in how parishioners themselves responded to the building-blocks. Here are some of the highlights:

Spirituality: We have developed, through parishioner initiative and organization, some Small Christian Community groups that gather informally. The Adult Faith Formation activities continue at various intervals throughout the year. A Contemplative Prayer series continues regularly. Our Children's Faith Formation activities enrich our youth. The parish involvement in the National Catholic Youth Conference included youth from the Cathedral Community. Black Catholic History month broadens the awareness of our spiritual roots.

Social Activity: the way that our parishioners experience family. Our regular Community Table encourages sharing following Sunday Mass. Soup Suppers extend

Hospitality to our Saturday worshippers. Our summer picnic joins with our springtime dinners to encourage getting to know each other. Specialty-themed dinners held in the rectory do this also. Our long-time Airport Seniors lunch group offers fun and support. The 50 Week Club brings the larger parish family together. Music adds flavor to our Mardi Gras, special choral group events (John Jay Choir; Matsiko Orphans Choir) and our Music Fest.

Living Our Mission Outside of Our Church: *Social Justice*

Each month our parishioners contribute to the *Blue Bags* activity that secures food and practical items for groups serving youth, neighborhood service entities, and homeless individuals. The parish provides assistance to two families who are part of refugee resettlement. Fair Trade issues get direct parishioner support. Several parishioners provide planning and logistical help for the Westside Farmers Market. St. Peter's Kitchen benefits from the continued volunteerism of St. Monica parishioners. Our parish gardens and Genesee Street floral planters brighten the neighborhood. The Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. luminary celebration joins with a parish clothing drive. The SWEM Stroll fundraiser for local food availability succeeds with St. Monica resources and involvement. Parishioners support public policy initiatives serving the poor.

Evangelization and Marketing: St. Monica has two Legion of Mary groups that combine spiritual growth with outreach to our neighbors and home-bound parishioners. Our annual Music Fest extends our hospitality to our neighbors. Vacation Bible School includes neighborhood children. The parish maintains a website and a Facebook page. The parish campus hosts the Westside Farmers Market.

Care for Our Common Home:

The Creation Stewards continue with on-going educational opportunities that included, this past year, an Environmental-themed art show held in the narthex. Parishioners joined in public meetings and marches on Science, Environmental and Social issues. Restoration by parishioners of the neglected 200 year-old Rapids Cemetery on Congress Avenue restores the landscape and neighborhood pride. St. Monica parishioners assist at *Clean Sweep* each year.

How did these examples of parish growth happen?

In simple terms, parishioners saw needs and set about to meet them. People became engaged in living out the parish *Vision and Mission Statement*. The growth was incremental. There were no long-term programs; just one-time activities or ones that could be carried out primarily by motivated parishioners without drawing heavily on limited parish staff. The key was engaging the interest and support of parishioners who kept in touch with the pastor, staff and Facilitation Team as needed. Parishioner-led, small scale activities engaged others and created the actual growth of the parish since *St. Monica 2020* began in earnest in 2015.

What are some practical ways to grow the membership of the parish?

Register as a parishioner. We have many regular church-goers and families whose children have participated in Youth Faith Formation activities who have not yet taken the actual step of

formally registering. Doing so is important because it informs the Diocese about St. Monica parish vitality. Invite a friend to worship at St. Monica or participate in a parish activity.

How else do we grow as a parish?

By joining a parish ministry or participating in the variety of single-day or short-term activities like Music Fest. Refer to the parish website or get a copy of the Parish Ministries listing found in the narthex information slots.

By focusing on the “building blocks” that exemplify the parish *Vision and Mission Statement*, the parish does well financially. Our plate collection is exemplary within the Diocese. The parish is financially sound with sound advisement from the Finance Committee and good project selection conducted by the Buildings & Grounds group.

Open Dialogue Segment on St. Monica Growing the Parish

Saturday and Sunday input joined together here:

- Registering as a parishioner is important to ensure a fair assessment by the Diocese.
- Encourage people to use church envelopes but don't pressure.
- Support Southwest Ecumenical Ministry programs and join SWEM Stroll 2018
- Father Ray encouraged more persons to join the Facilitation Team (parish council). The meetings are now monthly (no longer bi-weekly).
- Participate in the parish photo directory. Get to know your fellow parishioners
- Return to the use of name tags to identify parishioners
- Continue to celebrate birthdays and anniversaries at the end of Sunday Mass
- Welcome and acknowledge visitors

B. Pastoral Responsibilities: Over the past year Father Ray has served as *pastoral administrator* for Immaculate Conception / St. Bridget Church. He celebrates Sunday Mass there once per month. He accepted Bishop Matano's request to become pastor, effective immediately, at IC / SB. The title change conveys greater stability and includes check-writing responsibilities.

- As an illustration of where we find ourselves today, Fr. Ray pointed out that when he began in the Diocese back in the 1980s, the city of Elmira had 26 priests. Now it has only two. The priest shortage has consequences on parish organization and staffing. We face challenges. Fr. Ray states that, “It is important to go with the Spirit and to appreciate the gifts found in each parish.” At both IC/SB and St. Monica / Emmanuel Church of the Deaf parishioners play an important role in setting parish direction. He looks forward to collaboration between the two parishes: “With God's grace and the goodness of the communities, we will continue.”

- Saint Monica, Emmanuel Church of the Deaf and Immaculate Conception / St. Bridget are **three separate parishes** with **very unique identities that need to be preserved**. Father Ray

stressed that the three parishes DO NOT constitute a “melting pot”. **Preserving the unique integrity and culture of each parish is essential.** We continue as three faith communities under the leadership of one pastor serving three parishes. There will be on-going efforts to work collaboratively. For example, each of the parishes is encouraged to attend the dramatization of the life of Father Augustus Tolton, the first African American priest, being held at Aquinas Institute on Monday, May 21st. Add American Sign language interpretation.

- All three parishes are in good shape financially. All three parishes have their own parish councils (facilitation team), Finance Councils, Building & Grounds committees, parish ministries and staff.

Open Discussion on Pastor’s Role (Saturday and Sunday input combined)

-When asked how he will manage three faith communities, Father Ray responded. “I don’t know but tight-rope walking can be fun.” All three parishes provide strong parishioner direction working with the pastor.

- Effective time management will be important.
- Vitality and preservation of unique identity is essential for each faith community.
- We need to develop unique structures in response to the priest shortage.
- Welcome this as a “sistering” opportunity for the 3 faith communities to come together.
- Keep doing what we are doing. The parish is doing something right.
- Adding more people is the key to overall parish growth for each faith community.
- Personal invitation works best to engage parishioners in ministries and activities.
- People who feel valued tend to give back more in many ways.

The Parish Meetings closed with the Vision and Mission Statement.