



ST. PAUL'S ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH

Minutes of the Parish Council Meeting – October 12, 2020

Elected Members Present: Christine Forbes, Patricia Davies, Pam Vogt, Deborah Harrison, Ross Terranova, Peter Adams, Rosa Gonzalez and Kevin Green

Elected Members Absent: None

Ex-Officio Members Present: Fr. Sean Harlow, O. Carm., Deacon Carl Locatelli and Deacon Michael McCabe

Recording Secretary: Deborah Botti

Ex-Officio Members Absent: None

Others Present: Rebecca Suchy

The meeting began with prayer at 6:50 p.m.

Minutes of the meeting of September 14 were accepted.

Rebecca Suchy was thanked for reaching out to the Parish Council and welcomed to the meeting. Parish Council members wanted more detail regarding her email. The floor was turned over to her:

“I had been thinking about writing this letter for about a month. I recently attended Confirmation, and four families came up to me in confidence, no names. A couple of families are leaving, perhaps as many as five that I know of.

“One mom was almost in tears. She said she had been turned away from Mass three times – and twice she was early. She supposes she should go to another parish if she’s not getting into St. Paul’s.

“Some families have already left. They didn’t understand why the hall wasn’t used for overflow or why there wasn’t something done outside when the weather was nice. So they’re going to other places, like St. Mary’s, because they can’t be seated here. It’s sad.

“A woman and her daughter wanted to attend the 5 o’clock Mass. At 4:55 p.m., the door was already locked. She knocked loudly, but no one opened the door. I don’t want to hear from my Confirmation student: ‘We just want to come to church.’

“Those who attend Mass are afraid of making a mistake because they’ll be yelled at, even if they move the wrong way at Communion.

“On social media, there are political statements being made that are not acceptable. There should never be a political reason for people leaving. The reopening was bad enough.

“At St. Mary’s outdoor Mass, no masks were required. ... Maybe we don’t need as many volunteers, and I think St. Paul’s could try to open up more space.”

Reaction from Parish Council members:

- It’s good to hear feedback, but it’s sad volunteers are ‘yelling.’ Might that be a perception? Rebecca replied that several people said, ‘No one wants to go to church and be yelled at’. ... They thought they were being motioned forward, only to hear, ‘It’s not your turn yet.’
- So people feel like grade-school children? That’s not how we want to operate. But the bottom line is we are trying to prevent the spread of a deadly disease.
- There’s a lot of anxiety on both sides, and there’s some culture-shaping at work. Maybe there needs to be better communication with the volunteers.
- As a volunteer, I look terrible in a mask. No one can see my smile, only my sinister eyes. I appreciate everything Rebecca has said.
- We have explored using the hall. It’s worth revisiting.

Additional comment from Rebecca:

“ It would help to open up the hall.

“ St. Paul’s has always been welcoming. We need to figure out a way to bring that welcome back. Faith is being lost in fear. ... Live-streaming the Mass is better than hearing ‘We’re filled up for the day.’

“Do we have the means to live-stream Mass on our website?

“I understand there’s a pandemic, but we can’t ignore our St. Paul’s community. ... Flocknotes are nice; we want to reach out. What about a survey to find out why people aren’t coming back to church?”

Discussion ensued regarding some of the issues raised:

- St. Paul’s is a mission church of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, which is in a better position space-wise. It’s larger and much more open, so it doesn’t feel as ‘different.’ Ushers are not needed because there are marked sections for couples, singles and groups of three or more. Suggesting parishioners go there – hopefully temporarily – is less devastating than knowing they’re not going to any church at all because they’re not comfortable with St. Paul’s reopening process.
- A Communion Service – with readings, a reflection, Communion and prayer –

was offered for three weeks as an alternative should the church maximum be reached. This was made known via Flocknotes. No one attended. That influenced the Reopening Committee's initial decision to not expand into the hall.

- No more than nine or ten people have been turned away on a Sunday.
- The numbers at the Saturday Mass have remained under the maximum, typically in the 40s range.
- Returning to two Masses on Sundays is not out of the question. However, initial outreach didn't prompt much interest.

The Parish Council was grateful for Rebecca's input. (A prior commitment necessitated her leaving the meeting at 7:20 p.m.) It was noted that she is an engaged and trusted member of the St. Paul's community, and parishioners are comfortable speaking with her.

The Parish Council discussed – and applauded - her suggestion of a brief survey. Not only will that let parishioners know the church is genuinely concerned, but the church stands to gain valuable information; even information that is difficult to hear has value. Peter Adams will take charge, with the goal of readying the survey to be distributed through Flocknotes in advance of the next Parish Council meeting.

Other business:

- All eight remaining Parish Council members agreed to extend their terms for one year. The Constitution provides for nine members for voting purposes. Should the Parish Council go with eight members through 2021 or appoint someone, which it can do in emergency circumstances? It was decided that because the Council technically makes recommendations and not decisions, eight members is fine.
- Because Parish Council and Reopening Subcommittee members overlap, it was decided that the monthly Parish Council meeting on the second Monday can be considered one of the bimonthly Reopening Subcommittee meetings. Its second meeting will remain on the fourth Monday.
- The raffle drawing will proceed, even though not all the tickets were sold. The drawing will be conducted with children in the First Eucharist class. The winners will receive an unexpected gift as holidays near, thereby tying one more loose end.
- Holiday baskets are moving full steam ahead, with about six weeks to get all the ducks – or turkeys – in a row. Food donations are needed. The list will be posted. Food collected will be distributed by category among four classrooms. Dom Zigrossi will once again donate hams and turkeys as well as his time and truck for the bulk pickup of groceries.
- WiFi will be upgraded throughout the church. A commercial-grade router will be

installed in Deacon John Hall and a commercial-grade wireless access point in the main church to deliver high-speed WiFi in a zone that previously offered none.

The meeting closed at 8:18 p.m. with prayer.

Next Parish Council meeting will be Monday, November 9, at 6:45 p.m.

Respectfully submitted, Deborah Botti