

Holy Spirit Church

Minutes of the Town Hall Meeting
Sunday, November 9, 2008
9:45 a.m. to 11:00 a.m.

The meeting was opened by Veronica Hernandez-Shepard, President of the Holy Spirit Parish Council. Veronica introduced the members of the council who were present: Marge Hoffa, Vice President; Carol Garitty, Secretary; Denise Brown, Mary Dailey, Bemis Ikejiofor, Anne O'Connor, Mike Perrone, Larry Shepard, and Jack Urbanski. Peggy Doty and Wilfred Ikejiofor were unable to attend.

ISSUES FROM THE PREVIOUS TOWN HALL MEETING:

The first agenda item was to give a recap of the major issues discussed at the last Town Hall, February 2007. They were:

- choir
- Youth Minister
- loss of parish members to nearby parishes
- financial report details
- church bell tower

Veronica stated that the desire for a choir is still a top issue with parishioners, and she urged anyone who has a voice and an interest to step up and make themselves known.

We do not have a Youth Minister; however, Brian McCarthy and Gail Wilson have been working with the young people of the parish and have been instrumental in planning activities such as the annual Halloween party, the Breakfast with Santa and the Family Dinner Dance. Sister Susanne, new to Holy Spirit this year as Director of Faith Formation, will be working closely with anyone wishing to be involved in the youth program.

Regarding the loss of parishioners from Holy Spirit to other parishes, Veronica acknowledged that one of the reasons for that is having children in Catholic schools and those parishes might give a discount to parents who are members. However, the Harford Catholic Assembly, of which Father Simmons is a member, is stressing that the various parishes in Harford County must work together to combine and share resources and to engage in joint activities.

Veronica stated that the annual financial report has been sent out to all registered parishioners with a recent newsletter. We will make copies available for anyone who would like one. If there are questions regarding that report, one should ask them of Father Simmons.

The bell tower was a much discussed issue at last year's Town Hall. It has been determined that the structure will not support one on top of the church, and the cost of a stand-alone tower is prohibitive and not feasible at this time.

THE SURVEY TAKEN FOR THIS YEAR'S TOWN HALL MEETING:

Veronica noted that we received 142 surveys, which is a good return, about 25% of the parish. The top suggested topics for this meeting were:

- youth involvement (youth activities, getting young adults involved)
- how to get more structures committees and people to participate in committee activities
- music – choir – cantor
- organization of committees, groups and their processes (example: ushers during Mass)

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QUESTIONS FOR THE TOWN HALL MEETING:

Veronica said that many questions were suggested for this meeting, and the top five were:

- Can we send flyers to area residents to introduce our parish?
- My family is interested in youth group programs – what are they?
- What efforts are being made to keep the young families here?
- What are the committees and activities of the parish?
- Why is the tabernacle not in the main church?

Veronica replied that the flyer suggestion was a good one, and we could look into that. The youth programs were touched on briefly at the beginning of the meeting, and would be talked about again in the context of the various committees and their functions. The question of the tabernacle's not being in the main church is one that Father Simmons would be happy to meet and discuss with those who are interested.

RATING OF THE PARISH:

- welcome at liturgies – 82% good, 7% fair
- location convenience – 82% good
- Mass times convenience – 79.5% good, 2% fair
- leadership – 78% good, 8.3% fair
- spiritual needs met – 77% good, 12% fair, 1.4% poor

The ratings do not add up to 100% because not everyone answered every question.

ABOUT OUR PARISH:

- Ages of respondents – 2/3's were over age 55 and 1/3 were 54 and under. Only 12 people responded in the surveys that they were under age 39
- Length of membership in Holy Spirit parish – 60% of responses were marked "over 40 years"
- Children enrolled in Faith Formation – 15% Yes; 54% No

PARISH ACTIVITIES YOU PARTICIPATE IN:

Responses to this question were many, and indicate that just about everyone who responded is active in one or more parish activity such as the folk group, the family dance, usher, Sharing Table, music and liturgy, Parish Council, Faith Formation, and more.

PARISH ACTIVITIES YOU WANT TO PARTICIPATE IN:

- youth activities/group
- adult faith formation
- helping seniors
- Outreach activities (e.g. homeless persons)
- fundraising

DETAILED SURVEY RESPONSES WILL BE TYPED AND MADE AVAILABLE BY THE BEST MEANS IN THE NEAR FUTURE.

THE PARISH COUNCIL'S FOCUS BASED ON FEEDBACK FROM THE SURVEYS:

- develop strong infrastructures and procedures
- develop a mentoring process whereby parishioners may assume leadership roles
- foster an active and energized young adult program
- help form strong committees with committed leaders

OBJECTIVES TO ADDRESS RECOMMENDATIONS:

- promote the Church of the Holy Spirit website: www.hspiritchurch.org
- hold a committee fair
- have greeters at weekly Masses
- assign council members as liaison between the committees and Father Simmons

Phil Durham, Webmaster, reported that the target date for the new website to be up and running is December 10th; Veronica confirmed this will be done by the end of this year.

A committee fair was held earlier this year, not as successful in terms of getting new people as we had hoped, but we will be holding another one in the next few months.

Parish Council members have been greeting people as they come in for Mass.

Veronica said that two years ago the council/committee liaisons were instituted and for lack of definite committee chairs, this was not pursued. This will be reinstated and council members will be assigned to definite committee contact persons, if not designated committee chairs.

OUR COMMITTEES TODAY:

Veronica presented a list of the committees existing in Holy Spirit at this time:

- Education – Sister Susanne, Faith Formation Director, is the contact person. Sister is actively engaged in seeking out opportunities to educate parishioners of all ages.
- Evangelization – Dave Micelli is the contact person. Dave talked about a project this group is embarking on, contacting each registered family by phone with a brief question or two to determine whether or not they are attending Mass here and to listen to their responses to see if we can be of help or encouragement in any way.
- Liturgy – Brian O'Connor, contact person, stated that they are always looking for people for Eucharistic Ministers, ushers, altar servers, readers, etc.
- Social Outreach – Erma Protokowitz, contact person, reported that they are actively involved in the Sharing Table, held at Prince of Peace. Currently they have 12 women and 2 men, and they would like to have more men to assist. She is looking for men to help out more, as some of the volunteers are older and cannot lift tables or move furniture. Erma is no longer working on the homeless shelter effort.

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- Stewardship/Planning – Phil Durham said that a lot of what the Parish Council does is what his team focused on in the past. His committee has not met in the last few months, but once the other committees are more solid, his committee can help with long-term planning.
- Ways and Means – Mary Smith, contact person, talked about the activities of this group such as the upcoming flea market and the spring plant sale, the Lenten meals, etc.
- Youth – Brian McCarthy and Gail Wilson are contact persons for this activity. Brian talked about the success of the family dinner/dances and how much the youth and their families enjoy that. Right now, they are looking for help with the next one coming up in early spring, and they need someone to be chair of that activity. The Youth Group meets every Sunday, and they would welcome involvement and interaction with older people from the parish.

Veronica stressed that the Parish members' "PARTICIPATION IS CRUCIAL. WE CANNOT STRESS THIS ENOUGH."

Veronica also talked about the Interest Groups.

INTEREST GROUPS:

Before opening the meeting up for questions, Veronica talked about the idea of forming "interest groups"; that is, groups of people to meet and discuss "hot" topics they are all interested in. These interest groups could meet weekly, monthly, however often they wished to meet, day or evening, and there are rooms in the hall building that they can use. Just give your name, phone number, e-mail address, to a council member to help these groups get together.

Veronica also talked about people getting together with others who are interested in working on a particular committee or activity. Tri-folds have been set up in the lobby describing each committee and there are sign-up sheets for names of persons interested in getting together and learning more about a committee and working with it. Signing the sheets does not commit you to being on a committee or chairing a committee – just get together and see if you are interested in it.

QUESTION/ANSWER SESSION:

Marissa Quintero asked for more information about the Evangelization Committee. Dave Micelli responded and said the committee will be meeting on December 1st; the time will be in the Bulletin, and everyone is welcome to attend. He said we need young people involved in evangelization – they are the future of our parish.

Sue Johnson asked why such a small percentage of children in Faith Formation is shown on the survey returns. The response was that it is possible that the parents with young children at Mass just didn't take the time to fill out the survey forms, leaving Mass quickly to get the children either to their Faith Formation classes or, at the later Masses, to get them home. (Council members who tallied the surveys had the same question.) Complete information on the number and ages of children in Faith Formation is in the FF office.

Father Simmons commented that the survey was only given out as Masses and with few people attending Mass, not everyone had one. Debbie Baldauf suggested sending surveys out with the newsletter, including a self-addressed stamped envelope for return, or e-mailing them out. Father replied yes, we can do that, though we get about 10% return on doing it that way. If things are given out at a liturgy, there are more responses. We need to look at all options, whom we are reaching. Dave Micelli's group is doing that.

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Another individual asked if we could prepare people in advance about a survey coming. We can tell Parishioners what questions to expect on the survey and give them time to think about their responses. Two people suggested we do the survey over several weekends and catch more people at more Masses. Lil Garitty suggested sending the surveys home with the children, to be returned the following week. Father commented that all these good suggestions are now coming in after the survey, and it illustrates that the more people you would have on committees, the more suggestions you get. Veronica said possibly we could survey twice a year.

Brian McCarthy talked about the joint Breakfast with Santa with Prince of Peace, rather than our doing one here and the Knights of Columbus doing one there. It is scheduled for Sunday, December 14, and Father Simmons will say the 9:30 a.m. Mass at Prince of Peace. This is one way to combine activities in the two parishes. Some of the kids may already know each other from school or other activities; if not, this is a good way start the friendships now.

Marge Hoffa brought up another point. Youth and older people need to get together in some way. The youth are the future of our church, and the seniors are the backbone. Anne O'Connor commented that with BRAC coming in, people are moving away from grandparents, and we could work to give them "family" here.

Gail Wilson asked how old does one have to be to participate in the liturgy, such as being a reader. Maybe that's a way to get youth involved. Brian responded that usually at age 16, as long as they are capable.

A parishioner commented that the turnout for today's Town Hall meeting might have been small because having filled out the survey form, some people may have felt they didn't need to come to a meeting, that they had given all their suggestions and questions.

Veronica thanked everyone for attending today and urged them to look at the tri-folds and consider working with one of the committees, or getting into an interest/discussion group.

Submitted by Carol Garitty
November 12, 2008

Approved at Parish Council Meeting, November 21, 2008