

Diocesan Lay Pastoral Council **Minutes of the March 6, 2010 Meeting**

Facilitator Gary Pieters, called the meeting to order at 9:00 a.m. Bishop Melczek led the prayer. Gary then welcomed all of the members, and stated that the discussion for the morning would center on Catholic Schools. He then invited Bishop Melczek to share his comments with the group.

Bishop Melczek also welcomed the Council, and gave some introductory remarks that related to the agenda of the meeting. He quoted from a study by Fordham University on the future of Catholic Schools. The author of the article said that the Catholic Church has always stressed clearly the values of our Catholic faith, and if our parish schools are going to thrive they will need to meet the needs of the people as they did in the past. The whole parish community is needed to nurture the faith and to build community if Catholic schools are to survive.

The Bishop introduced Dr. Barbara O'Block, Superintendent of Catholic Schools, who presented a power point presentation on Formation in the Diocese of Gary. Dr. O'Block reviewed the Diocesan Mission Statement, and the importance the diocese places on faith formation. Special attention was given to the future of Catholic Schools. Following Dr. O'Block's presentation, the Council broke into small groups to discuss the following questions she had prepared for them.

- **Is a shared sense of purpose that sustained our Catholic schools disintegrating?**
- **How can we, as an entire Catholic community, affirm this mission and this conviction of Catholic Education.**
- **Have the increasing financial demands of supporting Catholic schools weakened or diminished other formational needs of the people in the parish.**

After two rounds of discussion the Council made the following recommendations to the Bishop:

Two General Statements:

- **The Council agreed that the people want to see Catholic Schools continue to be a viable way of forming our children and youth.**
- **A major obstacle to this viability is the lack of information disseminated in our parishes, and in the wider community, about our Catholic Schools. People do not know about our Catholic Schools.**

Supporting Recommendations:

- **Address the division between Catholic Schools, Religious Education and the parish as a whole.**
- **Commission the school teachers and catechists together each fall as a sign of unity and commitment to the teaching of the faith.**
- **All parishioners and priests need to be committed, and financially supportive of Catholic schools as an additional way in forming the faith of our children.**

- Priests need to give support to one another, whether they have a school or not. Priests need to be mentors for one another.
- Begin mentoring and working with parents about the importance of Catholic education when their children are at different stages – i.e., time of Baptism, school age, Confirmation.
- Develop mentoring programs between Catholic High School students and parish grade school children.
- The Hispanic culture is growing in the diocese. Meet the needs of people of other cultures by welcoming them to the parish and making the school accessible to them.

Financial:

- Include a Catholic School envelope in the monthly envelope packet.
- Publish the amount of money from the CSA that is given for scholarships annually. People need to know that \$500,000 from the CSA goes to scholarships.
- Help families apply for scholarship money, especially those from the Hispanic community.

Marketing:

- In parishes where there is no school, let school students and/or staff speak before or after Mass about the availability of Catholic schools. Have an information table in the vestibule.
- Religious Education Programs need to let students and/or staff give an annual presentation about Catholic high schools and grade schools.
- Let Catholic School alumni speak before or after Mass about their experience of having a Catholic School education.
- Keep information about Catholic schools in front of the people in all our parishes, at all times.
- Ask parishes who have been successful in marketing their school to help parishes who have not been successful.
- Use the internet to creatively market the Catholic school.
- Awareness and marketing must be ongoing in all our parishes, and the wider community.

Bishop Melczek thanked the Council for their input and it will be shared at the priest's meeting later this month.

Before the closing prayer the Bishop thanked those members leaving the Council after completing their three year term. The members reflected on their experience of serving on the Council. Some stated that they were honored to be asked to serve, while others said that it gave them a broader experience of church. All found that meeting and listening to people from other parishes help them have a real experience of Church. The meetings themselves were a good learning experience.

Gary adjourned the meeting at noon and lunch was served.

The next meeting of the Council is September 11th, 2010.

