

## Outreach Discussion Group

### June 4, 2009: Parish Hall

Present at meeting: Sally Rizzo (SR), Eileen Cole (EC), Edie Kuffner (EK), Cathy Carlson (CC), Vinni Rella (VR) (representing, in part, Richard Rella), Marcia Farrell (MF), Fr. John Stubbs (JdS+).

[Next Meeting: Tuesday, July 14<sup>th</sup> at 7:30 p.m.]

The meeting was called to order at 7:35 p.m.. It opened with Psalm 50 v. 1-6 and with prayer (JdS+).

Fr John said that during Bishop Mark Sisk's visit to the Parish of St Mary's in September, he said that a healthy parish pays attention to (1) worship; (2) nurture (including pastoral care); and (3) outreach. The first two of these three is being addressed, at least to a degree. The purpose of this discussion this evening relates to the third of these three points: Our intention this evening regards the future outreach (and mission) of St Mary's Parish. A definition of *mission*: (David Bosch) "Crossing boundaries in the name of Christ." Fr John expressed appreciation to Sally Rizzo for carrying the concern of this Parish of St Mary's up to this point in time, in terms of the field of outreach; and also, for the several discussions that the two of them (SR and JdS+) had had together during the year past.

This first meeting of this Parish discussion group on outreach, is, in some way, a preliminary one (JdS+) in view of the following four items:

- Firstly, during this meeting together, on this particular evening, there is the question, "*How* should we conduct this discussion on outreach in the parish?" The *method* of discussion might be different from other discussions: for example, a Parish discussion on the matter of outreach might be different from the previous process of a Parish discussion on worship, which we carried out during the year past. How should we conduct a dialogue on outreach amongst the parishioners of St Mary's?
- Secondly, if the continuation of this discussion on outreach, after this evening, achieves nothing else, then it could, at least, assist and inform the search committee in terms of discussions and interviews with candidates for the position of Rector of St Mary's.
- Thirdly, this point needs to be made: On the one hand, there is discussion. On the other hand, there is action. It is possible that *action* on this matter (by contrast with *discussion* on this matter), may need to await the appointment of a permanent priest or rector. Fr. John has limits set by his position as Interim Pastor as to what he can do, with regard to decision-making on worship, pastoral care, outreach, or any other matter regarding the future of the Parish of St Mary's. The role of an interim is simply to stabilize a parish. At this point in time, the Parish is clearly quite stable enough as to be equal to the task of carrying out a discussion on outreach in the future.
- Fourthly, when an appropriate moment for this comes, Canon Tom Orso recommended that the leadership of St Mary's has a meeting with leaders of other parishes in this locality with regard to this matter of outreach.

After that, the group present at the meeting then took up the discussion, which had the tone of 'brain storming'. (What follows is a description of the discussion, but rearranged along thematic lines):

1. *Mission, vision, and outreach*: During her last visit to St Mary's, Canon Wilson raised this matter: Most parishes in this Diocese are small parishes, of a comparable size to St

Mary's. Therefore, there are limits on what such parishes can take on. So, then, what might be the specialty of each local Episcopal parish? (JdS+)

So, then, what is our mission exactly? What is our community? How far do we want to reach into our community? How do we market ourselves to our community? In terms of outreach, there may be overlap between what different churches do. We don't want to step on other's toes, or unduly repeat what has already been or is now adequately addressed by others. We need consensus on the following two distinctive types of statement: a mission statement, and a vision statement. What would we want as a parish? (CC).

There are a number of possibilities mentioned below, for example, youth, the elderly, and several others. Each of these possibilities has its own characteristics. Some will bring people into church, but not money. Some will bring money into church, but not people. Some will cost the Parish both time and money, and may not bring people in either, but will still be worthwhile if only, perhaps, because it yields the dividend of a greater recognition from the community (JdS+). Others might not bring any kind of benefit at all to St Mary's. Such things the Parish might do simply for the love of Jesus, in which the right hand does not even know what good and worthwhile thing the left hand has done (EK).

It would be good to decide as a Parish where our outreach emphasis will be.

2. *The local context and population around St Mary's:* Who are our neighbors? Who are the people within our zip code need (10310, West Brighton)? On Sunday 17 May, Canon Mitchell gave us our demographic breakdown of this zip code area. Canon Mitchell said that it appears that our neighbors include many single parents (with children) who have quite reasonable levels of income. Furthermore, it is likely that we have at least a few thousand Roman Catholics in this zip code area, who do not attend church any more. It appears that some of them might be seeking worship which: (a) Might well be traditional on the one hand, and yet, on the other hand, (b) Is more open and reasonable than they had previously experienced. Combining the above considerations together, there is this question: What about those close by us – those who appear to be many single (or married RC) parents with children who are not currently attending church? Might we do something to attract them? Fr. John has been hearing from such families. How might we serve them? How might we present ourselves to them, or advertise ourselves to them here in this zip code area? (JdS+). There are indeed very real child care needs (MF).
3. *Youth:* In the past, there was an active youth group. Increasingly effective plays were produced by the youth group. This reached the point that royalties were required, at a price that this one small Parish could not afford to pay (SR). Young people are seeking a spiritual center and spiritual education (EC). Dianne (who could not be present) said that young people are looking for a fulfilling worship experience. They seek uplifting and joy in their faith experience (EK). Depending on the emphasis we select, in terms of outreach, there are many resources that can help us to achieve our objectives. For example, to this particular end of reaching out to youth or of young adults, there is the program originating with the London lawyer Nicky Gumbel at Holy Trinity Parish church, Brompton, in the UK. This is called the "Alpha" program. The "Alpha" program addresses young people, and young professional adults, and has proved to be very effective in doing so. At each event there is firstly food and fellowship, then a (video) presentation, and then guided discussion in small groups of about eight people. This goes on for 8 weeks. St George's/ Calvary Episcopal Church in Manhattan uses the "Alpha" program. It is comparable to another, different, and also highly effective program called Cursillo (or the youth version of the same, called Happening). Cursillo is used by many parishes in the Diocese of New York (JdS+). Also, there are parish youth programs that involve sports, and so forth that have been very popular and enjoyable (VR).

4. *The elderly*: There is also the whole matter of ministry to the many elderly people. Marcia took cards with money to Verrazano Nursing Home this year, as we didn't give the annual party. Nursing Home residents have a great need of visitors, and want to receive Holy Communion (MF).
5. *Hospital*: Might we (as a Parish) consult with Richmond University Medical Centre (St. Vincent's Hospital) with regard to their pastoral care needs? Deacon Novella Lawrence is the person we would need to talk with in this connection (JdS+).
6. *Hobbies and personal interest groups*: We could use hobbies of ours to serve the community- knitting, crocheting, (lessons), and others. We could develop musical presentations for nursing homes, hospitals, shut-ins, Christmas caroling in the neighborhood, and so forth (VR).
7. Other possibilities in terms of emphasis within the field of "outreach" could be *poverty, homelessness, hunger, social outreach, or evangelism*.
8. *Discussion, communication, selecting priorities*: Where should our emphasis be as a congregation? For example: Elderly? College students? Child care? The poor? Local? International? Single parents? Married parents? Unchurched Roman Catholics (or other Christians)?

There are specific techniques for outreach to various particular groups, but we can't do all of them at once. How can we first discover the appropriate emphasis for this Parish of St Mary's? After that, how can we so present an idea so that the parish works together in unity (JdS+)? The purpose of seeking the opinions of those in our Parish, and those outside our Parish (in our neighborhood) would be to gain more feedback as to what our mission should be (CC).

- We could contact people through direct discussions, by telephone or through written cards, asking them for ideas as to what they want (VR, EK, MF).
- Vinni offered to look into web techniques to get a vote through that channel of communication (VR).
- Sally will prepare something for Cathy to put into the Cloister asking for input from the Vestry, and others (SR).
- We could also try to poll people who've been away from the Parish for some time (JdS+).
- How about a sign on the fence, welcoming people to stroll through the grounds & enjoy the garden (CC and others)?
- We may discuss this at the next Wednesday morning Bible Study (MF) – and, indeed, with all Parish groups (SR)
- This method of consulting folk could include people who come for baptisms, weddings, funerals, or, in general, the pastoral offices of the Parish. We should do our best to be (and to keep) in touch with them; and to ask them what we might be doing that would serve them (JdS+). [Sally asked about baptismal certificates- do we give them out individually, with the seal, candle, etc? (Fr. J said yes we do)]. When asked, speaking for herself, Eileen said that she seeks spiritual nourishment and education (EC). People are looking for church home where they will feel accepted & welcomed and truly "at home". They don't want to feel bound by rigid dogma or to be judged (EK).
- There will be another special moment when we begin to get things going at the beginning of the academic year in September. What do various groups think about some of the ideas we come up with? (JdS+)
- Through such efforts, we may reach the point of identifying a specialty or an emphasis for St Mary's. After that, following the suggestion of Canon Orso, how about setting up a meeting with leaders of other local Parishes in October (SR)?

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The meeting was adjourned at 9:00 p.m. Fr. John led us in the Grace.

*The above notes do indeed describe what was actually said at the meeting, but these notes do not reflect the order in which these things were said: rather, the notes.*