



**ST. MARK'S CATHOLIC CHURCH
PARISH PASTORAL COUNCIL**

**APRIL 24, 2007
SPECIAL OPEN MEETING
RESPONSES TO THE PARISHIONER QUESTIONS SUBMITTED**

PARISH COUNCIL

QUESTION 1. How does one join the Parish Council? Is this an appointed or elected position? If elected, when will the next election be held?

RESPONSE 1: The February 20, 2005 issue of the St. Marks Bulletin (page four) indicated that "Nominations to the Parish Council are now over and the five parishioners who have agreed to serve are as follows: 1. Mr. Gary Cademartori; 2. Ms. Marion Bohlen; 3. Mr. Peter Abitanto; 4. Ms. Karen Walsh Pappas and 5. Mrs. Mary Ellen Ballou."

At that time, there were five seats open and five nominations, so no election was necessary. In the past when there were more nominees than open seats, Parish members were asked to vote. There are no plans for an election at this time, given the full slate of members recently nominated in 2005.

QUESTION 2: Many parishioners have been requesting the opportunity to attend and address the Parish Council meetings since last summer. Why did it take over nine months to schedule an "open" meeting for all parishioners to attend?

RESPONSE 2: St. Mark's Parish Council meets on the last Tuesday of each month, except for December. Meetings are held from 7:30 P.M. to 9:00 P.M. in the Rectory. Meetings are open only to Parish Council members unless otherwise announced. In the past two years there has been only one request to the Parish Council for an open meeting. That happened when a woman unexpectedly showed up for the meeting on June 27, 2006. Below are excerpts from the minutes of that meeting. In the excerpt that follows, Karen Pappas, Chairperson of the St. Mark's Parish Council, has just opened the June 27, 2006 meeting.

Karen opened the meeting by talking with a parishioner who showed up because she believed she had seen a sign that the Parish Council meeting was open to parishioners. Karen explained to the parishioner that the Parish Council could not accommodate open meetings for all interested parishioners at each meeting. She pointed out that having unscheduled “open meetings” would not be practical due to time and space limitations and the need to conduct the planned business of the Parish Council. She explained that meeting materials are prepared after the 10th of each month, approved by the Pastor with input from the Council members and the meeting materials are handed out in advance of the meeting. Therefore, we would be unable to accommodate a change in our plans at this meeting and the meeting was not open. She advised that we would possibly consider an open public meeting with all parishioners in the future.

Later, during further discussion by Parish Council Members with Monsignor Carton and Deacon Dennis, it was decided that a general meeting open to all parishioners will be held on April 24, 2007... (Taken from Minutes of the June 27, 2006 Parish Council meeting. Note: The time of the meeting was later changed. The meeting will be held from 7:30 P.M. to 9:00 P.M.)

April 24, 2007, was selected as the date for the next open meeting and reserved after careful consideration of all outstanding Parish Council Agenda Items and the Parish events calendar, as well as parishioner availability and convenience.

Members of the Parish Council serve our Parish by discussing issues of general concern and by providing parishioner feedback. Because of this role, parishioners are asked to work through their parish representatives. To encourage this, during the past year, articles have been run in Weekly Parish Bulletins for parishioners, providing the names of the Parish Council members and stating, “If you have any suggestions or would like to become more involved in our Parish, please contact any of the Parish Council members.” (For example, see August 6, 2006 Parish Council Bulletin, page 8.) Likewise, monthly Parish Council agendas frequently allow time for “Parishioner Feedback.” Parishioners can learn about our Parish Council through our Webpage at www.stmarkseagirt.com. The phone number at the Rectory (732.449-6364 x 116) allows for parishioners to phone-in issues for discussion. Parishioners can also keep apprised of the work of the Parish Council by reviewing the minutes of our monthly meetings, which are available for all parishioners on-line.

Special meetings of the Parish Council were held during October 2005 and October 2006. For example, on October 25, 2005, St. Mark’s held a special Parish Council meeting with the leaders of our various Ministries to gather their feedback and suggestions on a number of thought provoking questions. All comments, suggestions and recommendations from that meeting were documented, and then from January – June 2006, these recommendations were thoroughly discussed at our monthly Parish Council meetings, the minutes of which are all available on our Parish web site. Many suggestions have already been implemented and others are being considered for future implementation. The results of this activity were documented and presented at a special

Parish Council meeting on October 24, 2006, which was attended by over 70 participants including members of the Holy Name Society, the Altar Rosary Society, the Social Concerns Ministry, Altar Servers, Readers, Extraordinary Ministers and St. Mark's Spanish Ministry, to name a few. The handout materials from that meeting are available on line.

QUESTION 3: Why do questions for the April 24, 2007 meeting have to be submitted over a month in advance? Aren't our parish and ministry leaders capable of answering questions and concerns on the spot? Why do we need to submit questions weeks before the meeting?

RESPONSE 3: Parish Council members are not able to answer every question without adequate preparation. As you can see from the questions submitted, significant information has been requested, for which it took considerable time and effort to prepare reasoned responses. Likewise there is information which was requested (collections from 2004, etc.) that is not readily available. It took time to write and assemble these answers and the full membership of the Parish Council requested the opportunity to review the questions and discuss the responses. The March 20th deadline was picked, so as to be prepared for the March 27th meeting of the Parish Council, which was the last Parish Council meeting in advance of the April 24th meeting.

The Parish Pastoral Council is one dedicated to leadership and vision, and as such, we seek to plan our activities. As members of a thoughtful Parish Council, we seek to give careful consideration to issues presented by members of our Parish.

Finally, we also anticipated the possibility of having formal responses prepared for you to take with you after the meeting and we did not know how many questions we would receive or how much time it would take. Out of 1,400 families, we received only four letters and one voice-mail. Of these, only two were letters of complaint and only one of these letters was signed. Based on this fact and the results released in a Parish Survey in the fall of 2005, it would appear that most people are satisfied with their Parish. Of course, in a parish the size of St. Mark's, there are bound to be multiple opinions on a variety of topics. The St. Mark's Parish Council tries to give a voice to each of these multiple opinions, and work thoughtfully and cooperatively to bring vision and harmony to our parish community.

FINANCE COMMITTEE:

QUESTION 4: What are the qualifications to be on the Finance committee? How does one get appointed to be on this committee?

RESPONSE 4: The Parish Council at St. Mark's serves as an advisory body to our Parish and assists Monsignor Carton, Pastor, by discussing issues of general concern, by providing parishioner feedback, by offering comments and suggestions, by helping to schedule social events at the parish, by coordinating with ministries in the church and by assisting the Pastor, as he requests. Parish Council members are volunteers. They are not

involved in the day-to-day running of the Church, such as personnel or finance. Since further information on the Finance Committee was requested, we took the liberty of forwarding a copy of the letter with all the questions relative to the Finance Committee to the Finance Committee.

QUESTION 5: Please supply the total amounts of all parish collections for fiscal years 2004, 2005, 2006, and year to date 2007. If the amounts are declining, please be prepared to explain the reasons, and what our Church administration is doing to address this.

RESPONSE 5: The webpage at www.stmarkseagirt.com offers a variety of information about our Parish and contains a copy of the most recent St. Mark's Parish Bulletins, which provide information on weekly parish collections. The information requested is not readily available to Parish Council members, but feel free to look up the information you seek, as it is printed each week in the bulletin. For your information, however, a member of the Finance Committee has advised us that collections for this time this year are on average, the same for prior years.

QUESTION 6: Where can we obtain information about the operating expenses of the parish? Isn't this supposed to be shared annually by the Pastor? Please have this information available for the April 24th meeting.

RESPONSE 6: As indicated in Question 4, Parish Council members are not involved in the day-to day running of the Church or in parish finances. We understand however, that in the past this information has been published in the Bulletin and it is our understanding that it is expected to be published again soon.

MUSIC:

QUESTION 7: During 2002-2003, at Monsignor Carton's request, St. Mark's successfully ran a major capitol fund-raising campaign to fully restore and rebuild our church organ. Why is this beautiful improvement to our Church being utilized at less than half of the liturgy services on a weekly basis?

RESPONSE 7: As this question points out, that campaign was completed and more recently St. Mark's was successful in completing a much larger and most necessary Renovation Campaign reaching the target goal of financial pledges. As a result of these drives, we have been able to make a number of very significant major renovations to our Parish Infra-structure.

With our organ, we are able to offer traditional music during 8:00 A.M. and 12:00 Noon Masses on Sundays, and for special occasions, such as First Communions, Confirmation, Weddings and Funerals. An organ cable was installed, allowing for the choir loft organ to be played live from the piano ensemble area. This very worthwhile and incredible feature is utilized at all 5:00 P.M. and 10:00 A.M. Masses. The sound system was upgraded allowing all instruments and vocalists to utilize sound monitors and speakers.

St. Mark's was also fortunate to have a loving parishioner who donated a brand new grand piano. Other musical instruments were also donated. St. Mark's truly responds to the needs and musical tastes of all!

In addition to the organ and piano, there have been other parish renovations and upgrades. New heating and air-conditioning systems have been installed and are properly working. The roof and outside masonry have been repaired and sealed. The kitchen in the basement has been renovated with new countertops and appliances, and Father Child Hall has been freshly cleaned and painted. The renovation of the bathrooms in the Rectory is now complete. The Rectory has been painted, old walls repaired, new carpeting installed in the Church and Rectory, new appliances added in the kitchen and the basement made into a useable area for our youth and community meetings or projects. The Church landscaping has been improved and the Holy Family statute outside the church has been repaired and benches were placed outside for contemplative prayer and reflection.

QUESTION 8: Why were there such radical changes made to the music liturgy, beginning last July, without any feedback or input from the parish community? Why are there now so many non-parish members who have been given key roles in our services? Was there dissatisfaction with the abilities of our St. Mark's music ministers? When will the new music ministry be evaluated as to its success or failure in meeting the needs of all parishioners?

RESPONSE 8: As our Pastor pointed out in a letter to all parishioners in July 2006, he realized that there have been a number of very significant changes that have occurred in our Parish which have resulted in significant accomplishments. For example, the results of the October 25, 2005, special Parish Council meeting showed that one item which was consistently recommended by all of the parish organizations was the need to draw-in more parishioners, particularly younger parishioners who can take leadership roles in our parish in the coming years.

To accomplish that, it was recommended that we do more things in our parish to attract youth. With the new Music Program, we now have music for our young people of different ages and a youth band has been formed. Traditional music is also offered and both the piano and organ are utilized. (Please see question 15 below for more exact details.)

As far as we are aware, there are no immediate plans to conduct another parish survey, because the music is now responsive to the needs of our entire parish family, and the music is very varied to accommodate divergent preferences. The Music Director works with all members of the music program to ensure that our new parish musical program is not only one of excellence, but one that also captures the spiritual, prayerful dimension of worship to God that is so vitally important here at St. Marks.

The question on why non-parishioners are able to take an active role in our parish brings to mind a book written by Thomas Groome, who has a background as Professor of Theology and Religious Education at Boston College. He is the author of a book, What Makes Us Catholic: Eight Gifts for Life. (Harper Collins Publishers, Inc., 2003). In the preface the author explains that the term "Catholic" is usually taken to mean "Universal." However, "Inclusion" is closer to the roots of the word "Catholic:" "Katha holos" literally means "gathering in the whole" or more colloquially, "ALL ARE WELCOME." (p.vxii.)

Because Catholicism calls Christians to a world consciousness and faith, we have profound responsibilities to foster solidarity and interdependence. Thomas Groome suggests some specific practices to nurture Catholic consciousness and commitment: make friends among all people. (pp 261-262). Although we each suffer from human imperfection, we must be open to allowing others to share their special and unique gifts. This allows others to experience the joy of worshipping together in a spirit of prayer and full embracement of the principles of Christianity and service to God. It is our goal, through the work of the Parish Council, to assist St. Mark's to strive to meet this Christian ideal.

QUESTION 9: Please ask the piano player/organist not to sing harmony while the cantors are singing. It is very distracting and does not add anything to the quality of the music being sung.

RESPONSE 9: We are sorry that you do not like this singing. Unfortunately, this is a matter of personal taste and we have received many comments on the prayerfulness of this accompaniment. Likewise, this issue lies at the discretion of the Music Director.

QUESTION 10: Where have the cantors gone? Who are these new people, cantors?

RESPONSE 10: We are not aware that the cantors have gone. In fact, we have even more willing and talented cantors at St. Marks now than we did a year ago. For more information on the Music Ministry, please see the response to Question 15 below, which provides up-to-date information on this issue.

QUESTION 11: Who are the singers at the 10:00 A.M. Mass? Are they from St. Mark's?

RESPONSE 11: The Children's Choir and Contemporary Adult Ensemble sing at the 10:00 A.M. Mass on Sundays. For details on these groups and how they are scheduled, please see the response to Question 15 below.

QUESTION 12: Why has the music changed so severely?

RESPONSE 12: Based on recommendations on the leadership of our parish organizations received in a survey in October 2005, it was very important for St. Mark's

to involve more young parishioners who can take leadership roles in our parish in the coming years. To accomplish that, it was recommended that we do more things in our parish to attract youth. With the new Music Program, we have music tailored to our youth. A youth band has also been formed. At other Masses, piano music is played and the volume of the organ has been adjusted. We now work with all members of the music program to ensure that our new parish musical program is not only one of excellence, but one that also captures the spiritual, prayerful dimension of worship to God that is so vitally important here at St. Marks.

QUESTION 13: Are there many families that have left St. Mark's because of the music? Is that the "Misunderstanding" that we prayed over at Mass Sunday?

RESPONSE 13: We are not aware of parishioners who have left St. Mark's because of the music. In a parish the size of St. Mark's there are, unfortunately, people who will need to leave for a variety of reasons. Rectory staff has advised that our parish has grown from 1,100 families to over 1,400 families and more people are participating in the ministry of Music. Many of these new people are our youth – those whom we were attempting to attract and we are grateful to God for their kind, good-hearted, generous and unselfish service. We are not aware of any special prayers for particular misunderstandings. However, Catholicism calls for each of us to work together for unity and harmony.

QUESTION 14: Can we please address how unhappy people are with these changes?

RESPONSE 14: Although the Parish Council has been running announcements in the bulletin and at Mass advising parishioners to contact Members of the Parish Council with their concerns, out of 1,400 families, only four letters and one voice mail were received and of these only two were letters of complaint. Based on this fact and the results released in a Parish Survey in the fall of 2005, it would appear that most people are satisfied with their Parish. Of course, in a parish the size of St. Mark's, there are bound to be multiple opinions on a variety of topics. The St. Mark's Parish Council tries to give a voice to each of these multiple opinions, and work thoughtfully and cooperatively to bring vision and harmony to our parish community.

QUESTION 15: There seems to be so many positive things happening with our youth in the Parish. The Music is so reverent that it sometimes brings me to tears. How has the music changed and what is being offered?

RESPONSE 15: In order to properly answer this question, we conferred with our Music Director. There have been a number of significant changes in our Music Ministry in the period from July 2006 through March 2007. All of these changes have been geared to foster increased participation, especially of our youth. These are some changes which the Music Director has implemented during this period:

1. **Youth Ensemble Formed And Implemented Into Weekly Masses**

The Youth Ensemble consists of: two guitarists, one bass player, three percussionists, two keyboardists, eight vocalists, for a Total of 16 active members - average 10 per Mass. The Youth Ensemble sings every 5 P.M. Saturday Mass and practices weekly along with peer activities (pizza and soda). This is for youth aged 13 – 21. The youth ensemble recently collaborated with the Parish CYO for the Living Stations.

2. **Contemporary Adult Ensemble Formed And Implemented Into Bi-Weekly Masses**

Consists of: two-three guitarists, one bass player, one percussionist, and seven vocalists, for a Total of 12 active members - average nine per Mass. The Contemporary Adult Ensemble sings at 10:00 A.M. Mass every 2nd and 4th Sunday. They practice bi-weekly.

3. **Cantor Ministry Enhanced and Enlarged**

The Cantor ministry has been enlarged from five original cantors to a Total of 15 members. Six of these newly trained cantors are youth, under the age of 21. The five original Cantors are still in cantor rotation. Cantor training provided both "in-house" and encouraged professionally from NPM Cantor Workshops.

4. **Adult Choir Maintained**

The 18 original members are maintained, and three new members added for a Total of 21 active members, with an average 14 members per Mass. The Adult Choir sings weekly at 12:00 Noon Mass or at 8:00 A.M. The Adult Choir Practices weekly. Harmony and Theory has been implemented into weekly practice. The Adult choir has taken two group trips to date to encourage unity and foster relationships.

5. **Children's Choir Maintained**

There are a Total of 48 active members, with ten new members. Average 25-30 per Mass. The Children's Choir sings bi-weekly at 10:00 A.M. Mass with weekly practices. The Children's Choir has begun to sing in 2 and 3 part harmony. The Training program begun as "Junior Cantors in Training" (two 5th graders). 5th graders are singing the psalm, gospel acclamation and Kyrie solo from altar. The children sing in front of assembly memorized with hand motions to enhance connection with piece of worship music and the assembly. There is training on various rhythm instruments - tambourine, shakers, etc.

6. **Spanish Community "Embraced" And Liturgically Educated**

Bi-lingual Masses are played. Preparation for entire bi-lingual Triduum underway! Music reading and intonation taught.

7. **Organ, Piano, Keyboard Enhanced and Utilized To Full Potential**

An organ cable was installed, allowing for the choir loft organ to be played live from piano ensemble area. This incredible feature is utilized at all 5:00 P.M. and 10:00 A.M. Masses. The sound system was upgraded allowing all instruments and vocalists to utilize sound monitors and speakers.

8. **Regular Organ And Piano Maintenance**

Regular organ and piano maintenance has now been scheduled to preserve the instruments.

9. **Apprenticeship Of Youth Organist**

Encouragement, training, and practice with Sophomore on organ and liturgy for betterment of parish community. Mentorship of our youth on the importance of prayerful worship and using and developing our gifts from God.

10. **New Hymnals, Worship Aids, And Missalettes Purchased**

Expired hymnals were removed from pews. New hymnals which have a three year copyright were replaced and include increased numbers of hymns as well as Spanish and Bi-Lingual hymns. "Voices books" purchased for use with Youth and Contemporary Masses. Contemporary Mass Parts laminated for weekly use and endurance. Missalettes purchased from hymnal publisher for continuity of lyrics and verses between hymnals and missals. Spanish inclusive.

GENERAL CHURCH ADMINISTRATION:

QUESTION 16: If we are dissatisfied with the response of our pastor or church administrator, who can we contact at the Bishop's office in Trenton, to discuss this?

RESPONSE 16: Information on the Diocese of Trenton is available at the website: <http://www.dioceseoftrenton.org>. In the event you wish to write, this is the contact information for the Most Reverend John M. Smith:

The Most Reverend John M. Smith,
Bishop of the Diocese of Trenton
P.O. Box 5147
701 Lawrenceville Road
Trenton, New Jersey 08638-0147

QUESTION 17: In recent months, our parish Priest and administrative Deacon have become non-responsive to questions raised by our parishioners. They have

refused/delayed meeting with concerned parishioners. In some instances, the reactions of Monsignor and Deacon Dennis have been disrespectful. Why?

RESPONSE 17: We cannot explain why you feel you have been treated in a disrespectful manner and based on our personal experience it is difficult for us to comprehend this possibility. We can assure you that we know how difficult and disconcerting it feels to be treated in a disrespectful manner. This question certainly brings home that point and we regret that anyone would feel this way. Although not perfect, all the clergy, staff and volunteers of St. Mark's have dedicated their lives in service to God and are here to assist in the hope that our work together will bring you closer to experiencing God's presence and love. We pray daily for all of our parishioners and ask for God's continued grace and blessings in all of our work.

QUESTION 18: Would the Parish Council establish, set up and coordinate a Hospitality Ministry for the various events held in our Parish? Most schools and parishes have Hospitality Groups already established and people sign up to help each year.

RESPONSE 18: The Parish Council has been supportive of Rectory Staff in attempting to accomplish this. For example, the August 29, 2006, Parish Council minutes report that "Deacon Dennis reported that more socials of various types are now being planned, perhaps 1 or 2 per month. That is why he is trying to recruit some volunteers for a New Hospitality Committee, so not to overburden our Social Concerns folks who have been supporting the wine & cheese socials so far." Thereafter, announcements were run in the Sunday bulletin to recruit volunteers. Unfortunately no one volunteered. So, St. Mark's has been attempting to do this and the Parish Council has been supportive of this. We are hoping that someone will come forward and attempt to lead the way. Perhaps it will be YOU!

QUESTION 19: Perhaps members of the Parish Council would sign-up to initiate the establishment of this very welcoming [hospitality] Ministry. The Parish Council should show by example that participation, leadership and initiative is needed for successful parish community.

RESPONSE 19: There are 12 council members, including Monsignor Carton and Deacon Saake. The 10 parishioners who serve on the council represent a diverse community of the faithful from different backgrounds and interests. There's a lawyer, a physician, a librarian, and a retired telecommunications executive just for starters. Our experience is that most of the members of the Parish Council already serve in a number of ministries and are helping our parish in a way that is able to work with their schedules. They also have been planning and working at many of the social events that the church offers, including the wine and cheese parties and the Parish Picnic. Many already serve in other capacities such as readers, ushers and participate actively in the Social Concerns Committee, the Holy Name Society, the Hispanic Apostolate, just to name a few. Frankly, it is important that we do not "burn out" and overuse the people we already have by keep asking for them to do more. It is true that a hospitality ministry would be a great

asset. To accomplish that, MORE people are needed. Perhaps YOU will step up and lead the way! To do so, please contact the Parish Council at (732) 449-6364 x116 and leave a message or call Deacon Dennis Saake at x. 102.

QUESTION 20: Please discuss the matter of the Masses being too long in length and perhaps assigning one Mass (i.e. 5:00 Saturday) to be 45 minutes, with the beautiful music. You might get more young people to attend. Also, could Saturday Mass be held at 4:00 P.M. instead of 5:00 P.M. This would be more convenient.

RESPONSE 20: These suggestions will be shared with our Pastor and Parish Council for further discussion and consideration.