

It was not you who chose Me,
it was I who chose you ...

John 15:16

WOW ... contemplations of the Parish Pastoral Planning Process

A Plan and a Process for St. Cecilia's Parish

by Barbara Vetell

A heart truth.

No arrogance, no lies, no manipulation, just Jesus' truth.
A breathe of fresh air.

At the Pastoral Planning meeting there were no expectations. Approaching with trepidation I thought would it be like other meetings? Disappointing. Would one thing be said and another meant?

Two years ago we at St Cecilia's worked on a process similar to this but nothing came of it. Three hundred people wanted 200 things and no one would commit to anything. But it was a beginning, tilling the soil.

As I listened at the first planning meeting, you were talking straight. Statements were made, questions were asked and information was given. There was no subtext (except maybe Christ's love entering our hearts.)

What I heard from the presenters was very clear.

What's God calling me to?

The Presence of God

Understanding
Openness
Love

We are the Body of Christ.

The spirit of God exists in the community.

What are the Attributes of God?

Power , Passion, Love, Wisdom, Vision, Joy, Anger, Wisdom

What are the dark forces:?

apathy, negativitty, passivity, aggression

What is the Mission of the Church?

Evangelization

To gently explain ones beliefs to someone in the hope they might wish to adopt them.

Decisions we make affect to the 7th generation.

The Church, is always one generation away from collapse.
The Church is not a museum. We are not curators. We are gardeners.

**We have to believe God holds the Church together.
We are the Body of Christ.**

Then you talked about the One-to-One Conversations and something lit up inside of me . . .
I knew it was the right time. Everything would change at St Cecilia's.

Listening

One-to-One Conversations with individuals was what we hadn't done.

The talk on the One-to-One Conversations made my heart sing. I knew that for our Parish this is what we didn't have two years ago. This was what we needed, to listen to people individually. What we did before was God tilling the soil of our parish. Now He was giving us the chance to see the Garden of St. Cecilia's grow. What had been fallow for a while, would come to new life. The future started to look better than the past. This would allow us to plan to the 7th generation. What a gift.

We are at our first Parish Pastoral Planning Team meeting trying to keep our eyes on Jesus
meanwhile wondering
what is this all about
what did I get myself into
who are these people and will they like me
People inwardly trembling, afraid, thoughts;
maybe I won't do the One-to-One's right,
maybe I'm not the right person for this
what makes me think God is calling me ...

Second Meeting

Someone speaks. "When I realize that one-to-one's are not about me, but about Christ and the other person, that makes it easier. Then I think I can do it with God's help."

Listening to God. Listening to each other.

Trusting that God is leading us, that the Lord is using us, His people of faith.

How do we know He is leading us? Just look!

The Bishop who has changed over the past few years and is becoming more open to the Spirit,
more willing to talk about Christ and less afraid.

Priests more willing to trust Jesus, themselves and the laity, less afraid.

The laity more willing to trust God, themselves, the Bishop and their priests, less afraid.

Look at their faces and hear their voices hungering for God.

See their willingness to take up the part that Jesus is asking each to play in our faith.

All of us together - to go out - to be sent out in Faith -

Apostles - Disciples - Evangelizers.

All are being softened. The hearts of stone are becoming hearts of flesh.

A love that comes from adversity

Knowing that only Jesus can save us. The spirit will lead.

A few things we have done at St Cecilia's:

1. Adding the Pastoral Planning Team in the prayers of the faithful.
2. Asking everyone we know to pray and keep the Team surrounded in prayer.
3. Writing about the planning process in our bulletin each week.
4. Mentioning hospitality in the church at Sunday Mass.
5. Scheduling Planning Team meetings every two to three weeks to:
Build relationships with each other
discuss the future
practice One-to-One Conversations
praying a lot.

The Planning Team is beginning to say the "E" word. You know that word, the one Catholics shy away from and cross their fingers and cover their ears when they hear it. Oh no not that word. *Evangelization.*

Do we have to knock on doors?

Do we have to stand on the corner?

Do we have to sit in the front pews of church?

Do we have to say we are Christians to someone?

Do we have to say hello?

ASKING EACH OTHER WHAT PEOPLE MIGHT SAY IN THE ONE-TO-ONE MEETINGS

I want all these things ... Complaints ...

Or spiritual sharing on a very deep level

Will I be able to listen with no judgment and bring it back to the Team?

Can't we just do our one hour a week, maybe less, but no more?

I'm a good person, God said, "never let the left know what the right is doing". "The first will be last and the last will be first". So if I sit in the back of church and never tell anyone who I am or what I believe I will be first in God's eyes. Right?

CAN I JUST LISTEN?

WHAT DO I BELIEVE?

DO I BELIEVE

God speaks to me through the Scriptures?

Jesus is present in the Eucharistic?

God wants me to go out to all nations

or my neighborhood

or my church and spread the Good News?

Jesus was kidding?

Jesus has touched my life and I am a gift.

AM I ARROGANT ABOUT MY FAITH?

I have faith and that's all I need.

Does Jesus come first in my life?

Am I willing to give up everything for Him?

Exciting!

In everything you do keep your eyes on Jesus.

Ask God every day for a deep personal relationship with Jesus!

DO NOT BE DISTRACTED

DO NOT BE AFRAID

I AM ALWAYS WITH YOU