

St. Mark's Parish Pastoral Council

February 8, 2017

In Attendance:

Arsenault, Sr. Mae
Beyea, Dianne
Breen, Fr. Don
Carey, Pat
Carvell, Trinda

Ellis, Wendy
Glasgow, Mary Alice
Hache, Charles
Howe, Marilyn

Lawlor, Bill
MacDonald, Mike
Murphy, Dave
Stroud, Anne

Absent:

Drummond, Mavis

Isaacs, Denise

Johnson, Kayla

The meeting was called to order by Chair, Pat Carey at 7pm.

The opening prayer was led by Dianne Beyea, on behalf of Mavis Drummond, who was not in attendance.

Jean MacDonald, Chair of the Syrian Refugee Initiative (SRI), gave Council a presentation about this ministry. As newer PPC members had not been present for Jean's previous presentation to Council, she began by providing the background for the formation of the ministry.

In September of 2015, Jean became very concerned about the plight of Syrian refugees. She approached Fr. Don and he encouraged her to determine whether there was sufficient interest among parishioners to sponsor a family to come to our area. The response was overwhelming, and 150 parishioners signed a commitment to donate \$240 (\$20/month for one year). A committee was formed, with many of the original members being drawn from the Peru Committee. Our sponsorship application was submitted through the Diocese of Halifax, as they were already recognized as a Sponsorship Agreement Holder (SAH). SAHs are incorporated organizations that have signed an agreement with the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism Canada to resettle refugees from abroad.

Committees of the SRI were formed to deal with issues such as Housing, Education, Clothing, Medical Needs, etc. We were offered a family in November of 2015. Housing was a major issue, due to the difficulty in finding a reasonably priced 3BR rental property in the Rothesay/Quispamsis area, close to necessities such as grocery stores and banking. Our family consists of 2 adults and 4 children. This problem was solved when SRI member, James Higgins, purchased a town house on Parkdale Avenue, which he proposed to rent to the family. On January 5, 2016, the Parish Office received an e-mail stating that the El-Zohbi family would arrive in Montreal the next day!

The El-Zohbis are a wonderful family and have settled in well. Close relationships have developed between the SRI volunteers and the family. The parents are Mahmoud and Salam. They are very appreciative of what we have done for them. The four children are all boys, now aged about 13, 9, 7 and almost 3 years of age. The older boys are doing well in school and have made many friends. They have a Teaching Assistant to help them and their English is improving. The youngest child, Haidi, was in day care for a time, the first months of which were covered by the daycare itself. We then covered the cost until it became too expensive. He is also doing well. The boys have participated in many activities in the community, including (free) karate lessons and groups at the library. Mahmoud and the boys love

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fishing, and he and his eldest son are taking fly-tying lessons with the Hammond River Angling Association. Salam has attended a quilting guild.

Salam and Mahmoud have received tutoring in the English language in their home from volunteers. Mahmoud is now attending tutoring offered at the YMCA in Saint John.

Health was a priority when the family arrived. They required appointments with dentists, doctors and for eye care. Both Mahmoud and Salam required dentures and the cost was not covered by government health care; however, the government plan did pay for some of the El-Zohbis' dental work and for prescriptions.

The biggest challenge to date has been budgeting, but Mahmoud's understanding of this is improving. He purchased a 2000 vehicle, which has had many problems. Currently, the ignition is not working properly.

Mahmoud desperately wants a job so that he can support his family. His English needs to improve in order to understand safety information and workplace instructions. To date, Mahmoud has had a bit of part-time work for spending money only. He worked in the area of concrete construction back in Syria, and had a company in partnership with his brothers. He was excited to be offered an opportunity to receive training in bricklaying/stone masonry at NBCC-Woodstock; however, the Provincial Government has now decided to only offer this training to refugees living in Fredericton and Woodstock. Jean will contact Jeff Cameron, Entrepreneurship Branch, about this decision. Mahmoud had been offered employment with HomeStar Inc. if he completed this training.

Before marriage, Salam worked in a garment factory in Syria. She has a higher level of education than her husband and her English is better, as she studied some English in school. It is not feasible for her to work full-time outside the home, as it is very important to her to be home when the children return from school. Also, her youngest child is not quite 3 years of age, and daycare would be required.

The El-Zohbi's continue to worry about family members left behind in Syria and Lebanon. Mahmoud's brother has recently arrived in Ontario, where another brother and sister have already settled. Salam's sister and her family are being sponsored by St. Alphonsus Parish in Hampton. The family consists of Salam's sister and her husband, along with their 6 children. Although their interviews and medicals have been completed, the family is still waiting and the date that they will be able to leave for Canada is not known. Some families in Lebanon are now being pressured to return to Syria, so this is a huge worry for Salam.

Following Jean's presentation, Jean responded to questions asked by Council members:

Pat inquired as to what would happen once the sponsorship period was completed. Our financial obligation has already been completed, but as there are funds remaining in the SRI's bank account, we will continue to assist the family for a few more months until the funds have been depleted. We will not abandon the El-Zohbi's, but if Mahmoud does not obtain adequate employment, the family will need to go on social assistance.

Anne asked if we could find out what housing costs Mahmoud would be required to cover if he was still able to obtain a spot in the training program in Woodstock. Perhaps we can assist him? Jean will be contacting the NB government, so she will check on this.

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Bill inquired as to the nature of Mahmoud's car troubles, and the location where he has service and repairs done. Bill may be able to help Mahmoud save money in this area.

Fr. Don pointed out that the SRI at St. Mark's has an outstanding commitment of up to \$5000 to the group at St. Alphonus, who are sponsoring Salam's sister and her family. This money may not be needed-it is too soon yet to know. Fr. Don also mentioned that the SRI's funding was not provided only by St. Mark's parishioners and ministries. Others in the community also donated, and the Knights of Columbus made a \$5000 donation. Fr. Don also commented that we have supported the El-Zohbis in their faith commitment. Before the family obtained their own transportation, volunteers drove them to the mosque, where the boys had Arabic studies.

Charles asked whether the experience of the El-Zohbis has been better than that of the average refugee family in our area. Jean stated that it was. Our family came to Canada under the Blended Visa program, which meant that they received lots of non-governmental support from sponsors. Refugees who are strictly government-sponsored do receive initial help from the YMCA. Charles also inquired as to the citizenship status of the El-Zohbis. Jean stated that they are classed as permanent residents.

Bill asked whether the El-Zohbis have had contact with Syrian families who have settled in the Crescent Valley area of Saint John. Jean responded that they have had some contact with families there. Bill also inquired about translation services. Jean stated that the bulk of translation was provided by Ahmed, a retired gentleman, and the mother of a student at the boys' school also assisted.

Fr. Don thanked Jean, stating that the El-Zohbis have a better quality of life and a brighter future because of her initiative and concern.

The minutes of the January 11, 2017 were approved on a motion by Charles Hache, and seconded by Bill Lawlor.

Business Arising from Previous Minutes:

- 1. Discussion of presentation about Regional Pastoral Council (RPC) given by Rick Northrup on January 11, 2017:** Some discussion took place. Pat stated that Rick's presentation highlighted the process of change that our Diocese is undergoing and, in particular, the Church's response to the Disciple Maker Survey (DMS), and our own actions. Fr. Don noted that the DMS and RPC are connected. It was acknowledged that Rick was "wearing 2 hats" during his presentation, as he is involved in both. Fr. Don stated that parishes will be re-aligned to help us better witness to our Catholic faith. The RPC will help Bishop Harris to develop strong relationships with the parishes in our Diocese. We need to increase the degree of cooperation between parishes-sharing and learning from each other.

Anne stated that Rick's presentation has warned us that all parishes will be affected to some degree. We should not be complacent. Even parishes that have active ministries and are financially viable will see some changes, as the goal is to make the best choices for the entire Diocese.

Pat remarked upon the declining population in New Brunswick, as shown in the recently released census data. He also mentioned that our Diocese now celebrates more funerals than baptisms!

Trinda asked what the role of PPC was in getting this information to parishioners. Several members responded. It was agreed that our role is to keep ourselves informed and to direct parishioners

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looking for information to our parish and diocesan websites, as well as encouraging them to read the handouts about revitalization being provided by Bishop Harris. PPC minutes are also a source of information, and can be found on our parish website or in our library. It is anticipated that in April or May of 2017, parishes (not just PPCs) will receive more detailed presentations and have the opportunity to ask questions and offer input. We may have a more definite role to play at that time.

Bill suggested that we don't have many details yet, so it would be counterproductive to share much at this stage.

Mike mentioned that Rick informed us that 4 potential models for revitalization were being submitted to Bishop Harris. Mike also stated that the message is that we are not stagnant, or comfortable with the status quo.

Anne asked if Council would like to send a note to Rick, thanking him for his presentation. It was agreed that this would be a nice thing to do, so Anne will work with Pat to compose a letter.

New Business:

1. **Invitation to ministry speaker for March PPC meeting:** It was Council's consensus that it was best not to invite a speaker at this time. We can re-visit this at our March meeting. Anne may be able to develop a "Did You Know?" about the Art and Environment ministry from information already forwarded by Denise Isaacs and Helen MacDonald.
2. **Report on catechist retreat by Mary Alice Glasgow:** Mary Alice began by giving a short personal testimonial about the impact attending a retreat had in turning her own life around. Her testimony is a form of evangelizing action. She then spoke briefly about the "Go Make Disciples" catechist retreat which she attended on January 27-29 at Villa Madonna. The retreat was led by Fr. John Jennings. Because we are all really catechists, the retreat was actually an "all ministries" retreat. Mary Alice stated that Bishop Harris had remarked that he was surprised so few Catholics have gone on a retreat. She then showed PPC members a short presentation from U Tube. To view this presentation, please go to: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oJWkQ9UP_m8

Updates re: Parish Ministries:

1. **Adult Faith Formation:** As Denise was unable to attend, Anne informed Council about the upcoming "Introduction to the Bible Workshop", which will be held at St. Mark's on Saturday, February 18. She circulated a sample of the workshop poster.
2. **Peru Committee:** Anne updated Council about 3 current initiatives:
 1. **Concert:** A concert will be held at St. Mark's during the evening of Saturday, February 25. Musicians include Mark's Men and Comhaltas. Anne circulated a poster.
 2. **Painting by David Cool:** ticket sales continue after all masses this coming weekend. The draw will take place on February 14.
 3. **"Postcards for Peru":** This project will take place over 2 weekends, March 4/5 and March 11/12. A bulletin insert will be distributed on the weekend of February 25/26 to provide information. Postcards will be displayed in the church for a time, then mailed to St. Luke's Parish in Otuzco. Because there are no catechism classes on March 5 and 12 due to March Break, arrangements will be made to get postcards to the students on either the weekend before or the weekend following the break. Sr.

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Rita has supplied us with information about 3 urgent needs, 2 of which are medical and 1 which relates to education. She also expressed her gratitude for all the assistance that St. Mark's has provided, including the \$4000 that was sent before Christmas.

Anne informed Council that the Peru Committee has recently learned that Sr. Rita will be returning to Canada permanently in June. We are unsure as of yet how this will impact our ability to send financial aid to St. Luke's, as funds have always been sent via the Sisters of Charity. Their congregational leader, Sr. Mary Beth, traveled to Peru on February 6, so we are hoping to receive more information when she returns.

4. **Hospital Spiritual Care:** Mary Alice has scheduled a meeting for Friday, February 10 with ministry coordinators, Rick Duffy and Ann Harrison.
5. **Newcomers:** Bill will meet soon with ministry coordinator, Andrea McLean-Holohan. This is a small ministry with a specific purpose. Bill intends to obtain a paragraph or 2 of information.

Fr. Don asked all PPC members to begin to identify potential candidates for the upcoming Council election in May. The 4 members who are completing their terms are responsible for organizing and running the actual election, but all members are tasked with recruiting suitable candidates. The 4 members whose terms are ending are Anne, Denise, Charles and Dave. The PPC election will be added as an Agenda item for our March meeting.

The meeting was called to a close by Pat Carey.

The closing prayer was led by Trinda Carvell.

Next meeting will be held on Wednesday, March 8, 2017 at 7pm in Room 1.

Meeting will be chaired by Pat Carey. Minutes will be taken by Anne Stroud.

Opening prayer will be led by Dave Murphy.

Closing prayer will be led by Mary Alice Glasgow.