

**Assumption Parish  
The Year in Review  
By  
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Outgoing 2003-2004 Pastoral Council Chairperson**

As outgoing chairperson, it is my responsibility to leave the Pastoral Council with a summary of what happened in the past year—our accomplishments, our failures, our opportunities as a result of those successes and failures and perhaps to provide some parting words of advice to the 2004-2005 Pastoral Council.

As a parish of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we have many challenges before us that will require future Pastoral Councils to play a critical role. We are facing a certain future with significantly fewer priests (as many as 50% fewer in the archdiocese by 2012) and declining attendance at Sunday mass across the country. In addition, Assumption Parish faces an increasing deficit in income vs. expenditures with some relatively expensive repair bills coming due. Finally, we are a parish that seems to have a core of people who are very dedicated but cannot possibly handle all of the issues confronting the future and present needs of the Parish and Church. These then represent challenges and opportunities facing this and future Pastoral Councils. So how, as Pastoral Council did we do in confronting these challenges? Let's look.

Rather than go through a month by month compilation of events, I felt that it might be more valuable to identify the main events of the year and use this as a forum to celebrate our successes as well as define what we came up with relative to our plans going forward to deal with these challenges and to achieve our Vision. In looking over the notes from this past year, these would include:

1. Our 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration
2. The goals that we stated that we wanted to accomplish by the end of year, way back in September.
3. Our January Town Meeting
4. The deanery meetings
5. Our May Town Meeting
6. Our Vision

**Our 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration:**

Clearly, the crowning achievement of this past year has got to be our 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations. From the Music of the Parish to the Festival, to the Tall Stacks to the Who Dunit Mystery, to the Artifacts of the Vatican to the Matthew Kelly Mission to the Reception and all those activities in between, this has truly been an amazing successful adventure! This celebration took untold hours of preparation by many who have every right to be proud of their accomplishments

**Goals:**

In our first meeting, we discussed and challenged ourselves as to where we were on our journey to achieving our vision as a parish. In a sense it truly was a “come to Jesus” meeting! We concluded that we were no further along now than we were when the vision statement was first authored several years ago and asked ourselves why that was. It was a good healthy dialogue couched in reality. This is a true quality and basic strength of this Pastoral Council-- to face things as they are with acknowledgement but with a determination to succeed, set goals and planning to face those facts head on.

Some of the goals that we established were to have a successful celebration of our 150<sup>th</sup>, to see increased participation in the sacrament of reconciliation, bring inactive parishioners back into the community of the parish, more young people attending church, improvement in church facilities and improved communications. As this session of Pastoral Council concludes, I believe that we can reasonably say that we have had forward movement on all of these. Clearly in some cases the flywheel is barely moving while in others, it is at maximum momentum. The good news is that we have done something to address this head on. What would the something be? Let's start with the Jan Town Meeting.

### **January Town Meetings**

This concept was first discussed in the September meeting and it became a discussion topic in all future meetings. We settled on Jan 24 and 28<sup>th</sup> as the dates for this meeting. Agendas were prepared, discussion questions were authored by the entire PC, and all appropriate materials were organized. Karen B, the newest member of PC, received her baptism by fire at this meeting!

This was attended by a total of about 75 parishioners. Given that most of these were married couples this represented about 5% of our active parishioner families. Gratefully, we discovered that our vision still seemed to be the one that parishioners wanted for the parish. There were a number of areas identified for work but the common themes seemed to be adult faith formation, youth, seniors and leadership development/empowerment. Perhaps the most powerful statement made at this meeting was that there were more opportunities listed than people to do them and focus on the most important few would be a good approach. Recalling our first meeting in August, we had challenged ourselves as to why we were not closer to the vision now than when we first started. This meeting provided some clarity on where we needed to be more active if this vision is ever to be reached. In light of the deanery meetings, this issue really was one that would tackle the concept of being more ministerially complete than we presently are.

### **Deanery Meetings:**

There were three SMM deanery meetings held to discuss the certain reality of as many as 50% of the current priests in the archdiocese no longer being active by 2010 to 2012. These meetings were to seek the input of the laity as to how we can be church in light of this situation. It painted a rather somber picture and the notion that parishes that are "financially sound and ministerially complete" would stand the best chance of surviving was put forth. PC was now on alert to the future of Church beyond just Assumption. There was a clear desire by the attendees that laity wants to be more involved in the operation of the parishes than they are now and an equal recognition by the priests that they needed to delegate, empower and give more of the operational nature of pastor to others.

The second meeting promoted this further and identified more clearly the concept of ministerially complete. The idea of what it means to be Church was revealed and this was good as it made the importance of keeping all parish buildings open secondary relative to this.

In the third meeting, we actually began to discuss what some of those actions might be, where parishes at the lay level could collaborate in a spirit of Church and cooperation. As well, we began to put together geographical areas of collaboration. The ideas of this meeting are now in the hands of the central committee at this writing.

## **May Town Meeting**

Way back in September, we had spoken about the need to include leaders of all organizations in some form of meeting to discuss how they were helping Assumption to achieve its vision. Now that the Jan meetings had identified some focus on areas to attack, we followed up with this meeting and challenged each organization to develop action plans over the next year that will show how they intend to help with those priorities of adult faith formation, youth and senior programs. It must be stated that these three areas represent subsets of the original 5 pastoral priorities that were identified in years past and indeed formed the basis of the vision statement.

## **Our Vision**

When I look back on all that we have done, and all that we have learned, there is no doubt that the Vision that Assumption Parish created for itself nearly three years ago and the pastoral priorities that formed it are still as valid now as they were then. We need only change the statement to read “By providing an atmosphere of hospitality, appreciation, educational quality and spiritual energy, Assumption WILL be a parish where all are enthusiastically involved in serving the needs of its members, the community and the world according to the teachings of Christ and as led by the Spirit”

## **Conclusions:**

To say that this has been an interesting year is an understatement!

1. We found out that our Vision statement was indeed still an accurate reflection of the Parish
2. We challenged ourselves as to where we were on the path and had the courage to face the answers head on.
3. We took action—we scheduled one town meeting, then another, conducted both and spread the message of our parish priorities.
4. We challenged some of our lay leaders to step up and help out with making these become real
5. We chose to hold them accountable for this commitment in measurable terms.
6. In short, we have put together a structure that will optimize our chances of moving closer to achieving that vision.

So, where do we go from here? Well, as outgoing Pastoral Council Chairperson, here are my recommendations and advice:

1. It all starts at the top—we need to challenge ourselves, our spiritual and educational leaders, our organizational leaders, our parents and our parishioners to work collaboratively to achieve the vision. In other words, either hop on the bus or get out of the way because we’re moving!
2. We need to stay the course with our four priorities and make them the main topic at every PC meeting of the future
3. We need to continue to offer town meetings to encourage dialogue and allow all those who wish, to be involved.
4. We need to stay focused on our prime directive and that should also be a formal part of any PC meeting i.e. what did we do this past month that moved us closer on that journey to achieve our vision.

In Jim Collin's "*Good to Great*" book, he talks about a concept that all great companies have that differentiate them from the also rans. He calls this a Hedgehog concept and defines it as this— Whatever it is that you are truly passionate about, whatever it is that you believe you can do better than anyone else in the world, whatever it is that gives you a sense of accomplishment and fulfillment, is what you need to do every day of your life! As a parish, our vision statement is our Hedgehog concept! Live it, breathe it, practice it, facilitate it and you will be doing God's work on earth!!

Lastly, I would like to sincerely thank all of you with whom I have had the pleasure of working with this past year.

- To **Karen G**, who added simplicity to complex situations, and focus when things got fuzzy.
- To **Bob A** for his devotion to Catholic virtues, his efforts to do God's work in bringing people back to the parish and his insight
- To **Bob L** for the wonderful snacks (just kidding) for his honesty and views that were freely given
- To **Bob D** for his efforts in organizing some of the things we do and challenging us from time to time when we perhaps got a little out of bounds
- To **Steve** for keeping Bob L at bay (just kidding !) and for his work with the finance and B&G group, his wit when we needed a good joke, his determination and of course his agreement to stay with council.
- To **Paul**, who has done such an outstanding job as PC chairperson elect and has really stepped up to the plate as we begin to transition to the future.
- To **Karen B** for agreeing to join this group and taking on whatever we threw her way even though she may not have had any training or background on which to work.
- To **Julie**, for her tireless efforts in making our 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary the success that it has been and for her insight on particularly sensitive issues that we discussed this year.
- To **Nancy** who took all of our notes when I know there were many times when she was dying to speak up, yet remained quiet—we'd be lost without you.
- And finally to **Fr K** for his guidance, leadership and helpful input during our many deliberations.

This has truly been a wonderful group with whom I am proud to have been associated. This PC may not always have seen everything eye to eye, but we all respected each other's views and ultimately walked away with a consensus agreement and that is a rare quality in today's world.

In closing, you have many challenges before you as does our Church. It is a secular world in which we live, always trying to pull us away from our prime directive—to know, to love and to serve God in thought, word and deed. I have never met a group of people who live this as well as this group has lived this and because of this, I leave with every confidence that we have an excellent group to carry the torch forward for Assumption. God bless you all and may you always walk in the light of the Holy Spirit and with the guidance of our patroness the Virgin Mary!!

Respectfully Submitted  
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Assumption Pastoral Chairperson, 2003-2004 Session