

**Parish Council Meeting
Minutes
Monday, February 22, 2016**

Attendees: Fr. Tom Thorne, Gracemary Avitabile, Helen Thiemann, Michele Modugno, Marilyn Moran, Rose Odell, Connie Luppino, Nancy Axthelm, Jim Meehan, Juany Fumai, Joe Malaterra and Maureen Belford.

Opening Prayer – Fr. Tom

Approval of Minutes – Minutes were approved and accepted from the previous meeting on September 28, 2015.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION – Cathy Romano

Religious Education has begun. We have five new catechists this year. To date we have 563 students. We have 81 students for Confirmation and 85 in First Penance and First Eucharist preparation. We are using the Pflaum Gospel Weeklies as our text this year. This text follows the liturgical year, and current events happening in the Church. The Catechists like using the Gospel Weeklies. Most of the students take them home weekly. This is a small way to help parents be a bit more involved in their children's faith formation.

LECTORS AND EUCHARISTIC MINISTERS – Cathy Romano

We could use more lectors and Eucharistic Ministers for 10:30 and 12 Noon and 4/5:00PM Sunday Masses. Especially when the snow birds head south during the winter months.

MARY'S MANTEL SHAWL MINISTRY – Cathy Romano

We meet every Tuesday in the Beard room at 1:00pm. We are now making lap blankets for the Veterans. The Knights of Columbus will take them to the VA Hospital when they visit. Also we have shawls if anyone knows a person in need please let us know.

FAMILY LIFE – Cathy Romano

The Confirmation students had a food drive during their Hunger Banquet, for The Soup Lady's Outreach Ministry, they have made scarfs, and Thanksgiving Blessing Bags for the homeless, and cut shoes for the children in Uganda. The seventh grade are in the process during Lent to fill a plastic baby bottle with loose change. Monies collected will be donated to Birthright. Michele Harding's sixth grade have filled 15 backpack with goodies and basic necessities as their service project. The backpacks will be donated to the Missionaries of Charity outreach. All grades have participated in our Christmas Fair Basket raffle and in a Valentine outreach project. They decorate and fill paper bags with candy, and other wrapped goodies. The bags will be distributed to local soup kitchens. Our next outreach will be collecting Easter Baskets for the children in Bridgeport who attend Sr. Theresa Tremblay's daycare and the children at Open Door Soup Kitchen in Norwalk.

ADULT SERVERS FOR FUNERALS – Cathy Romano

We have three teams with three servers on each team. We also have a substitutes who will be called on as needed.

PARISH PASTORAL PLANNING COUNCIL – Cathy Romano

Fr. Tom called together members of the parish in various leadership positions to form a Parish Pastoral Planning Council. We had our first meeting on Tuesday, July 14, and our second in December, 2015, 7:30 pm at the Rectory. We are in the process of looking over the demographics of the parish to access needs.

Following explains this council which the bishop signed into effect at the synod closing mass. A Comprehensive Pastoral Planning Process (November 2015) to engage every parish to create a road map for its future. Pastoral Planning will provide the priests, deacons, religious, professional staff and lay leaders of each parish the opportunity to engage in ongoing, systematic and comprehensive planning towards the establishment of each parish's plan for long term viability and pastoral vitality. The spirit that should animate all such planning is one of servant leadership. The long term goal for pastoral planning is to create a mechanism by which every aspect of parish life is intentional, missionary driven, and open to periodic evaluation and improvement.

CHRISTMAS FAIR – Cathy Romano

We had a wonderful Christmas Fair on December 5 & 6, with our local vendors, tons of baked goods, jewelry and crafts which all help make the fair a success. We made twenty five thousand dollars this year.

FOOD CLOSET – Rose Odell

The food closet is running smoothly and we are currently assisting around 23 families. Most families come every month, but not always. We also continue to give \$30 Stop & Shop cards each month. Connie and the Social Concerns committee generously donated gifts cards to the food closet from the Gifts of Plenty collection. Thank you Connie for always thinking of us! Also, for Thanksgiving Neil Harding and his family donated turkeys, pans and a few groceries to all the food closet families. We are very grateful to Neil and his family for their yearly donation. Michelle and the Youth Group donated many cans of soup to the food closet from their "Souper Bowl of Caring" and we really appreciate Michelle and her teens thinking of us. We continue to put food requests in the bulletin and are always pleased with the response we receive.

RCIA – Marilyn Moran

We have 4 candidates going through RCIA. Two are catechumens, Eric Stanger and Anna Wang, who will receive Baptism, First Eucharist and Confirmation at the Easter Vigil. However Anna is a 13 year old who will receive her Confirmation from Bishop Caggiano with her class on April 30. Our candidate, Derek MacCormack, who has already been baptized Catholic will receive First Eucharist and Confirmation. We also have a young woman, Alexandra Garcia, who only needs Confirmation.

On Sunday, Feb.14, Eric, Anna, and Derek were presented to the Bishop at the Rite of Election and the Call to Continuing Conversion at St. Thomas Aquinas Parish in Fairfield. As always, a reception will follow after the Easter Vigil.

WESTPORT REHABILITATION CENTER – Marilyn Moran

We currently have 37 Catholic patients that we see at the WRC. We continue to go room to room to give Holy Communion. After that we proceed to the Community room where we have a Communion Service and pray the Rosary. Father Tom celebrates Mass there on the last Tuesday of every month. Patients are very appreciative of our visits. We have 3 of our team members in Florida so Tom Wendorff and I are the only ones visiting there right now. Judy York will be back in March.

BOOK GROUP – Helen Thiemann

In August the group met and chose reading for the year. In the autumn we read and discussed Father Ronald Rolheiser's SACRED FIRE. During Lent we decided upon Father Richard Rohr's NAKED NOW. Since this is the third book of Rohr's that we have read in the group, we continue to grow in appreciation of Father Rohr's spirituality. Father Tom occasionally presents a writing of his in our bulletin. Our group has welcomed several younger women from the Assumption community as participants.

BEREAVEMENT GROUP – Helen Thiemann

Over about 5 years approximately 40 people have come to the bereavement ministry. Our present group is about 12 to 15 people, who come as they feel the need. We acknowledge their losses and share and discuss issues that affect them presently (fears, finances, anger, housing, depression, relationships).

FIRST FRIDAY PRAYER/DISCUSSION GROUP – Helen Thiemann

Started about 33 years ago this group has gone through several versions, always a mixture of men and women. Presently it is small but vital as we pray together, support members in their difficult times and discuss spiritual ideas and experiences.

SOCIAL CONCERNS MINISTRY – Connie Luppino

October 2015

Blanket Collection - We collected 83 blankets. Helen Thiemann arranged the collection and distribution to: Bacharach Community, Gillespie, Open Door and Dorothy Day.

Sock Collection – The total collected was 532 pairs (mostly new, some gently used) and they were distributed to: Family and Children, Soup Lady and Missionaries of Charity.

November 2015

Gifts of Plenty Collection – We collected a total of \$13,782 in food gift cards. Most of the cards were distributed to these recipients: Assumption Food Closet, Westport Human Services, Bacharach Community, Open Door, Gillespie Center, Merton, Dorothy Day, Soup Lady, Missionaries of Charity, Father Tom, CLASP, Evergreen Families, St. Joseph's Church Pantry, Blessed Sacrament Church. I have the remaining cards so if you know of anyone who needs some please let me know.

Hunger Banquet Report – Siobhan Lidington represented Social Concerns at the Hunger Banquet again this year.

December 2015

Advent Angels – Approximately 900 Angels were placed on the trees. The gifts were either delivered or picked up by the recipients in time for Christmas. Some of the recipients were: CLASP, Bacharach, Gillespie, Evergreen and Westport Human Services of Westport; Soup Lady, Sepulveda's Outreach, Sister Theresa, Waltersville School and Missionaries of Charity of Bridgeport; Open Door/Manna House of Norwalk; Dorothy Day of Danbury and some individuals from our parish family.

As always, I want to thank everyone who helped with this project but special thanks go to the DeMarco and Marcarelli families for lending their truck and for helping us with deliveries.

January 2016

Winter Warm-Up Collection – Your generosity provided 200 coats, as well as sweaters and winter accessories to those in need in our community. This year's recipients were Open Door Shelter, The Soup Lady, Sister Theresa Tremblay, Waltersville School, St. Joseph's Church and Dorothy Day.

February 2016

Lenten Alms -The collection is in process now. Will report results at our next meeting.

March 2015

Palm Sunday/Easter Food Collection - We will do this collection on March 20th.

Ongoing Activities

Merton Center/Shelter

Members of the Knights and Social Concerns continue to serve breakfast to the clients of Merton Center/Shelter.

Blood Pressure Screening – Nancy Engel continues to do blood pressure screenings at the Senior Luncheon, a service much appreciated by many of the attendees. She also does screening after Mass the first weekend of each month.

Prayer Network - People continue to request prayers to the nearly 70 members of this ministry, who pray daily for those in need of prayer. Requests are received through e-mail and telephone.

A.C.T.S.

A.C.T.S. continues to provide rides as needed. The request for visits to an elderly woman at Westport Rehab resulted in 14 volunteers scheduled to visit on a rotating basis.

YOUTH MINISTRY – Michele Modugno

October 2015

Sent out between 45 to 50 Halloween Goody Packages to our college age parishioners; received many wonderful thank you's from these young people.
Youth Mass – well attended with six musicians

November 2015

Worked with and instructed the 8th Grade Confirmation students on making fleece scarves for the homeless. These scarves were blessed at Youth Mass by Fr. Tom and given to “The Soup Lady of Bridgeport.” This month's youth mass was very well attended as all of the 8th graders attended along with their families. Youth Group members also helped out at the 8th Grade Retreat as they helped the potter load in and out with his materials, and helped the 8th graders with their “lights”.

December 2015

Youth Group members helped out with the crafts and games at the Family Pancake Breakfast with Santa and volunteered at the Annual Christmas Fair by helping with the raffles, bake sale and helping out the vendors.

We also went on a field trip to Holiday Lights at Lake Compounce in Bristol, CT with the St. Luke's Youth Group. The plan had been to go to NYC, but due to the circumstances around the world we felt it best staying local and we all had a terrific time.

January 2016

We collected thousands of Christmas cards that parishioners donated just after Christmas and into the month of January. We have already sent off two large boxes of cards to the St. Jude Ranch in Nevada and will continue to prepare more cards for mailing to them before the end of March.

The Souper Bowl of Caring was held over the weekend of January 30/31 with a new twist as parishioners were asked to donate a can of soup when they came to mass and/or donate one dollar for the efforts. Almost 350 cans of soup were donated via masses and Sunday & Tuesday religious education classes. We were able to donate about 200 cans to our own Pope Francis Food Closet and the rest of the donations were given to the Open Door Shelter in Norwalk and Sister Theresa in Bridgeport. We also partnered with Saugatuck Elementary School who also ran a “Souper Bowl” can drive, which was co-chaired by two of our parishioners, and they have asked us to donate their cans (550) to the same charities which will be done on Tuesday morning, February 23.

The teens also made Valentine's Day Goody Packages for the homeless which all the religious education students also participated in this year. Those packages went to the Open Door Shelter and the Soup Lady.

We also held our first "Open Gym" for the teens and it was very well received and we plan to offer it again in March. In fact, we put together a basketball team for a very special game that will take place in March at the Westport YMCA.

On Sunday, January 31, we also helped the 8th grade Confirmation students with making shoes out of old jeans for the project known as "Sole Hope." Over 82 pairs of shoes were prepared for the organization which will be sent over to Uganda, so men and women there will complete the shoes for the children of that country that are suffering from the "jiggers" bugs that embed themselves in their feet when they do not have shoes.

February 2016

In February (next Sunday, Feb. 28), we will begin the task of filling Easter eggs for the annual parish's Easter Egg Hunt which will take place on Saturday morning, March 19. Our teens will also help with the crafts and games at the Family Pancake Breakfast with the Easter Bunny and one of our youth group members will once again dress as the Bunny!

The 30 Hour Famine will be taking place at St. Philip parish in Norwalk this coming weekend and we only have one participant this year. We look forward to hearing more from our youth group member, Danielle Miller about her experience this year as this will be her second year participating.

March 2016

Our teens will serve as volunteers for the crafts and games, along with distributing raffle tickets to the children attending the Family Pancake Breakfast with the Easter Bunny. They will also put out the eggs for the Hunt on that morning.

On Sunday, March 16 at 6:30PM, our Youth Group along with the St. Luke's Youth Group and teens from two of the synagogues in town will be playing in their own basketball tournament. It is a fun event...stress the fun in order to help our teens heal from the incredibly sad incidents that happened in December and January. Bringing together students of all faiths will go a long way to aid a community of teens that need healing.

March and Beyond...

We will be collecting used crayons for The Crayon Initiative, a national non-profit that collects used crayons and makes them into new crayons for hospitals across the nation including Connecticut. We are also looking at other "recycling" efforts!

KNIGHTS OF COLUMBUS—Jim Meehan

Thomas Merton Center – We continue each month to prepare and serve about 150-170 meals twice per month. We started about 18 months ago and have prepared and served more than 6,000 meals with the help of the Knights of Columbus and Social Concerns Ministry. Volunteers are never hard to find. We now have the process down to a science and it allows our volunteers to get to know the guests better and for us to get to know them.

We delivered the gift bags made by the CCD religious education students in January. Those bags were incredibly filled with toiletries, socks, hats, and snacks.

We also delivered the Valentine's gift bags prepared by the CCD religious education students in February. The guests were very appreciative.

I look forward to continuing working with our parishioners and serving our guests.

"The Thomas Merton Center is committed to providing a loving, safe and hope-filled community atmosphere, which responds to the needs of its guests. Respecting the dignity of each person, we reflect to the individual and the community our shared responsibility to love and support one another".

Special Olympics – We will again be representative at the Compo Beach Special Olympics this year on event on March 12th. We will have Knights from Westport participating in the coordination of the activities.

Coats for Kids – The Knights made a donation of 2 cases of winter coats.

Stations of the Cross – The Knights have agreed to lead the Stations every Friday at 7pm during Lent including Good Friday. We will have 2 readers at each service.

Christmas Fair – The Knights participated in the Christmas fair and sold bears and Christmas cards.

Women Veterans - Transitional Housing, Bridgeport - We continue to support the women veterans in their transition to civilian life.

Weekly Pray Group - Knights Rosary pray group continues to meet each week on Thursdays at 7pm. We are a group of 4 and are looking to expand.

Membership – Our membership committee continues to look for new ways to participate in local charitable activities. Our local council membership is 74.

Monthly Meeting 1st Tuesday of the month - at 7:30 pm in McGrath Hall. Our monthly business meetings are held on the 3rd Tuesday of each month at Dunville's Restaurant. We are always looking for new members.

ALTAR GUILD—LITURGICAL DECORATING—Carol Gabriel

From November to May we have set up for All Souls Day and Advent. Moved things around for the painters then put everything back. Put up trees, wreaths, nativity and poinsettias! For the New Year we set up for St. Blaise Blessing. Lent was early Starting on the 10th with Ash Wednesday.

Book Nook

New books came in during December. I will soon order books for summer reading, along with Bibles.

INTERFAITH COUNCIL OF WESTPORT & WESTON - Dolores Bacharach

On October 25th The Council offered a program - Human Trafficking, a Problem Here in Fairfield County - at the Westport Library. Sister Maureen Fleming from St. Luke and a Representative from the International Institute's Rescue Committee were the two presenters. Resource material was handed out to the 50 attendees.

The Council joined with the Westport Playhouse and TEAMWestport (Together Effectively Achieving Multiculturalism) to present the 2016 Martin Luther King Jr Celebration on January 17th. The program included the Staples Orphenians, the Serendipity Chorale (a group of mixed racial adult singers) and 4 teens from the Regional Center for Arts in Trumbull. The main speaker was Professor Marilyn Ford from the Law School of Quinnipiac University. It was a marvelous program, both inspiring and entertaining. Over 250 attended the largest attendance for this program ever. Thanks to Cathy Romano, for doing the e-mail blast to the parish. The Westport Playhouse wants to partner again and has placed it on their 2016 - 2017 calendar.

ALTAR SERVERS – Juany Fumai

The adjustment back in November to Mass schedule changes from 5:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. was well accepted and managed by all of the server families.

The nine (9) newly installed servers were very eager to “shadow” serve in preparation for the extra services during the month of December. Christmas Masses were well covered by both veteran and new servers alike.

At Christmas, Father Thorne graciously awarded each server with a gift certificate to Barnes and Nobles, much to their delight. Both Fr. Thorne and I received numerous thank you notes expressing their appreciation.

During the weekend of March 19, Palm Sunday, all 4:00 p.m. services will return to the 5:00 p.m. schedule due to daylight savings. I look forward to very shortly commence planning for the Easter Triduum with all of the servers.

LENTEN SOUP SUPPERS – Connie Luppino

Due to Ronnie Estony's absence because of an accident, I am reporting on the Soup Suppers. We had two wonderful speakers so far, Sister Jane Silk and Dr. Thomas Hicks. And two very delicious meals prepared by Karen Como, Connie Luppino, Nancy Engel and Susan Saracena. I want to acknowledge the wonderful parishioners who volunteered to help us continue the Soup Suppers while Ronnie recuperates. We wish Ronnie a speedy recovery and look forward to her return so she can continue her wonderful ministry.

FINANCE COUNCIL – Nancy Axthelm

Finance Council meeting in March was a quick review of our numbers which clearly note our Parish fiscal health. Father Tom explained John Kondub's resignation (February 2016) and our intent to have Michelle Hankey and Nancy Wright assume all of the Business Manager responsibilities, a number of which they had been covering already. Michelle will manage payroll, accounts payable, human resources, and all tenant billing and management. Nancy will manage all incoming funds (Offertory, On-line giving, gifts and bequests and banking functions). She will also oversee the Saint Matthew Ministry (Offertory counters). The council accepted the changes with thanks and agreed to a full review of all numbers in May in preparation for the June 2016- 2017 budget proposal.

PASTOR'S REPORT – Fr. Tom

THANK YOU for your emails, homemade soup, coffee cakes, bread and prayers. I am well on the way to recovery and beyond contagion.

Cathy Romano is recovering. I did get to visit Ronnie Estony before I came down with the flu. She and Cathy have a very positive attitude and will be back with asap. Carol Gabriel is also sick and hopefully will be back in operation asap. Lee McGuire, our parish Secretary/Receptionists has been out sick for about a month now. She is doing well and hopefully will return soon. We miss them.

Lent has started off well with Ash Wednesday, Stations of the Cross on Fridays, Confessions on Thursday evenings and Saturday afternoons, Daily Masses at 730 AM and 12 noon, Sunday Evening Prayer, Benediction and Lenten Talk. Sr. Jane Silk and Dr. Tom Hicks have presented very well and Jose Abelardo, our parish seminarian will present next Sunday evening.

Thank you to Frank, Carol, Gracemary, who is pitching in for Carol, Cathy who has everything in order for the Triduum, as she may still be out of commission. Thanks for already making Lent ready and beautiful with music, décor and preparation via choir practices.

The Bishop asked Pastors to consider offering their parishes as MERCY CENTERS for the Holy Father's Jubilee Year of Mercy. So I did and he accepted. Adoration is Mon and Wed 8 AM to 5 PM and Confessions with visiting clergy are Thursday evenings 7 to 8:30.

I believe on June 18th Jose Abelardo will be ordained a Deacon by Bp. Frank in the Cathedral on next day at the 12 noon Mass he will preach followed by a parish reception for him. I did ask the Bishop that me be assigned as Deacon to us and await the outcome. That weekend Abelardo's parents will stay at the Rectory. They have never been to the U.S. We shall also welcome to the Rectory Fr. Lane, from Honolulu, Fr. Tony, from Belize and a Colombian young man, friend of Abelardo who hopes to study for our diocese as a seminarian next year.

Starting today during Lent the 12 noon will be covered on Monday and Thursday by Father Sudhir and on Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday by Father Juan. I'm very grateful to them. During Holy Week seminarian David Roman asked to stay with us. He is bringing a seminarian friend from Dallas Texas named Ryan. Both are First Theologians and will help with Holy Thursday, Good Friday and Easter Sunday but not the Vigil. Ryan is part Latino, I am told, and is most excited about meeting and hearing Jose Feliciano sing! I am hoping Abelardo will also be with us. Rehearsals for Holy Thursday, Good Friday and the Saturday Vigil are scheduled. Juany we have 2 perhaps 3 seminarians but the number I gave to Michelle to share with you still holds please. Thank you.

One weekends I am seeking the help of Father Gonzag, chaplain at Trinity High School and Father Paul, chaplain at Norwalk Hospital for help. If they can help we all shall have two Masses each Weekend. Msgr. Shea, retired Pastor of St. Catherine, Trumbull will come when his schedule permits.

The School buildings bottom floor, beneath the Gym has been restored with new lighting, new painting and new carpeting. The stair way was redone with durable and nice looking flooring. The two windows in the stairway have been replaced with double pain safety glass.

A leak in the Sacristy roof is being repaired. The lighting in the Church for the time being is finished. We know can dim the hanging lights when we desire to do so. The Circuit Breaker Box which was used to turn light on and off is now finally what it was intended to be...a circuit breaker box. The clips preventing breakers from breaking have been removed...we are lucky there was NEVER a fire all these years. All lights are turned on/off from the walls: (1) to the left of the Box (2) as your go out to Sanctuary, and (3) one walls near Tabernacle and Baptismal Font.

Our staff computers are being updated with the latest version which is annoying as it is like learning all over again where everything is! But it has to be done. Out Tech Guy, Henry has still to do Cathy, Nhur and Michele's computers in this building and he has to return to the rectory to help Michelle as she can't get into some of her programs. We are grateful she made the AGENDA for us yesterday!

The PPC (Pastoral Planning Council) made up of 14 Members was to meet this Wednesday but I asked for a delay to catch my breath and good thing as we received today some wonderful literature from the Bishop, Fr. Dogali and Patrick Turner which I shared news about with you today via email.

We are nearing the signing of Contracts for our two Tenants: Pumpkin Pre School and Landmark Academy of Ridgefield. Pumpkin has signed, we are waiting final negotiations with Landmark and then the Bishop has to sign both Leases. It has been a very long, difficult process for many reasons. I am very grateful for Maria Onorato, Esq. Vice Chair of our Finance Council and Nancy Axthelm, Chair of the Council for their hard work while I was away. I relied on them in my absence and they came through with flying colors.

On the Vigil of Palm Sunday Mass will return to 5 PM, Confessions at 4PM and Sunday afternoon Mass will return to 5 PM.

On May 15th I shall be ordained 40 years. Because I retire on my 48th and won't be here for my 50th I yielded to the request made by Maureen Belford and Tom Leyden to celebrate the Anniversary on the Day of Anniversary which falls on Pentecost. So the 12 noon Mass will be in honor of the Holy Spirit with me in the background followed by a reception, catered by Trips in McGrath Hall.

Next Meeting – May 23, 2016, 7:00pm

Closing Prayer – Fr. Tom