

When a Parish Council Is About to Be Born...

BY BARBARA MOYNEHAN
St. Thomas the Apostle's parish council formation committee met for the first time last week.

The 30-member committee was chosen by Msgr. Richard Burns, pastor of St. Thomas the Apostle since 1955, with his assistants Fathers Andrew Kalafsky and Douglas Hoffman, and lay people who are already leaders of parish organizations.

Msgr. Burns explained that St. Thomas the Apostle has had an elected board of education for four years and an elected finance committee for three years.

"If the parish council is as successful in its contributions to the parish as they are, it will be a wonderful addition to the parish," he said. However, he was concerned about the prospect of integrating these two very important and very successful arms of the parish

'One Parish'

into a new parish council.

Outlining what will happen once the formation committee is chosen, Msgr. Burns said, Edward Winterkorn, of 138 Canton St., a layman who has helped organize many parish councils in Rochester, will meet with them. Using the diocesan directives set forth by Bishop Joseph L. Hogan as a basis, he will explain the philosophy and the process of parish councils.

When the formation committee feels competent in its understanding of parish councils members will bring small groups of people together for informational meetings.

"And we will talk about it from the pulpit and in parish bulletins."

"Then when the base is prepared we will ask all those who might want to serve as members of the council to submit their names," he added.

The formation committee also will be responsible for drawing up a tentative constitution which will be presented for a vote and amendment by the people of the parish at the same time the parish council members are elected.

The parish is divided into four blocks now since it draws from such a large area and diversified population. The parish council may form more blocks, or sub-divide them so the representation on the council would be proportionate to the population of the blocks.

Age groups also will be incorporated into the council, as representative blocks. Msgr. Burns said; 22-30 year-olds in one, 30-40 in another and they are trying for high school and college level representatives.

But, once the election is held it will be up to the parish council Msgr. Burns concluded.



Ed Winterkorn, member of the Pastoral Council Formation Committee, instructs 25 members of St. Thomas the Apostle parish on how to set up a parish council at their first meeting, the evening of Feb. 17.

One Parish Assembly

(Catholic Press Features)

In one parish in Texas separate organizations for men and for women, plus a variety of other parish groups were replaced by one organization called the Parish Assembly.

A number of developments led to the decision "that this was the only path to take in our continuing efforts to become a more effective Church," said the pastor. The Parish Assembly, which has been in operation since September, is scheduled

to meet four times a year.

"For one thing, there was the growing realization that the day of separate organizations of men and women in the parish is over," he began. "Last year we really pulled out the stops and had imaginative programs and dedicated officers, but both the Men's Club and Women's Club experienced poor attendance at their monthly meetings."

As a result, the parish council discussed the problem and came to the conclusion that there was really no need for men and

women in the parish to meet separately. It was further decided there was no real need for meetings every month, with officers pressed to plan programs.

"There was the conclusion that the Catholic people today, now fully integrated into the mainstream of American life, were involved up to their necks in neighborhood and civic activities and no longer experienced a need for 'fellowship' or meetings for the sake of meetings," the pastor explained.

Another factor contributing to the creation of a Parish Assembly was "the awkward relationship" between the parish council and the various organizations of the parish.

"It was felt that with just one parish organization, this relationship could be clarified and unified," the pastor continued. "The council now serves as the policy-making, goal-setting unit of the Parish Assembly, acting as a board of directors of the Assembly."

Another development leading to the formation of the Parish Assembly, he said, "was the increasing need to address ourselves to the most basic purposes of the Church. We felt that having this one parish organization would facilitate this questioning and help us redirect our efforts to fulfilling the main functions of the Christian Community."

The Parish Assembly meetings are attended by parish council members, who preside. The Assembly consists of five general "commissions": worship, education, community life, social service and physical plant. Previous parish groups such as the Altar-Rosary Society, Lectors, Ushers, Altar Boys and Choir are now absorbed into the worship commission. The annual parish dance, formerly a project of the Women's Club, is now a function of the community life commission. The Confraternity of Christian Doctrine people are now part of the education commission. The St. Vincent de Paul Society was disbanded and its members now serve on a more general social service commission. One of the main reasons for the creation of the Parish Assembly, the pastor stressed, was to do away with "meeting for the sake of meeting," which many parish groups find themselves doing, he said. "The Parish Assembly is the Christian Community assembled," he said, "it's the parish organized. Our main goal was to accomplish a more unified, integrated effort as disciples of Jesus."

Our Parish COUNCIL

by Bernard Lyons

It's a sign of progress that parish councils have made that they are now subject to criticism. I just wish we were getting better criticism!

Many times there can be blanket condemnations that do not apply to all councils, or suggestions that the coming of a council automatically should make that parish fall into some ideological line favorable with the critic's mindset.

It reminds me of the meeting I attended with an independent group of laity who spoke out against councils because they did not want "racist" parishes voting to keep blacks out.

It seemed to make no difference to them that these so-called "racist" parishes were in fact all-white now and that when blacks did move into the parish, many of the parishioners would "vote" with their feet as they moved out.

The argument that a council might help parishioners to face their own fears, even if they were to articulate a now unspoken — and often undealt with — vote against blacks, held little weight with them.

All of this criticism has a machine-like quality to it — today a council — tomorrow the Second Coming of Christ!

I recently heard the statement "the typical council thinks of the parish as a business to be managed and of it-

self constituting the management." That statement doesn't square with my view of councils, after hundreds of letters, workshops and conversations of the past eight or nine years.

It would be impossible to cite a typical parish council, and I doubt that more than a few council leaders would select that style of definition for itself.

Do parish councils get themselves bogged down in details so that they neglect or overlook more vital concerns? Some do. And others do on occasion.

I see dramatic changes.

And these changes are documented! Not only with a recent survey conducted through this column, but in a tape-recorded book of interviews I did with Catholics and "former Catholics" (Voices From The Back Pew) that clearly show a change in Catholics' understanding of the Church as the "People of God."

A staple item in workshops that I conduct is a word-association test that also inevitably reveals that the post-Vatican II Catholic is now likely to think of Church as "us," or a community, rather than as a static place of worship.

Certainly, our accomplishments are less than they should be, then so has the criticism been less than what it should be.

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