

Bellarmino Advisory Committee Minutes

Dec. 1, 2005

The regular meeting of the Advisory group opened in the small chapel at 7:00 pm.

Karen Hurley provided the Advent prayer, and the group proceeded to “check-in” on this topic: “What is your heart saying to you as you gather this evening?”

Connie Widmer volunteered to provide prayer and to scribe for the next meeting.

Wanda then provided a brief overview of how the public part of the meeting (to discuss the experience of lay leadership and how it can be fostered in the future) would be conducted. It was determined that Advisory members might sit in on the small group discussions to listen—but not participate.

Advisory members then moved into the main chapel to join the approximately 15 parish members who came for the discussion.

The public meeting to discuss lay leadership opened with remarks from Richard. He explained that Advisory had been discussing this topic and were now counting on those present to help “fill in the blanks.”

He then went on to share his own experience of lay leadership in his years at the parish, explaining how he had encountered lay leadership in his own hiring process in the fall of 1991. His early impression was that Bellarmine had a lot of leadership in place and was a group of “self-starters.”

He also emphasized, since taking on the job of pastor, how many things have gone on that he really had nothing to do with—like the resettlement of the Afghani family. More typical of his pastorate, he said, are the things that he “helps to happen.” And that is where he says a pastor should be—calling out the gifts of others, moving the Catholic life of the community toward just action, and leading prayer.

He expressed his eagerness to find out what was on the minds of those present—and turned to the first question for discussion:

What do you see to be important characteristics or qualities of lay people in leadership in the Church now?

The following is a listing offered by the group:

- ***Persistent***—You have to really care; it’s not easy!
- ***Humility***—Smart enough to know—and acknowledge—what they don’t know.
- ***Empowering***—Getting others involved. (This is a church of volunteers!)
- ***Good listener and consensus-builder***

- ***Enthusiasm***—An enthusiastic person draws people into leadership
- ***Diverse***—representing different styles and backgrounds
- ***Accountable to the community*** (Lay people are used to this because of their jobs and families.)
- ***Fed by the experience of family and professional responsibility***
- ***Has historical perspective***
- ***Cares about the church***

Wanda then invited the group to break up into small groups of four or five to discuss the next two questions:

Tell about your experiences of lay leadership in the parish. Where do you see this happening, and how does it touch you? What are your current understandings—and questions and observations?

How so you see people called forth, supported or empowered to do what they are expected to do? What might happen to better foster lay leadership?

After about 30 minutes, Wanda called the group together for the final questions for discussion:

What learnings come from your conversation?

What recommendations?

These are the points reported back to the large group:

- It is hard to talk about democracy in an authoritarian church. This is a “stumbling block”—less on the local level but real.
- Came prepared to talk about different questions. Wants to actively prepare for a priestless parish/church; wants concrete thinking about the shape of this future.
- At the end, one small group came to the hard question: “What is leadership?”—but didn’t really have an answer.
- We are not being proactive enough to get ready for the future. We need to be better educated about the lay leadership question and we need to be more proactive in nurturing/mentoring younger generation into leadership.
- Five recommendations reported from one small group:
 1. more communication on a regular basis
 2. official evaluation for all leaders—volunteer or paid
 3. mentoring (Every leaders needs to mentor someone to follow them.)
 4. talent inventory needs to be taken and used to recruit new volunteers
 5. term limits

- We need to communicate our community expectations about the need for individual involvement like many Protestant churches do.
- We need to look at/study emerging models of lay leadership in the Church.
- We all need to learn to claim our “priestly role.”
- More communication to let people know how things happen here (e.g., how the giving tree appears every year!) and what our need are. “Genuine leaders arise in response to real needs.”
- We need to get more deeply in touch with Ignatian spirituality.
- There should be a pilgrimage in Ignatian spirituality for parish leaders/members—like those provided for Jesuit high school and college faculties.
- When we had a crisis in the parish (the “communion crisis” in the mid 1980s), lay leadership worked. We responded then; we would respond again.

In wrapping up the final reporting session, Richard looked back over the list of qualities/characteristics brainstormed at the beginning of the meeting to see if any additional qualities about leadership emerged that were not part of the original list. These two were noted: the importance of communication and an educational piece.

Other points mentioned in conclusion:

Brennan and Marie Hill will lead a pilgrimage in June that will visit some Ignatian sites. It is open to parishioners.

Karen B. reported that a program is being planned for Lent on empowering lay leadership.

A concern was expressed that there was no mechanism for parish voting on any issue. Someone suggested it would have to be a “vote of the whole.” This led to a recommendation that we design a model of what the parish could look like with a lay administrator rather than a priest-pastor. What might Bellarmine look like given that future scenario?

Folks were thanked for participation and the meeting was adjourned after all present joined hands for several minutes of silent prayer.

*Submitted by Karen Hurley
December 12, 2004*