St. Michael Parish Council Minutes

Monday, May 23, 2016

**Members Present:** Karen Basham, Leslye Biller, Jay Blair, Chris Bonbright, Helen Bryant, Stacy Davis, Charles Edelen, Bob Goodin, Kathy Goodin, Gary Grieshaber, Denise Hampton, Angela Kimbel, Kevin Popp, Brenda Rickert, Susan Robison, Jim Smith, Mary Rose Stephenson, Fr. Dick Sullivan, Stacy Tackett, Lisa Wilhelmus

**Members Absent:** Karen Karem

**Minutes Secretary:** Teresa Watson

**Opening Prayer:** Jay Blair

**Special Guests:** There were 38 guests present; several made requests in advance to address the Council.

The meeting started 7:06 pm with Bob Goodin explaining the agenda to the group.

**2016-2017 Budget:**

Denise Hampton presented the Budget, explained the budget planning process and recognized members of the Finance Committee. She pointed out:

* The budget total is approximately $6 million, up from $5.8 million
* The following assumptions were factored in: Collections will continue to be down 5%, approximations of income from fundraisers: $35K from auction, $40K from picnic, Fish Fry $13k, Campaign income $200K, total interest payments $181K, payments on principle $425K.
* The budget includes a reserve fund of $16,420

Parish Budget details:

* 615 students
* Expected income: PTO $46K, Auction $35K, Picnic $40K
* 4% increase in tuition
* Pre-school 104 students
* New 8th grade teacher, New junior kindergarten, new instructional assistant
* Bus service - 53% school tuition and fees, 47% subsidy and user fees.
* Reserve - $34,012

Denise reminded the Parish Council that it is the body that ultimately oversees the financial and general health of the parish. In terms of the budget, she expressed concern that changes to new programs (adding a bus service, Junior Kindergarten, increasing tuition, etc.) were not well thought out. She stated that the Finance Committee was not part of those decisions on the front end, but they were the ones charged with making the modifications necessary to fit them into the budget very late in the process. She reported speaking with several faculty/staff persons in the school to get a better understanding of the programs and reported people (non clarified) were fearful of giving input because of retaliation. The feedback she received was that many were not happy with the fees, tuition increase, bus service, etc. Consequently, she expressed concern that this could impact their overall giving to the parish.  
  
Bob expressed gratitude to the Finance Committee for the many hours and hard work they dedicated to creating the budget. He then moved to open the floor to the guests waiting to address the Council.

1. Amy Eisenbach took the floor as the representative for several other guests in attendance. She expressed concern over the budget and the discord it seems to have created among school families. She highlighted the following areas:

* Lack of consistent and up-front communication from the school administration (examples: Grandparents Day, the Fall School Threat, etc.) Currently she stated there is serious confusion over the new school tuition and fees and the new bus program. She added her personal upset at her child being taken out of class to tour a school bus.
* Lack of fiscal responsibility from the school.  She expressed the opinion that the Principal has misled the Finance Committee. Particular areas of concern are the new bus service contract, purchase of furniture and flooring for the school, and the wisdom of taking these on while the school is still trying to pay down their debt.
* High employee turnover at the school. Mrs. Eisenbach stated 10% as a normal turnover rate; with a loss of 16 employees this year, St. Michael’s rate is 21%.  Concern was expressed over the top performers who are leaving such as Marylyn Storrie and Mrs. Crowding.
* Principal Certification – The Principal has not completed this process and concern was expressed that this will affect the school’s accreditation process.  
  Mrs. Eisenbach closed by thanking the parish council for all of their hard work.

2. Bill Moad spoke next making the following points:

* This kind of dissatisfaction and frustration has happen before at St. Michael’s.
* He expressed a serious concern that the email and social media chain in the current situation has been detrimental to the parish and caused some unverified information to spread before being proven.
* In his experience, Mrs. Tackett has been more than approachable.  He suggested trying to focus on the positive versus the negative and asserted that Mrs. Tackett is excellent with the kids.

3. Angela Sherman spoke next stating that teachers are not speaking out about problem areas at the school because they are worried about retaliation from the administration.  She questioned the absence of the funds ($200 per teacher) budgeted for distribution at the end of this school year and expressed concern that these monies were shifted with no accountability. Mrs. Sherman called for visibility with financial issues.

4. Tammy Hubbard asked for an explanation of the budget approval process. She suggested a tighter process especially in the area of what can be approved and how it gets approved.

5. Jason Maguire expressed the following concerns:

* 4% tuition increase may cause him and others to leave the school.
* Some come St. Michael’s to get away from JCPS and school busses.
* St. Francis Xavier Parish paid off their debt in 5 years for a comparable sized church, while St. Michael is still paying $182,000 per year in interest alone on our debt.
* The extras that families are asked to purchase (like iPads) are not necessary. They keep costs up.

6. Lisa Bauer – expressed deep concerns about the Principal and the way her (Mrs. Bauer’s) financial contributions to the parish are being used. She asked Fr. Dick if he is concerned about the number of faculty members leaving.

7. Rebecca Eisenbach – stated there is a loss of trust and respect between the Principal, the faculty and some school families. To her question of how we can get passed this, Father expressed his hope that we go with acceptance, compassion and working together.

8. Lara Norrenbrock – reported a lack of harmony in the school and expressed concern over how the changes have been handled - such as the Junior Kindergarten program.  She encouraged a reevaluation of what has happened in the last year and a rethinking of how the school spends money.  
  
9. Wendy Smith – Agreed that some financial items need closer review, but she encouraged everyone to make the effort to get to know the Principal in order to better understand her as a Principal, a mom and a person.    
  
10. Brian Helm, Finance Committee Member – expressed the opinion that St. Michael’s needs a tighter budget process and more diligence in sticking to the budget in order to maintain appropriate control over how the money is spent. He expressed serious concern over changes made after the budget was approved.

Responses from Fr. Dick Sullivan: (NOTE: Fr. Dick responded to many of the issues as they were raised, but for simplicity sake most of his responses are listed below.)

* Bus Service for 2016-2017 School Year: The original research was for 3 buses, but the cost was too high. Miller Bus Company is working on a 2 bus solution. The buses are needed and have been talked about for the past nine years. Eventually they will become self sustaining. Father asked for patience with the changes that are being proposed.
* New Flooring: There is flooring in the school that needs to be replaced. This is part of standard maintenance.
* Faculty Turnover: Father interviewed each teacher who is not returning and reported that some are not happy, but others have personal reasons for leaving. They are not all leaving because of problems within the school.
* Dissatisfaction within the School: Some issues were brought to Father throughout the year, so he enlisted the assistance of the Catholic School Office. They interviewed the entire faculty and staff, drew up a report of their findings and then met with Father Dick and Mrs. Tackett. At that meeting they all drew up an agreement of areas that needed work. Father expressed his confidence that Ms. Tackett has many good gifts and we need to give her the opportunity to use them.
* Principal Certification: Mrs. Tackett, along with several other Catholic school principals, has been working on her certification. This is not an issue with the Archdiocese.
* School and Parish Debt: The school debt will be paid off in 8 years, but the parish debt of $7.5 million will take much longer.

Comments and responses from Parish Council members:

* Susan Robinson – Proposed that the Council schedule meetings to follow up on the information that was shared at this meeting.
* Jim Smith stated that it is important for everyone at St. Michael’s to be heard on a regular basis. He encouraged the guests that if they feel they are not being heard, representatives of the Parish Council are available at every weekend mass and will assist in addressing their concerns directly. He gave the assurance that nothing that was said tonight will be dismissed; the Council will be sure the issues are addressed.

At this point, Bob Goodin ended the open conversation with the guests, and thanked them for coming and expressing their concerns. He then directed the Council back to the evening’s agenda. Many guests chose to leave at that time.

**Minutes:** Minutes from the April 25, 2016 meeting were approved as written.

**Old Business:**

* Distribution of Committee Reports prior to Parish Council Meetings: to ensure Members receive the reports with time to review them before each meeting, in the Fall Bob will change the deadline to the Thursday before the meetings.
* Nominations for New Council Members: Six nominations have been received since Council members spoke at the 6:00 and 8:30 masses last weekend (May 21-22). Susan Robison will speak at the 11:00 mass this coming weekend (May 28-29).
* Outgoing members: Karen Basham, Leslie Biller, and Susan Robison are leaving the Council. Bob thanked them for their service.
* Parish Council Presence at Weekend Masses: Feedback - - -
  + Susan Robison reported from the log: there are usually 2 members each at the 6:00 and 11:00 masses and 8 members at the 8:30 mass.
  + Kathy Goodin suggested 2 members at a time should be sufficient.
  + Jim Smith reported receiving some phone calls with questions because people had seen him at church with his nametag and connected him with the Parish Council, which is a positive result.
  + In order to promote that connection throughout the parish, Gary Grieshaber proposed that members wear their name tags to every parish event, and Susan Robison suggested inserting the Parish Council member list in the bulletin on a monthly basis. Chris Bonbright agreed and affirmed the importance of Council members being visible to the rest of the parish.
  + Bob recommended that the effort to have Parish Council Representatives at every weekend mass will continue over the summer and be reviewed again in the fall.
* Parish Council Constitution: Bob has e-mailed the Constitution to all members and requested it be reviewed over the summer so decisions on suggested updates can be made in the fall.

**New Business:**

* Father Dick introduced Phil Green, St. Michael’s new business manager.
* Father announced the new bell tower is under construction and should be complete before the July picnic. The total cost will be about $100,000 and is being paid by an anonymous donor. The tower will resemble our cupola and will make a great addition to our campus. Father plans to ask the Archbishop to bless it. Lisa Wilhelmus suggested communicating this good news to the parish and community through social media.
* Father will be meeting soon with Robert Hale, a seminarian who is interested in joining us at St. Michael.

**Next Steps in Addressing School and Budget Issues:**

* Susan asked about the kind of follow up required for the issues raised tonight. After some discussion of those issues it was decided that Stacy Tackett, Lisa Wilhelmus, Jim Smith and Gary Grieshaber will write a communication to the school families concerning the primary issues. They will select the parameters of who should receive the letters (graduating 8th grade parents? preschool parents? etc.) and make every effort to get the letter out as soon as possible by mail, e-mail, Twitter and the school’s Facebook page.
* Related budget issue: Removal of **cafeteria fee from letter of tuition and fees sent to school parents** 
  + **Fr. Dick, Stacy Tackett and the members of the Finance Council were all aware there were differences between the budget and the letter that was sent out to the school parents announcing the new tuition rates and fees.**
  + **The budget was completed by the Finance Council and was to be presented to the Parish Council at the May 23 meeting. The Wednesday prior to the Parish Council meeting, there was a rush by the school administration to get a communication out to school parents from Fr. Dick and Stacy announcing the new tuition rates and fees for the 2016-17 school year.**
  + **It was through this letter to the school parents, that Stacy increased the instructional fee and removed the cafeteria fee. Before the communication went out, members of the Finance Council voiced their concern that the fees in the letter did not match and agree to the budget and the plan was for the budget to first go to the Parish Council for approval before rates and fees were issued.**
  + **Fr. Dick responded to the Finance Council, through an email from the Business Manager, that he heard the concerns of the Finance Council but was going forward with Stacy’s recommendations and letter as presented to him.**
  + **The decision not to collect the cafeteria fee had a negative impact to the budget of $60,000 causing the cafeteria budget to have a deficit.**
  + **It was proposed in the Parish Council meeting that we send another letter to the school parents with a revised fee schedule, asking for the cafeteria fee.  A decision was made not to do this because parents were already told that they would not have to pay for the cafeteria fee. Also, the first letter sent to school parents contained an error in the fees and a revised letter was sent. Sending a third letter would reflect on the competencies of the Finance Council and school administration.**
  + **The Finance Council was asked to revise the budget and determine where the shortfall of $60,000 could be covered.**
  + Father suggested in the future we might consider including all fees with the tuition and giving out the one number only.
* Budget timing suggestions:
  + Feb. 15 – final date for budget submissions to the Finance Committee
  + Before the budget is submitted to the Parish Council, there should be a line by line budget review between the Finance Committee and the Principal.
  + April 30 – deadline for final approval by the Parish Council.
  + No letters concerning tuition or fees should be sent to parents until after the final approval of the budget.
  + Phil Green offered to be the one to get the budget process started next February, monitor its progress, and keep the Parish Council informed along the way.

**Special Meeting of the Parish Council**: The Council will meet in one to two weeks (depending on the completion of budget revisions) so final approval can be given. Bob will notify the members of the exact date when he has it.

**Committee Reports:**

* Justice and Charity, Kathy Goodin reporting: Kathy and Cindy Woods will co-chair the Stewardship Committee. They have recruited several members so far.
* Worship, Mary Rose Stephenson reporting: Mary Rose is stepping down from the Chair position effective July 1. Dennis O’Donoghue will replace her. Mary Rose will become a co-chair with Geri Brooks for the Hospitality Committee.

**Closing Prayer:** Charles Edelen

**NEXT REGULAR MEETING: August 22**