

St. Jerome Pastoral Plan Meeting of April 27, 2010

Present: Fr. David Blanchfield, Dan Loch, Dick & Annette Maiberger, Tom Rietano, and Pat Spear

The meeting began at 7:09 pm in the rectory.

Purpose of This Meeting

Fr. David called this Pastoral Plan meeting for selected parishioners to hear a presentation from Pat Spear, a community organizer from Bridgeport. Also invited, but unable to attend, were Jeanne Tarrant and Joe O'Callaghan, Sr.

Pat Spear

Mr. Spear began with a general introduction of himself. He spent seven years with the Catholic Campaign for Human Development in Appalachia and the South before deciding to take the training to become an organizer of groups himself. Now he is a community organizer for 29 Connecticut churches from Milford to Norwalk in a group called the Connecticut Sponsoring Committee consisting of clergy from the 29 churches and about 200 laypeople. He invited St. Jerome's to participate in this group.

The Connecticut Sponsoring Committee began as a New Haven organization and won several significant neighborhood successes which Mr. Spear detailed for us (e.g., banning liquor sales near a local school).

Mr. Spear asserted that the two principles of Catholic social action are

1. charity to the needy and
2. power and politics.

With these principles in mind, the Connecticut Sponsoring Committee hopes to give birth to a new political group of 40 churches to exercise power (i.e., the ability to act) in a union that goes public in conjunction with government and political leaders.

Mr. Spear used the example of a well-established New Haven church whose pastor claimed his church was the best at Christian social action in its area. Yet the pastor could not answer Pat's question, "So why is your church not in the newspapers for its social actions?" It practiced local charity well, but exercised no clout in local policy or politics, none that could be identified with changing the social arena for an entire social issue.

The process the Connecticut Sponsoring Committee uses at first is a series of 10- to 20-person "house meetings" to listen to people's concerns, identify issues, and bring them to the attention of their congregations. If there is a commonality of issues, the communities work together on a wider, broader level. "What's bothering you?" and "What's on your mind?" are the questions

asked at these house meetings, about 260 of which have been conducted thus far.

The Connecticut Sponsoring Committee has three goals:

1. build leadership
2. build capacity / power / clout
3. build self-interest

Mr. Spear explained that St. Jerome's may not see much connection, say, with Yale University's gobbling up parking lots in New Haven, but he used the example of a suburban church in Newton, MA which became involved in non-Newton issues such as immigration or college loans.

He challenged us the way he challenged the pastor in his previous example: If St. Jerome's is committed to social outreach, why are we not in the local newspaper for having clout on a social issue like affordable housing for the poor?

Mr. Spear explained that the Connecticut Sponsoring Committee was now in its pledging phase and that churches were making pledges of \$500 to \$5,000 to the organization. Annual dues would be 1% of a church's operating budget.

The parishioners in attendance thanked Mr. Spear and took his invitation seriously into consideration. Both Fr. David and Dick Maiberger said that those in the room had full plates when it came to assisting St. Jerome's and just could not take on one more large-scale activity. Dan Loch said that the social activism Mr. Spear proposed, was something he sensed intuitively that St. Jerome's should be doing, but that Fr. David and Dick were correct. New leadership has to be found at St. Jerome's to take on an endeavor such as Connecticut Sponsoring Committee participation. Fr. David said he would try to recruit during weekend Masses some future weekend to see who in the parish might emerge with enough interest to take on this project.

The meeting ended at 8:25 pm.

The next meeting is not scheduled.

Submitted by:

Dan Loch

Member, Pastoral Plan Subcommittee