

DFW LAY COUNCIL III

March 28, 2009

SUMMARY REPORT

THE DAY

The third annual DFW Lay Council was held on March 28, 2009 at Tarrant County College – Southeast, in Arlington, TX. Sponsor of the event was Voices For Renewal (VFR), a local non-profit organization formed in 2003. VFR, along with fellow Catholics from Dallas, sponsored the first DFW Lay Council in May 2007, with the theme “The Laity’s Rights and Obligations in Canon Law”. The Dallas group hosted the second DFW Lay Council in April 2008, with author Paul Lakeland discussing his book, *Catholicism at the Crossroads*.

The day’s theme, “The Challenge of Being Catholic Now”, was an invitation to reflect on and to share in the variety of complex issues of our faith journeys. This third Lay Council gave voice and value to the diversity within our church family.

VFR’s intention for this third Lay Council was to celebrate our faith journey as we respond to the urgings of the Holy Spirit. VFR took the position that the day would be one of respect for each individual voice, and therefore VFR would neither endorse nor censor any individual’s views. The goals governing Lay Council participation were:

- To experience and celebrate diversity in the church community
- To be open, inclusive and hospitable to all
- To provide a forum for ideas and dialogue
- To be re-energized on our journey by faith, hope and love

THE PANELISTS

Individuals representing the diversity within the Church today were invited to speak. In morning and afternoon panels, ten individuals shared their faith journeys. Following each panel, round table discussions were held during which attendees and panel participants enjoyed free-flowing conversations about their faith journeys.

Striking commonalities voiced by each panelist showed similar elements in their faith journeys. Specifically there was a strong experience of God's presence, of God's invitation, of transformational life events at various ages from childhood to adulthood, bringing the individual to conscious decisions regarding faith and belief.

THE PARTICIPANTS

At the end of the day a consensus of satisfaction was palpable. The richness and simplicity of each human, beautiful story was remarkable. Each story stirred participants in totally unexpected ways, broadening knowledge, understanding and acceptance of the validity of each experience.

Opening each table discussion was the question "what feelings stirred in you as each story was told?" While the table conversation covered a multitude of ideas, questions, opinions and shared experiences, there were commonalities as a whole. Those commonalities can be summarized as follows:

"I am the only one like me". Participants repeatedly said that they felt alone but rejoiced to find in this Lay Council that others were truly "like me". Even though we try to live the "Jesus way" we don't seem to "fit" the model.

Repeated over and over was the story of having found or having searched for a home, and Catholicism is it. For some, this call and search to belong did not find corresponding acceptance by the Church. On the other end of the spectrum, one convert expressed satisfaction with the catholic experience, maintains active engagement in parish youth ministry, acknowledges but will not be drawn into polarizing issues within the Church.

Clearly expressed was the need for a group, a religion, a Church context to satisfy their God-search.

Typical of participants was commentary by one individual who summed up the majority feeling. In paraphrase: “from a lifetime of thoughtful study, personal convictions developed that challenge creedal statements and Church authority. Many people hope they will live long enough to see the kind of church in which Jesus would be happy”. The remarks were nuanced to show the personal convictions in the broader context of Truth, but Truth imperfectly packaged by Church.

Common issues of participants were:

- refusal of Eucharist to Christian non-Catholics or divorced Catholics
- words said with insensitivity by pastors
- teaching that sounds rote and patronizing
- priestly celibacy
- the Church is too slow in responding to today’s concerns
- liberal/conservative “split” is encouraged by Church policy
- lack of forums for adult conversation on alternative points of view.

One final commonality was summed up in the statement that there are too few priests and bishops to share the “spiritual treasures” of the Church, and as a consequence today’s laity are impoverished and stories abound of family members and friends who gave up on Catholicism in their faith journey. The day’s participants are proof that many respond to God’s call to holiness and service, but not all find leadership adequate or supportive.

With prayer and singing, DFW Lay Council III concluded.

Evaluation Summary document follows. Of the 42 people attending, 28 completed evaluation forms. All comments are transcribed as written.

EVALUATION SUMMARY

DFW LAY COUNCIL: “The Challenge of Being Catholic Now”; March 28, 2009

How well did the Council reach its goals?	NOT AT ALL		SOMEWHAT		DEFINITELY YES	
	1	2	3	4	5	6
1 To experience diversity in the church community.	0	0	0	2	5	21
2 To be open, inclusive and hospitable to all.	0	0	1	1	2	24
3 To provide a forum for ideas and dialogue.	0	0	0	1	3	24
4 To be re-energized on our faith journey.	0	0	0	3	7	17
5 The campus location was convenient.	0	0	1	3	6	18
6 The meeting rooms were comfortable.	0	0	3	0	8	17
7 The lunch was adequate.	0	0	0	4	5	19

Comments written between the lines of the above statements:

- 1: What about those who don't go to church but are always Catholic.
- 2: No disabled person on panel.
- 3: Have juice or tea for all non coffee drinkers.

- 4: I would like to have a summary from each table.
5: Warm, friendly and nice to be with friends.
6: Too far for me.
7: A little chilly. Room was too big and too echo-y. Too cold. Cold. Cold. Too cold. Too cold.
8: Soft Drinks?

Please list topics you would like discussed at future Lay Councils.

- I would like to set it up as the Vatican Councils with summaries and “Documents”. BTW: How was the council organized? How did they create the documents?
- How do we grow our community so that we can have a significant voice in the church? Can we leave with a plan of action? Are we going to have to split up from Rome?
- Liturgy of Mass
- Keep in mind there is a movement for a National American Lay Council in Detroit in 2011?
- Action topics. Where can we voice our concerns? Let’s contact the Bishop about open communication and announcements.
- American Catholic Council.org
- Celibacy, Islam, Changes in the church-foreseeable.
- As we age, where are others? Our families have abandoned the church.
- How to change the institutional church?
- Bless you all!
- Some focus on women in the church like Mary Magdalene.

On the reverse, we welcome any and all comments on Church topics that you feel strongly.

- Question and answer time?
- Could it be that the church equates homosexuality w/pedophilia (ie, priest predators must be gay – intrinsic disorder.)
- Equality for women; gay, lesbian equality.

- Presenters should be advised to use mikes properly to assure that they project speech.
- Challenge of Being Catholic today:
 - Staying Catholic
 - Living your faith when church is like Pharisees w/rules; love God and neighbor in church that's legalistic instead of loving.
 - Catholic w/capital "C"; congregation of God's family (all human beings)
 - Sense of Community especially in "megachurch" current parish set up.
 - Being Post Vat II w/pope who is Pre Vat. II
 - Knowing love when you disagree w/current leadership
 - If you are educated and you think the church marginalizes you
 - Continuing to speak the truth (like what Father does...how chancery treats employees.
 - Having uneducated male priests from other countries who don't understand American culture or women.