

DRAFT

The First DFW Lay Council

March 24, 2007

Tarrant County College, SE Campus

Arlington, Texas

RISE UP!



Report of the Council Proceedings

March 26, 2007

Brief Review of First DFW Lay Council Day
March 24, 2007
Tarrant County College, SE Campus
Arlington

Background:

A group of people (cf. Appendix A) first met on July 12, 2006 to plan the First DFW Council on March 24, 2007. This group was responding to a *Call-To-Action* (CTA) challenge to begin local meetings around the country to deal with the role of the Laity today. They met in Dallas, Arlington and Fort Worth about every two weeks to plan this first council. Later Tarrant County College, SE Campus, was selected as the site for the conference.

The Council Day (cf. Appendix C):

Two consultants (cf. Appendix C) were invited to speak: Ms. Lena Woltering, a CTA Board member, and Sister Kate Kuenstler, PHJC, JCD, a Canon Lawyer. Len Woltering renewed the history of Lay Synods, beginning six years ago in the Belleville Illinois Diocese. The DFW Lay Council is the fourth of the kind in the U.S. There are about ten (10) more in the planning stages across the country presently. CTA plans to facilitate a national Lay Synod in four to five years. Lena also developed the theme of the role of the Laity through the documents of Vatican II. Sister Kate defined the roles, the rights and the responsibilities of the Christian Faithful as developed in the 1983 edition of Canon Law, following the theology of Vatican II.

After the lunch break the round-table discussions were facilitated (cf. Appendix A) by trained facilitators using the guidelines adapted by Margaret Wheatley's *Turning to One Another: Simple Conversations* (cf. Appendix D). The participants joined in two round-table discussions. At the end of the second session each round-table noted three (3) summary statements. The total group listened to each group reporting their summary statement to the general assembly. A vote was taken when each participant voted his or her top three priorities by placing colored dots on their top three (3).

The summary statements follow and then the top ten and the percentage of voters is listed below:

Summary Statement of Round-Table Discussions

A. Exercising Your Rights and Responsibilities:

“Empowered Laity”: What does the term mean?

How can the Laity get pastors/bishops to listen...to share decision-making...to be financially accountable?

What opportunities and challenges does this project create?

Table A-1:

- Submit a request to our bishops that they mandate and underwrite a formal contemporary Adult Education Program for the Lay Adult Catholic of their respective diocese (The Adult Education Program at the University of Dallas was suggested as a model.).
- It was recommended that every parish have a copy of the 1983 edition (with commentary) of Canon Law which would be available to all parishioners.
- Develop a weekly column in church bulletins and/or *The Texas Catholic* about the rights and responsibilities of the Christian Faithful.

Table A-2:

- Promote and schedule educational programs in parishes which would focus on the contemporary rights and responsibilities of the Laity (developed by the II Vatican Council and specified in the 1983 edition of Canon Law).
- Promote a program in parishes to overcome an unjustified “fear” of punishment or “what they will do to us” if we speak out as empowered Laymen and Laywomen.
- Work with sympathetic priests in the above educational activities.
- Develop a focused letter writing campaign to pastors, bishops, the media, reform-oriented organizations on the rights and responsibilities of the Laity.
- Develop alternative financial guidelines in all parishes and dioceses with the assistance of the empowered Laity to promote honesty, fairness and justice.

B. The Priesthood – Declining Numbers:

Solutions for the clergy shortage may include: optional celibacy, married clergy, women's ordination, married priests for liturgical and sacramental life in priestless parishes.

Table B-1:

- The requirements for the parish priesthood today are neither realistic, conducive to an authentic spirituality for all (“one size does not fit all.”), nor in line with contemporary psychology/sociology. One of the solutions might be more appropriate training with the Laity involved both in the planning and in the seminary training.
- Problems with so many parish priests today: loneliness, alcoholism, sexual acting-out, etc. As possible long-term solutions to be developed with educational programs for the clergy and laity:
 - Optional Celibacy (“Celibacy should be a separate gift for some priests, but not required for all.”)
 - Married Clergy: as in our Eastern Rites, or Protestant clergy, etc.
 - Women's Ordination: as with our Protestant clergy. Roman Catholic Church might considered beginning with the ordination of women to the diaconate and then to the priesthood for those who choose.
 - Today's Married Priests: Invite those back who are married today as short-term solution to priestless parishes.
- Encourage all priests and bishops to be accountable for abuses, mistakes of the clergy.

C. Our Gay, Lesbian and Transgendered Brothers and Sisters:

Welcoming and including in parish life, recognizing committed unions, as well an understanding of the Church's teaching on the primacy of conscience.

Table C-1:

- Participants in this round-table discussion felt like the Church is wrong to reject the Gay or Lesbian committed relationships to which God may be calling them. In the Gospels Jesus included all and rejected no one.
- The Church (and all parishes and dioceses) needs to actively and aggressively minister to the Gay, Lesbian and/or Transgendered communities, use the Adult Education Programs to educate the Christian Faithful and include them in the Catholic communities.

D. Making Parishes Stronger:

Helping marginalized parishioners to become more active.

Encouraging diversity, developing ethnic celebrations.

Using the wisdom and courage of older members as well as using the creativity and energy of younger members.

Note:

This round-table was cancelled. There were no pre-enrollments in this discussion.

Many participants felt their needs were met for this discussion in Groups C and G.

E. Sexual Abuse Crises and Authority:

Do bishops need to be more responsive with this issue?

How can the Laity, and parishes help victims of abuse?

Should the Laity have a voice in what priests are assigned to their parishes or which bishops are assigned to their respective diocese?

Table E-1:

- Little has changed at the top. Bishops need more than just legal advice. They need the advice of the diocesan Laity (as do pastors from their parishioners) on forgiveness and intervention.
- The unquestioned and unaccountable authority of the bishops is at the heart of the sexual abuse crisis, i.e. the “cover-up.” Bishops need to understand that they are responsive and in the service of the Laity of their dioceses. The Laity of each diocese needs on on-going dialogue with their respective bishop.
- The insensitivity of the bishops nationally has been the real scandal. Bishops in their leadership role (pastors, as well, in parishes) need to step up and convince the Laity of their sensitivity by taking action.

F. Living the Gospel Message:

Making Peace and Justice a parish priority – getting the message to the pews.
What are the issues? E.g. “Seamless Garment” metaphor (Capital Punishment, War & Violence, and Abortion).
Where do we go to learn of our Christian moral obligations?

Table E-1:

- Keep asking “Why” and “How” (in parishes).
- Provide Social Justice and Peace education for all:
 - Starting with Adult Continuing Education
 - Include reasons for injustice
 - Stress the non-violent Gospel.
- Parishes and Dioceses offer vehicles for transformation.
- Build relationships in the community:
 - Nurture each other (small groups)
 - Within the parish community (and diocese)
 - Interfaith alliances.

Table E-2:

- We need a fully functioning Office of Peace and Justice in every diocese for all the Christian Faithful to educate about the domestic, national, and international violence issues.
- We recognize that environmental issues ARE justice and moral issues.
- Promote homilies and para-liturgies that apply to real-life moral situations and issues.

G. Women's Roles in the Church:

Justice vs. Patriarchy is the central issue.

Marginalization of women in parishes and in the diocese is the result of the Patriarchy emphasis.

Table G-1:

- The traditional role of women inevitably evolves with education. There is a critical need for adult education in their matter.
- The hierarchy must acknowledge that the Holy Spirit's call to the priestly vocation overrides the Roman Catholic definition of "priest" and must include women.
- Local dioceses needs to hear the voices of all the Christian Faithful at all levels and in all areas.

Table G-2:

- The greatest injustice is the lack of good substantial contemporary adult education, especially in Spirituality steeped in current theology.
- The notion of "hierarchy" is from a past culture. "Equality" is from this generation. Change it.
- We need to consider the role of equality instead of the hypocrisy and sexism we are experiencing in today's church.
- Love is stronger than resistance to change (love overcomes preconceived stereotypes). Therefore, make love the motivation for all these reforms. We want change because we love the Church.

Final Vote on Issues

At the end of the second round-table discussion, the groups were instructed to summarize their discussions in these statements and write these statements on the newsprint provided. As each round-table reported to the total group, participants were asked to keep in mind the three (3) topics for which they would vote. Each participant was given three colored dots to place on the newsprint around the room to vote on their top three priorities. In this way the DFW Lay Council Board would be given directions for future meetings. There were seventy-five (75) participants at the workshop. A few, however, had to leave before the final vote due to previous commitments.

Final Votes:	% of Total Vote:
1. Need a fully functioning Office of Peace and Justice in every diocese (and a committee and/or task force in every parish) to educate all about the domestic, national, and international violence issues.	13.0%
2. Develop a weekly column in church bulletins and/or <i>The Texas Catholic</i> about the rights and responsibilities of the Laity.	12.4%
3. The hierarchy must acknowledge that the Holy Spirit's call to the priestly vocation overrides the Roman Catholic definition of "priest" and must include women.	10.2%
4. The unquestioned and unaccountable authority of the bishops is at the heart of the sexual abuse crisis, i.e. the "cover-up." Bishops need to understand that they are responsive and in the service of the Laity of their dioceses. The Laity of each diocese needs on on-going dialogue with their respective bishop.	7.9%
5. Provide Social Justice and Peace education for all: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Starting with Adult Continuing Education b. Include reasons for injustice c. Stress the non-violent Gospel. 	7.9%
6. The Church (and all parishes and dioceses) needs to actively and aggressively minister to the Gay, Lesbian and/or Transgendered communities, use the Adult	7.3%

Education Programs to educate the Christian Faithful and include them in the Catholic communities.

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| 7. | Develop alternative financial guidelines in all parishes and dioceses with the assistance of the empowered Laity to promote honesty, fairness and justice. | 4.5% |
| 8. | It was recommended that every parish have a copy of the 1983 edition (with commentary) of Canon Law which would be available to all parishioners. | 4.0% |
| 9. | Problems with so many parish priests today: loneliness, alcoholism, sexual acting-out, etc. As possible long-term solutions to be developed with educational programs for the clergy and laity:
a. Optional Celibacy (“Celibacy should be a separate gift for some priests, but not required for all.”)
b. Married Clergy: as in our Eastern Rites, or Protestant clergy, etc.
c. Women’s Ordination: as with our Protestant clergy. Roman Catholic Church might considered beginning with the ordination of women to the diaconate and then to the priesthood for those who choose.
d. Today’s Married Priests: Invite those back who are married today as short-term solution to priestless parishes. | 3.4% |
| 10. | The greatest injustice is the lack of good substantial contemporary adult education, especially in Spirituality steeped in current theology. | 2.8% |

Total %

73.4%

Note:

26.6% voted for other issues which were lower than 2.8% of the voters.

At the end of the day the participants were asked how many want another Lay Council in 2008. The vote (a show of hands) was unanimous.

Appendix A

DFW Metroplex Lay Council Board:

Dallas Group:

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Haigh, Sandra
Matula, Pat
Parkinson, Johanna

Fort Worth Facilitators:

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Cotterly, Rita
Dolenz, Billie
Endres, Marjorie
Fulbright, Mary

Appendix B

Brochure

Appendix C
The First DFW Lay Council
March 24, 2007
Tarrant County College, SE Campus

- 8:00** Registration: coffee and pastries are available.
- 8:45** Let us pray together: *Prayer of St. Francis* Kathy Smyth LaMorte
Welcome and Introduction of Speakers
- 9:00** *Rights of the Laity in the Catholic Church* Lena Woltering, *Call To Action*
Rights You Never Knew You Had Sister Kate Kuenstler, PHJC, JCD
- 10:30** Break
- 10:45** Continuation of the Presentation by Lena and Sister Kate
- 12:00** Prayer and Lunch
- 12:30** Topic Tables Discussions – Introduction Joe Sullivan
- 12:45** First Round-Table Discussion
- 1:30** Break
- 1:45** Second Round-Table Discussion
- 2:30** Reports of Round-Table Discussion Groups Martha Walker
- 3:00** Open Floor Discussion of Next Steps for the Lay Council Martha Walker
- 3:30** Voting with the Dots
- 3:45** Open Discussion of Next Steps Kelly Wofford
- 4:00** *The Future of the DFW Lay Council* Kelly Wofford
Closing: Please pray together, *The Lord's Prayer*

Appendix D

Simple Conversations – Guidelines¹

- 1. We acknowledge one another as equals, setting aside judgments, meeting as peers and colleagues.**
- 2. We speak honestly, personally, and with sensitivity to one another.**
- 3. We invite each thought to be shared freely, without debate, correction, or interpretation.**
- 4. We try to remain curious and open-minded about other's points of view, even as we work to identify our own, sometimes hidden assumptions.**
- 5. We listen carefully to each contributor, acknowledging that it is hard work to listen, but well worth the effort.**
- 6. We slow down, taking the time to think and reflect after someone has spoken, instead of immediately filling the space with words.**
- 7. We expect this process to be messy at times, as difficult or challenging thoughts are added to the stew of ideas.**
- 8. We remember that conversation is a natural, time-honored way to think together, strengthen relationships, and address issues.**

¹ Adapted from the work of Margaret J. Wheatley, *Turning to One Another: Simple Conversations to Restore Hope to the Future*. Barrett-Koehler Pub: San Francisco, CA. 2001.

