

## ***Parish Seeks Renewal and Growth***

Article by Jeannette Timmerman published in the *Prairie Messenger* 04/20/2016

### **ST. BONIFACE ARCHDIOCESE**

A lively exchange of ideas, questions, concerns and comments from a packed hall of parishioners followed the presentation of Mary, Mother of the Church's new mission statement and parish renewal and growth initiative at the annual general assembly held April 14, 2016.

Shawnda Muir, chair of the parish pastoral council, introduced the topic and led participants in reciting the Parish Renewal and Growth Prayer which was provided to each person as they entered the hall. Next she had them form small groups to introduce themselves and discuss the question, "What does being a disciple of Jesus look like to you?"

The discussion was followed by feedback from various groups.



Rev. Kevin Bettens, pastor, spoke about the "mission vision" and how the parish council over the past few years had decided to "rethink how we do church." The decision was to change from a "maintenance parish to a missionary parish."

To reach this point, various churches in Winnipeg, Catholic and non-Catholic, were visited, websites looked at, books read, information compiled and discussions held.

*"Love God. Love Others. Reach Out. Build Disciples"* is the new mission statement for the parish.

Bettens, with the aid of a PowerPoint presentation, discussed the aspects that came under each of the four points of the mission statement. Under *Love God* comes prayer, liturgy and worship. Under *Love Others* comes fellowship, community, charity, healing, social justice, and welcoming. *Reach Out* includes evangelization, dialogue, witnessing, inviting, and gathering to discover Christ. *Build Disciples* focuses on faith formation, spiritual renewal, equipping parishioners to do ministry and serve, leadership formation and small groups.

Pierre-Alain Giffard, a member of the parish who is also director of Pastoral Services for the archdiocese, continued the presentation with the explanation of a structure to put the initiative in place. He said without a structure the initiative would remain "just a dream."

He said the two major thrusts were prayer and evangelization. Prayers for the renewal and growth of the parish are needed in order to “go out and reach others” through evangelization.

With prayer and evangelization as a basis, he set out other structural components: hospitality, Sunday experience, building disciples, discernment of gifts, ministries, and leadership formation.

He gave some examples of what could occur in each section. Giffard stressed this would be “a learning process” for everyone.

Muir pointed out that, although as a parish “we have done great things,” we now will focus on building an “awesome church.”

After a break, Muir discussed the next steps in this renewal and growth initiative. She said there was a lot to do to get ready for what she called the fall “hard launch” to the entire parish. The parish website needed to be refreshed and communications put in place.

Muir said the starting emphasis would be on four steps of the program. First, a prayer group would be started as soon as possible to pray for the success of this initiative. Second, education of the parish on evangelization would be undertaken in order for people to be “comfortable with” and understand this aspect. Both she and Bettens stressed it would not be a “knocking on doors” process.

Hospitality and Sunday experience would be the next two steps addressed. After that, the other steps would follow.

Muir said it was hoped that as the parish renewal and growth initiative progressed over the next few years, each parishioner, besides attending weekly mass, would become involved in one additional parish activity.

She also urged people to fill in the feedback sheet, which contained a section of “potential areas you’d be interested in helping.”



Bettens closed the assembly by leading everyone again in prayer.

There is no doubt that the assembly will lead to a lot of conversation over the coming months as parishioners put forth various viewpoints, concerns, and suggestions.

As was pointed out several times, change does not come easily, but there was a general air of optimism throughout the assembly.