

Oct. 23, 1991
St. Odilo Parish
Meeting with Parish Leadership

Present: Jill Gardiner, Ralph Bonaccorsi, McDonagh, Goedert, Jakubowski, Gorman, Cyscon, Mulvihill, Dunleavy, POM

From the parish, the following groups were represented: A & R Society, Scouts, Pastoral Council, School Board, Finance Committee, Parents' Club, Ushers, Music Ministry, Ministry of Care, Eucharistic Ministers, DRE, Youth Ministry.

Again Peter Cyscon led off with prayer and introduced POM, who introduced the panel and the first speaker B. Goedert. Ray gave substantially the same statement as on Tuesday night, then questions were entertained.

First question was from [REDACTED] brother of [REDACTED] priests. Said he was a lieutenant with State Police, member of Pastoral Council. In a way he set the tone for the meeting - positive for the most part with emphasis on avoiding our unhelpful procedures in the future. Later Jill Gardiner was to characterize the meeting as sad rather than angry - though some people were obviously still angry and hurt.

He asked: What will the Diocese do to avoid this kind of fiasco in the future - what are your procedures? He said that the attempt to cover up was an insult and, at least, some people should have had information - both about Mayer's background and when removal took place.

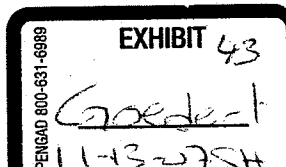
He then asked what we were doing to inform good priests and to shore up their self esteem. We spoke of this meeting, the task forces to be formed, the talk to fourth year seminarians on 10/28 and other initiatives.

[REDACTED] confided to me at the break that he was determined this meeting would be positive yet truthful. He wanted to do what he could to assure something good would come from it.

Another question from an older man: Why did we hear it from the media, from others and not from our own newspaper? Again the issue of silence was spoken to.

Jill Gardiner (wrongly introduced as Gail by POM) then spoke about what happens when this kind of situation happens. She spoke of people's upheaval, of the range of normal reactions. Some of it predictable, some of not so. She went on to validate their reactions. She spoke of emotionality of reactions, the variety of reactions, how this trauma can trigger past traumas in their lives, the volatile nature of people's reactions.

She indicated there would be much ambivalence - especially among leadership. Some people found Mayer a wonderful and helpful person. (This regard for Mayer also surfaced in one-to-ones at the break.) Jill then talked about what could be helpful to the people. She called for people to accept their feelings and the feelings of others. She said information, and plans for moving forward are important. So also prayers, returning to good "business as usual" routines, respect for all varieties of reactions, seeking appropriate help.



Jill concluded reminding people that there was a tremendous power for healing within the Odilo community itself. She told the people they were key people in that healing.

More questions:

One man indicated he himself had been abused and accused wrongly as a younger person. He had sympathy for Mayer and had been almost threatened by a person recently when he was accused of defending "that man" meaning Mayer. He wanted to know if others had been bothered besides the one young man who came forward. Jill explained about the young girl at Tuesday night's meeting and Ray explained about the original accusation that triggered the removal. Ray also mentioned concerns that had surfaced in small groups on the previous night but were not reported out for understandable reasons.

[REDACTED] spoke of how not knowing the circumstances of Mayer's problem and restrictions put her in a very vulnerable spot - especially vis a vis the children. She was controlled but angry and frustrated.

A man on the Finance Committee said that the parish had been hurt by this. People would not come to Church, children would not enter school, the financial picture would be worsened. What would the diocese do to bail out the parish?

Ray Goedert answered that the school is being evaluated and is doing a very good job. It will grow. He said the diocese through the Vicar and Vicar of priests will continue to monitor the parish situation and try to be of help to Peter and leadership until it's no longer necessary.

Someone asked if the parish might be sued. Ray explained that that would not happen. Andy McD. spoke to the feelings he was picking up and he explained how the diocese's ability to deal with situations around sexual abuse is just growing - he used the AA experience of 25 years ago as a paradigm.

In the break, one young man from the youth ministry privately expressed great anger at the group for knocking Mayer. For him, Mayer had been an entry back to the Church. He was angry and said he was through with the Church now. Several of the youth ministry team seemed to share this supportive feeling for Mayer.

After the break, more questions: Any real proof that he was guilty of the charges? We went over them again. How far back do the allegations against Mayer go? Ray explained the 1982 situation.

One woman, obviously emotional and still angry, said that this was the third meeting she had attended and she was still so enraged at the diocese for sending in a man under a mandate without supervision.

Then POM introduced the possibility of informing the rest of the parish. He talked about a letter being read at all Masses this coming weekend from the Cardinal, with the opportunity for further information and feedback afterwards in the school hall. A young man said the Cardinal himself should come out, not B. Gorman. Gorman said we would inform the Cardinal of that sentiment.

Once again [redacted] intervened and said that the Cardinal's coming would occasion a media circus and the primary reason for the meeting - the dispensing of information - would be lost. He suggested Gorman come this weekend, information be given - and then at a later date, the Cardinal should be invited in to give his input. Most of the people found this approach to be acceptable - especially the sympathetic older people. The crowd was not unanimous in this, but seemed to favor it over other options.

One man asked whether help would be available for individual parishioners who had been psychically hurt by what had happened. We assured him it would. An older lady from the A & R table said the Cardinal should tape a message to the people Sunday. Another man suggested a TV program by the Cardinal to the Archdiocese in general, but which would also cover Odilo's problem.

[redacted] said the Cardinal should have a big meeting with all the people invited. Peter Cyscon took an active part in the planning of the next meetings then. He spoke against a big parish meeting - which he had originally favored - on the grounds that people would not be heard.

Another older man said the problem was being exaggerated, the Cardinal shouldn't be involved. The problem was that the P. Bd. had not done their job when surveying the parish and recommending a pastor.

[redacted] recalled an incident years ago when the pastor, C. Skach, had stood before the people and announced he was a recovering alcoholic. The people had cheered him. He encouraged the Cardinal and the diocese to trust the people to respond in a Christian way. "We made it through that crisis; we'll make it through this one." There was general agreement among others.

Women from the A&R Society were volunteered to help with coffee and on the weekend. Leadership was encouraged to be present, to direct people, to explain, to heal.

Peter Cyscon closed the meeting with a short talk in which, in a comfortable and kidding way, he told the people that the Diocese, with all its problems, is demonstrating real care for the people. He extolled the various vicars and priests.

(He did not mention the great work done by the consultants and facilitators from the OCE and elsewhere. The presence of Craddock, Gardner, Bonaccorsi, Guccione, Leone, et al has been an essential ingredient and has kept these meetings from being total disasters!)

It's clear however that Peter has high regard for all who have come to help. He called them his "family" and encouraged the people to trust them. He said the Spirit is at work. Faith, Peter said emotionally, is all about dying and rising - and that's what is happening at St. Odilo. His message was met with approval and applause.

The panel stayed around afterwards and each of us learned more about where people were at. Suggestions were also made to us, some of which have real merit. E.g. an 800 number people could call for information, for help - the number to be posted in the school, in the bulletin.

WHAT ELSE SHOULD BE ADDED TO THIS SUMMARY?