

Fr. John Dillon announced his 2017-2018 Parish Goals to the Pastoral Council at its meeting Oct. 19, unveiling plans to support robust small groups of parishioners who can discuss and nurture their faith in homes; establish a group of parishioners focused on engaging potential new parishioners and those who have left St. Francis; and task the Pastoral Council to coordinate an archdiocesan framework that assesses how our parish is faring in the areas of worship, education, community, service and administration.

In his remarks to the Pastoral Council, Fr. John said he will focus on the following goals in the fiscal year that started July 1 of this year and ends June 30, 2018:

- Developing robust Small Groups, which bring together five to 10 parishioners in homes to discuss their journey, deepen their Catholic faith and support one another in their relationship with Christ. Small Groups began meeting for a fall session the second week of October and include groups of parishioners discussing the upcoming Sunday readings and watching and discussing films on influential people in the Church.
- Establishing and supporting the Neighbor-to-Neighbor Team, a group of parishioners strategizing on how to invite new people moving into the Derwood area to our church and bring back past parishioners who have left
- Launching the archdiocesan Indicators of Vitality process, which is a self-assessment tool that helps pastors and parishioners strategically plan and identify needs for active participation in the mission of New Evangelization, a movement in the wide Catholic Church to fully form disciples of Christ in our Catholic faith.

A fourth goal on a parish facilities plan will be announced in coming weeks.

Pastoral Council member Alicia Church, who is a member of the Archdiocesan Pastoral Council, also briefed her colleagues on several initiatives that the advisory body to Donald Cardinal Wuerl is addressing. Most prominently, the archdiocese is moving forward with plans to honor African-American men, women and children who were enslaved and anonymously buried in archdiocesan and parish cemeteries. The memorials will be placed in all archdiocesan and parish Catholic cemeteries, including Montgomery County-based Gate of Heaven Cemetery in Aspen Hill and All Souls Cemetery in Germantown.

The archdiocese's comprehensive initiative will involve:

- Creating a memorial space or marker to commemorate the presence of African-American men, women and children buried anonymously there when slavery was legal
- Celebrating the creation of the memorial with a liturgical celebration
- Developing a catechetical presentation on the memorial
- Creating an educational/catechetical pamphlet to be available through the cemetery's office

Next steps will include the establishment of a committee to identify dates for a liturgical celebration and the development of draft language for review.

In other archdiocesan business, Church said a Special Education Taskforce is working on a special education curriculum to be used in all Catholic schools across the Archdiocese of Washington. Church

said the development of the curriculum would help support Catholic schools, which want to continue educating students with special needs seeking a Catholic education. Currently, 932 children with identified special needs attend 39 archdiocesan Catholic schools, representing about 9 percent of the archdiocese's Catholic school population. This compares with the national average of students with special needs comprising 13 percent of the entire student population nationwide.

Church also briefed her colleagues on the archdiocesan Hispanic Enrollment Advisory Group, which is studying ways to engage Latino parents and children across the archdiocese, parishes and schools. In addition, she reported that the renovation of the dome at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington DC is completed and that an unveiling will be planned.

In other parish business, the Pastoral Council heard reports on work from the Health Ministry, Religious Education Ministry and Haiti Committee. Deacon Dan Finn also updated the council on the recent meetings of:

- the Neighbor-to -Neighbor Team, which hopes to send out postcards detailing Christmas-related events and activities at St. Francis to people who have recently moved into areas around Derwood
- the Small Groups Ministry, which is preparing to launch a new session after Christmas
- the status of the Offertory Stewardship Appeal, which launches Nov. 19 on Stewardship Sunday

The Pastoral Council also discussed the cancellation of the Pastoral Council election for new members, previously scheduled Nov. 4 and 5 in the church. Because two candidates removed themselves from contention, Fr. John chose to appoint seven new members to the body that advises the pastor of our local church. These new members will begin their three-year term on Jan. 1, 2018 and are:

- Justin Fitzgerald
- Charles Gichohi
- Mark Harang
- Daniel Koscinski
- Bernard McGuire Jr.
- Alec Niedermaier
- Travis Tomon

It also discussed themes for the Volunteer Appreciation Dance, which is scheduled for February 10, 2018. The council is recommending a theme of Mardi Gras to Special Events Coordinator Sylvia Jones.

The following members of the Pastoral Council attended the Oct. 19 meeting: Fr. John Dillon, Alicia Church, Deacon Dan Finn, Arleen Hall, Anton Handano, Anne Pierre, Vincent Price, John Vilgos and Miguel Welanetz. Communications Coordinator Melissa Egan also staffed the meeting.

For more information about the Pastoral Council and its work, e-mail asktheppc@gmail.com.

