

Father Mele's End Game Report to Pastoral Council in November 2019

I have been asked to present to you a report this evening that lays out for you what I believe is the end game for us and our parishioners. I am happy to attempt this although I feel a little like Oprah in the story she tells before she became a television talk show host. Oprah was fired from a job she loved and it caused her to revisit the trauma and dangerous memories she experienced as a child. She had to fight every day during that state of her life but later went on to host her own talk show that ran for 25 seasons. Now she has a net worth of \$2.7 billion.

We all hear stories like the one about Beethoven who started losing his hearing at age 26 but kept composing. He composed the famous Ninth Symphony when he was almost completely deaf, and it is now one of the most performed symphonies in the world.

I mention these stories as I prepare to tell you what I see as the end game of our work as leaders in this Grouping because I believe the obstacles we face are pretty much as serious and discouraging as those faced by Oprah and Beethoven. They became people numbered among the heroic and winners because they understood that winners don't win because they face fewer obstacles, They win because they find ways to overcome the obstacles that get in their way.

Our problems ahead are major. We would be kidding ourselves if we thought otherwise. We know all the statistics. One in three people raised Catholic holds on to the faith today. Most Catholics, two thirds of our membership, mistrust our leaders; the most recent reports tell us that is applied to mistrust for clergy, especially Bishops, but these updated reports are indicating Catholics mistrust lay leaders in almost the same proportions. As soon as a layperson takes on a leadership role even in a local parish, many people mistrust them as having ulterior motives.

- A closer look at the local level of being Church tells us our children and young people hate their religious education programs. Finding volunteers to run them becomes more difficult every year.
- Most parishioners have no youth ministry, teenagers and young adults are no-shows at church.
- A line-up of rotating priest-celebrants guarantees an uneven quality of preaching and sometimes, in many places, conflicting messages.
- Weekend Masses are reported universally as “depressing” so people attend only because they feel they have to hang in while they hope for improvements.
- Many staffs are stretched beyond what is reasonable so parishioners see them as inept and start treating them strictly as employees and relating to them as they would employees at a store or service station.
- The list goes on.

I don't think I fall into the category of Oprah or Beethoven as I deliver this presentation, but I hope we get the picture. My point is the end game, whatever it might be at this point in our grouping, is that we not only have to solve problems as we move forward, we are going to have to pick up new ideas, create deeper relationships and much wider ones and, together, learn skills

that maybe some of you have to teach us if we are going to be effective leaders in this moment of time.

As bleak as the picture is, I still think we can do it.

Although I try not to look too far into the future, if I were to describe what I see as the end game, it is this: We will become one parish. We will be more vibrant and more loving and even more human than we have become at this time in society and in the Church. I also believe although it is going to be difficult and it will require a lot of effort, it won't always take this much effort. It won't always be so confusing. Part of the end game depends on us to keep going. No one quits until we finish and that is when we start growing disciples again and not just any kind of disciples. We have to grow disciples and influence parishes (and maybe even other denominations) around us to do the same.

What is the timeline that I am advocating so we can get on with this work? We are currently in the diocesan timeline of being established as a new parish by 2022. I am asking us to work hard enough to petition becoming a new parish by July 2020 and being established as a parish by July of 2021, no later.

That will require a lot for us to accomplish before we can petition for this to happen.

I will rely on you to keep studying the Blueprints. They lay out step by step what we need to do. I believe we can easily do what the Blueprints require. The hard part is bringing forth the inner conversion that will make the biggest difference. Anyone can fulfill what the Blueprints require. Changing the hearts of our people will be the distinguishing quality that will make us different from all the other groupings and new parishes.

What have we done so far to get us there:

- We are working hard in securing and hiring a staff that share the vision and understand the mission of helping us become one, vibrant parish in order to grow disciples. We have hired some of the most competent ecclesial ministers I know. I am sure you are getting to know them. They all have the spirit of Vatican Council II, they are trained to respect and value laypeople like themselves, they trust our clergy team, and they are equipped to collaborate with clergy while naming and challenging what needs to be addressed.
- We have already moved to combine all financial data between parishes into one system. For example, staff is able to access information from both parishes. We can record all financial activity on one system. We will soon have both parishes on the same envelope schedule. We plan to eliminate many of the envelopes that have outgrown the need for that collection as well as prioritize what programs deserve the most emphasis; namely the regular offertory collection. Having one professional business manager has reaped results that will bear fruits for many years to come already.
- I will soon be coming to you for your advice on how we will use buildings at both campuses. Where will our clergy live? Where do you believe all our administrative offices should be located? We obviously cannot afford two separate locations for both. What will we determine as the purpose of all the other buildings? There will be two

churches for worship. Make no mistake of that. How we use all the other facilities will be agendas for discussion in the very near future.

These will be hard, difficult decisions. But we have to face them sooner than later. I recommend we come to a resolution by spring at the very latest with the new arrangement operative by May or June at the latest.

I have been asked finally to touch upon the key areas I see for you as my council:

I will simply mention them at this time:

1. Complete the requirements of the Blueprints by May 2020.
2. Design a strategic plan that will guide the new parish for at least the first three years. This plan needs to be presented to our people for their input and buy in before the end of next summer.
3. Motivate people to build lasting and life-giving relationships by, first of all, living that out and doing the same in this room.
4. Create dynamic ways for our people to follow us in advancing the Kingdom of God by recognizing God's call to serve both our parish and beyond: in our city, even our country and in some real way our world. I will rely on you to value that challenge in a way where no one will be excluded and will honor the richness of diversity in every stratum of our neighborhoods.