



DIVINE GRACE PARISH

Pastoral Council Meeting Minutes

March 13, 2025

St. Gregory Library - 6:30p.m.

The meeting was called to order at 6:37 p.m. by Father Jim, who opened the meeting with a prayer.

Attendees:

Father Jim, Laura Dadey, Judy Shearer, Tim Maloney, Valerie Bucek, Beth Markovitz, Shalini Savio, Patric Savio, and Joyce Gaydosz.

Laura motioned to approve the minutes from the February meeting, Beth Markovitz seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

1) Presentation by Jason Gawaldo— Summary of his new position & update on faith formation opportunities

- Jason accepted a new position within the parish. Jason is the new Director of Evangelization & Catechetical Ministries.
- There are 355 new homes being purchased monthly in our parish area. To welcome newcomers, the parish has partnered with a third-party service that sends out postcards at a cost of \$0.69 per piece. These postcards include a welcome message from Father Jim and the parish website link. Postcards will be mailed to 10 zip codes.
- Lenten postcards were sent to all parishioners, providing details on Mass and service times during the Lenten season.
- Jason is exploring the idea of launching a parish magazine, which may feature parish families, ministries, and events, aiming to connect with both registered parishioners and those outside the parish. The goal is to reach out to families and individuals beyond our registered parishioners in efforts to evangelize.
- A new initiative targets families 11 months after baptism, sending postcards with anniversary celebration suggestions and directing families to the parish website for more information.
- Efforts to send out postcards for wedding anniversaries for couples that got married at our parish.
- The parish has welcomed 60 new Catholics since July 1, 2022. The new website will feature a section for those interested in becoming Catholic, titled “How to Become Catholic.”



DIVINE GRACE PARISH

- The procedures at the parish office are being refined, and a new shared document has been implemented for both the clergy and parish staff. This will ensure that everyone is aligned and has the necessary information for each parishioner.
- Jason is working with the parish's evangelization committees to ensure consistent messaging.
- A feedback email was sent to attendees of Scott Hahn's recent event.
- Chris Stefanick will be speaking at St. Ferdinand on September 10, 2025, with a PR team organizing the event.
- Joyce suggested hosting social hours after Masses this summer to build community among parishioners.
- The parish is planning multiple social events for parishioners and non-parishioners to attend including the Easter Egg Hunt, Mother Daughter Teatime, Family Field Day, Summer Story Time, and parish festival.
- Laura proposed offering talks for married couples, such as the diocese's "Renew the I Do" program.
- Focus on welcoming people at every mass.

3) Father Jim's General Updates

- The local township is considering purchasing the 10-acre ballfield for a \$50 million activity center. The property, donated to the parish by a St. Ferdinand's parishioner, incurs high upkeep costs and is rarely used. Father Jim plans to hold a town hall meeting to discuss the pros and cons of selling the land.
- The sale of the St. Agatha property is currently on hold due to a last-minute assessment by the Lawrence County Property Office, which values the property at \$1.1 million, far above the agreed sale price of \$195,000. The parish is appealing this assessment.
- The Finance Council has approved a preliminary assessment for the sale of Ritzert Hall. Due to annual losses of \$20,000-\$25,000 in maintenance costs, Father Jim will hold a town hall for Evans City residents.
- Latino Ministry – The bishop is collaborating with the bishop in Mexico to bring two Spanish-speaking priests to our diocese. There is a significant need for a Spanish-speaking priest in Cranberry, and our parish may be asked to house one of these priests. The possibility of offering a Sunday afternoon Spanish Mass is being considered, with plans to eventually establish a Latino ministry within the diocese.
- Sacramental Preparation: Approximately 110 children will receive First Communion in three separate ceremonies, and 100 will be confirmed on May 31, 2025, by Bishop Zubik. Erick, the seminarian, will be ordained a Deacon in June, with the hope that he will serve at our parish.
- Census Database: Rose has begun cleaning up the parish's census database.
- Flocknotes: Approximately 5,000 parishioners receive the weekly Flocknotes email, which is sent every Saturday.



DIVINE GRACE PARISH

- Fish Dinners have been a great success and are fostering community building.
- Zelienople Open Market will be starting soon, the parish will have a table at the weekly market every Thursday. Divine Grace will also participate in the 4th of July Festival in Ellwood City, and CTCC Community Days.
- Next Generation Survey: A follow-up survey will be conducted in spring 2026 to compare results from the fall 2022 survey. Father Jim asked if the Pastoral Council could distribute an informal survey to gauge the parish's progress.

4) Pastoral Council Survey distribution and instructions Surveys will be collected and data reviewed at April meeting

- Laura has created an informal survey focusing on the three priorities from the Next Generation initiative and parish welcoming and communication.
- Each Pastoral Council member is asked to collect up to 10 anonymous surveys from parishioners.
- The surveys should be submitted by April 10, 2025.
- In the April meeting, the survey results will be reviewed, and a summary will be created for each priority.

4) Discussion of the “Church Welcoming” Document from Bishop Zubik

- The Council discussed ways to improve the welcoming atmosphere within the parish, focusing on how clergy, staff, and parishioners can all contribute to a more inviting environment. Ideas included:
 - The Parish office should have a friendly and consistent intercom greeting to welcome visitors and ensure they feel comfortable upon entering. Additionally, there is an emphasis on fostering pleasant, personal interactions at the parish office, ensuring that all visitors and parishioners feel valued and welcomed in person.
 - There is a need to improve the process for booking Mass intentions. A more streamlined and efficient system to ensure that parishioners can easily schedule Mass intentions for all three churches.
 - The Divine Grace Parish Ushers are a welcoming and friendly presence, serving as a great face of our parish.
 - Regular parishioners should make an effort to be friendly and inviting to newcomers.
 - The clergy could make an effort to be more personable during Mass, as well as before and after services. Taking time to engage with parishioners in a friendly and approachable manner would



DIVINE GRACE PARISH

help build stronger connections and create a more welcoming atmosphere within the parish community.

- Laura suggested adding a short blurb to the bulletin with the question, "How are you helping to make our parish welcoming?" The blurb could include simple ideas like:
 - Do you greet the people around you?
 - Do you sit in the center to create space for others?
 - Do you make an effort to introduce yourself to newcomers?
- Focus on welcoming young families with children, encouraging them to attend Mass even if their kids act out. The message would be that their presence is important and appreciated, and families should feel supported, not judged, regardless of their children's behavior. This could help create a more inclusive and understanding environment for families at church.
- Conutnie to host community and social events.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:25pm with a "Our Father" as the closing prayer. The next Pastoral Council meeting will be held on Thursday, April 10.