

## The Pastor's Column - September 7th, 2023



Happy New (School) Year! Fall is here. The city is coming back to life and, yes, there is work to be done! For example:

How do you bring a parish in New York City back together after Covid? The answer is: you don't. The parish community as we knew it before March 2020 no longer exists. Many of our parishioners left the city; some went to the Lord; folks who worked in midtown and came to daily mass now work remotely; some no longer come to Church for reasons known and unknown; new people have become members of our church, some from other parishes, others new to town; and there is a whole new community of people who join us virtually for Mass who live near and far. St. Paul's has always been a constantly changing parish, but with Covid, that normal cycle of change has been upended. We are different.

Perhaps the better question to ask is: "Who are we now?" and "How can St. Paul's be a sign of God's love for all people today?" **These questions can only be answered with a great deal of prayer, discernment, and collaborative dialogue. The times call us to reconstitute a Parish Council so we can hear the many voices of our faith community, and properly discern and respond to Jesus' call to love God and neighbor.** We also need to determine what the pastoral needs and priorities are at

this moment (and how to pay for them).

How do we restart the parish council? Slowly and deliberately. Let's take our time, inviting everyone to the table to affirm the good, acknowledge the needs, and challenge the status quo. In early October, representatives of all our ministries, committees, outreaches, Masses will be called together for an initial dialogue on parish life. That will be followed by a Town Hall Meeting open to everyone in the parish. From those two gatherings a small group will be tasked to take what was heard and create an agenda and a road map for a new parish council. It would be great if we could have a council installed by Pentecost 2024, if not sooner.

Of course, there will be bumps along the way. While all voices will be heard, not every good idea can be implemented. There will be differences of opinions, but hopefully there will be consensus on common goals. Through it all, with the help of the Holy Spirit, this new group will help our parish come together in a new way to address the pastoral needs of our community and equip us to be Good News to all who enter our doors.

For now, I ask you to take a moment and pray for our parish asking the Holy Spirit to guide us as we begin this exciting new chapter!

God Bless,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Fr. Eric".

Rev. Fr. Eric Andrews, CSP  
*Pastor, Church of St. Paul the Apostle (NYC)*