

50 Year Summary

2019 – Summary of Pax from Vincent Cushing OFM

17th b/f 105
- providing information
- cc will/w/d/vince (list serve)

PAX 50th Anniversary

Part One: The Founding Years

1969: A Year of Creativity for PAX

Certainly the (1960s was) a time of national and international tumult: war, riots, assassinations, educational uprising, theological creativity, major disputes about family planning, (as well as) imaginative understanding of what a congregation can be.

The year 1969 was a time of healing and building within the Catholic community. PAX, with the hearty encouragement of St. Luke's, began putting down roots for a new understanding of what a congregation could be. Built upon desire for a deeper sense of congregational life, coupled with the Spirit-filled wisdom of a new understanding of church from Vatican II, a group of parishioners from St. Luke's enthusiastically began fashioning a parish Mass that took into account the desires and creativity of many parishioners. At first, this was a parish effort, blessed by a pastor who keenly encouraged the interested parish members to design a new congregational structure for worship and a deeper role for the laity in design and decision making.

Gradually, key elements began to emerge: a sense of community, a strong emphasis on the quality of worship, a new role for laity as active participants in understanding what a parish can be, while all the time maintaining a cordial relationship with the local parish and the Diocese of (Richmond).

In the face of personnel change at St. Luke's, by the late 1970s, it became apparent that PAX needed an autonomous expression of its own inner dynamic of community and worship. To that end it sought a suitable external site for worship and community life. With that, PAX grew into an Intentional Eucharistic Community incarnated in a new design of what a congregation could be while maintaining a cordial relationship with the (new) Diocese of Arlington. This led to a community that of its own genius came up with a new and different design for a congregation of Christian families. The poetry of today's first reading well describes what took place.

(Isaiah 60: 1-6)

"Arise, shine, for your light has come,
and the glory of the LORD rises upon you.
²See, darkness covers the earth
and thick darkness is over the peoples,
but the LORD rises upon you
and his glory appears over you.
³Nations will come to your light,
and kings to the brightness of your dawn.
⁴"Lift up your eyes and look about you:
All assemble and come to you;
your sons come from afar,

and your daughters are carried on the hip.
⁵Then you will look and be radiant,
your heart will throb and swell with joy;
the wealth on the seas will be brought to you,
to you the riches of the nations will come.
⁶Herds of camels will cover your land,
young camels of Midian and Ephah.
And all from Sheba will come,
bearing gold and incense
and proclaiming the praise of the LORD.

Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, a congregation assumed its own best expression of a new design. Key elements of that design have guided PAX right to this very day, yes for 50 years! They are these:

- Worship and preaching built on sound liturgy and informed study;
- A vibrant and warm sense of community life, in which all members are equal, with each having voice and vote;
- A deeper sense of the role of laity in congregational life and design;
- Transparency in governance and finances;
- Awareness of and support for selected issues of social justice.

(Joe Nangle now speaks to his experience of extended pastoral ministry in the PAX Community.)

Part Two: Events of the Present Time

What are the issues for the future? I suggest only two: The PAX Community and the crisis within western Catholicism.

PAX is a community of vision and joy. It has a legacy of creative thinking and lively worship, founded on a deep sense of Christian community. PAX is too valuable to lose and it needs to address in the immediate future how it will bequeath this ecclesial treasure to a future generation. PAX needs to make some major changes if it is to survive. There do not seem to be problems basic to its internal life and manner of being, but the issue of declining membership and the ongoing

aging of PAX requires immediate action. PAX is an excellent model of how a church should function, but it will face hurdles in trying to forge a future.

To that end I recommend that PAX assemble what I label a 'Committee for Survival'.

The task of that committee entails the following:

1. A critical analysis of PAX' declining membership, both in regard to declining numbers and a current community that is increasingly facing the issue of aging.
2. A look at issues of finances and current site for the future of PAX.
3. (A recognition of) its lack of racial and ethnic diversity and engage in new efforts to expand membership taking into account.
4. A concrete program of advertising and Facebook presence in selected areas that would invite new and younger membership from all economic classes.

(The committee shall:)

- Consist of eight to twelve members, with at least one quarter of membership (from) outside talents in Facebook and advertising.
- Equally represent women and men of varying ages.
- Report monthly to PAX as a whole and complete its analysis and recommendations by September 1, 2019.

The current situation in western Catholicism is one of crisis and possible collapse of key administrative structures such as the role of bishops, the selection of candidates for ordained ministry, the admission of married persons to the ordained ministry of the Church, (and the) significant need for transparency in finance and governance. PAX brings to the institutional Church a model it should seriously embrace but, given the sclerosis in the structures of the Church, (such) will be quite difficult to negotiate. PAX is too good to lose, but the challenge facing you remains quite demanding.

Call upon your talent and devotion to the Holy Spirit to share your gift to this broken Church.

(Remarks offered by Harry Vincent Cushing, OFM, January 6, 2019 at PAX in McLean, VA)