

LEAD

at St Matthew, 5401 Loch Raven Blvd, Baltimore 21239

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender (LGBT)
Educating and
Affirming
Diversity

LEAD is Church

- ... A connection for people who feel disconnected**
- ... A conversation place for people who don't know where to go to talk about gay issues in the church**
- ... A spiritual home for those who are seeking one**
- ... A welcome center for gay and lesbian people who are seeking a welcoming community.**

Following a presentation by New Ways Ministry (NWM) at a summer picnic to explain the introduction of same-sex marriage legislation in the State of Maryland, Carolyn Scheide, the questioner and mother of a lesbian daughter and gay son, asked what are we to do? There was silence among the 40-50 guests. After that pregnant pause, Dick Ullrich who was seated next to Carolyn raised his hand and asked the pastor, Father Joe Muth, who at the time was on the Board of NWM, if we could have a meeting in the Fall to answer Carolyn's question. "Sure!", was his quick and firm reply.

In October 2010, we invited folks to a meeting in the Rectory dining room to explore an answer to the questions what can we do and how can we help? Along with the pastor who has been with us every step of the way we had 7-8 people some from the picnic and some invited leaders from the parish.

In order to help us identify our own purpose and direction, we invited Ann McDonald from St Bernadette Parish in Severna Park,

MD to share with us their very successful program RECLAIM. We also got more input from NWM through Matt Myers and Ryan and Joan Sattler, who began an LGBT program at their former parish in York, PA. Individuals around the table also had experiences and information to share.

We then took up the work of developing our vision/mission statement. We met regularly over the next nine months and each time we were very intentional about inviting more people to join us at the table. St Matthew is a very diverse congregation: racially, culturally, and theologically. We have tried to incorporate that diversity in LEAD. A particular challenge is the African culture and naturally those who have a more conservative or traditional religious formation.

One key experience we all learned early on was that at each gathering we would very intentionally take time to introduce ourselves and create a trusting atmosphere for us to share our stories. We always had more than one new person around the table or in the room and, sure enough, we were profoundly blessed with moving, sometimes painful, sharing. More than once our pastor would confirm that this ministry with and for each other was 'saving lives'.

In March we devoted our meeting to a SWOT analysis; that is, we looked at our Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats. This exercise gave us some real perspective and practical expectations.

Once we had settled on our vision/mission statement and determined our handle - LEAD - several of us met with the Pastoral Council and Staff. The Pastoral Council was particularly affirming, provided helpful advice and we gained new members for our meetings.

In May 2011 we published the vision/mission statement in the Church bulletin and invited parishioners for refreshments and conversation in the Rectory dining room following each Mass. We were delighted to have a full room each time and the opportunity

to hear stories from parishioners. We received affirmation and began to build a contact list.

In addition to our monthly meeting in June, nine of us attended a program at St Joseph Parish in Sykesville, MD presented by the Marianist Social Justice Collaborative. This program was entitled *Everyone at the Table*. We found this experience to be so enriching and valuable that we decided that day to present it at St Matthew. We did this in February 2012.

Father Joe Muth, our pastor, met with Archbishop Edwin O'Brien about his membership on the Board of NWM. The night before his meeting with the Archbishop several of us gathered with Father Joe to pray and anoint him for the Holy Spirit to be with him and the Archbishop. Father Joe shared with the Archbishop not only an information packet about NWM and LEAD but also importantly his personal and pastoral experience of ministry with the LGBT community, and how that ministry was indeed life-saving. Father Joe did resign from the board but maintains his pastoral work with NWM. In addition, the Archbishop has agreed to visit St Matthew and meet the parishioners.

To observe the Tenth Anniversary of 9/11 we showed the film *Saint of 9/11* after each mass with refreshments. This is the story of Father Mychal Judge, the New York Fire Department chaplain who was the first recorded death at the World Trade Centers. Each showing had full attendance. In fact it was so well received that we were asked to show it again later in the month. People were deeply moved and had high praise for LEAD in bringing this to the parish. For the three weekends prior to 9/11/2011 we had a special bulletin insert with information about the film and a different message each Sunday. In addition there were spoken announcements at the liturgies. From these announcements and gatherings we gained more contacts and members for our monthly meetings.

Later in the month of September, six of us took the bus to New York City to attend the first session *Learning to Listen: Voices of Sexual Diversity and the Catholic Church* at Fordham University.

We gained valuable knowledge, resources, and more contacts. At the same time, Ryan and Joan Sattler were attending a workshop presented by New Ways Ministry out of which they developed a Pastoral Plan. They presented this plan to LEAD. We reviewed, modified, and adopted it in December 2011.

In February 2012 we presented *Everyone Around the Table* mentioned earlier. This session, with 40+ participants, was led by a young married parishioner. He shared, for the first time, with the attendees, including his parents, a story from his youth. At 10 years of age, he encountered homophobic prejudice from his closest cousin. This cousin treated him as if he was gay himself. He was stunned at the time, and now, as he has reflected on that experience in his youth, he can appreciate how such occurrences can influence one's attitudes and perceptions of gays and lesbians.

We conducted another SWOT analysis and then used it along with our vision/mission statement for a day-long retreat.

Out of that experience, we formed working committees: Education, Network/Outreach, and Marriage Equality.

Through our Marriage Equality committee we held a workshop for 50+ at Goucher College in June to strategize how to make our Catholic voice heard IN FAVOR OF marriage equality which had been directly opposed by the Archbishop. We planned a Voter Education night to present the law, hear the position of the Maryland Catholic Conference and a mother with an adult gay son. Our pastor scheduled a meeting with the new archbishop, William Lori. Before that meeting could happen, the Urban Vicar, Bishop Denis Madden called the pastor and asked that the event not be held.

As a result of that conversation and a very reluctant decision to cancel the event, Bishop Madden agreed to begin a dialogue with LEAD. We had our first meeting on September 16th. This was the regular monthly LEAD meeting and was attended by 28 persons. The bishop listened as we each introduced ourselves and shared

our stories and our dreams. This, again, proved to be an enriching, diverse and pointed sharing. Some of the strongest questions and comments came from an aunt, mother, and parent of LGBT children. An hour and half of discussion did not produce anything new from the bishop except a commitment to continue the dialogue which we will do on December 1st.

Father Joe did have the meeting he requested with Archbishop Lori at which time he shared the information about LEAD and an invitation to visit St Matthew. The Archbishop agreed to visit in the Spring when he would have sufficient time to spend with the parishioners. As we did prior to his meeting with Archbishop O'Brien, we gathered to pray with and anoint Father Joe prior to his meeting with Archbishop Lori. We were all very anxious and concerned about the meeting based on reports about the new Archbishop's reputation and his stance on same-sex marriage.

The encounter proved to be nothing that we were anticipating. The Archbishop's manner was pleasant, open, and accepting of the LGBT ministry at St Matthew. We held a Prayer of Thanksgiving with Father Joe and heard from him the details of the meeting.

In addition to our weekly 'phone bank' our work on marriage equality has included distribution of buttons, lawn signs, T shirts, bookmark prayer, letters to the editor of local papers, bumper stickers, and pledge sheets for Catholics to sign for inclusion in newspaper ads. We also have identified other Catholic pastors to visit to talk with them about LGBT presence in their parish and the marriage equality referendum.

Another member, Richard Cook, spent considerable time and effort trying to energize the LGBT student groups, administrators, and faculty on local, especially Catholic, college campuses with less than hoped for success.

Within the parish we are finding opportunities to work with or cosponsor events or activities. We were asked by the Fundraising Committee to help plan and put on the first-time Halloween Bash;

we were invited by the Social Concerns Ministry to participate in the weekend observance of Election 2012 for the Common Good. We were invited to make presentation to the Cross Cultural Team and the Men's Fellowship. We also volunteer to prepare casseroles for Our Daily Bread soup kitchen once a month.

We try to find opportunities to socialize and welcome new members with bagels and coffee after the 11am liturgy at a nearby shop, or movies, or music events, new pizza café, bar, or restaurant. We have built a church community. One regular married couple from another parish commented that she never experienced such a spiritual 'committee'. We are also rotating our monthly meeting: sometimes on the third weekend after the 5:00pm liturgy on Saturday and other times after the 11:00am Sunday liturgy. This enables us to accommodate parishioners who have work schedule conflicts or who have mass time preferences.

We are very conscious of our challenge to find ways and meaningful opportunities to have conversations with members of other cultures and ethnicities particularly the African members from Kenya, Nigeria, and South Sudan.

Several LEAD members attended Call to Action last year in Milwaukee. This was a refreshing experience for a number of us and we plan to attend CTA this year in Louisville. We have been affirmed and supported in our efforts and greatly enriched by the program and those whom we have met. LEAD is and has been BLESSED:

- ❖ A leadership of LGBT, straight, and professed religious of St Matthew
- ❖ Support, affirmation, and presence of our pastor
- ❖ Intentional, personal invitations to others to join our meetings - Come and See!
- ❖ Each meeting begins with sharing in a trusting and caring atmosphere
- ❖ Broad acceptance of responsibility and cooperation in LEAD and the parish
- ❖ Generous financial support from LEAD members

- ❖ Outreach to other parishes, colleges, and allies
- ❖ Development of resources and education for ourselves and the parish
- ❖ Strong faith-based spirituality

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