

Some Thoughts about the Importance of Coffee Hour from Fr. Marc and the Parish Council

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Fr. Marc was recently asked by the Parish Council to share some thoughts on “Sunday Coffee Hour” and why it matters. These thoughts were subsequently discussed and expanded to include the Parish Council’s thoughts also. We want to share these thoughts with all the beloved and faithful members of our Parish.

Purpose

To begin, Coffee Hour provides a helpful refreshment after the Divine Liturgy, especially since those who receive Holy Communion have been fasting since waking. This practical benefit is important, and yet Coffee Hour serves an even greater purpose too: It helps build community within our parish. Coffee Hour gives us a regular opportunity to connect with one another, catch up, and strengthen relationships. It also offers visitors a chance to meet parish members in a welcoming and informal setting. In all of these ways, Coffee Hour helps us live out our shared life in Christ and strengthens our parish community.

Here’s a Problem

For many years at St. John’s, we have organized Coffee Hour by dividing parish families into four groups. Each group is assigned one Sunday per month to provide food and assist with setup and cleanup. In addition, two (or three) families are designated each Sunday to “host” and ensure that Coffee Hour runs smoothly. Recently, however, we have encountered some challenges that have caused a disproportionate amount of the work to fall on the host families.

There appear to be two related issues. First, when a small number of families are asked to host frequently, the responsibility becomes burdensome. Second, when families assigned to bring food do not bring items or leave before cleanup, the workload increases significantly for the hosts. This situation becomes even more difficult when some parishioners say they do not attend Coffee Hour and therefore do not wish to participate in hosting. Over time, this causes the responsibility to fall on fewer and fewer families.

It is helpful to remember that hospitality is central to our Christian life, and we have named hospitality as one of our parish’s core values: *“At Saint John’s we want to receive all visitors with a warm welcome, sharing the love of Christ by serving both our members and guests alike.”* Coffee Hour is one of the ways we live out this calling.

Here’s Some Solutions

With that in mind, we have considered the following approaches to address these concerns:

1. Expanding the number of host families

Looking at our parish phone list and considering regular attendance and physical ability, it is possible to identify nearly 90 families who could reasonably take on the role of “hosting”

Coffee Hour. This number grows more if you include our catechumens. If two families host each Sunday, this would mean hosting approximately once every six months. While some may not regularly attend Coffee Hour, hosting can still be a meaningful way to serve others and support parish life.

Moving forward, we think it is best to include all these families in the hosting assignments. For Coffee Hour to remain sustainable and fair, everyone who is physically able will be expected to participate when scheduled. If someone is truly unable to serve in this way due to physical limitations, they can contact **Jennifer Gillquist** to have their name removed from the hosting list. This will allow us to be compassionate and consistent, while also ensuring responsibilities are shared equitably.

2. Sharing responsibility for cleanup and food

Families assigned to bring food for a Sunday also need to assist with cleanup. To help us remember this, it would be appropriate after the Coffee Hour prayer to thank the host families and kindly remind those assigned to bring food that their help with cleanup is needed that day. We will also post in a conspicuous place in the basement a list of routine tasks involved in setup and cleanup, along with the current schedule for hosting families.

3. Last Thoughts

- a. If you are scheduled to host and are unable to do so for some reason, please take the initiative to trade with another family for another Sunday or ask someone to take your place. Finding your replacement is no one else's responsibility.
- b. Children are welcome at coffee hour and enjoy it just as much as the adults. They should not run or wrestle in the basement at this time as it is too crowded. The main instruction that should be given to them regarding the food tables is simply not to take more food than they should so there will be plenty for others. While anyone present can kindly remind them of these two expectations, any further direction would be the responsibility of their parents. If parents are helping cleanup, for example, they can encourage their own children to help that day.
- c. The priest or deacon saying the prayer of blessing the food will help reinforce the things by a simple comment after the prayer, before inviting people to take food.

Summary

The challenges we face stem from two issues: inconsistent participation from families assigned to assist, and too few families hosting too frequently. By sharing responsibility more evenly and supporting one another, we can preserve Coffee Hour as a joyful, welcoming, and sustainable part of our parish life.

Thank you for your continued love, service, and commitment to our parish community.