

PINE BARRENS FESTIVAL (PBF) – Holy Eucharist’s response to concerns

Doesn’t the PBF make a difference in the life of the parish?

The major pro of the Festival was the tradition it wove into our surrounding community as people gathered year after year. In addition, it did accomplish what it was intended originally for – to pay off our first mortgage. For these two things, we are forever grateful. With that being said, the planning for the Festival distracted our focus from the mission of the Church for quite some time. As pastor of this Church, Father Andrew’s responsibility is to distribute how the staff, leaders and volunteer ministers of the Church best engage their energy for the mission of the Church. The festival was fun, and, during many years, it brought great revenue for the Parish, but overall, it was not helpful in serving the mission of the Church. Yes, to some extent, the parish should be a social hub for the community and that’s good. But what’s not good is expending our resources on events that are secondary to our mission.

What is the background to discontinuing the Festival?

The topic of the Pine Barrens Festival and what it brought to the mission of the Church, or how it distracted from the mission of the Church, has been a debatable topic within leadership for a few years now. While it was a traditional event that brought community together for entertainment for a few days (a huge pro to the Festival), it wasn’t serving the needs of our community beyond entertainment nor was it growing disciples. In addition, the planning of the event took an average of six months of preparation and planning...often taking with it summer vacation time of the volunteers and more. While it did bring in some monetary support (a number that was often affected by the weather), year after year the load of planning and gathering volunteers took away from the day-to-day focus and energy from the vision of building God’s Kingdom.

If the masking mandate and social distancing requirements have been lifted, why can’t there be a Festival this year?

While the debate of ending the Festival was taking place before the pandemic, the pandemic opened our eyes to the real distraction that the planning of the Festival took from our mission of the Church. This past year, we have been able to focus on and have been blessed with community support with efforts such as Christmas in July, a gifting event for New Lisbon, Cathedral Kitchen in Camden, the Living Nativity and much more. We’ve had the opportunity to dig up our foundation in how we did things before the pandemic and lay out a new vision that we’ve only been able to dream of in the past because we just didn’t have the time or energy with the Festival. This year proved even more that our energy needed to be distributed elsewhere, supporting our mission – to Follow Christ, Love all, and Grow Disciples.

PBF was a fun, community building event. Are we going to have opportunities to get together as a community?

Absolutely! The Church is meant to be a communal place to gather and bring our parishioners, visitors and community together. We have an annual Trunk or Treat, Easter Egg Hunt, Parish Feast Day celebration, Community Outreach Service Projects but the Festival might’ve overshadowed some of these events, and we’re excited to build more opportunities (Movie Night, Fall Fest, new Community Service Projects and so on). Truth be told though, we might never attain the numbers of a community gathering event like the festival...but we can build Church gathering events that grow our mission, God’s Kingdom and affect people beyond what the Festival ever did. Our efforts should always move to affect the community in a positive way, and sometimes those efforts won’t necessarily be recognized.

If you are expecting the parish to be self-sustaining, are you expecting me to make up the difference of not having a festival?

Not necessarily only “you”, but the Church as a whole. The “giving of Treasure” step of discipleship is often the most difficult to prioritize due to our culture, but it is our job as Church to help cultivate this step. As a Church, we prioritize our giving to the Church not because the Church and God “want your money”, but because our gifts, treasure, talents, and more are all from God and rightfully belong to Him anyway. Also, giving at a level right for you and your family is a sign of worship and supports something greater than yourself. Finally, this decision to discontinue the Festival moves in the direction of trusting that God and His people will provide what we need to fund our vision. It’s believing in and trusting in the mission to make a difference for others which essentially brings life change for each of us as well.

I don't have more money to give. How will we raise more money?

As mentioned in the previous question, all of us are on a mission...a mission to build the Kingdom of God – we will work diligently to grow disciples through the STEPS (Serving, giving of Treasure, Engage in Small Groups, Prayer and Sacraments, Sharing the Faith) and provide opportunities for each of those steps of growth. If we focus our energy to provide inspiring life change opportunities and nourishment for growing our Church, we will gain the support we need. We aren't an entertainment business; we are in the business of life change. Of course, discipleship is a choice that has to be taken by each person who comes to this path. It is a risky way to raise money, but we believe this mission is worth the effort. Individually, each family will discern what they will give to the mission but know that we do not want the pressure of raising money to lay on your shoulders alone. If you have nothing to give monetarily, then support the mission by giving in other ways through giving your time and talent to the Church.

Why now? After all that we've lost this past year?

While it appears as if this is just "another loss" this year, the Festival deadlines were passed long before we were given the green light to have the Festival. We wouldn't be able to have the Festival this year even if we could – due to planning requirements, volunteer outreach, municipal permits, vendor purchases, tent and equipment set up and more.

My kids loved serving at the festival. Is it because there aren't enough volunteers?

Volunteers were a secondary issue when it came to the decision of the Pine Barrens Festival. A Church can always use volunteers, and often we come up short. Volunteers were needed not just during the week of the Festival but also for a month and a half before the Festival for setup and a month after the Festival for break down, but if the Festival was a primary way to support the mission of the Church, we'd find a way to make it happen. However, we believe it's best to utilize our energy for the outcome that brings people to God and provides community outreach for the poor and needy.

As for our young volunteers, they are always appreciated, as are all our hard working volunteers. It is our hope that your kids will join efforts with HERO (Holy Eucharist Reaching Out), our youth ministry, and grow in love of serving our community and fun events that support our mission at the Church. While these efforts will overall support their community and provide great memories, it will also encourage them to build a relationship with God and others of the same age.

Will there always be a Summer Faith Gift push now since the Festival is gone?

A campaign to build our revenue for supporting the Church the next year is not a goal. But truthfully, we don't know what next year will look like financially. It is our hope that we never have to have a Summer Faith Gift outreach again...but it will take some time shifting our understanding of what it means to support the Church including our staff salaries and ongoing operational expenses. The answer to this question is "hopefully, not"; we are striving for a life changing experience that has parishioners of this community wanting to support our mission – not because they have to, but because they want to be a part of supporting a Church that inspires others because they are inspired themselves.

Final thoughts –

Overall, please know that the decision to discontinue the Pine Barrens Festival was not made lightly; it involved many conversations and lots of prayers.

If you have concerns or questions that aren't listed, let us know through an email to hec@holyeucharist.org. Please know that the staff and Father Andrew are committed to praying that the decisions made are in the best interest of the Parish, and we thank you for your support even if hard to understand. We intend to walk with you and others as long as it takes to understand why this decision was made.