

Running for MOGC Council – Don James

2018

1. How are you living out community life now?

I try to keep the covenant as best as I can, in prayer, reading scripture, trying to grow in holiness, interceding and relating with members of the community, as well as trying to evangelize. Sometimes this is easy and at other times it is a struggle. I pray for the community every day, especially for members that are in need, and for any outreaches we may have going on at the time. I also help lead a men's group, our Praise and Worship meetings on Sundays as well as some of our outreaches (like *Life in the Spirit* or *Growing in Faith*) when we have them.

2. What have you been most blessed by in living out the covenant at Mother of God?

Prayer and scripture are always a blessing to me, even when I am challenged or corrected by the Lord. But I would say one of the greatest blessings to me is the witness of brothers and sisters trying to put God first and working to draw others to the wonderful gift of salvation in Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit. It is their witness and the sense of belonging with a group that has a heart for Christ that always calls me on.

When I read the lives of the saints and see their love and devotion for God and their humility and boldness, it moves my heart to give more of myself to God and those around me. The witness of brothers and sisters in the community who are laying their lives down, whether in visible or less visible ways, is an inspiration to me and helps me to persevere in my own walk with the Lord.

3. What has been the biggest challenge/struggle in living out the covenant at Mother of God?

Time is a very limiting factor. We all have time constraints, but you can do a lot more as a community if many are doing a little in comparison to if a few are doing a lot.

I would love to be able to fellowship with more of the members in the community, but I spend a lot of time serving in various ways (preparing for and leading prayer meeting, various community outreaches, other things – like working on the MOGC website, or marketing for some of our events). My hope is that others will realize their potential and step into some of the outreaches or other ministries we may need for the body so that all could have time to fellowship.

4. What do you see as the central grace(s) of Mother of God Community?

I believe there are several “pillars” of grace that act as the foundation of what God has called us to. These are all the fruit of Baptism in the Spirit that we are so blessed to have received. They are (not in any particular order)

- (a) **The Call to Holiness** – I believe this is a foundational grace that, if we are pursuing it, allows us to be a genuine light to the world. It can reshape our priorities and allow us to abide in Christ, seeing our life in his, our purpose in him, our end in him. If we are truly working to grow in holiness, our lives will be changing, we will be listening and attentive to the Spirit, putting ourselves at his disposal.
- (b) **Teaching** – I believe that through the history of MOGC, that God has given us a call to teach about the life that he calls his people to. We are not theologians, yet we understand his call in practical ways, ways that anyone can understand, ways that can stir the heart.

- (c) **Praise** – this has been a characteristic of our community for decades. We have the freedom and desire to express our love and gratitude for God, to proclaim his greatness. This is a beautiful witness to others of the freedom that God wants to give us.
- (d) **Spiritual Gifts** – I believe that God wants to strengthen us in this area. We have experienced gifts of tongues, prophecy, words of knowledge, and healing – but I believe God wants to do much more, especially in the area of words of knowledge and healing.
- (e) **Fellowship** – a community is not a community without brotherhood/sisterhood. This has been a true grace in our community, but I think it has weakened over the years. I believe God wants to strengthen this area, especially because it is what is being torn apart in our present day. People are growing up in broken families, people become unaware of the needs of others, ... fellowship/friendship is something I believe the Lord wants us to bring to the world around us.

5. What is your vision? Where do you see God calling us as a community?

In the same way that a train rides on 2 tracks to get to its destination, I believe there are two tracks that God wants us to embrace continually if we are to not only survive but thrive as a community. One track reaches out of the body, the other fosters life within the body. Four areas to work on are:

- (a) **Outreach** – we can see fruit from our outreaches of *Life in the Spirit*, especially as it has been tied to our prayer meeting. *Growing in Faith* added another level of teaching for the new people who have been coming. Part of our covenant is to evangelize, so this is an area that we need to continue to develop and improve.

Younger Generation – I believe God wants to draw young families and young adults. This doesn't mean that we focus exclusively on young adults, but that there is an effort to be attractive to them and to find ways to meet their needs. We need the spirit of St. Pope John Paul II who saw the younger generation as the future of the Church, and seek to have a place for them and to call them forth, to grow in Christ and step into roles where they can flourish.

- (b) **Community Life** – for our own well-being as well as to have something to bring new people into, we need a vibrant community life, one where the love of God in our hearts is nourished and springs forth for the good of all. If we do not have a strong community life, it doesn't matter how many new people we reach, they will not stay. We need a way to continue to feed people. Our focus on Outreach cannot overshadow our focus on community life – they should complement each other.
- (c) **Greater Participation** – we need greater involvement. Feeding and inspiring people cannot come just from the leaders, because most of the leaders time is split between family, work, and community, and as I mentioned before, time is a very limiting factor. Inspiration needs to come from the body – our goal should be for every member to live an inspired life. Our Men's and Women's groups should be a primary place where the members are nourished – both in relationships and in their spiritual walk, and this should be a responsibility shared by all in the group, not just the small group leader. I pray that each individual here can recognize their true dignity and ability – that each of us can be a well that overflows with the grace of the Holy Spirit, for the good of one another.

I know someone who recently got involved in a new business. It took her out of her normal routine and got her relating with more people, both as a team as well as potential clients. This has caused her to blossom – she is more joyful than I've ever seen her. She feels she has a mission and she is realizing potential she didn't know she had. This can be true for all of us – we get what we put into something. If we can all have a little greater focus on the body, on interceding for each other, on relating with each other, on trying to bless one another – we will see a new blossoming of gifts and fruits of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

(d) **Bridge between Outreach and Membership** – we need to find a way to help new people join our group. Many are coming to prayer meetings which is wonderful, but I believe that many might want more. We need a means to do that – and one of the main ways to bridge this is through greater involvement. New programs here or there are helpful to nourish them, but once they are over, there is always the question of what is next – this results in a group of people that want to be fed but are not necessarily closer to building the body of Christ. To really bring people into membership, we need to do at least 2 things:

- i. **Plug them into men’s and women’s groups**, which most likely means starting new groups. This means we need more small group leaders.
- ii. **Raise them up** – help them to see where they can serve or lead (if they have some leadership potential). This may mean you see new faces at prayer meeting.

6. What do you see as the top priorities for the community over the next 5 years?

In light of what I said about #5 (our vision), I believe that we’ve done pretty well with outreach as seen by the new people coming to our prayer meetings. I believe we need to continue what we are doing in that regard. But I believe we need to do two more things:

1. **Community Life Development** – we need to foster community life. I think we need to have more fun together, more ways to share our lives. We need to do a better job keeping each other in our hearts and minds, feeling that we are all part of a team, that we share a common purpose. The times most of us come together with others in the body are at prayer meeting or retreats, and these are times where our focus is on praising God or receiving what he may have for us, which is great – but there is little focus on one another. We can treat meetings as an obligation rather than an opportunity to fellowship, be restored and refreshed as we interact with one another. We need to appoint someone who has a pastoral view/gift to help develop community life. This would involve: (a) helping small groups adequately care for their members, (b) helping members discover, understand and use their gifts in the body, (c) organizing times for fellowship (Lord’s Day celebrations, game nights, etc.)
2. **Build a Bridge between Outreach and Membership** – we need a team of people who can focus on doing the work to bring new people into membership. This involves relating with the new people, seeing about getting them into small groups that meet regularly, even if there is no “program” going on, and setting up activities where they can socialize, develop their gifts and learn to serve in the body.
3. **Continuing Outreach** – we need to develop more than one *Life in the Spirit* team, and we need to have other things to offer new people. We can have outside people come and give retreats or events (like Damian) – but ultimately, we need to raise up people who can give such retreats or courses.

7. What do you see as the biggest strengths and weaknesses of the community?

Strengths:

- **Faithfulness** over the years shows real commitment to the Lord and wanting to hold onto the grace God has given us.
- **Devotion** – Our members have a real devotion to the Lord. This springs from a real conversion at some point in our lives that took our faith beyond a cultural practice to a real relationship with the Lord. This is something all people need – so it is something all of our members have to offer others through their testimony and example.

- **Knowledge** – I think our members understand a lot about the spiritual life and have a lot to offer the world around us. This knowledge isn't just about a deeper insight into the gospel message, but also the practical knowledge of how to live in light of the gospel.
- **Outreach** – I believe we have grown in this area. One thing we've seen is that if we want to expose and invite people to experience the baptism in the Holy Spirit, we need to bring them to prayer meeting. Holding events on Sunday where they can be incorporated into prayer meeting has been the key to growing our attendance at prayer meeting. I believe God wants to do more – and if we can do a better job ministering to the new people, they will be the ones inviting others. Though we are small, we are the primary charismatic group in the area with the knowledge and desire to put on larger events to serve the diocese.

Weakness:

- **Relationships** — I think we can be somewhat passive in our relationships – we can start to think of our meetings as a duty or obligation rather than an opportunity to bless our brothers and sisters. We don't honor or show appreciation for those coming to prayer meeting by coming on time.
- **Lack of Invitation** – how often do we invite someone to the prayer meeting? How often do we invite another member over for dinner or fellowship of some kind?
- **Tiredness** — I believe that many of us are tired as a body. We've been at this for decades, we are in different phases of our lives, and various priorities compete for our time and attention. We need a fresh start, new people to interact and grow with that can remind us of how joyful it is when God speaks to us, of how fulfilling it is when we help someone give their heart to the Lord. These things come when a body is growing, when new people enter the fold and share their stories (or when we meet with other members we haven't really spent time with for a while). When you see God work through you, it is energizing. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak – if we allow ourselves the chance to see God work through us by sacrificing just a little more (it could be as simple as coming to prayer meeting early to fellowship with others), we will see our spirits revived... and even want more!
- **We don't show our appreciation well** — we need to do a better job showing appreciation for one another, especially for those who are serving so often (music, chairs, leading prayer meeting, small group leaders, outreach leaders, etc.) – we do not want any of our ministries to become thankless tasks, we want all to know they are playing a vital role in our life as a community and that we are very grateful.

I think we should have special events now and then to honor the particular way members are serving the body, maybe an occasional dinner for each ministry now and then so that those teams can fellowship together and understand how much we appreciate them. (Example – one month, a dinner for the chair ministry, another month a dinner for the music ministry, ...) I was on the chair crew for decades. When we used to meet at Our Lady of Mercy, we had a routine of going to Friendly's after the prayer meeting... this built up our friendships and helped us feel a part of a team. We don't have to do something this regular, but I believe we need to do something.

- **80/20 Rule** — Many of the things we are doing are done by a small percentage of our members. This can drain those serving more and limit what can be done. We need to bring more into the things we are doing – not simply for efficiency or so that we can do more, but because when people serve in new ways, it is a way to grow and produces fruit in their own lives.