

Summary Report of the Five Open Collaborative Meetings Regarding Reconfiguration of the Watertown/Belmont Parishes

Needs:

- Reconfigured Parishes need strong Religious Education and Youth Ministry Programs
- There must be strong outreach to the elderly and homebound
- Care must be taken to bridge the different communities of kids
- Interim time of transition needed to blend together; work and pray together
- More Pastoral Associates and greater role of the Laity
- A school is needed for parochial education
- Full scope of Pastoral Care is needed. More pastoral planning is needed.
- New community building events needed to ease transition and increase communication
- Accessibility/Transportation is a major and common concern; how ensure elderly can get to Mass?
- Early morning Mass kept for working people
- Development within collaborative of children's programs needed
- Need to reach out and be welcoming
- Need clergy from closing parishes to stay to assist in the transition
- Continue this type of meeting after reconfiguration
- Add Masses to accommodate influx
- Need to educate parishioners: not "my" church; but, "our" church
- Consider amenities of one place over another; service of hospitals, elderly housing and presence of bus lines

Questions Raised:

- Is Real Estate Value to be factored in?
- How will we impact and be impacted by abutting clusters?
- Would we be better served to have the changes phased in?
- Can the cluster share financial resources?
- What is the assessed value of each parish?
- Why in arrears re: Fire insurance? Why not use savings to pay it off?
- Is there a plan to make the Church more attractive to younger folks?
- Where will records be kept?
- Who determines condition of buildings? Suggest external assessment by engineering firm

Recommendations:

- If one were to close, it most likely should be Our Lady of Mercy
- If more than one closes, close Sacred Heart and Saint Luke's and keep Our Lady of Mercy as a weekday mission for liturgy
- Close St. Joseph's due to decline in activity
- Close Sacred Heart due to debt
- Saint Joseph's is more "sellable"
- Close Our Lady's and St. Luke's
- Close all five and start fresh with a totally new joined parish
- If only one church to remain, St. Patrick's is the largest
- Close places that are farthest apart so there will be less distance to travel to church
- Suggest two churches be retained and share common: rectory, office space separate from rectory, meeting area. Have common programs.
- Close Sacred Heart: There is no staff to lay off.
- Closing St. Patrick's would put huge Religious Education and Sacramental Index burden on another parish

Concerns:

- Closing both Our Lady of Mercy and Sacred Heart will cut off one entire area serving the elderly
- There is a lot of fear among our seniors

Miscellaneous Comments:

- Activities can move anywhere, be started anywhere
- Demographics skew # for Sacramental Index. Young in one area; old in another.
- All parishes have to change
- Our Lady of Mercy has good pew configuration: greater distance between benches which is good for the elderly
- Economics is a factor causing difficulty in attracting the young
- Saint Patrick's and Saint Joseph's have the most vibrant Religious Education Programs
- All pride and greed are to be put aside in order to develop most faith-filled community we can
- Sacred Heart is the only air-conditioned church
- The fact that we are the church, not buildings, needs to be remembered
- We need to relieve pastors of administrative duties; give them opportunity to do priestly ministry
- Saint Patrick's has balanced population vis-à-vis age groups

- In the future, we need to know about our finances better than we have. We feel blindsided.
- Backlash will mean a loss of Catholics
- Suppression is stealing; but, it's legal under the Canon Law

Feelings Expressed:

- Anger and frustration over past poor management; people are fall guys for the hierarchy.
- Devastated. Traumatic.
- We are looking at this from the spiritual side; church is looking at it from finance side.
- Fell like recouping after a war.
- We're in crisis: haven't figured out how to pass the faith on.