

If the Archbishop needs to close a parish in your cluster for the greater good of the Archdiocese, how would you recommend that you cluster of parishes be reconfigured and why?

Our analysis is based on the assumptions that we are planning for the next twenty years, that the decline in number of active priests in the diocese is only going to worsen for the foreseeable future and that programs existing in a closing parish can be built in another.

Our consensus was that we would recommend that Our Lady of Mercy close because it is the smallest of the churches in membership, seating capacity, Sacramental Index and religious education students. Because of its smallest numbers it would be the easiest to integrate into the remaining parishes.

The church and former convent building are wooden structures and easier to work with for a developer.

Our Lady of Mercy was previously recommended for closure during the lengthy process engaged in when St. Theresa Church in our Collaborative was suppressed.

In order to maintain a Catholic presence in that section of the town, the parish center, currently leased to the city could be taken back and used as a multipurpose structure including a ministry center and either a senior center fW1 by the collaborative or a youth ministry site. The rectory could be retained for a common rectory used by the remaining parishes.

A transportation ministry should be established in order to make certain that the elderly are not deprived of the ability to get to church. Parish schedules should be reworked collaboratively in order to provide for needs of everyone e.g., the Mass convenient for working people (6:30 a.m.) will be lost with the closure of OLM.

If the Archbishop had to close more than one parish, how would you reconfigure and why ?

A tremendous amount of reflection, conversation and good faith effort was put into the painful process of making the following suggestions. We chose to respond to this second question with some possible options: Two variations of closing two parishes and two of closing three. What is happening in neighboring clusters could influence the ultimate decisions.

If two parishes were to close, they would be Our Lady of Mercy and either Sacred Heart or Saint Luke's.

If the two were Our Lady's and Saint Luke's, this would leave the three largest church buildings to accommodate those whose churches close and to accommodate those whom we would hope to draw back to church through revivification of parish life. The numbers in the religious education programs of these two parishes could easily be accommodated. The geographic spread of the remaining parishes gives church presence across the Belmont - Watertown area.

An argument against these two closing is that St. Luke's has the greatest flexibility for expansion and our Lady's has some flexibility with its corner parking lot.

If the two were Our Lady's and Sacred Heart, this would involve the two smallest churches in terms of seating capacity and sacramental index. It would be rather easy to accommodate the religious education students since these parishes have the smallest programs.

Arguments against these two closing is that an entire continuous section of the Belmont Watertown area would be without a church and Sacred Heart Church has been renovated in recent years.

If three parishes were to close, they would be Our Lady of Mercy, Sacred Heart and either Saint Joseph or Saint Luke. The reasons for keeping the remaining parishes are as follows:

Saint Patrick Parish has the highest Sacramental Index, largest Mass count and seating capacity .The church has been recently renovated. It has the second largest religious education program.

Saint Patrick and Saint Joseph

These parishes which have the largest Religious Education programs would remain open.

These two churches have the largest seating capacities of the five churches.

The parish center at St. Joseph' s has kitchen facilities and is larger than the one at Saint Luke's

St. Joseph's has a family Mass and Youth Ministry program.

St. Joseph's is in the geographic center of Belmont.

Saint Patrick and Saint Luke

The parishes with the two highest Sacramental Indices would remain open.

St. Luke's has room for expansion if it is ever needed and its church capacity is only slightly smaller than St. Joseph.

Of all the parishes in the cluster, St. Luke's has the largest amount of parking facilities; although St. Joseph's currently has weekend access to the adjacent public school's parking lot.

Demographic shifts have been taking place in recent years with an increase in the Mormon population in St. Joseph's area and many non-Christians moving into Our Lady's end of town. *If* this trend were to continue, this would impact the size of the Catholic community in these sections.

Saint Luke's rental of the school (including its recent completion of a lease for the portion that was vacated last summer) puts it in good financial shape.

Saint Luke's rectory is more conducive to use as a common rectory to the two parishes.

Saint Luke's has considerably less deferred maintenance to undertake.

The worship space at St. Luke' s has more adaptability.