

Summaries of “Town Hall” Style Meetings

Greetings!

Below you will find summaries of the input received at the Town Hall style meetings held at our parish’s three worship sites after weekend Masses on March 2/3, 9/10, & 16/17, along with input that I received in others forms (i.e. emails, letters, conversations, phone calls). I worked primarily from the notes that were taken by someone present for each of the gatherings. I cannot confirm that everything was captured in those notes or in my summary of them. If you are aware of any significant gaps, please bring them to my attention. Thanks.

After reviewing the summaries, the next step in the process will be an **All Parish Gathering** in conjunction with our next Parish Pastoral Council meeting, on **Monday, May 20th at 7:00pm** at Blessed Sacrament school. Members from all three churches in our parish are invited and encouraged to participate. My hope is that we can identify several positive and constructive initiatives based on, but not limited to, the input from the “Town Hall” meetings.

If you remember, in letters to each of our church communities on February 24, 2019, I shared some information with you about the current state of our church community and some thoughts to help frame our discussion in the subsequent “Town Hall” style meetings. I highlighted the significant operating deficits, associated declines in attendance and collections, as well as demands presented by old and aging buildings and infrastructure, that are common across all three sites. While I could not offer any simple steps to turn things around, I did suggest three areas – the Eucharist, Engagement and Evangelization – that offer opportunities for improvement and growth.

In reviewing the summaries, you may note that some of the ideas and suggestions offered are common across all three sites, whereas others are specific to one or two sites. Some may be more appealing or appear to be more doable. In our All Parish Gathering, I would like us to identify which of the ideas bear some follow-up. As we identify those, we also will need to consider who and how they will be carried out. My sense is that the ideas that generate the most energy and support, especially in terms of volunteers who are willing to help drive them forward, will be the easiest and most effective for us to pursue. I hope to come away from our gathering with list of ideas to pursue along with some willing volunteers to help us move forward.

If you are unable to attend, please feel free to share your suggestions for next steps with fellow parishioners who will attend, and members of our Parish Pastoral Council, parish staff or myself.

Thank you for your prayers and support of these efforts aimed at sustaining and growing our parish.

Yours,

Fr. John

Suggested ways to increase attendance/membership/involvement/engagement:

A. Surveys/Information Gathering:

- 1) Reach out to people who were raised Catholic to find out why they are not coming to church
- 2) Reach out to inactive parishioners to understand why they left/aren't coming to Mass
- 3) Efforts to support diversity in a diverse neighborhood (e.g. Divorced Catholics)
- 4) Ask the young people who attend why they come
- 5) Find out where those who have left have gone
- 6) Survey parishioners
 - a. Why they come to Blessed Sacrament
 - b. Where would you go if Blessed Sacrament closed
 - c. Where do we stand?
 - d. What may be lacking? - what can we do to meet unmet needs?

B. Targeted Initiatives/Marketing:

- 1) Work on new ways to align with younger people; find ways to enhance and bring new energy to younger generation
- 2) Transient make-up of the parish, where parishioners stay for 5-7 years, then leave the city. How can we reach out to these people and welcome them into our church? Fr. Amering spent time visiting parishioners in their homes to engage them in the parish
- 3) Reach out to surrounding neighborhoods to attract more parishioners
 - a. Distribute flyer to all in neighborhood listing Mass times and inviting to join us; invite to an event, like shopping at Next-To-New Sale;
 - b. Welcome those moving into the neighborhood – possibly through active neighborhood associations
- 4) Publicize parish events - capturing folks who cross Monroe/Goodman intersection = one of most heavily travelled in the city
- 5) Outreach to large # of people who attend the Next-To-New Sale; display/info table
- 6) Display/Exhibit/Handouts at Park Ave Festival – staffed by diverse representation of parishioners
- 7) Car Decals - to let people know we are here
- 8) Learn from experience of other churches in the area; whole body of literature on “rebuilding/renovating” parishes – best practices; Three H’s: Hymns, Hospitality and Homilies

C. Improve liturgies to attract people, not drive them away:

- 1) More and better trained liturgical ministers
- 2) Pauses/Moments of quiet for people to pray
- 3) Music
 - a. Eliminate musical overload;
 - b. Need beautiful, joyful, inspiring, uplifting music, less somber;
 - c. Increase tempo to evoke more spirit and willingness to sing;
 - d. Misses musicians and singers who brought 12:15 pm Sunday Mass alive – diverse instruments played by parishioners
 - e. Relatively unknown hymns
 - f. Volume of organ to support not overwhelm singing; able to hear self and others
- 4) Establish a liturgy committee
- 5) Slow down the sometimes-hurried pace of Mass

- 6) Preaching style
- 7) Homilies too long
- 8) Incorporating children and young people into liturgy
- 9) Encourage active participation through listening, responding, prayerfulness
- 10) Examine Mass Schedule – bring back 8:00AM Mass

D. Hospitality – how do we make the church a welcoming place

- 1) Greeters to welcome regulars and visitors – answer questions, direct to restroom and handicap access; offer a wheelchair
- 2) Ministers at end of Mass – pass out bulletins; thanking and wishing people well
- 3) Greet each other before Mass
- 4) Cider and donuts
- 5) Welcoming Tour of church and parish campus – history/orientation to buildings, use, ministry, staff; 12 or less people per group (intimacy)
- 6) Open House – same format as welcoming tour but opened up to neighborhood and larger community; targeted times like Park Ave Festival
- 7) Church Tours – use beauty of building to bring new people in

E. Re-registration Process:

- 1) to inform about what is going on in the parish
- 2) give them an opportunity to sign up to volunteer

F. Other:

- 1) Address the clergy abuse scandal – praying weekly at Mass for those affected
- 2) Common large social event to bring diverse groups in the parish together (e.g. Pancake Breakfast in the winter)
- 3) List of volunteer opportunities to engage more people
- 4) Offer Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament – tied to name of church – in the day time for those who can drive at night

Suggested ways to increase revenue:

A. Appeals/Education/Marketing of Current/New Parishioners:

- 1) Reminding parishioners to make up contributions to collections after weather event like snowstorm on weekend on January 20
- 2) Tithing Program
- 3) Increased Giving Campaign
- 4) Special Appeal/Collection at weekend Masses for CMA
 - a. Find out why people not giving to CMA, respect reasons and pass on to bishop
- 5) Review of Collection Envelope Packet
 - a. Explanation of need and possible re-labelling of “Capital Improvement” envelope
 - b. Explanation/elimination of “Utilities” envelope
 - c. Explanation of “School Subsidies” – once a year tied to Catholic Schools Week
- 6) Explain how Supper Program is financed, supported and staffed – not aware was drain on parish
- 7) Annual “Review Your Giving” Week – encourage increase and/or special donation
- 8) “Special” Donation Opportunity for specific capital projects
 - a. Done in the past to repair/replace church doors
 - b. In place of generic capital improvement envelope: “Parking Lot Repairs”; “Church Roof Repairs”; “Church Painting”
 - c. Need online component

- 9) Volunteer at and Donate items to the Next-To-New Sale

B. Fundraising and New Sources of revenue

- 1) Grant writing - used for the supper program in the past; perhaps a source of revenue for the larger parish, albeit a slow process
- 2) Paid Parking during events like the Park Ave Fest
- 3) Food Truck during Wednesday Farmers Market
- 4) Bingo
- 5) Fish Fry
- 6) Recycle Bottle and Can Drive or ask people to donate money from redemption
- 7) Fundraising: Baked-In Goodness by Special Touch Bakery – Holy Childhood [not clear benefit parish?]
- 8) Parish Festival with raffle and games of chance
- 9) Sell homemade pies baked by parishioners in their homes

Suggested ways to decrease expenses

- 1) Evaluate building insurance – Self-insurance pool through diocese with secondary insurance policy
- 2) Census/Re-registration process to drive down diocesan assessments based on # of registered households, like CMA, Catholic Courier
 - a. Use robocalls or volunteer phone call program

Suggested ways to increase revenue and decrease expenses

- 1) Sell/dispose of underutilized buildings

St. Boniface: Summary of Input from Town Hall Meetings and Other Sources

Suggested ways to increase attendance/membership/involvement/engagement:

*NB: Declining attendance has been a long-term trend in our parish churches, the diocese, and the US church as a whole

A. Targeted Initiatives/Marketing:

- 1) Create awareness of church in the neighborhood
 - a. Reach out to and get involved with Neighborhood Association
- 2) Reach out to those who grew up at St. Boniface and moved away
 - a. Hold reunions
 - b. Invited to participate in fundraisers
- 3) Learn from experience of other churches' efforts to grow their parish; whole body of literature on "rebuilding/renovating" parishes – best practices; Three H's: Hymns, Hospitality and Homilies
- 4) Increase engagement in parish ministries and activities
 - a. In lieu of ministry fair, highlight one ministry a month at Mass one weekend; article in bulletin same weekend; parishioner gives 2-3 minute talk describing ministry and ways to get involved; other members of ministry at church entrances to distribute flyer and answer questions
- 5) Offer Christian concerts
- 6) Food Truck Rodeo
- 7) Find ways to attract younger people
 - a. Sustainability issues big with younger generation
- 8) Stress connection to the Eucharist
- 9) Address concerns about bringing children to Catholic Church in light of scandals
- 10) Scandals in the church driving people away and to other churches

B. Improve liturgies to attract people:

- 1) Music
 - a. Bring back folk Mass;

C. Other:

- 1) Use energy and ideas generated by Mathew Kelly book discussion groups
- 2) Find way to combine various initiatives around times when folks already in the neighborhood or gathered for another event:
 - a. Hold Chicken BBQ when beer festival on Gregory St in the summer or in conjunction with Garage Sale event (like Next-To-New)
 - b. Hold a raffle in conjunction with Open House during Southwedge craft sale
 - c. Hold silent auction during one of Men's Club dinners
- 3) Struggle to find volunteers to carry out all these wonderful ideas

Suggested ways to increase revenue:

A. Appeals/Education/Marketing of Current/New Parishioners:

- 1) Efforts to close CMA gap
 - a. Letters sent to lapsed donors
 - b. In-pew solicitation
 - c. "Just \$5" or "Just \$10" – small dollar donation program
- 2) Food Truck Rodeo

B. Fundraising and New Sources of revenue

- 1) Hold a large sale at St. Boniface akin to the Next-To-New Sale, but in the summer
- 2) Bring back the Chicken BBQ
 - a. Concern with increasing food costs cutting into potential profits
 - b. Concern with Dept. of Health enforcement of food handling & other regulations
- 3) Raffles
- 4) Fish Fry – series of them during Lent
- 5) Twenty Week Club – struggle to carry out under NYS Gaming regulations

Suggested ways to decrease expenses

- 1) Cost of the school, convent and rectory – concern that exceed the lease revenue, but the leases do cover the cost of these buildings and they are not a drain to the parish.
- 2) Reduce the number of Masses – but still have significant fixed costs for security, insurance, etc. that would not be affected by reduction in number of Masses

Other:

- 1) Is there a record of building maintenance/projects over the years?
- 2) Tax law changes to have some impact on collections and donations

St. Mary's: Summary of Input from Town Hall Meetings and Other Sources

Suggested ways to increase attendance/membership/involvement/engagement:

A. Targeted Initiatives/Marketing:

- 1) Reach out to surrounding neighborhoods to attract more parishioners
 - a. Small group at St. Mary's is producing and mailing/distributing a postcard which invites people to come and worship at church; so far distributed to local hotels and new apartment buildings in the neighborhood;
 - i. Suggestion that personally delivery postcard more effective than mailing
 - b. Utilizing community events happening in our area (i.e. Jazz Fest, Corn Hill, etc.) to introduce church to new people;
- 2) Group of volunteers to do a "reach out" to invite people to our community
- 3) Process or program to welcome new parishioners with the current neighborhood growth.
 - a. Newly registered parishioners receive a welcome packet from parish office
 - b. Need to do better job utilizing information about needs/interests indicated on registration forms
- 4) Develop means to engage and encourage growing number of young adults in neighborhood to come to Mass
 - a. Existing Young Adult Ministry
 - i. Includes parishioners from three worship sites
 - ii. Young Adult brunches held each month
- 5) Think outside the box – targeting those who are not here
 - a. Make events accessible and inviting to all
 - b. Source of potential new members and energy for ministries
- 6) Alternative uses of church to attract people - music, like a bell choir; or prayer service that uses bells to inspire others.
- 7) Attract families with children through offering
 - a. Liturgy of the Word for children
 - b. Religious education at St. Mary's – once per month family faith formation option currently takes place around 4:00pm Mass usually on the first Saturday of the month; not all families that attend 9:00am religious education at Blessed Sacrament attend 10:00am Mass, some go to 10:30am Mass at St. Mary's
- 8) Bring in outside groups to perform at St. Mary's so that can showcase church/parish
 - a. Thatcher, former music director, used connections to invite groups
 - b. Gateway Music Festival – young, African-American, classical musicians
 - i. Attract people then give them tours of the church
 - ii. Also performed at Mass
- 9) Guided Tour of the church – one scheduled for Sat., May 4th at 2:00PM – describe and explain stained glass windows
- 10) Fix chimes in bell tower to signal presence of church in downtown

B. Improve liturgies to attract people, not drive them away:

- 1) Music
 - a. Lost tradition of joyous music that moves people; too somber;
 - b. Former 10am Mass with folk group of 30+ people was successful;
 - c. Used to have endowment fund for music – supported paid musicians at Mass;
 - d. Form small group to meet with music ministers to express concerns and desires;

- 2) Incorporating children and young people into liturgy

C. Hospitality – how do we make the church a welcoming place

- 1) Revive old parish traditions (Gathering Tables; Coffee hours) as way to welcome new people

D. Re-registration Process:

- 1) to inform about what is going on in the parish
- 2) give them an opportunity to sign up to volunteer (making use of Parish Ministry Directory)

E. Engagement/Other:

- 1) Existing ministries need help (more trained/scheduled volunteers), including those that can encourage kids
- 2) Publicize volunteer needs of specific ministries in bulletin – also inform everyone about what Social Ministry Committee does
- 3) Parish Ministry Pitch at Mass – short 2-3 minute pitch by current member describing ministry and opportunities to get involved; followed by other members at entrances with handout to answer any questions and recruit folks face-to-face

Suggested ways to increase revenue:

A. Appeals/Education/Marketing of Current/New Parishioners:

- 1) Develop process to request that parishioners increase their online giving
- 2) Re-form a Stewardship Committee to help engage parishioners

B. Fundraising and New Sources of revenue

- 1) Repurpose our buildings when they are empty to generate revenue
 - a. Venue for Jazz Fest
 - b. Renting space to business during week when not used by parish – growth in downtown creates opportunities

Suggested ways to decrease expenses

- 1) Make use of skills of parishioners, such as licensed electrician, to reduce costs
- 2) Census/Re-registration process to drive down diocesan assessments based on # of registered households, like CMA, Catholic Courier

Dedicated group of volunteers updating census

- 3) Effort to convert current parishioners and urge new registrants to use online giving option
 - a. Reduce cost of envelopes – need process to cancel envelopes
 - b. Create steadier stream of donations
- 4) Concern about cost of new handrail on ambo side of sanctuary – needed for safety of those accessing space; cost consistent with creating matching handrail originally designed and manufactured by same woodworker