

Holy Cross Parishioners Meeting
Feb 7, 2016
After 10:30 am Mass

Planning Team members present: Jennifer Sharp, Stephanie Houck, Barb Willers, Kathy Sinkiewicz, Gerry Frank, Lee Anne Fox, and Karen Rinefield

Fr. Bernard led the group in an opening prayer.

Gerry Frank reviewed merger process both the church and state/ legal parts. He reviewed the time line that had been developed by the planning team. With a recommendation from the Pastor regarding merger or non-merger to the Bishop by end of March. This would allow for necessary review by Bishop's Presbyteral Council and a decree from the Bishop sometime in May or June.

Questions: **What does merger mean?**

It means there would be one parish with three churches. There would be one parish pastoral council, one finance council, one checking account, one set of church records. The goal would be to work together as one large faith community.

If the scope of the merger is to bring together the strength of the faith in number of bodies of people that would be a good thing. If the goal is to get more people in the benches at mass to increase the energy of the Catholic community that is a good thing.

What is in the Mind of the Bishop?

Who really is making the big decisions here?

The Bishop is looking at how to have Eucharist through and across the 12 counties of the Rochester Diocese. Over the next 10 years, more priests will be retiring than the number of new priests ordained. Currently, many older priests in their late 70's and 80's are saying regular masses.

Bishop is looking at the number of people at mass. St. Francis had submitted incorrect numbers of attendance indicating an average of 23 in October 2014 (which has since been corrected to the accurate 50). The Bishop is looking at the number of people in the rural area and the best way to serve those needs with the resources (priests) available.

Most merged parishes in the Diocese are bigger than what this parish merger would be. The Bishop believes if the people of these three churches St. James the Apostle, St. Francis and Holy Cross could work together the needs could be served by one priest. With that in mind, the Bishop asked to have regular mass at only two locations. St. James the Apostle will continue to have mass at that church. They have the largest amount of people and the most financial resources.

At the last planning team meeting, a discussion occurred if a letter should be sent to the Bishop to ask if mass could continue in all three churches. At this time, the planning team--although not a unanimous decision--decided to keep going to figure out a mass schedule at just two of the churches.

What would mass schedule look like?

Merging and mass schedule are two separate issues. If changes were to occur in mass schedule there would be more parishioner meetings to gather input regarding proposed changes. The planning team is going to be looking at possible options for mass schedule at the next meeting.

What happens to the church that does not have regular mass?

It would be open for special services, weddings and funerals.

Are we not already acting much the same way as being suggested of a merged parish?

No, right now there are three separate parishes, with three separate finance councils, three separate pastoral councils and records. The merged parish would have only one of each of these.

Where is the savings with the merger?

There is not real savings maybe some in utility costs from less regular use. The merged parish would have to maintain the buildings for a period of time. In church law you cannot merge parishes and close a church at the same time. There are two separate processes. Churches can be closed without a merger. A merger does not mean that churches will close. It would take time if a closure happened to actually sell the building.

Comment:

In another diocese about 15 years ago, there was a merger of churches. People showed up for Sunday mass, and two of the churches were closed. No notice to parishioners or anything. Karen said this is not the experience in the Rochester Diocese. More often than not, all churches have stayed open with regular mass.

It does make sense to have fewer masses to say with less priests available.

Why doesn't St. James the Apostle go to Ithaca to cluster?

St. James like Holy Cross and St. Francis is served by the Capuchins. That is why the suggestion is to merge these three parishes. Comment made that Seneca County population is different than that of Trumansburg. Feeling that T-burg is more of a "bedroom community of Ithaca, more mobile community where folks in Seneca County have been here for generations.

Need to remember that in rural areas with lower numbers of Catholics the churches are still important.

Suggestion that rather than use all this energy to take apart the church, should use same energy to be positive and try to increase number of priests in the diocese. Make no changes, grow the church, add one priest at a time.

Karen reported that the Diocese has made a concentrated effort to increase ordinations. There have been more for the last couple of years and there will be more in the near future. Diocese has a relationship with Columbia with the plan that 10 young men would be incorporated into

our church. Several men from Columbia have already been ordained and are serving within our Diocese. The Catholic Church in America is becoming more Latino. These priests will be able to serve the needs of the Latino population as well as parishes in general.

It is a good idea to have people put positive energy into the merger. May want to go after parishioners who do not attend mass. In the past, Fr. Bart visited each person registered in the parish to try to get them to come back to mass. May need to have parishioners do this on a more organized basis. May also need to add different ministries to meet the needs of the rural community.

Feeling that the life of the parish goes in cycles. Church numbers may have been during time of low cycle. Mass attendance at Holy Cross is growing. Low numbers in the past may have been due to past leadership.

At Holy Cross, people have stepped up when needed especially for financial contributions. Currently Holy Cross is giving more in donations. In the past with the restoration project, 110% of the pledged amount was raised. With the restoration, the theme was Last One Standing. That is going to be the theme now. To have Holy Cross be the Catholic Church standing on Main Street!

The members present were asked would they stay in the merged parish if there was just one mass at Holy Cross even if it was not on the day or time you regularly attend?

People agreed having one mass at the church was more important than the specific time of mass. There was a suggestion that mass be on Sunday at the current time of 10:30

Comment:

In the winter fewer people attend. It is harder to come out in the dark and cold. In the summer there is much financial support and increased attendance from the Sampson and Babcock Hovey (Boy Scout) campers. Also we have many snow birds that leave for the winter. Their attendance and financial contributions are also seen upon their return in late spring. We would lose them. Many live at Lake Shore Landing and would head north to church. Should look at possibility of two masses one at night, one in morning in warmer months.

Comment:

Parishioners would like to be kept up to date with what is happening. Currently there are weekly notes in the bulletin.

Submitted: Kathy Sinkiewicz