

Minutes from Church Hall Meeting
St Charles
3-27-17 2-4PM

Meeting opened at 2:07PM

Welcome and Opening Prayer – Fr John

Recognition of members of Planning Committee – stood and were introduced.

Karen Rinefierd – Addressed the question, “Does the Bishop know what’s going on in Elmira?” She answered yes, he gets regular updates, cares about the community here, admires our proactive approach, and prays for us.

Question about where Fr Rick and Fr Scott will be. No answers yet. The Bishop and Priest Personnel Board are looking at the available openings, and the Bishop is deciding on appointments. The Bishop is fully aware of our situation. Fr Rick has applied for the position of the pastor. Fr Scott is interested in staying as well. Hopefully the bishop will be able to announce priest appointments earlier than in other years. They are hoping for a mid to end of April announcement.

Fr Rick conveyed a big thank you to Karen Rinefierd for all her help and hard work.

MERGER

PowerPoint slide on why clustering and merging. PowerPoint slide on the process to merge.

Questions on the merger:

1. Q) Why isn’t SMOM Horseheads involved with the merger? A) Although Horseheads is only 5 minutes away, it is separate geographically. It’s its own entity. Not ruling out the future possibility of a merger.
2. Q) If the Bishop is close to retirement, will he be around for this entire process? A) The Bishop is 70 years old, but retirement age is 75. The merger should take 18 months, so he will be here the entire time.
3. Q) The work load for priests is very heavy & busy. Can you perform all your duties with only two priests instead of three? A) The proposed schedule has a decrease in weekend Masses from nine to six, a reduction of three Masses. The retired priests want to be involved and will help out when they can. The staff and parishioners will also help. The scheduling of baptisms, Faith Formation classes and other events will fall into place after the Mass schedule is set.
4. Comment: St Charles was originally a mission church with Horseheads. The Mass Schedule plans of B1 and B2 should be out of the question. It makes for too long of a day for the priests. St Charles has the best handicapped access.
5. Comment: The location of the 5PM Regional Mass should be changed to St Charles since it doesn’t have any weekend Masses scheduled there. Easy access, though no air conditioning.
6. Comment: With three parishes merging there is much confusion in Elmira. We need the stability of having the current priests who we know. The Bishop should consider the parishioners’ feelings.

7. Fr John – Conversations about collaboration across parishes are also happening at the Deanery level. Corning has no pastor but a deacon as pastoral administrator. Our three parishes will remain financially separate until the merger is complete.
8. Q) Will it really only take 18 months to merge? A) Yes.
9. Q) As we decrease the number of Masses, with fewer Masses we will have lower income if we can only have one intention per Mass per Canon Law. A) Per Canon Law we can actually have two or more intentions per Mass as long as the other parties agree. The first one to pay for the Mass has the right to refuse having additional intentions.
10. Q) How many priests are in the entire Diocese? A) Not as many as we'd like, and more are retiring. There are many elderly priests. Although there has been some increase in ordinations, but to replace priests expected to retire in the next few years we would need to have 30 seminarians and that is not happening.
11. Q) Can we get priests from other dioceses? A) Occasionally there are transfers. Currently there are around 20 priests working in the DOR from outside the DOR (here completing their education, working in High School ministry, college campus ministry, etc.). For example – Fr Joseph in Horseheads is a student at Elmira College.
12. Comment: She appreciates having the opportunity to give input rather than other places where decisions are made with no parishioner input.

MASS SCHEDULES

Saturday Evening Mass Schedule:

PowerPoint slides on why the Mass schedule needs to change, principles guiding the decision making, other considerations, and proposed Saturday evening Masses.

Questions on Saturday evening schedule:

1. Comment: We can't have two Masses at 4PM because there would be no coverage if the other priest is out of town or sick and retired priests are unavailable.
2. Q) Is the capacity large enough to accommodate all the people at two churches? A) Yes, if we use the larger churches.
3. Comment: I hope we have welcoming gatherings to unite the parishioners.
4. Q) Is there interest in a 5:30PM Mass? A) Yes, many people in the summer especially, want the daytime to do activities and prefer a later Mass.
5. Comment: The golfers would prefer a 5:30PM Mass on Saturday. We are fortunate to have the priests we have. In the decision making process we should consider what the priests' thoughts and preferences are.
6. Comment: The 7:30PM Sunday Mass is too late for seniors.
7. Q) We used to have a 4:30PM Mass at St Mary's, but during Standard Time it was dark driving home. Could it switch to 4PM when the time changes so people are driving home in the daylight?
8. Comment: In the winter the afternoon Masses are too dark.
9. Comment: She likes the idea of a 4PM and 5:30PM Mass. The Regional 5PM Mass on Sunday is popular. Active families can't always make a 4PM Mass. It's nice to have options.
10. Comment: We should consider that the 4PM Saturday Mass is at an air conditioned church. It doesn't have to be a permanent decision.

11. Comment: The Mass is only one hour. We should be able tolerate no air conditioning for one hour.
12. Comment: In the history of St Charles Church, people went to Mass with no heat for the first four years that it opened.

Sunday Morning Mass Schedule:

PowerPoint slides on the proposed options for the Sunday morning Masses, advantages and disadvantages.

Questions on Sunday morning schedule:

1. Comment: Currently there are almost 500 people who attend 8AM Mass. They won't all fit into St Casimir's Church. A) Not all may continue going to 8AM. Some might switch to another mid-morning Mass.
2. Comment: The 10:30AM Mass at St Patrick's has consistently had the highest attendance of all 10:30 Masses. It has the largest seating capacity, a well established music ministry, solid Children's Liturgy including involving youth in Children's Liturgy and music. The goal of the schedule is that the Mass times and locations should displace as few as possible. Therefore, there should be a mid-morning Mass at St Patrick's. One hour is not enough for the priests to cover the next Mass in an emergency. We cannot count on retired priests. The 7:30PM Sunday Mass is unnecessary as we have the 5PM Regional, and that Mass instead could be used at another more well attended time. The 7:30PM Sunday Mass would be an unnecessary burden on our priests.
3. Comment: From 2012 to 2016, total attendance has decreased by 385 people (16% decrease). The 8AM Masses only have a decrease of 7 people (1% decrease). The Saturday 4PM Masses are showing a 198 person decrease (24% decrease). The 10:30AM Masses show a 162 person decrease (19.5% decrease). Since the 8AM Masses have remained stable in attendance, there should be two Mass time slots at 8AM.
4. Comment: Instead of 7:30PM Sunday Mass, maybe we should consider moving the Regional 5PM Mass to 6:30PM. The 10:30AM Mass at St Patrick's should stay at that time.
5. Comment: There are too many Masses. We only need one early morning Mass, one mid-morning Mass, and the Regional Mass.
6. Comment: Remember that after Mass schedules are set, we will need to fit in a Religious Education schedule. Also the 7:30PM Mass will be tough for families with activities and kids doing homework.
7. Q) Will the Faith Formation classes still be in the Faith Formation Building? A) Yes. Q) When will the kids go to Mass? St Casimir's would be very convenient to go to after Faith Formation classes.
8. Comment: Thank you to the priests for all the past beautiful Masses. He was surprised that the 7:30PM Mass was even a suggestion. A) It might attract families who are out of town for the weekend. Canon Law says that 7:30PM counts as a Sunday Mass.
9. Comment: For college students a late Mass is good, but there is not a high population here who would attend. Air conditioning should be considered an important necessity due to medical situations. People have passed out in church due to the heat.

10. Comment: If people want to go to Mass, they will find a time. At 7:30PM young families will be putting their kids to bed.
11. Q) Once the Mass schedule is set, will it be revisited if it's not working, or after a year? A) Yes it will be evaluated, but we need to give it time first.
12. Q) Who makes the final decision? A) (It will not be chosen out of a hat!) The Planning Team will look at all the suggestions, and the least disruptions, and do their best with this input to decide.
13. Q) Is there a limit to the number of Masses a priest can do in a weekend? A) Bishop Clark said three per weekend. Bishop Matano says three per day.
14. Comment: If St Patrick's gets the Regional Mass, then CTR should get the choice of Sunday Masses.
15. Comment: It's difficult not knowing which priests will be here. When scheduling Masses, need to consider that priests have vacation time, and retired priests could be sick.
16. Q) What about Reconciliation times? If there are only two Saturday Masses, it will also decrease a Reconciliation time. Could there be an additional weekday time for Reconciliation? A) Reconciliation has had consistent attendance on Saturday afternoons, but it would make sense to add another time slot for weekday Reconciliations. Parishioners can always make appointments for Reconciliation as well.
17. Comment: The 5PM Regional Mass has always had a rotating priest. It is wonderful to get different perspectives. The homilies are very rich.
18. Q) We are privileged to have four deacons. This merger will mean extra work for them. Is there any chance we will get more deacons assigned here? A) Probably not. We are lucky to have so many now. They do a great job.
19. Comment: Under Schedule A, the two times should be switched. St Mary's should have the 9AM Mass and Our Lady of Lourdes should have the 10AM Mass.
20. Comment: Each parishioner favors their own schedule. The Holy Spirit will be working among us in this decision making process.
21. Q) We have great deacons who give great sermons. Can they consecrate the host and wine, and perform the Mass? A) There are limitations. They can't anoint the sick. They can only use hosts that are already consecrated at a Communion service. In an emergency a deacon or even a trained lay person can lead a prayer service.
22. Q) In regards to there being fewer priests and fewer parishioners, where does the Catholic Church stand on having female deacons? Is the Church evolving at all? A) In the early church there were women deacons. The Pope has been thinking about female deacons and married priests. There is no answer in the immediate future for changes. The shortage of priests is in Elmira and the whole Northeast.
23. Q) Has the Committee considered a 3:30PM Mass on Sunday? A) It's a possibility, though some think 12:30PM on a Sunday is too late.
24. Comment: In her childhood there was a 7:30PM Mass on Sunday and it worked great. Convenient especially for people who work all day on Sundays.
25. Q) Elmira College has a late Sunday Mass. Would they open up to the public? A) We can look into it.
26. Fr John: The 7:30PM Sunday Mass is not necessarily meant for young families. It's a way of reaching out to working people and young adults, who are the future of our Church.

27. Q) Could we have a Youth Mass once a month? Sometimes it's the only Mass kids will attend.
A) We need a basic schedule first and then can decide which Mass can be a Youth Mass.
28. Q) Will the Planning Committee make the recommendation to the Bishop about the decision made on April 5th? A) The Planning Committee will convey the agreed upon Mass schedule to the Bishop for his blessing.
29. Comment: Years ago there were only Masses on Sunday.
30. Q) When will we find out who will be our priest and parochial vicar? A) Hopefully soon.
31. Q) If we are going from three parishes to one, won't all the Masses actually be Regional Masses?
A) Yes there will no longer be BS or CTR. The church buildings will still retain their names. The Regional Mass also includes St Mary Our Mother.
32. Q) What will the new parish name be? A) We will submit possibilities, but the Bishop will make the final decision.
33. Q) How long can you stay at a parish? A) Because it's considered a new parish, Fr. Rick and/or Fr. Scott would be allowed to apply here.
34. Q) What about daily Masses? Right now they are dependent on retired priests. Is there a possibility that some would be cancelled? A) The weekend Masses need to be set up first, and then daily Masses will be looked at.
35. Comment: She is worried about losing parishioners due to animosity. She thinks the Bishop should be present at these meetings especially with personnel changes. A) The Bishop is concerned with this situation and is keeping updated.
36. Comment: Disappointment expressed that St Charles is not being used. A) St Charles will still be used for funerals and weddings.

NEXT STEPS:

PowerPoint slide about Planning Team meeting on April 5th.

Fr Scott – We are all disciples of Jesus. Faith is important to all of us. We are lucky to have choices of Masses instead of some places where people cannot go to Mass every week. We may have to adjust our schedules if our top choices don't work out.

CLOSING PRAYER