

Town Meeting Minutes - Wednesday, April 25, 2018 at 1:00 PM – Sacred Heart Church

Questions with Responses:

1. Did the Planning team consider demographics such as age and transportation needs? Specifically, when deciding to have the Holy Family Saturday evening Mass at 6PM? Holy Family has the oldest parishioners of all the Churches and they should not be going to Mass that late, especially in the winter, it would be very dangerous for them!
Response: Many variables and demographics were used to create these schedules, but we will look at age as a factor at our next meeting.
2. Will the 5PM regional Mass rotate to all the different parishes?
Response: No, at present it will remain at St. Alphonsus Church. The priests will rotate but not the site. Our new religious education director, Carlo Stebbings, presently has a community wide high school youth group meeting at St. Alphonsus and has plans for a middle school youth group soon. Where ever these groups are held will be where the regional Mass is celebrated.
3. It seems that there are a lot of retired priests that could be used in this equation, were they considered during this process?
Response: There are only three retired priests assisting in our area presently and they can't be considered in the schedules but they can fill in when asked at their discretion and we are very thankful to them for doing so.
4. How many priests are working at the pastoral center? Couldn't they be assigned to parishes and hire lay people to take their places in those jobs?
Response: There are only four:
 - Our Bishop, who travels to celebrate Masses at different parishes within the diocese during the week and on Sundays.
 - The Bishops secretary who travels with the Bishop.
 - The Chancellor who fills in when parishes ask—for instance, when a Pastor becomes ill and the Parish needs a short-term replacement. He is presently doing so at two churches since one of our pastors has been on medical leave since last June.
 - The Vicar General who is serving two parishes in our diocese for weekend Masses.
5. Why is St. Mary's getting to keep all their Masses and most of their original Mass times? It does not seem fair at all, the sacrifices do not seem equally distributed, was percentage of capacity the biggest factor?
Response: Yes, that was a strong factor in decision making. Our top priority in creating these schedules was to displace and disrupt the least amount of people as possible.
6. Is the planning team looking at physical plants, not just Mass schedules? There are a lot of unused buildings that are costing too much, is this the next step to close all our churches and buildings?
Response: Yes, the planning team has a buildings and grounds sub-committee that has met twice already and they are looking at all the non-worship buildings at all the parishes, the results will be reviewed at the planning team meeting in June. Our Bishop is against closing any worship sites, we are looking at the other buildings and using them in the most efficient way in conjunction with the ministries that are found to be most important to this community as configured from the ministry surveys. These issues will be addressed in the next fiscal year planning meetings. Pastoral planning includes many different issues and we have only just begun.
7. Will there be some type of evaluation done once this schedule takes effect?
Response: There will be an evaluation done after a full year.

8. Is there going to be a change this July?

Response: No, there are no changes taking place in our community on July 1, 2018 with regards to Pastors. Fr. Erick will be leaving St. Mary's, he has been reassigned to Geneva and Fr. Justin Miller from Penfield has been assigned to St. Mary's.

9. Why can't a priest that is only doing one Mass in Cluster 1 on Saturday evening come and do an earlier Mass at Holy Family in Cluster 2?

Response: With this schedule each priest in each cluster is assigned four Masses each, therefore this suggestion would not work because that Priest doing one Mass on Saturday has three more Masses on his schedule on Sunday. Although the four priests in times of illness or vacation will help between clusters, it is better to concentrate on serving the cluster they are assigned to.

10. There are many foreign priests, are you actively recruiting them?

Response: We are very grateful that our brother priests have come to the United to States to help us. Priests from other nations are presently serving in our Diocese, unfortunately there is not a large group asking to come here and serve. When requests are made these Priests are welcomed, but our foreign nations are also in need of more Priests due to over population in their home parishes. With the immigration laws becoming stricter it is also more difficult and time consuming which may be a deterrent to some Priests.

11. I am worried that we are not going to have a bond with the Priests anymore with these changes.

Response: This is also a concern of the planning team, we discussed an option that involves Priest A and B rotating their schedules on some sort of weekly or monthly rotation within their cluster to help develop and foster relationships between the Priests and the different congregations.

12. Holy Family is already struggling financially--will envelopes from different parishes put into different Churches' collections be sent to back to the home parish?

Response: Yes, that is the procedure now and it will continue to be practiced.

13. Why is the Diocese, who is so far removed from our community, making all these decisions for us, why aren't we involved, do the Priests have any say in this?

Response: The reason we are in this process is because the number of Priest vocations is far below the number of Priests moving to senior status. Therefore, this is a Priest shortage and our Bishop is asking all communities in our Diocese to proactively come up with a plan to take effect when we lose Priests, because when that time comes there will not be any Priests to replace them. It is important that we have a plan so we can continue to serve this community and as many parishes as we can with the Priest coverage we will have, while at the same time causing the least amount of disruption and displacement to as many members as possible. This is not just a DOR problem; there is a nationwide shortage of vocations.

To help put it in perspective for you, here are some statistics from our Diocese:

In 2017 50% of the Priests were over 70 years old.

By 2022 40% will be over 75 years old.

Present ages of Priests serving in the DOR:

Age	# of priests
20's	3
30's	9
40's	8
50's	19
60's	41
70's	48
80's	31
over 90	2

14. Is 4 PM the earliest a Mass can be celebrated? In Naples, Florida they have Masses as early as 2:30 PM, why not here?

Response: This question came up during the Planning Phase in Elmira and we asked our Bishop and he asked other Bishops in New York State. It was unanimous that that was the earliest. One consideration as to why is because of Funeral and Wedding Masses taking place on Saturday afternoons and then we must also allow for reconciliation time, therefore there is not time to have a Mass any earlier than 4 PM. Also, with regards to earlier Masses in Florida, this is probably due to the increased number of retired Priests living in that area due to its warmer climate, which allows for greater assistance in coverage of Masses.

15. Will the Bishop be closing Churches here? Is that the next step after reducing Masses?

Response: It is not the Bishop's intent to close worship sites. If a planning team makes a recommendation to close a worship site because it makes sense for that community, he will consider their recommendation but he does not have any plans to close any worship sites.

16. Do we really need to have Saturday evening Masses, why not have all the Masses on Sundays?

Response: Our goal with the new Mass schedules is to cause the least amount of disruption and financial loss as possible, this was our driving force. Many people can't attend Mass on Sunday for many reasons and we would not want to disrupt that entire group that attends Mass on Saturdays.

17. You mentioned that the regional Mass is going to stay at St. Alphonsus, why can't you rotate that Mass from parish to parish?

Response: As mentioned, there is a link to that Mass and the youth group which now is held at the St. Alphonsus parish center. In the future, there may be more youth and religious education components taking place there as classrooms become available at that site.

18. St. Hyacinth's has all those things right now and is not being used at all, why not go there for youth and religious education? We have a rectory and gym and school building with classrooms, gym/hall and kitchen. Then the regional Mass could be at St. Hyacinth's Church.

Response: Thank you, we will bring all your suggestions back to the group at our future meeting.

19. When will the planning team be meeting again to discuss all of these suggestions and concerns?

Response: Tuesday, May 1, 2018.

20. What will be the status of St. John's Church in Port Byron?

Response: Although weekend Masses will not take place there if one of the current options is chosen, the worship site will not be closed. Sacraments can still be celebrated at that site.

21. With all the pressures that have been put on the Priests and the parishes and the parishioners and this planning team it seems that the better solution is to either allow woman to become Priests or let Priests get married. Why aren't we putting the pressure on the Pope, why aren't the Bishops putting more pressure on the Pope?

Response: This is not something that is supported by the Bishops or Priests, therefore they are not pursuing this path with the Pope.

22. I believe that if Priests could marry, as they are in other religions, we would see a tremendous increase in vocations.

Response: This is not an option for Roman Catholic Priests, but I want to point out that non-Roman Catholic religious groups that allow their leaders to marry are also experiencing the same decrease in vocations, so it would seem this is a trend in all religions and allowing marriage is not a deterrent to that trend.

23. How are these four Priests expected to cover these new schedules and daily Masses, Sacraments, Holy Days, etc.?

Response: The present Priests feel they can sustain the proposed schedules. However, there are priests in the Diocese that may not be able to maintain that schedule, due to various reasons one being health issues and at that time the schedule might have to be changed or the possibility of a retired priest helping that priest may be an option. Until that time comes, there is no way to predict the variables that will be involved. Therefore, this would have to be dealt with individually by each cluster and change could take place.

Comments/Suggestions:

24. If St. Ann's closes in the winter months the parishioners will have nowhere to attend Mass because most live so far away and on rural roads that it would be too dangerous to travel to any of the other churches.
25. I believe that you did not consider the "culture" of each parish and although St. Ann's is small and has a small membership comparatively our culture is very different. I came to Sacred heart last summer to sell raffle tickets after Mass and I was appalled at all the people that left after communion! That never happens at St. Ann's, so you must look at different cultures of each parish before you expect people to just go anywhere for Mass.
26. Why was Holy Family's Saturday evening Mass changed to 6PM? It is far too late and dark for walkers. In the winter months it is very dangerous for both those who walk and drive! Also, this cuts into the dinner hour for most families and the elderly. I don't think any other church in the diocese has a Mass that late.
27. The 6PM Mass at Holy Family is a huge safety concern. People have been killed crossing North Street at night, it is too late for a Mass.
28. Was the fact that the organist at Holy Family has a second job on Saturday's and wouldn't be able to play at a 6PM Mass? Many fundraisers and events take place at Holy Family on Saturday evenings after Mass, a 6PM Mass would be a major conflict. Couldn't Sacred heart or St. Alphonsus take the 6PM Mass?
29. It seems all the parishes have in the past and/or are now making sacrifices, with regards to Masses, why isn't St. Mary's?
30. St. Mary's Church has the absolute worst parking situation in this community, in fact it is non-existent.
31. St. Ann's Church has a loyal close-knit core group of members that attend Mass year-round. If you take away the Masses during the winter, that group will go to another parish and make friendships and ties to that parish and not return to St. Ann's in the summer months. We will be losing the group that organizes all the events that take place at St. Ann's throughout the year. If you decide to close St. Ann's Church in the winter, that group will not have a place to gather and plan the events like our annual chicken barbeque and bazaar. We often have meetings when we hold our monthly coffee hours after Mass during those "off season" months. There will be no one left if you take away the Mass at St. Ann's for 6 months of the year.
32. Please consider bringing back Children Masses, where the children are involved in every part of the Mass and the homily is geared toward the young. I feel we would bring in more young families and young people if we had these Masses.