

A couple weeks ago a town meeting was held in South Portland. The focus of the town meeting was to begin a conversation about our parishes and to seek out the best way to live as church. Over 100 people attended the meetings. The town meetings invited parishioners to think about the greatest challenges that we face and must pay attention to, especially as they pertain to 5 areas: worship, catechesis (religious education), community life (church and family life), service (social justice and peace), stewardship (finance and administration). Parishioners were also given an opportunity to give voice to their greatest hopes and fears about the possibility of merging Holy Cross and St. John and forming a new parish with two worship sites. If you would like to see a summary of the meeting and the data that was collected, copies are available in the narthex of the church or at www.hcsj.org.

As a direct result of the town meeting, three steps have been taken: first, I will be writing a letter to Bishop Malone expressing our desire not to merge immediately. Secondly, the parish pastoral council made the decision to dissolve and to reform itself as a Parish Council of Ministries. The Council of Ministries represents each of the parish commissions. The Purpose and Function of the Council of Ministries is:

- To coordinate and give pastoral direction to all the pastoral activities and ministries in each particular parish community
- To focus on Evangelization through the ministries of each parish. Consequently, evangelization happens in word, worship, service and is supported through stewardship of time, talent and treasure.
- To establish annual goals for their specific parish and areas of ministry, in light of the Cluster Pastoral Plan and Mission Statement, with plans to carry out the goals
- To listen and address the concerns and needs of parishioners
- To dream new directions and to discover new avenues of growth for the parish

The parish commissions are also being reformed to reflect the current needs, the parish commissions will be: Worship, Community Life, Catechesis, Social Justice, Communications, and Stewardship.

And thirdly, we will be scheduling a series of town meetings to address very specific needs and concerns. **The first will be held on June 12, 2007 at 6:30 p.m. at the Pastoral Center on Aspen Avenue.** The topic will be Community Life. The following questions will be used to focus our conversation: *As the Catholic community of South Portland:*

- a) How do we care for our aging church members? What are needs? What are concerns?*
- b) How can you connect beyond Mass time?*
- c) How do we keep youth involved?*
- d) What limits you from having a sense of belonging?*

What are the greatest challenges that we face and must pay attention to as we move forward?

Worship:

- Stress placed on clergy / scheduling their time effectively
- We may not be able to accommodate the larger numbers at church with 2 fewer masses
- Parking
- Not enough clergy to service parishes
- Cutback in masses = less attendance=less cash flow
- Calling forth people to serve in ministries that are available to them
- Creating an inclusive and welcoming worship community
- Retreats offered during the evening and daytime and maybe in several locations
- Loss of masses
- Keep the 5:30 mass / Cut the 8:30 instead
- Transporting the elderly to mass: how can we do it?
- Mass times
- Size of worship space
- Ushers to help seat people
- Attendance may drop because of fewer masses
- Can we better utilize deacons?
- Use retired clergy for retreats, etc
- It will be difficult to establish a relationship with the priest if he is running to another mass
- Use the retired priests for weekend masses
- 5:30 mass very important to the elderly
- Finding a time and place to go to mass
- Get the changes done now so that we can move forward and get back to why we come together to worship
- Adoration / Prayer groups
- Trained laity to lead prayer services, etc.
- Loss of identity with the loss of a mass
- Publish the presiders schedule in the bulletin

Catechesis:

- How can we involve the parents in the faith formation of their children?
- Youth Ministry for junior high and high school
- Continued involvement of the laity
- Need for volunteers and training
- How do we keep the kids after Confirmation?
- How can we support families with older teens and young adults?
- CLOW & VBS
- Both parents are working, kids lead active lives, it is difficult to get enough people interested and enough volunteers to help
- Centralized resource location for up to date materials especially with RCIA – make it available to catechists
- Prioritize education needs beyond Confirmation
- How do we educate our parents?
- Youth coffee house / pub for them to gather

Community life:

- Communication VERY important in all categories listed on this survey
- Profile parish commissions in the bulletin
- We are losing a personal contact with people as we grow larger
- Loss of sense of community and belonging because of fewer masses (parishioners identify with the mass they attend)
- Funeral ministry
- Parish socials / activities to bring people together
- Lack of volunteers because people are spread too thin
- Women's Council and KC
- Market the commissions more effectively
- Open the Women's council to women at Holy Cross
- Institute a welcoming committee and update the new parishioners folder

Service:

- Support ongoing projects like the Food pantry, Soup Kitchen, Capim Grosso and SJP activities
- Outreach to the homebound
- Need to be more welcoming of new people
- This is one of our strengths
- Programs to encourage environmental consciousness / energy conservation
- Drivers to take the elderly to church

Stewardship:

- People sometimes feel inadequate about what their talents might be
- We need to start "asking" more often
- List the parish "needs" and offer the training needed
- Communication is a must!!!
- Encourage planned giving (wills, bequests, etc)
- Start a program to help people understand how important it is to share our time and talent
- "I don't think it is fair for St. John to have to help pay Holy Cross' debt"
- Combine the finances
- Hire qualified people
- More volunteers
- Combine the finances, reduce the debt at Holy Cross
- "Everybody has something to share" how do we help them invest their time and talent in the church?
- Study what would be the best use of our buildings
- Create a building and grounds committee
- Encourage use of envelopes
- "Need to merge the finance councils sooner rather than later and, keep the 5:30 mass...this is a must!"
- "Can we support 2 church buildings?"
- Shared contracted services with the 4 parishes?
- If we were to combine, how do we maintain St. John in the future, could this be the first step to closure?
- "accept the inevitable and move on..."
- How do we reach out to our younger families and encourage them to get involved?
- Where are the "new" clergy going to come from?

If the two parishes were to merge and form a single parish with two worship sites, what are:

Our greatest fears/resistances:

- Eventual loss of St. John
- Loss of identity
- Financial consequences
- Will we loose parishioners?
- Debt, overcrowding, parking
- Will we have enough people to do the work?
- Will there be someone to offer the sacraments and preside at the funerals?
- Change
- From my point of view we have already merged thanks to Fr. Paul

Our hopes and dreams:

- Mutual help
- Vibrant churches/ worship
- More interaction with parishioners
- Two churches that thrive forever
- That we thrive, grow and share our faith

What will we lose?

- Parish identity
- Nothing

What will we gain?

- Strength in numbers: sharing our time, talent and treasure
- Larger congregations: more spirit and community
- What's wrong with continuing to call us the Catholic Community in South Portland?