

Questions from the 4/15/18 10:00 Mass listening session

1. **Why can funerals be held at Alvada, Liberty and Frenchtown funeral chapels and not weddings?**

The consensus from our Parish Assembly, Listening Sessions, and discernment from the Leadership Councils, in seeking a sustainable model of Parish Life for the future of the Church in our area, was to conserve personnel and parish resources by concentrating our worship and pastoral life at two centers instead of five. This results in limiting Sunday Masses and the celebration of the Sacraments to the Church sites in Bascom and New Riegel. We felt it was a compassionate response in this first year of transition, that at a time of death for those who request them, we could make use of the chapels for funerals only through June 30, 2019, as long as they are clean, safe and worthy. To extend their use for other celebrations and Sacraments would be contrary to our goal.

2. **Is the Bishop or the Pastor making these decisions?**

The Bishop always has responsibility for the care of the faithful in the diocese. Decisions like these, can only be made by him, and only in fact, with the blessing and approval of the Vatican. The decision to unify our parishes is not made easily. Our request is unique, in that it has come from our local leadership, after years of thoughtful study. The Pastoral Council and Finance Councils were tasked to study our current situation of two parishes with one pastor, at 5 sites with aging buildings, dwindling resources, and uneven growth in ministry engagement and to seek a sustainable model of parish ministry that would lead to a vibrant and faith filled future for the Church in our area of rural Seneca County.

3. **Why was there so little information shared with or sought from the congregation since the listening sessions.**

RCM Architects, at the request of the Pastoral and Finance Councils of our parishes, assisted us with a Feasibility Study, which looked not only at our buildings and the projected costs of maintenance and updates, but also at our current and projected ministry needs. They presented us with several options for a more sustainable future. Invitations to the presentation of the RCM Report, and to the Listening Sessions that followed were mailed to every household, along with rsvp response cards. The consensus from each of those gatherings was always the same. Either unify on one campus in New Riegel or concentrate major effort at that one site and maintain a presence on the Bascom site. Summaries of the results of the Feasibility study, and the Listening sessions were mailed to all households. Videos of the sessions were offered on the parish website. The Finance and Pastoral Councils continued to use that information as they sought the best way forward and the minutes of their meetings have been published in the parish bulletin. Pastoral Council representatives met with all active ministry teams. Some will say we've talked too long and moved too slowly. Others will say we didn't talk long enough and are rushing too quickly.

4. **Did we receive the Bishop's response to our letter to him on the unification plan? If not, when do we think we'll receive it? Do we have to wait until we receive his response?**

When Bishop Thomas was here for his canonical visit in January, he was already aware of our preparation to petition him for unification. He had already seen our Feasibility Study, was aware of the results of the Listening Sessions. He and representatives in his Leadership Cabinets had visited with us and had seen the ongoing work of the Pastoral and Finance Councils. He expressed his support to the Councils personally when he met with them. His letter to our parish, published in full in the bulletin, clearly expressed his gratitude for our thoughtful process and his support of our direction. In the same way that a pastor couldn't make a recommendation like that to the Bishop without the affirmation and recommendation of the parish leadership councils, so too, the Bishop won't make a decision without the recommendation of his advisory councils, which includes the Presbyteral Council. This council consists of representation of priests from every deanery, and from every level of priestly leadership in the diocese and exists to assist the bishop in the governance of the diocese. They will meet next in early May. We shouldn't expect a formal reply from the Bishop's office until this council has met.

5. **5. If the Saturday Mass had stayed in Bascom (5:30pm) then Father would not have to travel back and forth on Sunday for the 8:00am and 10:00am mass.**

All Mass times have been evaluated and at this time it is felt that this new schedule (New Riegel 5:00pm Saturday, Bascom 8:00am Sunday and New Riegel 10:00am Sunday) will provide the most room for the members that are currently utilizing those Mass times.

6. What is the goal for dealing with the buildings? Why hasn't this been decided now rather than later?

To pursue the alternative use, sale, or removal of our chapels, while we are still using them for daily mass didn't seem wise or immediately necessary. We have honestly not pursued any offer or entertained any plans regarding the future of our buildings. We already know the economics of what it takes to heat and cool our buildings, even when they are used for only an hour once or twice a week. The Feasibility Study also has forecast what maintenance costs may eventually be required for each of the fourteen buildings at the five sites. Like many practical decisions that are made in every family, economics and justice will come into play. For how long should we pay for utilities and repairs on buildings that no longer serve our pastoral needs? For how long can we dedicate financial resources into little used buildings, and ignore other pressing pastoral needs? If you owned an antique car that belonged to your great grandfather, and you never drove it, and in fact you could no longer get working parts for it, but you continued to pay for insurance and storage, and there came a time that you couldn't afford to repair the vehicle that carried you to work, or the one that your kids needed to get back and forth to school...sooner or later, economics and justice would, or should come into play in your family's decisions. We'll give ourselves a year to monitor the conditions of the buildings, assess the facility needs of our newly united parish, evaluate the expenses at each site, and then begin to consider what are the wisest options at each site. A sub-committee responsible to the Pastoral and Finance Councils might be needed to assist in this. All decisions about land use and property sales would need the final approval of the Bishop and need to follow church guidelines and canonical norms.

7. What is the benefit of bringing on SSPA with All Saints when we're adding more buildings to take care of and limited funds?

Some parishioners from SS Patrick & Andrew may feel like they are being "swallowed up" by the bigger parish, while some parishioners from All Saints may question the wisdom of taking on more buildings with less financial resources. The truth is, we didn't *ask* to be "twinned" as sister parishes back in 2011... and prior to that we weren't *asked* if we wanted to be the NPB cluster, or be joined as All Saints, or be merged as SSP&A. Those were decisions that were made for us. The petition to unify as one parish under the patronage of all the Saints, is the only recommendation that has actually come from us. We've been walking together for the last seven years, guided by one pastor, sharing leadership councils, sharing Mass schedules, sharing pastoral planning, sharing bulletins and webpages. In times of sorrow we've shared worship sites and in times of joyful gatherings we've been guests around one another's tables. Because our parishes have shared life daily and deeply, we've already begun to see the value in our shared walk of faith. Honestly speaking, we've also already shared in the experience of carrying...and being carried by the other. The decision to unify in some ways is a recognition of what has already been happening. "Diversity is a given. Unity is a choice"

8. Why are Pastoral Council meetings closed to the public?

While most monthly Pastoral Council Meetings are not "public meetings", on the other hand they are also not "secret meetings". A summary of the minutes are published in the bulletin every month, and all minutes as required by the diocese, are kept on file in the parish office/archives. The local dean reviews them every year to ensure that we are keeping them updated. So, the work of the Council is made very public, however, the meetings are typically not "public meetings". The Council meets only once a month for only two hours. The first half hour of the meeting is spent in prayerful silence that leads to faith sharing. We practice training our hearts and minds to listen to the Word of God. Discerning the direction of God's Spirit for our parish community is the main work of the Council. Often times the Council's agenda includes discussion of a book they are reading, evaluation of studies that have been done, or working in small groups to refine recommendations that are the result of their study. On most occasions the Council doesn't complete the entire work set out in the agenda as they often have more to accomplish than time allows. So, while the ordinary meetings of the Council are dedicated to it's agenda, the Council takes seriously it's effort to listen to the hearts and minds of the parishioners. In the last several years, two Parish Assemblies were held, two Listening Sessions, Two Parish wide surveys, all of which were widely publicized, through weekend announcements, parish bulletins, parish wide mailings and the parish website. The results of each of these efforts were also widely published in the same

fashion. It's the results of these efforts to listen to the needs and concerns of the parish which in fact have established the goals of the Council and still now shape its agenda and its on-going work. The Question and Answer sessions being held monthly and the recent meetings with ministry teams also flow from the Councils desire to listen and respond as best they can to parishioners concerns and to seek the common good.