



STELLA MARIS PARISH

OUR LADY "STAR OF THE SEA"™

Dear Fellow Parishioners of Stella Maris Parish,

It helps to begin with some context... As long as I have been pastor of Stella Maris Parish, our leadership has been trying to plan long term and short term, so that the combined parish that we had become, could be the best parish. I personally think that we have done a very good job. Although some mistakes have been made and I take personal responsibility for the good and the bad whatever it is; we have come a long way since the time that five parishes and an island ministry became one parish.

Shortly after I became pastor, we explored the possibility of closing our present original church buildings and constructing one new church. There were many good reasons to do just that for the sake of efficiency, updating and uniting but it was not the decision that was made or somehow the best decision at the time. The vote was 39.1% in favor and 60.9% against. After the vote, we consulted the diocesan officials since the bishop ultimately makes the final decision but we were between bishops. When Bishop Ricken arrived, he made it clear that he did not want any more churches closed unless there was an overwhelming movement within a parish to do so. We moved on from that decision and eventually to help with our long term planning affirmed as a leadership that we were keeping all of our buildings/sites while finding the best way to be Stella Maris Parish as we were. We kept the parish office in Egg Harbor and the rectory in Baileys Harbor. We then decided to improve the kitchen and hall in Sister Bay so that they could function for all of our big parish events. The basement in Baileys Harbor was then greatly improved so that our united faith formation program could function best. These improvements have greatly helped the parish to accomplish its mission. The last major building issue is our parish office and how we can change it to best serve our parish. Along the way, we have fixed the outside and inside of buildings as well as the worship spaces. We also demolished the little Wagner house that was on the south side of our Sister Bay property. It was not serving our needs well and was more of a liability than a help while the property was a big plus. There is still other work to be done.

Long before Mary Ellen Waldvogel, one of our former faith formation directors moved out of the Friex house which is to the north of our Sister Bay parish property, we have been considering what to do with that house. It was bought as housing for the two Dominican Sisters who served the parishes with Fr. Matt right before Stella Maris came together as one. It was simply the norm years ago that parishes housed religious sisters. Starting 20 – 30 years ago though, many of them began to live in apartments (like Sister Angela) and other settings as there were not enough sisters to support the maintenance of convents if there were even still convents to live in. Since we had the house, it seemed logical for our last two faith formation directors to live there. We do not have any staff who need a house now. We were confronted with the strong possibility by the village of Sister Bay that we would have to pay taxes on the house if a staff member did not live there, just as we have been paying property taxes on our land on A and F from the beginning. Churches are not always tax free. That would be a burden. The biggest burden of having that house has been being a landlord. Many hundreds of hours of volunteer time as well as hours of my time and other staff has been given over to that house, which is a huge distraction from our parish mission and vision. I know it has been a huge stressor for me at times, on top of the five sets of buildings that we already have. That is the main reason why we have been moving forward with the sale of the house.

I have heard very few objections to the sale of the house but I thought that it was important to address the objections that I have heard. An objection that I take seriously is the possibility that we might need the land someday.

Churches should always have land for expansion in case they need to do so. We know that our Sister Bay site is our biggest and most well attended. It is also possibly the most logical place to keep open even if all the others are closed in the future because of its location which is best positioned in relation to Sturgeon Bay, close to the tip of the peninsula, at the meeting of both highways, a part of the biggest village and biggest most complete building. With all that in mind, we would want to make sure that we have enough room for expanding the building, the parking and possibly building a house for the priest if there is one. The leadership is confident that there is enough space on the main part of the campus but even more importantly the land on which the house sits would be extremely difficult to use with it being on the sloping side of the hill. Parking would be very difficult to build. We could not add on to the church that way. There is just very little that could be done with it because of the nature of the varying elevation.

Another objection has been that there could be other uses for the property. It would not be suited well at all for offices someday. We already struggle with using a converted house which is far from ideal and hopefully going to change some day. Others have suggested that we house the poor or the elderly. The elderly would not do well with the slope of the property or the driveways or the different levels. Housing the poor is a whole different matter. Although the house is not well suited for that purpose either, there are other matters to take into consideration. The parish does not have the resources to run a house like that and neither does Saint Vincent de Paul at this time, as has been suggested. The diocese probably would not approve either use any way.

With all that in mind and the fact that we have spent much time, energy and money in fixing it up to be sold in the last year, the leadership of the parish believes that it is time to sell it. We have acquired a realtor who is a parishioner and committed to helping us achieve the best sale in price and swiftness. We are aware that the construction on the highway may keep it from being sold for a while but we are willing to take the risk. We do not know what the market will be like now or into the future. The property is on a good location with a small Bay view. The house is in as good of shape as we have seen it. If you know of anyone interested in the property, help them to connect with us. We want this situation to move forward as fast as possible. If you do have any concerns about this situation, please contact me or someone on the finance council in the next week. We would be happy to talk to you about it, listen to your concerns and answer them. It is always difficult to make these decisions when there are so many different ideas and input. I have seriously considered and tried to address each of these. In the end, as pastor, I need to make the decision and move us forward toward our mission.

Our parish recently adopted new mission and vision statements as a part of our continuing planning process. The leadership is studying how best to implement them as we read a book on discipleship together. We are committed to not only learning about discipleship but finding better ways to help all of us to be disciples. Our buildings are something that help us carry out our mission and vision. We have to evaluate how that is true for us continually. Hopefully as we continue to divest ourselves of some buildings, fix some and improve others; we find ways to become the best disciples of Jesus that we can possibly be. Thanks for listening. Please continue to stay connected and committed to your parish as a part of your faith. Always come to us with concerns, ideas and help. Together we will continue to become better. Thanks again. Best wishes and prayers.

In Christ's love,

Fr. Dave Ruby, Pastor