



St. Bernard Parish

We are St. Bernard's, Together we are Church

Facilities Task Force Progress Report and Recommendations

May 2018

St. Bernard's Facilities Task Force was formed earlier this year from a group of parish leadership persons who had participated in a 4-part series on the bishops' guidelines for a parish worship space and its added facilities. The two initial topics for the Task Force's study have been: the parish offices and the portable classrooms.

1. Since the parish's founding in 1977, the rectory on Parker Road has accommodated the parish's original chapel, its first few offices and pastor's residence. Over the years, this house has become inadequate as a parish service center. And its distance from the newer church has been less than efficient and convenient for staff and parishioners. In fact, the original plans of the church included a later expansion with offices and meeting rooms.
2. The portable walls in the worship space have been set up and taken down weekly for religious education for 30 years and are wearing out. Since replacement parts are no longer available, do we plan to purchase a whole new configuration of portable classrooms in the worship space? Or, do we plan to create more rooms for religious education and other activities outside of the worship space, leaving the worship space to be renovated more specifically for worship rather than as a multi-purpose space?

The Task Force studied the current rectory on Parker Road. They toured and evaluated its facilities and interviewed staff who use it. While it has some positive amenities, its disadvantages far outweigh the positives:

- The house's main challenges are the many stairs inside and out as well as the very limited parking—both of which hinder accessibility for parishioners and visitors.
- Of course, its distance from the church campus has proven to be a great inconvenience to the staff and others.
- Also, as a facility separate from the church campus, it requires the added expense of additional utilities and services such as landscaping and snow removal.

After such thorough considerations, the Task Force unanimously recommends that the parish explore the feasibility of building its parish office center on the church campus and sell the rectory on Parker Road.

The Task Force also focused on the issues related to the portable classroom walls in the worship space.

Communication with the original company and installers found that replacement parts are no longer available. And acquiring a new portable wall system would involve a significant renovation of the ceiling and a significant cost... probably in the six-figure range. The Task Force also learned that Our Mother of Good Counsel Parish spends close to \$10,000 annually in rent of public school classrooms. And the limited availability of these public school classrooms limits the parish's religious ed program.

The Task Force also conducted a consultation with the parish catechists, a group that includes the program director, assistant and our permanent deacons. At this meeting the catechists expressed the following:

- Appreciation for the nearness of the classrooms to the worship space, which they used frequently for instructional tours.
- The value of the versatility and flexibility of the portable walls, which allowed for some creative groupings of students for special events.



But, for the catechists, the many challenges of the current situation seem to flow from the TEMPORARY nature of the rooms:

- Due to lack of storage space, the portable classrooms have inadequate and inappropriate furniture and furnishings.
- There can be no permanent decorating that could reinforce instruction.
- The director and catechists must haul much material in-and-out every week, which takes more time and energy.
- There was consensus that the classrooms have poor lighting that is not always manageable in each room.
- The heat and a/c are quite uneven from room to room.
- The noise control between and among classrooms is quite poor.
- With the program director's office, work room and resource library in the rectory offices on Parker Road, catechists have no central area for gathering, communicating, class preparation and storage.
- The presence of the portable classrooms in the worship space contributed to the less-than-reverential atmosphere of the worship space. I.e., it was designed and has been maintained as a multi-purpose space.

The portable classroom walls have served a valid purpose in the early years of the parish and offered the new parish helpful versatility. But there was a strong preference among the catechists for more permanent meeting rooms on the church campus that could be used not just for religious education but also for other meetings, activities and programs of the parish. The Task Force reflected on the concerns of the catechists and affirmed them as they recounted many others in the parish expressing similar views.

After such consideration, the Task Force unanimously recommends that the parish explore the feasibility of building on the church campus more permanent meeting rooms to be used by religious education and other parish programs and activities. These rooms might still employ some folding walls.

If a new addition to the pastoral center with parish offices and meeting rooms is feasible, then the Task Force also recommends the renovation and updating of the worship space as a space dedicated to the singular purpose of worship and other religious events. There may also be some suggestions for upgrading the kitchen, storage and other auxiliary rooms.

To explore the feasibility of the Task Force's recommendations...

- The parish will contract with an architectural firm to work with the Task Force in developing a general conceptual plan that will include a general cost estimate.
- This process will include regular communication and consultation with the parish community and its committees over the next few months.

At this point, parishioners are most welcome to share their suggestions and concerns in writing at StBtaskforce@gmail.com. Of course, they may also talk with me or any of the other Task Force members: Corinne Cirillo, Don Guinta, Rob Martin, Kurt Mikuta, Mary Jo O'Connor, Lori Paruszkiewicz, Bob Payne, Mary Ponschke, Joy Siergiej.

Let us pray for each other as we embark on this very important phase of our development as a parish community in this 40th anniversary year of St. Bernard's. We are St. Bernard's, Together we are Church.

Fr. Joe McCormick, OSA
Pastor