

Holy Redeemer Town Meeting – March 26, 2006

Lunch was provided with sandwiches, chips, coffee and punch. There were approximately 80 to 85 in attendance.

Matt Murphy, the facilitator for Cluster 11 introduced himself and asked Father O'Hara to open the forum with a prayer.

Then Matt proceeded to have the Cluster Committee introduce themselves to the parishioners and inform the parish community of the ground rules. (It was to be a listening session for Cluster Committee, not a Q&A session, the committee could respond with clarifying answers to some questions, one speaker at a time, allowing 3 to 5 minutes, once you have spoken you can't have the floor again until new people have been allowed to ask questions or finish a statement.) Matt stated that if after the forum is completed, any parishioner has additional thoughts, comments or desires to request a choice of a model, please be aware that you can email those comments to the various parishes.

Matt then proceeded to give an overview of the Cluster process and what has already taken place. He went on to explain that the Cluster Committee will have to prepare a report to present to the Diocese in June. The cluster is made up of St. Joseph's Parish and the various satellite missions, Holy Redeemer, St. Ignatius and St. Peter's. He further explained what the Cluster has actually accomplished to date, (financial numbers and figures, gathering information about the condition of the buildings themselves and the property, and a list of intangibles). The Cluster's last meeting was a reflection meeting – brainstorming and thinking about reorganization and to unite the Cluster.

Matt then opened the forum to the parishioners.

Q – As to the tangible assets – what basis did the cluster use? Was it an actual appraisal of property worth done by an appraiser? A- No, we did not utilize that as of yet. We merely used the tax records and the assessed values.

Q- That parishioner continued...Is it true that St. Peter's will revert back to the family that gave the property to the Church, if it should cease being a Church? A – Darrell has read the deed and that isn't exactly what the deed says. His interpretation is that the family that provided the land to the Church will have the right of first refusal and they would have to purchase the property back at the market price.

Q – Has anyone ventured to price real estate in the area proposed for a central church if Option #3 was chosen? A- At the present time nothing has been done by any one individual to check out the availability of property. Because of the geographic location, Trenton seemed to be a logical possibility. If property was sold, then it was hoped that that money would be sufficient to support the purchase of property and building of a new church.

Q (by several various parishioners-(People unfortunately did not stay to the rules – several voiced opinions without being called on.)– What are the demographics of each parish currently? What is it when the summer residents are here? What is the population during the winter months? Does the Cluster Committee have those numbers? – A- Matt requested Darrell to address this particular question. Darrell responded that he didn't have the numbers of parishioners with him at this forum, however, we did have an approximate number. (Unfortunately, St. Joe's and MDI Catholics do not follow the same registration process. MDI has registry of year-round and one for summer residents. St. Joe's does have a year-round record of residents, not that of the summer residents.) However, Darrell continued to state that as to the offertory collections that he could give that number. For MDI that amount was - \$117,000 and for St. Joe's \$233,000. He went on to say that a lot of the summer contributors to St. Joe's, specifically in the summer, were people that were passing through. As for the numbers, in the summer on MDI we service approximately 1,000 people and the number significantly drops during the winter months, whereas St. Joe's may have 350 at Mass in the off-season. We have requested information as to a trend analysis, but unfortunately the Diocese does not have this information available.

Q/Statement – We may be wasting our time, because what it may boil down to is dollars. We are a distinct group and our Cluster spans a very large area.

Q/Statement – One parishioner stated that she had lived on MDI for 25 years. Unfortunately because of the two very separate school systems, there remains a very strong rivalry between Ellsworth and MDI. “To use a comparison we will always have the Montague's and the Capulets”. But we can combine as a single parish and utilize the intangible assets to form in this single parish. Suggestion – On MDI, HR continues to require a lot of repair. Tear the church down and rebuild a new church in Bar Harbor on the same property, large enough to accommodate the growing summer population yet efficient to service the MDI winter community. During the time of rebuilding this facility, continue to use St. Peter's as the main church during the winter months and if necessary during the summer period of building, use St. Ignatius and St. Peter's. Once the new facility (HR) is rebuilt, then close St. Ignatius and St. Peter's. As for St. Joseph's, the parishioner was not sure of the exact property designations, but felt an addition to enlarge that particular parish could be accomplished by building on an addition to the Church behind present altar to align it with the Parish Hall. Purchase a new furnace and install central air. – As for the parking, utilize what property remains and perhaps build a parking garage. Ellsworth is a growing City, and with the hospital up the street and the Church itself centrally located in town, the Church could possibly rent out parking spaces during the work week for income. As for the possibility of the shortage of priests – we have a fulltime Deacon. Perhaps we could offer a Eucharistic Service once a week, alternating between MDI and St. Joe's. Use the services of our in-house deacon. By combining the Pastoral Council and Finance Committees to form one, and by sharing our intangible assets between the two churches, we would definitely become one parish. If we were to select one location, such as Trenton unfortunately all of us would have to travel, thus adding to the already difficult traffic conditions in the summer. In the winter we would have to travel through various weather conditions due

to our physical location on the coast. We also would be expending far more in dollars paying for the additional gas to reach that destination. With limited incomes for some that additional travel would and could be difficult. Plus the median age for most of those here at this meeting appears to be 65 and travel becomes more difficult the older we get.

Q/Statement – In agreement with what was said immediately prior. We need to focus on the year-round population and servicing those parishioners, but we must not lose sight of the summer visitors that support our churches. Outside of those studying for First Communion MDI does not currently have a Religious Ed program for the older children. It has become a home schooled environment. Perhaps with the Cluster becoming one single parish we could pool our children together for a stronger program and eventually we could have an active youth group.

Q/Statement – If parking in Ellsworth is a problem, please feel free to utilize the parking spaces available behind the Maine Community Foundation. As to capital expansion, this parishioner was not sure that was the way to go. Should we build a new facility??? What would we need in 20 years? We need to be creative. We need to utilize technology to bridge the gap down the road when we do have fewer priests. – A – Matt stated that the plan is currently to continue with two priests, but we don't know if that will always be the situation.

Q/Statement – We must be prudent and consider the distance the Cluster encompasses. We must consider the distance priests would have to travel to service the parishioners. We need to allow them to survive so they don't get burned out. But we can't give up – we must continue to move forward.

Q/Statement – The option of having two parishes is practical. Perhaps we could use the funds from the sale of the other satellite churches to fix up the buildings. Consider this an option rather than tear down a historic landmark in Bar Harbor.

Q/Statement – I'm from a small parish community. Years ago it was small with few winter residents, now it is a growing and vibrant community, a treasure. Do we really want to give that up? By going big and building a larger building?

Q/Statement – We need to have people who are willing to take ownership of projects.

Q/Statement – One parishioner mentioned the distance she traveled as a youngster. Coming over to MDI on a boat to attend church Sundays from the islands, no matter what the weather conditions were. She said she would travel as far as it was necessary to have "Jesus" and go to Mass. Some things have changed over the years, but we must not lose sight of our caring for our spiritual well-being. Wherever you go, you will go because you worship as a community. This was instilled into this parishioner by her mother and she will persevere for Jesus.

Q/Statement – Why can't the Catholic Church encourage men to enter into the priesthood?

A- Father O'Hara stated that unfortunately families no longer encourage it. Matt also stated that it was beyond the scope of the Committee to answer.

Q/Statement – Can't we utilize technology and perhaps interactive TV to have Mass?

A -- Presently – Mass is viewed on several cable or television stations and on cable channel 17 several times a day.

Q/Statement – Using technology in that form is great, but unfortunately, Communion can't be received. We need to have lay ministers willing to distribute the Eucharist to those who are in need. Having a local Mass fulfills your spiritual well-being.

Q/Statement – One Parishioner mentioned that as a religious education youth coordinator, sacraments are important to parents but the numbers drop after Confirmation. There would be benefits from pooling the entire Cluster area. He wanted to correct one comment made earlier saying that the Diocese does not totally control what contractors are used, that if demanded, local contractors can be used. We need to look at the sustainability of our buildings. We need to evangelize in order to grow, we need to encourage those who have left, to come back, whether it is at one centralized Church in Ellsworth or somewhere else. This will be a struggle, but any obstacle can be an opportunity too. We need to rise up and go beyond.

Q/Statement – This parishioner stated that he wasn't planning on talking, but he first just wanted to listen and absorb all that was said, but the time had come for him to voice his opinion. He was in agreement that there are two separate groups of personalities between the Island and Ellsworth, and it starts once you get to the "bridge". Having one central Church will be very difficult and he personally can't see it working. We have a huge community of seniors and several nursing homes who presently attend church through the assistance of parishioners bringing them to Church locally. Each community needs to maintain its own identity.

Q/Statement – Perhaps we can keep the various community churches but combine to gain the benefits of serving our youth. That seems to be a very important point.

Q/Statement – When are we going to vote or take a straw poll for which Model choice we have been offered? A -- Matt stated that unfortunately that choice is not that of the parishioners, it is the Committee's decision to draft a report of a recommendation to the Bishop and the Diocese will have the final decision.

Q/Statement – I would hope that we could establish a religious education program. It is important that we gather our children together in some sort of program whether it is for a small group of 10 to 15 kids or more.

Q/Statement – We have to deal with what we have at the present time. Currently MDIHS is wired to Connors Emerson with interactive TV. Take advantage of the technology, establish a program similar to one that is available at our schools and perhaps we can teach or connect our youth using that method.

Q/Statement – Mass is offered on cable Television on Channel 17 at least 2 or 3 times a day.

Q/Statement – The regional discussion is amazing. This seems to be “the issue” in Maine. Demographics really needs to be the main focus. We must look toward the future concentrating on 30 to 40 years ahead. The Church will be more than just a location in the middle of a field. People will come to the community to do their shopping. Whatever the Committee decides, the parishioners should have the opportunity to view the report that will be presented to the Bishop and be told the reasons behind the decisions. Hopefully this could be done before the report is actually sent to the Diocese. A--We will try to utilize the Websites and parish bulletins to communicate our report decisions.

Q/Statement – Could it be possible to keep all the Churches open, but on the Island, close the smaller churches in the winter months and open them all back up in the summer.

Q/Statement – God is trying to bring us together. In twenty years some of us won't be around. We need to build up the community. I've also attended Churches in the Orono area and watched the community suffer after the loss of two major benefactors. If we continue to lose parishioners, who will continue to support the parishes? If money isn't coming in it doesn't matter what the size of the building. We must look at the cost of maintaining the buildings now and realize that the cost is only going to increase. Then try to utilize the funds that we have to service the parishioners in the best way. Religious education is an important factor, as we need to keep youth interested.

Q/Statement – One Parishioner stated that offering a structured Religious Education program is very important. No matter what the number of children a program is needed. She went on to say that we need to provide some sort of program beyond that of those attending the First Communion/Confirmation group. At one time the parish had an active program. What has happened? Having a program where kids get together once a month and home instruction isn't sufficient. We need to provide group opportunities.

Q/Statement – Encouragement is ongoing. But things have changed. Each Church has its own culture, but we all speak a specific language, the same language. That is one of Catholicism. We are Baptized with water and yet have the gifts from the Holy Spirit. We need to let go, and move ahead with the Holy Spirit.

Q/Statement – A lot of people have made comments about structured CCD classes. I grew up in that sort of environment. BUT we have to remember that the Catholic faith is an everyday living. It's wrong to say that it someone's responsibility to teach our kids, people need to remember that it should be taught at home. We become products of our parents and we as parents must remember this. Look at our own home.

Q/Statement – We are all Christians. We are all looking to bringing more people back to the Church. We must make sure that what we keep, will be able to grow and be maintained in the future.

Matt closed the forum by saying that the entire process was scary and the Cluster Committee was going to be working hard over the next few months to come to a decision that will eventually benefit all of us. Please remember to communicate any comments or suggestions to the respective Parish offices either by email or mail. Both email addresses were provided to the group.

Encapsulation:

- Need to maintain two separate Churches rather than one. But the idea of one Parish Community is not a bad idea.
- Combine the youth, so that a stronger Religious Education program can be a benefit to our youth and our community.
- Make sure that what we build will be able to service our communities in the future, 30 to 40 years down the road.
- Utilize technology – especially interactive TV, perhaps for religious education.
- Notify the parishioners of the Committee's decision before the report is presented to the Diocese.