

Bulletin Summary from June 27th, 2021

Please Note: This column is long and thorough. Please take time and read through it- our future is too important for a quick overview. The decisions to be made ahead are too important. – Fr. Andrew

This past weekend I was most grateful for the hundreds of people who turned out in person and on the livestream to learn about the St. Ignatius of Loyola Long Term Planning Committee's work, studying how best to strengthen our parish so that we can be as strong, dynamic, and vibrant as we are today- twenty years from now.

Recognizing that everyone in the parish may not have been able to attend I wanted to use this weekend's pastor's column to recap the meeting and the findings of the committee and keep you up to date. My philosophy is quite simple- in life and in the parish, there are no secrets- **be fully transparent in all things and let the facts and the Holy Spirit guide us from there.**

Eight months ago, I announced in the bulletin the formation of the St. Ignatius of Loyola Parish Long Term Planning committee. You may remember that weekend we had pictures of each of the Long-Term Planning Committee members in the bulletin with a short bio. In forming the committee, we intentionally drew from a broad cross section of the parish, young and old alike, people with long and strong attachments to both of our churches, new parishioners who only know the way things are now, and wide cross section of life experience.

For those who may have forgotten the committee members are:

Kevin Cavanaugh, Marty Pepin, Fella Stevani, Eric Mommsen, FX Bruton, Phil Munck, Lisa Lefebvre, Ashley Murphy, Diane Carroll, Eric Potter, and our facilitator Rob Harper.

The committee's charge was to look at the parish at this present moment, look to the future, and dream about **how we can best not only prepare for the future**, but also **build up this parish** community we all know and love.

For several months we met simply **dreaming about all the things we want to do as a parish.** We explored all the things we do well now, the things that make our parish and our community so very special.

We talked about **reverence and our prayer, we talked about our deep sense of community and the beautiful way we come together as one.** We spoke about picnics and parades, tailgates and prayer vigils, breakfasts and fairs, outreach to the poor, and the religious education of families and adults.

We began by looking at who we are and imagined if the sky was the limit what would do.

After we dreamed and after we reflected on who we are in this moment, we began to look to the future. In looking to the future, we took a hard look at some of the challenges we face as a parish and as a Church. We considered the fact that in ten years over half of all priests currently

serving in our Diocese will be beyond the age of priestly retirement (75). As a point of reference, we currently have 69 priests serving 89 parishes and 120 churches. Practically speaking it would be that the workload would double for the priest, and only be able to do half as much in current places.

We looked at the needs of our parishioners, and the changing realities of our community. Herein we kept returning to the importance of building intentional community in the parish. Fifty years ago, when someone walked into Church, they knew everyone in the pews, because they were from the neighborhood, went to Catholic school together, CYO, etc... Today we live in a far more mobile society, young people are often scattered far from where they grew up, and do not know their neighbors let alone many people at church. The point is simple, as we plan for the future, we need to foster community in a real and intentional way- as it is far more needed than ever before. Doing everything we can to foster community, family, and unity must be central in how we plan for the future.

What has arisen time and time again in our conversations with younger parishioners, new parishioners, and those that have come back to the Church is that not only is our parish Reverent, Relevant, and Real- we Faithfully follow the teachings of the Church, all the while fostering a sense of community and family.

Did you know we have registered 180 new families since the start of Covid last March?

Our parish is growing, it is stronger than ever and it is unified! The last year has shown us that we are stronger as one.

As we looked to the future, we also looked at our facilities and **the needs we have in both our churches (Holy Trinity & St. Martin).**

- Handicap accessible bathrooms on the main floor
- Electrical system upgrades
- Lighting upgrades
- Replacement of Church Flooring
- Repairs/Upgrades to Stained Glass Windows
- Fire Suppression System
- Air Conditioning System

All of these are of course things, and our parish exists not for things, but for people and for our mission to bring the Good News of Jesus Christ to all, to strengthen families, to walk together in faith and discipleship. These things matter only in so much as they are needed to make our parish accessible for all. Our elderly and handicap parishioners should have easy access to bathrooms and our parish halls and not have to worry if they can negotiate all that is needed to get there. **These things matter not because they are things but because they affect people in a real way and affect how we live out our mission.**

As we looked at our parish, we also dreamed about things that would make our parish stronger and help us live out our mission. Our mission is after all the reason we are here!

We imagined how our parish might be strengthened by

- Upgraded facilities
- A Centralized Entrance into the Church
 - ◊ Allowing for us to welcome all who come, not just those who enter through one door
 - ◊ A space to welcome new parishioners, visitors, and welcome home those who have been away
 - ◊ One space where we could have informational signups,
 - ◊ A place for wedding, funeral, and baptismal families to gather
- Fellowship Hall for events and functions
- Outdoor space for families and parishioners to gather after Mass
- Better religious education classrooms
- A center for parish youth
- Eucharistic Adoration Chapel
- And more...

Reflecting on what could strengthen our parish, and make us stronger, the Long-Range Planning Committee kept coming back to the realization that **we are Stronger when we are United.** All of the moments we love so much in our parish, are the ones which we are unified as One. Whether it be the Picnic, the Statue Unveiling last Summer, the Parade, the Christmas Caroling for Seniors, etc... We are at our best when we are one, not when we are running around juggling everything, and trying to keep everything going as is.

In considering all the possibilities for the future the Committee wrestled with the fundamental questions:

- Is it responsible to keep both churches?
- Do we need to duplicate our facilities?
- Can we be better as one?

After much discernment, and consultation with the Parish Council and the Parish Finance Council the **Long-Range Planning Committee is putting forward for the parish's consideration the idea that our best way forward as a parish is to have one Campus in Somersworth.** The recommendation is that we **consolidate our resources, energies, and build up a strong hold at one of our two current locations (either Holy Trinity or St. Martin) and put everything in one place, making all the improvements we need, build whatever we need to supplement our existing resources and make it incredible, make it one!**

It is important to note that if we went to one location, 100% of all proceeds from the sale of any properties would remain in the parish. By Canon Law not one penny can go to the diocese.

The Committee's recommendation, supported by the Pastoral Council and the Finance Council was based on the following:

- First and Foremost, UNITY- the recommendation was arrived at apart from the financial and for that matter apart from the priest personal end of things. The committee and councils felt

we are better when we are United, when we are One, and We are More Effective at What we Do!

- The desire for a Central Place for All Parish Activities
- The benefits of a Thorough Upgrade of Facilities, and Possible Expansion
- Accessibility for All

Decreased Overhead/Duplication of Expenses (two churches to heat, two roofs to repair, two parking lots to plow, churches to clean, places to decorate, etc....)

- Better preparing for future demographics- creating a campus and strengthening our buildings to promote community/welcome families, etc....
- Preparing for changes in the number of priests
- Ability to Focus Resources- time, talent, and treasure- so as to support the Mission of Our Church and Parish!

The more the committee and councils thought about it and prayed about it the more they arrived at the recommendation that we pursue one campus in Somersworth, not because we have to in this moment, but because we will be better for it, our parish will be stronger and because now is the time to move forward.

The Long-Term Planning Committee's charge was to make an initial recommendation, but this is not a decision for them alone, it is something for our entire St. Ignatius of Loyola Family to discern together.

This column is meant to be an overview of their thoughts and the process. Now is the time for the committee and me as your pastor to listen- to seek out your feedback and thoughts.

At the parish meeting last weekend the crowd in attendance was extremely supportive of the idea. All admitted any such a change would be difficult and painful, but all also were excited about what we can do together from this position of strength in which we find ourselves.

The sentiment was best captured by a lifelong parishioner who rose to support the recommendation and said

"We aren't French Catholics and Irish Catholics, we are Catholics. We have one faith that is bigger than a place. We are unified, we should go forward as one parish in one place."

A sentiment heartfully reflected by a young new parishioner who joined during Covid who said-

"Until a couple of weeks ago when we went back to all three churches, all I knew was St. Ignatius of Loyola as one parish, always together in one place. I feel lost now- torn between Holy Trinity and St. Martin- torn as to where I should go. I feel like I have lost something beautiful when we are apart."

Or the mom from Barrington who said:

“We joined this parish because you are unified and because throughout all this you did not stand still you went “full steam ahead.” The unity you have here is special, I want you to know I brought five families from my neighborhood with me!”

In the end at our meeting last weekend the support for the proposal was overwhelming. But it is important that we have input from everyone. I am asking all parishioners who are willing to share your thoughts as we discern this first most important question together.

Should we go to one campus in Somersworth- building it up- making improvements- and expanding to meet our needs both now and for the future?

I would ask you to please return the enclosed form (on the next page) in the collection box, or thru the mail by July 20th.

Should the parish arrive at a general consensus that we should accept the recommendation of consolidating on One Campus, then we will begin a comprehensive discernment, together, about what that might look like and where our best location will be.

First we must decide if we are better as One.

Then, if and only if we arrive at that general consensus, then we begin the task of studying all of our options therein, thoroughly, completely, in a fair and transparent manner. Should that be the case I will keep you informed every step along the way, and have many opportunities for feedback, suggestions, and review.

There are no secrets here. There is no die that has been cast, we are working through this discernment together – every step of the way.

Please share your thoughts, and feel free to ask any questions as we dream about the future of our parish together.

~Fr. Andrew