

Bulletin Summary from November 21st, 2021

History: In **November of 2020** the St. Ignatius of Loyola Parish Long Range Planning Committee was formed **at the request of Fr. Andrew and the Parish Pastoral and Finance Councils**. The members of the Committee represent a broad cross section of the parish, including new and longtime parishioners, lifetime members of Holy Trinity and St. Martin Parishes (before the merger), members of the Indonesian committee, and people bringing a variety of skills, talents, and perspectives.

The committee was tasked at looking at the **present state of the parish, future demographic changes within the church and locally, as well as our current and future needs**. Over the past year they have been taking a deep dive into these areas in order to best understand them.

From the very beginning a critical part of this process has been being fully open and transparent throughout. Everything being discussed has been fully in the open, and throughout parishioners have been encouraged and invited to ask questions, review all of the documents and studies we have undertaken. Additionally, Fr. Andrew has met with every person who expressed interest in further reviewing the details and understanding the process, and openly shared all information and answered any and all questions.

If we are to discern our future it must be fully open, transparent and in the light of day. The process will continue to be fully open as we go forward and continue to discern and questions always not only welcome, but also encouraged.

In **June of 2021** the Committee and Parish and Finance Councils presented their initial findings to the entire parish both in person, on the livestream, as well as in subsequent bulletin posts, and pulpit announcements. The June presentation was followed by a period in which parishioners were encouraged to submit their feedback. Hundreds of parishioners did and 97% endorsed the recommendation that St. Ignatius of Loyola parish should go from two churches to one in Somersworth.

The committee's recommendation to go from 2 churches to 1 in Somersworth was based on the following factors:

- The belief that we are **stronger as a parish when our efforts, resources, and presence is focused on one Campus**
 - o A strong indicator of this reality was experienced during the first year and half of the Covid-19 pandemic- when we had only one campus
- The **need for major improvements** at both campuses
 - o Including:
 - Lighting upgrades
 - Air Conditioning
 - Heating Improvements
 - Electrical Upgrades
 - Improvements to Entrance + Egress at parish halls

- Handicap Accessible Bathrooms – (especially on main level)
- Elevators

These Improvements are in addition specific to each campus (example: Holy Trinity- Organ, St. Martin- Pews, etc....)

- **The importance of strengthening community**
 - Our parish is more than a neighborhood church, it is a regional church that draws from across the Seacoast and Southern Maine- (over ½ of our families are from outside of Somersworth)
 - The importance of **parish community space** that supports activities and **intentional community** (50 years ago everyone in a Catholic parish knew each other because they grew up together, lived in same town together, went to Catholic school together, etc..... today it is much the opposite.... thus, a focus on forming intentional community for families to raise kids together in the faith is critical- our parish spaces must reflect this focus).
- The **decreasing number of priests** (today there are 69 active priests serving 89 parish and 120 churches- in 10 years 37 of those priests will be past the age of priest retirement.
 - The future likelihood of priests assigned to St. Ignatius & St. Mary (Rollinsford) having to serve even more parishes/churches (much as in Maine).
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- **Cost Savings-** multiple campuses- require a large duplication of expenses
 - Heating, electric, telephone, plowing, repairs, etc....

The Current State of the Parish

- The Parish is strong and experiencing tremendous growth
 - We have registered 180 new families in the past year, 500 families in the last four years
 - Baptisms are increasing
 - We are United
 - Our Faith is Strong and the Center of all we do
- We have a strong sense of unity, identity, and community
- We are growing
- We are in a place of strength

Why Now? Why are we looking at making changes at this point?

- Simply put the changing demographics of parishes and availability of priests is coming-
- The need to strengthen what we do and how we do it is here

- **IF we act** it will be on our terms, in the ways and manner that we think best
- **IF we wait** until when the time comes it will be the dioceses and the deanery leading the process- not us- and our options will be limited
- We think we will make better choices when the pressure is off and the parish alone is in the driver's seat

Is the Diocese pushing this process?

No. In no way has the diocese, the bishop, or anyone else been pushing for us to enter into this process or toward an outcome. It comes fully from within the parish and the desire to best position ourselves for the future before it gets here, and in a way that best helps St. Ignatius and the needs of our parish community.

The Second Report from the **Long-Range Planning Committee**, Pastoral & Finance Councils Explored the **Current State of Our Two Churches/Campuses** (Holy Trinity/St. Martin), the **improvements needed**, and the **potential for future expansion**:

The Committee Found the Following based on our Current circumstances or potential with existing buildings:

Seating Capacity

- The committee studied the inside worship spaces in detail measuring everything from pew spacing, to kneelers, and studied capacity relative to weekend Masses as well as special occasions
- The explored the practical space needed per person (26" width) for regular Masses (we can all really crowd together for Christmas/pack in like sardines, but regular weekends are different)
- Practical Seating Capacity: Holy Trinity-375/ St. Martin-519
- Looking at studies and industry standards for Churches the recommended seating capacity for a regular Mass is 80% of capacity (or 300 people at Holy Trinity or 415- at St. Martin)
- The average Mass attendance (outside of Covid) for St. Ignatius is – 4pm- 300/7am- 140/9am-350
- The Highest attended Mass all year- is the Christmas Eve-4pm (770)- the maximum seating capacity with overflow basement seating is Holy Trinity-553/St. Martin- 739—these totals do not include those who would be standing

Square Footage of Churches + Halls:

Holy Trinity- Church-7647sf. Hall- 7182sf. Total= 14829sf
 St. Martin- Church-8185sf Hall- 8060sf. Total=16245sf
 Congregation's Worship Space: Holy Trinity-4130sf. St. Martin-5670sf
 Parish Hall Space: Holy Trinity-3363sf. St. Martin-4740sf

Parking Spaces:

Current- Holy Trinity-140 spaces St. Martin- 318 spaces

Note: Both churches can have their parking lots expanded if needed
Average # of cars: 7am-6/4pm-133/9am-156

Faith Formation Classrooms:

- The Current need is for 7 classrooms
- Holy Trinity- 7 classrooms/1925sf
- St. Martin- 9 classrooms/3000sf

Property:

- Acreage
 - o Holy Trinity- 7.33 Acres
 - Including large green space (think picnic) and the areas in front of behind the office
 - o St. Martin 8.22 Acres
 - Including a large tree covered area extending from near the green house on Maple street to the back corner of the Baptist Church parking lot. Our lot includes the field on the otherside of the rectory property as well.
- In order to go to a one campus model – the St. Martin Campus would require an office, and the Holy Trinity campus would require a rectory- both are possible and feasible. Furthermore, a separate parish hall could be built at either campus if desired.

Visibility:

- Holy Trinity much more visible to the community- high traffic count passing by each day

Access/Egress

- Consideration was Given to the challenges to entering and exiting before and after Mass particular after the 4pm Saturday Mass, and the many regular weekday events (prayer groups/loaves and fishes dinners/etc....)
- Particular consideration was given to how access and egress and traffic patterns affect the ability of older parishioners to get in and out of the church parking lots such as a 140+ cars leaving at the same time

Location

- One area explored in depth was the strengths and weaknesses relative to both he Holy Trinity and St. Martin campuses and the ability to host and support activities
- In this manner what was explored was the sense of the campus (quietness, safety, atmosphere, etc....)
- Other factors such as proximity to the High School, Middle School, and Elementary Schools was considered

Estimate Market Value

- Respected professional property appraisers were consulted and noted that the real estate market is fluctuating wildly- but they also confirmed that in their professional estimation the Holy Trinity Property could be expected to be valued at twice that of the St. Martin Property
- If Redeveloped: Holy Trinity's property would be for commercial purposes, St. Martin's property would be returned to residential use

Finally, We Looked at the **Potential For future expansion:**

- Two architects were consulted for feedback relative to each campus and the potential for expansion
- Parish halls could be added on either campus, as well as a rectory or office as needed
- One surprising observation from both architects was that they both felt that Holy Trinity would be difficult to expand/add seating (see previous information relative to seating, etc...)
 - o **Holy Trinity Expansion:**
 - The current seating capacity of Holy Trinity would leave the Church at near capacity and packed in tight full at the largest weekend Masses (4pm + 9pm) and over what is considered practical capacity or comfortable capacity
 - One way to solve this would be to add additional seating at Holy Trinity- to meet the current capacity of St. Martin the challenge would be (Practical/comfortable capacity at Holy Trinity is 300 people and at St. Martin is 415)
 - We explored with architects how feasible an expansion of the seating area would be at Holy Trinity and St. Martin:
 - Holy Trinity cannot practically be made wider (problems with load bearing walls, roof lines, and site lines—the ability to see the altar, etc...)
 - The only practical way to expand Holy Trinity is to expand toward the main road/high street
 - This expansion would be limited by commercial setback requirements on High Street
 - Adding wings to the left, right or behind the altar would become nearly impossible due to the existing stairwells and sacristies and support beams
- Although **expansion of church seating at St. Martin is not likely needed** in the present, in the future **it is possible** to expand by making the circle footprint of the Church wider.
 - o Architecturally expanding St. Martin would be relatively easy due to the engineering design and the structural support not being found in the outer walls but rather in the beams and upper circle connecting the beams.

One Important Point that came out in the process was relative to seating capacity and Mass attendance.

- Mass attendance at individual Masses has continued to grow, most noticeably at the 4pm and 9am Masses
- Current Mass attendance across the Diocese is about 75% pre-pandemic levels- more people are expected to return when things normalize
- One likely possibility in the future (not anytime soon I hope!) is that the pastor of St. Ignatius and St. Mary will be placed in charge of more Churches
 - o Considering that in 10 years 37 currently active priests will be past the age of priestly retirement—about ½ of all priests
 - o In the future if the priest assigned to St. Ignatius was given more churches/parishes and communities to serve-- necessarily the number of weekend Masses here would have to decrease---and thus increase the number of people at the Masses offered would grow as people were forced to attend other Mass times

Central in the Discussion Presented was the recognition that whatever we do, that the road ahead will be difficult. We love our churches. These are the places so many in this community have grown up. Holy Trinity and St. Martin are the places we have been baptized, made the Sacraments. They are the churches many were married in, and were loved ones have been laid to rest from. The road ahead is not easy and the attachments we have to these sacred places is real, beautiful, and important. In many ways these places are members of our family.

We also know that it is important that we protect the future of the parish as well and best prepare for it. Your children and grandchildren and future generations are also important and the hard part for us all will be to figure out how we are best able to make sure the parish is there for them just as it has been there for us all.

At the comments section of the last meeting, I was struck by the powerful and heartfelt feedback of all who were there- both during and after the meeting. Most powerful of all was the testimony of a member of our Indonesian community who shared how she understood how difficult it is to consider leaving a place you love. She tearfully shared how she had to leave behind her country, her home, all she knew and love and come to the United States for the faith, because of the persecution Catholics faced at home. As she wept, she heartfully acknowledged the difficulty of such changes as those we are considering and those many have her countrymen have made for the sake of preserving the faith, and she closed by saying “whatever we do we must do with faith and trust in God, and we must go hand in hand together.”

I could not agree more. Please pray about this and then share your thoughts and feedback.

In January we will have a period of special prayer as a parish before the committee and councils meet to seek consensus and share their recommendation.

Prayerfully yours,
~Fr. Andrew