

MINUTES OF PARISH COUNCIL MEETING ON MAY 27, 2009

Fr. Bob began our meeting with an update of the Fitchburg Pastoral Planning regarding the potential closure of churches in the City of Fitchburg, of which will be determined by July 31, 2010. He explained that Mr. Mrs. John Doyle from St. George's Parish in Worcester had visited St. Anthony Parish several months ago for the purpose of reviewing our ministries, as well as the overall structure of our parish. All seven other parishes in the city of Fitchburg had visitors from the Pastoral Committee observing their ministries and processes as well. As a result of these reviews these visitors developed a plan and made the recommendation to Bishop McManus.

Fr. Bob made it very clear that this plan was a recommendation only, and two representatives from each of the parishes, as well as the pastors of each parish would meet to discuss and critique the pros and cons of this proposal during a six month period beginning June 17. When asked what we could do to prevent the possible closing of St. Anthony Church it was recommended that first, we pray, and second, continue to be supportive to all the spiritual and parish community events such as showing up for the Festa, etc.

Fr. Bob also explained that the parishes in Fitchburg were rooted in ethnicity, not neighborhoods, because the founders needed to be ministered to in their own languages. Whereas this situation no longer exists (with the exception of St. Francis Church), the goal should be more about ministries instead of paying large amounts to support buildings. Also explained was the two parishes with elementary schools are St. Bernard's and St. Anthony's, and St. Bernard Church contributes \$24,000 to their school, and St. Anthony Church contributes \$67,000 to our school. He stated that most successful schools have great support systems.

Another factor which appears to be in our favor is our historically generous contribution to the Partner's in Charity fundraiser. Fr. Bob stated that he reminded Fr. Sullivan that the two parishes in the city which contribute 47% of the city's contributions to the Partner's in Charity are St. Bernard's and St. Anthony's. The other six parishes contribute 53% of the total for the city of Fitchburg. As of the date of the meeting St. Anthony Church was at 89% of our goal of \$36,000.

Fr. Bob mentioned that all eight parishes in the city of Fitchburg are financially in good shape, and only St. Joseph Parish has large debt (due to their school) but that should be rectified because there presently is an interested buyer for the property. He quickly reiterated though, that the closure is not all about indebtedness.

Previously, when some of the churches were closed in Worcester, one of the criteria was the vibrancy of the parishes. Here in Fitchburg the first draft of the closure plan is solely about geography. Father explained that Bishop McManus wants the people of Fitchburg to make the most mature decision for the future. He's open to whatever the parish representatives feel will work out best.

A question and answer period followed Father's explanation of the proposed closure plan with much discussion as to why St. Anthony Church should remain open.

---

The proposed school expansion was then discussed and Father Bob informed the Council and parishioners that the Finance Committee authorized \$15,000 for a Feasibility Study. \$6,900 has been spent. The study is not complete. Although it was voted and agreed that the procedure to obtain the permits for the expansion will continue to be followed, the rest will be put on hold for one year, pending the outcome of the church closures. It was noted that the actual expansion would cost between 1.25 - 1.75 million dollars to complete.

A vote was taken regarding the construction of the upstairs church bathroom and the church hall bathroom renovation and it was accepted to proceed with these projects. The new bathroom upstairs would be constructed in the present confessional room space, and the confessional would be moved to the original confessional space, now used for music storage.

A proposal to remove several pine trees and one dead tree around the rear of the church was unanimously accepted - cost to remove these would be \$2,500. Mr. Nick Mercadante also recommended planting new trees on the North side of the church.

Another vote was accepted to have work in the rectory done - brick work, re-pointing, and a new floor for the porch - total of this work: \$7,400. Fr. Bob then explained some financial reserves for the parish: \$24,000 in the "Memorial Fund", and the "Secino Account", which is limited to seminarian support has \$167,000 capital and \$97,000 interest, and there are three endowed scholarships for school. Unrestricted funds of \$104,345.

A discussion about changing the Saturday and Sunday Mass schedules took place with the suggested new Masses being at 5:30 p.m. on Saturday, and 8:00, 10:00 and 11:30 a.m. on Sunday. This was "tabled" until after the decision about church closures has taken place. An "advisory vote" was taken regarding changing the Saturday 4:00 Mass to 5:30 p.m., and 23 votes were placed to retain the 4:00 time and approximately 50 votes were placed to change the time to 5:30 p.m. on Saturdays. Fr. Bob stated that nothing would be done about this until October, and he mentioned that it would be a good idea to ask the parishioners who actually attended this particular Mass how they felt about the potential change.

Mr. Matt Gauvin then suggested a Sunday evening Mass geared towards young people, and mentioned the possibility of following the "lifeteen.org" venue. Fr. Bob requested that some volunteers review the teen program at St. Joseph Church in Charlton to further consider this possibility.

Fr. Bob then spoke about the possibility of omitting the weekly Tuesday 7:00 a.m. Mass and it was unanimously voted to do so beginning this summer. This would enable Fr. Bob to have one full day off during the week.

It was mentioned that some of the 2009 budget items are as follows:

BUDGETED:		ACTUAL:	
Heat for Church	\$19,000	\$9,785	(53%)
Heat for Rectory	\$ 5,200	\$3,200	(63%)
Snowplowing	\$ 6,000	\$10,700	\$4,000 over budget)

---

MINISTRIES:

- The idea of a hospice ministry was addressed, but Fr. Bob responded that the Ministers to the Homebound spend time visiting the sick when they bring Holy Communion to them, therefore actually fulfilling the need for a hospice ministry.
- The idea of "Adopting an Elder" was mentioned but no discussion took place on this subject.

PARTNERS IN CHARITY UPDATE:

Collected at St. Anthony's:	\$30,000
Mailed directly to Worcester:	4,000
TOTAL:	\$34,000

200 Parishioners contributed so far, and there are 460 active parishioners at St. Anthony Church. Our actual goal this year is \$36,000 but Fr. Bob would like to see \$38,000 attained, which has been our total for the past 2 years.

Respectfully submitted by Susan Cronin, Recording Secretary