

Notes from the St. Joseph Townhall Meeting - August 25, 2019

History offers us lessons that can help us plan for the future. When our ancestors in faith built this parish, they saw the opportunity for growth. In 1847 they began the first English speaking Catholic parish in Dayton helping the Irish and the Italians find their way as an immigrant people. As the number of families grew, there was a need to educate their children and so, St. Joseph School was built in 1873 with the Sisters of Charity serving as teachers.

In the mid-1930's the needs of the parish were changing. Enrollment began to drop and by 1942 only 100 students remained in the school. To respond to changing needs, the parish embarked on a new mission and in 1945 opened St. Joseph Commercial High School to prepare young ladies for the business world as secretaries and bookkeepers.

In 1958 the grade school closed all together, but the business school expanded, and the parish built the addition onto the old High School building. In 1974 the Sisters of Charity stopped staffing the school and so the parish looked for another group to use the school. Building upon the Commercial High School's success, Miami Jacobs Business College opened and leased the building for 30 years which provided a helpful income to the parish for many years.

When Miami Jacobs College moved out, the school sat empty until 2006 when Richard Allen Charter School leased the building. As the economy shifted it was more economical for the Charter School to buy a building and they left St. Joseph's school building in 2011. For the past 8 years we have tried unsuccessfully to lease the building. There were a couple of proposals to buy the building and the parking lots, but we cannot give up the land which is needed for parking.

What does it mean for us to be good stewards of the resources that have been entrusted to us? This question has led to our discussion about the future of our school building. We currently spend approximately \$20,000 a year for heating, upkeep and maintenance on the school building. So, in the last 8 years we've spent around 160,000 on the building. The furnace is beyond repair and a new system would cost over \$40,000. The roof on the 1873 building is failing with many leaks causing damage. A new roof would cost \$100,000. In the old section of the school the bricks are porous and let in moisture causing walls to separate. There are many maintenance issues facing us.

Our focus over the last 8 years has been trying to hold onto a building that has outlived its mission. What has become clear to me is that, like our ancestors in faith, we are being given the opportunity to set out on a new mission for our parish community. To grow and respond to changing needs.

Earlier this year we formed a Building and Grounds Committee to begin looking at this question. The members of the Committee are Lou Homan, Steve Byington, Gary Roeckner, Rosemarie Marasco, John Eilers, Rita Zimmerman, Bill Baron, Fr. Angelo and Fr. Matt.

What we see happening all around us is the revitalization of the downtown core. We are right in the heart of this transformation and it seems to me that we are being given a new opportunity as a parish. Most of the people moving into the area are young professionals or empty nesters who could benefit from a strong faith community that is ready to receive them.

Just as our ancestors built a school to respond to changing needs, it seems to me that we are called to build a parish center to respond to changing needs. This is not a project so we can have a place for "coffee and donut" Sunday. If that were the case we would simply work out an agreement with Dunkin Donuts. Having an attractive, up-to-date parish center that is all on ground level and energy

efficient, a space that is functional and appropriately sized, airconditioned and equipped with modern technology opens up a world of possibilities as we look to the future. And we can also increase our parking for the parish.

The Parish Council, the Finance Committee and the Building and Grounds Committee have taken into consideration all the comments from our last Town Hall meeting and other comments that have come in over the last couple of months and have made the recommendation that we move forward with a decision to tear down the school building and build a new parish center.

In our discussions we talked about the various ways that a new parish center would enable us to build a stronger parish community.

- We would have a more functional, designated space for parish meetings and a lending library, we could offer educational meetings like Bible Studies or health ministry's presentations;
- We could host funeral luncheons for parishioners, hospitality nights for new parishioners, dinners for newlyweds, parish pot-lucks and coffee and donuts;
- There could be movie presentations for young and old alike, monthly card-club gatherings, quilting or craft work sessions,
- A much-needed gathering space for Evangelization outreach, workshops for personal and spiritual growth, days of renewal and a space for family reunions or family gatherings.

There are two milestone anniversaries coming up in the near future. In June of 2021 the Archdiocese of Cincinnati will celebrate its 200th anniversary and in 2022 our parish of St. Joseph's will celebrate its 175th anniversary. As we mark these historical celebrations we must keep an eye on the future and how our faith community will continue to grow for the next 175 years.

Our church is beautiful, and our liturgies lift our souls to the Lord. What is needed now is a parish center to build community within our parish and neighborhood. Since the papacy of St. Pope John Paul II, we have heard the consistent call to evangelization, to invite others to experience the love and mercy of God that we have experienced, to reach out to those whose faith has gone dormant or to those who have no religious affiliation at all. Responding to changing needs, we are being given an opportunity to sacrifice and make a commitment for the future of our faith community.

Rough estimates on a project such as this would be around 1.4 million dollars to remove asbestos, demolish and dispose of the old building, construct and furnish a new building and redo the entire parking lot. Our next step is to do a planning study to see if we can raise the funds needed for this project through a capital campaign. Over the next month we will be speaking with a random sampling of parishioners to talk about this project and to assess what kind of support we would have if we would move forward with this project.

Please keep this intention in your prayers as we discern how best to respond to the changing needs of our time and the call to bring others to Christ through the faith we love so much.

In Christ,

Fr. Angelo Anthony, C.P.P.S. and Fr. Matthew Keller, C.P.P.S.