



**CHURCH OF THE
ANNUNCIATION**

1760 NORTON ST.



**OUR LADY OF THE
AMERICAS**

864 E. MAIN ST.



**ST. MICHAEL'S
CHURCH**

859 N. CLINTON AVE

SFXC PARISH

We are the hands of Christ in the heart of the city.



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Regarding the Strategic Planning Process

After fifteen weeks of being closed, the parish reopened again at the end of June. It had taken some time to get things in order, but it also took time to get used to the new way of celebrating Mass and the sacraments. Thankfully, people were conciliatory in making the adjustments since they were happy to be able to participate personally in the Eucharist, once again. The Town-hall meeting that had been postponed since March was now set for July 18.

2020, Third Quarter

The Town-hall meeting took place in Our Lady of the Americas Hall in a hybrid fashion: some people were in attendance live and some people participated via Zoom video conferencing. Having met with members of the diocesan offices earlier in the year, we shared many facts and details that covered four fundamental areas of concern: Vision/Mission, our People, the Finances, and the Buildings and

Grounds. We had a frank discussion about the fact that we had already used from our savings \$531,434 and that to continue as is will exhaust the parish's funds within two to three years. Also, we made known that contributing factors in our decision-making is that we are also set to lose a great number of priests in the diocese. In the coming five years, nearly half of the priests in active ministry will reach retirement age.

We received some feedback from the gathering in July with the intent to reconvene on August 8. On Monday of the first week of August a Facebook posting was made locally that plans were in place to close St. Michael's. Various news media were contacted and interviews were conducted. I was away on vacation, but I received several phone calls, text messages and emails about the matter and had to write a response. I sent that out to parishioners and posted it on the parish Facebook page the following day (see addendum to this document).

Because of this situation I decided to cancel the Town Hall of August 8 and instead host a time of prayer on Sunday, August 9 at St. Michael's Church from 3:00 PM - 5:00 PM. We had about 60 people at the prayer service. There were people from all three sites and a few that were not regular parishioners. On Wednesday of that week, August 12, Fr. Werth, Migdalia Concepción, chairperson of Finance Council, Carol Wynne, our Director of Finance and Administration, and Fr. McGrath held a panel discussion with a group of concerned people from the community - people mostly who do not attend Sunday Mass but were concerned about the fate of St. Michael's and the process of decision making.

There was some tension and there were some heated remarks, but there was also clarification and communication. Emails were gathered and Carol Wynne sent out to those in attendance the information we were sharing with parishioners - more than 15 documents. There were about 20 people in attendance at that meeting (with some more listening through an attendees Facebook Live stream), plus the panel of 4.

At the time these things were happening a new Strategic Planning Committee was being formed composed of parishioners and parish staff in order to lead this process. The following people accepted to be on the team: from Annunciation - Karen Bernhardt Kuntz, Ann Marie Knauf, and Millie Lewis; from Our Lady of the Americas - Diamond Auble, Ivelisse DeJesus, Pat Galante, and Miriam Rosa; from St. Michael's Church - Migdalia Concepción, Miriam (Mayo) Cortes, Vickie Negrón, Jordan Rapp; plus Fr. Bob

The Mission Must Continue



In order to arrive at a decision concerning which worship site to close, it was suggested that a decision-making matrix would be beneficial, one that reflects the four pillars of our parish – Vision/ Mission, People, Finances, Buildings & Grounds.

The Diocese has set a proposed deadline of December 31, 2020 for a recommendation to be made.

Werth, Deacon Carlos Vargas and Carol Wynne. A principle goal of the first meeting on August 5 was to identify a chairperson to lead and guide our meetings. Despite his young age, Jordan Rapp, from the 4:00 Mass at St. Michael's, stepped forward to lead the charge. We also needed a secretary, and Ivelisse DeJesus from Our Lady of the Americas agreed to take our minutes. We met on August 5, 2020.

In order to arrive at a decision concerning which worship site to close, it was suggested that a decision-making matrix would be beneficial, one that reflects the four pillars of our parish – Vision/Mission, People, Finances, Buildings & Grounds. Committee members also suggested that we should reach out to the Diocese to see what tools might be available to assist the committee.

The Diocese has set a proposed deadline of December 31, 2020 for a recommendation to be made. Given the financial and structural needs of the parish, staff members who were present stressed urgency in our decision in order to preserve the parish as a whole that it may continue in the most viable way possible. This matter came to light in early June as a certain group had gathered with members of the diocesan staff to discuss a fundraising plan. This group that called itself the Dream Team began meeting towards the beginning of the year. Fr. Werth had been meeting with them to consider ideas to raise funds for St. Michael's. The meeting in June brought to light a challenge that the diocese wanted them to understand - namely, that the vision has to be for the entire parish. Though the Dream Team presented a fundraising plan, the diocesan personnel said that fundraising must be done for the whole parish and not for one church only.

One of the ideas brought forth in our discussions was to look into religious orders to come and serve here. It is the duty of the diocesan bishop to ask for orders to come in to the diocese and serve, but in an effort to be creative toward a solution, we thought we would see if there was interest. The

NUMBERS BY CAMPUS - 2020 BUDGET (Buildings Only)			
	OLA	STM	ANN
Collections / Colecciones	163,775	77,071	138,576
Rental Income / Renta	64,000	38,700	26,444
Office Building Expenses (STM) / Gastos (oficina en San Miguel)		-18,010	
Building Expenses / Gastos de Edificios	-97,966	-134,233	-40,703
Net / Netos	129,809	-36,472	124,317
Average Attendance / Asistencia (Promedio)	285	240	169
% Avg. Attendance / Porcentaje de Asist.	41%	35%	24%

diocesan representatives told us that the bishop had asked several groups in the past but many are in the same situation as we are - diminishing numbers. Fr. McGrath wrote to one group by email through there website in the summer, but heard nothing back.

Quick Numbers - Reality Check

	June 30, 2020	October 30, 2020
Stable patrimony	\$514,652	568,013
Deficit	\$175,000	113,738
Subtotal =	\$339,652	454,275
Bero Architecture report (repairs)	-\$374,000	-\$374,600
Total	-\$35,000	-79,675

BUDGET NOTE: At the start of this fiscal year we were projected to lose \$175,000 this year (as seen in the table above: “Quick Numbers”). Since then we have had a couple updates, especially considering that it was decided that, for the immediate future, we would not hire a full-time Director of Faith Formation; thus, the new adjusted budget deficit is \$113,000. The decision not to hire a Faith Formation person at this does not speak well for the parish. This is a sign of how sick the parish is; it is like a small business owner who is so ill that he cannot conduct his own business, and yet he needs it to stay alive. This is the situation we find ourselves in currently.

SUMMARY OF AUGUST 19 MEETING

As the new Strategic Planning Committee (SCP) was assembled there was a desire on the part of the bishop for the leadership members meet with a team from the diocese on a regular basis to keep them up to date. The Diocesan Team met with Fr. McGrath, Fr. Werth, Carol Wynne and Jordan Rapp the afternoon of 8/12/2020. They shared the following highlights with the whole committee:

- The Diocesan Team specified that the SPC is responsible for making a decision regarding a possible worship site closure.
- The Diocesan Team also advised that the Dream Team will need to revise their fundraising proposal in order for a campaign to be approved. The proposal needs to reflect the whole parish, not just one worship site.
- Even with a fundraising plan, the SPC will still need to make a decision regarding the possible closure of a worship site. We will need to create a timeline and submit it to the Diocese.
- The SPC will need to share information about our activities and progress with the parish.

Also, SPC members were apprised of the meeting that took place with the various community members at St. Michael’s Hall the evening of 8/12/2020. Including the fact that those in attendance who gave us their email addresses were sent the documents that were previously given to parishioners via bulletins and the Town Hall meeting in July.

A subgroup of SPC members presented a draft of a decision-making matrix. The purpose of the matrix is to help with the decision to close a worship site. Upon discussion, committee members recommended some revisions to the matrix, but also expressed concerns about the

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effectiveness of such a tool. It was suggested that committee members should reach out to the Diocesan Team for a recommendation on an evaluative tool that will help the committee to reach a decision.

SUMMARY OF SEPTEMBER 2 MEETING

The Strategic Planning Committee (SPC) reviewed the fundraising proposal developed by the Dream Team.

- The goal of the Dream Team was to launch the fundraising campaign the weekend of the Feast of St. Michael's.
- Dream Team members' concerns were expressed, specifically wondering if fundraising monies might be used to offset lawsuits (referring to the clerical abuse litigation).
- It was clarified that checks for the fundraising event must be made to the SFXC parish and not to a specific worship site. It was also specified that funds would be immediately spent on parish expenses.
- SPC members edited/annotated information on the proposal and suggested that these revisions should be made prior to submitting the proposal to the Diocese.

A meeting was held with the Diocesan Team on 9/2/2020. SPC members who were present at that meeting reported that the Diocesan Team recommended that SPC minutes should be published to communicate pertinent information to parishioners. The committee discussed various communication methods, such as Facebook, email blasts, mailings, and the restoration of the parish website. A subgroup of SPC members will work on updating the parish listing of emails and postal addresses.

The committee raised again the issue of inviting a religious order to minister at St. Michael's. Fr. McGrath wrote two letters, one to the group he had not heard from when he had emailed earlier (The Fraternal Society of St. Peter) as well as a letter to the Franciscan Friars of the Renewal (CFFR). He eventually received responses. The CFR response was that, though this is the very type of situation in which they like to minister, having just opened a new house in Oakland, CA, they do not have sufficient priests to send to us at this time. On the part of the the FSSP group, they also had no one available immediately but there was some interest. After a conversation with Bishop Matano, he advised that he could not consider inviting anyone until we submit a plan, since he could not declare to the religious group to what it is exactly that he was inviting them.

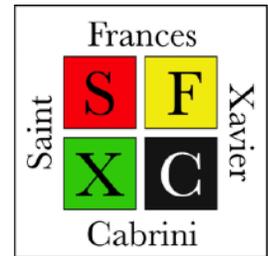
Respectfully submitted,

Fr. Mickey McGrath

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Statement sent out on August 5 in wake of media and social media attention (edited for clarity, Dec. 3, 2020):

In the summer of 2019 the Parish of St. Frances Xavier Cabrini (which comprises of three churches (Annunciation on Norton St., Our Lady of the Americas on East Main and St. Michael on North Clinton) finished its second consecutive fiscal year with a loss, both deficits of a magnitude of six figures! By that point we were already determined to put together an increased giving campaign. That campaign did not happen sooner due to sensitivity to parishioners who were still fulfilling pledges from a capital campaign begun six years earlier.



Since the urgency was clear we began in earnest to put on an increased Sunday offering campaign. By the late summer and early autumn, we informed the parishioners regularly of the need and of the details of the campaign. We were told that we should be able to increase the Sunday plate by 7-15%. To everyone's surprise the parishioners did far better than that. The increase was nearly 30% - a fantastic figure! We were all so ecstatic and the people remained faithful to their pledges. Even through the lockdown, despite a decrease, we saw very generous numbers from the people (The collection decreased about 9%).

Despite the generous response and increase, we saw that it simply was not enough to close the gap of six figures. Far from it. In February, we published several bulletins outlining the continued decreases over the years that had brought us to this point. We held a meeting in order to get some feedback with about 60 parishioners in anticipation of a Town Hall meeting to outline all the markers of the struggles we faced: declining attendance, declining giving, declining numbers of baptisms, weddings and so forth.

We outlined the expenditures vs. income and the case was clear. We are running out of money and have perhaps two years before the whole parish (not just one church) goes bankrupt. Questions have been raised as to where the diocese has been in all of this.

Many years ago the Diocese of Rochester created a fund called the One Percent Fund or the Building Fund. We were told that it was created exactly for places such as St. Michael's. Each year they ask parishes to give one percent of their savings to this fund to aid parishes in need with building projects. The diocesan office would survey the applications and give the money out according to need and the number of requests. Over the years the parish of SFXC has received more than \$1 million dollars. The diocese has also directed the gifts of generous donors to the Catholic Ministries Appeal toward the goal set for our parish, thereby effectively reducing the goal set for the parish by at times, 20%. Furthermore, on a regular basis, outlying parishes from the suburbs have been donating to our parish and our ministries many thousands of dollars per year.

In summary regarding the above, there have been no secrets and there have been many years of support from a variety of concerned individuals, parishes and diocesan administrators. We have tried multiple avenues of evangelization (ChristLife, missions, retreats), including proclamation, feeding, and praying with the people on North Clinton Ave. We have not had much success filling the pews. We are left to face the sad and disturbing effects of an ever-increasing secularization of culture, as well as that of a devastating sex abuse scandal that has wounded many souls, many families and our local, national and international Church as well. When a church closes, the most affected are those who have attended and who have sacrificed Sunday after Sunday, year after year. If the day comes that a church should close, it is to these people for whom our heart aches especially. We do believe in miracles, but we are not in control of them.

Finally, when a man enters the seminary, he has the best of intentions, hopes and dreams. His vision is to serve and to build upon the foundation laid out by the Good Shepherd, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. It is never the intention to tear down and destroy, only to build up. But the life of a

priest, like the life of a parish, experiences the joys and the sorrows, the hopes and the hurts of its people. We will do all that we can to serve all of the people whom we are called to serve in this expansive parish that is all that is left from what were once 10 separately thriving parishes.

Sincerely yours in Christ,
Fr. Mickey McGrath, Pastor
St. Frances Xavier Cabrini Parish

Frequently Asked Questions

Some facts to clarify:

Q. How much say does Bishop Matano and the Diocese of Rochester have?

A. Parishes are separately incorporated and it is the parish (through the pastor), with the consultation of the parishioners to give a recommendation to the bishop.

Q. Who makes the decision?

A. It is more of a recommendation than a decision. It is in the hands of a consultative body of registered parishioners who regularly contribute to the parish. The bishop receives the recommendation of the pastor and submits it to the Priests Council of the Diocese of Rochester, who then advise the bishop. The bishop makes the decision to accept or reject the recommendation.

Q. If one of the three sites is closed, will the property be sold?

A. Yes, the plan is to put a site on the market to see if it can sell.

Q. If the property is sold, will the profits go to the diocese or stay with the parish?

A. Unless there are debts to be paid off, proceeds from sales will stay with the parish.

Q. What happens if a church is not sold, will the rest of the parish be responsible for its maintenance?

A. Yes

Q. How long is the process to last?

A. The diocese has asked us to give them a plan by Dec. 31, 2020.