

Regional Pastoral Planning Process

God of everlasting mercy,
increase the grace you have bestowed,
that all may grasp and rightly understand
in what font they have been washed - Baptism
by whose Spirit they have been reborn – Confirmation
by whose Blood they have been redeemed - Eucharist
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.
Collect Prayer from the Second Sunday of Easter

April 19, 2021: Video of Community meeting at St. Hyacinth Church

April 19, 2021 Handout at Parish Information Meeting (attachment)

April 18, 2021: Pastoral Planning Update

Two meeting dates have been scheduled for parishioners to learn about the plans under consideration by the regional pastoral planning committee to consolidate worship sites in our community. The committee has been meeting since last fall and is preparing to make their final recommendations to the Diocese this spring. Interested parishioners are encouraged to attend one of two meetings being held this month. Both meetings will be held at St. Hyacinth Church, to allow for maximum seating capacity due to pandemic restrictions. The first meeting will be held on Monday, April 19th at 6:30pm and the second meeting will be held on Tuesday, April 20th at 6:30pm. Attendees will be invited to provide input for the committee's consideration following the meetings. Plans are being made to record one of the meetings to allow those who are unable or unwilling to attend a meeting in person to view the proceedings online. All parishioners are encouraged to attend a meeting to learn of the plans under active consideration in order to respond to the Bishop's request that a forward-looking pastoral plan be developed for our community.

March 28, 2021: Pastoral Planning Update

The pastoral planning committee for Auburn and Northern Cayuga County has been meeting since last fall to consider and identify the churches and facilities that will be needed to best sustain a vibrant Catholic community. The committee was formed in response to Bishop Matano's letter of June 4, 2020 urging significant progress be made in developing and implementing a pastoral plan for Auburn and Northern Cayuga County. Made up of representatives of each of the churches in our region, the committee is helping us confront the very real challenges facing our Catholic community today and into the future.

The committee identified and studied numerous factors that will continue to impact our faith community, including: priest availability, community demographics, financial trends, parish life trends and projections and future facility needs. After analyzing this information, the committee then examined each of the churches and related facilities in order to develop restructuring plans that best align with the projected long term needs of the community. Items examined included: individual church statistics, building conditions/needed investments, financial sustainability, potential for reuse/sale of properties and the impact of possible closure on parishioners, including options to attend an alternative church

On March 11th the committee presented their preliminary findings and plans to the parish pastoral and finance councils of the region to solicit comments and questions. The committee will use the feedback received to modify and further develop recommendations that will be shared with all parishioners in informational sessions in April. The committee will then make their final recommendations to our pastors in early May. The final decisions about the configuration of our parishes will be made by Bishop Matano.

Some have suggested the committee should be brainstorming ideas to increase church attendance in order to relieve the need to consolidate churches. This is a worthy idea and one that all Catholics are called to address. However, it was not the charge of this committee. Nor can such efforts be relied upon to suddenly reverse the reality that there are and will be fewer priests and fewer Catholic residents of the area.

We have all taken steps and made sacrifices in recent years to adjust to the current realities. We have consolidated our Mass schedules and staffing, organized parishes into clusters and witnessed the closure of St. Joseph School in Auburn and St. John Church in Port Byron. Unfortunately, more sacrifices are necessary. You will be invited to join the informational sessions in April. Please plan to attend to learn more. Changes will need to come to pass soon, so let us meet the challenges together. From our dialogue, the future will emerge. If we accompany one another on this journey, we will be guided by the Holy Spirit. Let us move forward together in faith.

February 2021: Executive Summary of Facility Existing Conditions (attachment)

December 13, 2020: Pastoral Planning Update

The committee that has been tasked with identifying the churches and facilities we need to sustain a vibrant Catholic community in Auburn and Northern Cayuga County continues their work. The committee has developed a set of principles that will guide their deliberations and has begun to review data and information about our parishes and current facilities. In the coming weeks the committee will begin developing preliminary scenarios to consolidate our physical assets in such a way the best enables us to sustain our mission. These preliminary plans will be reviewed, refined and finalized in early 2021, but not before parishioners will be given an opportunity to provide input.

Made up of representatives of each parish, the committee values and deeply respects the wonderful traditions and uniqueness of each church and parish in our community and knows any closing of church facilities will be both sad and difficult. However, it is increasingly apparent there is no viable, sustainable manner to maintain the current number of unutilized and underutilized facilities. In order to learn from the experience of other communities, committee members recently met with Msgr. Jim Lang of the Syracuse Diocese to learn more about recent church consolidations that have taken place in Central New York, such as Oswego.

November 15, 2020: Pastoral Planning Update

With the diminishing number of parishioners in Auburn and Northern Cayuga along with the consequent decline in financial support and in light of Covid-19 pandemic, Bishop Matano asked Fr. Lioi and Fr. Gathenya in June 2020 to take on the task of a) focusing on ministerial needs and appropriate staffing of our parishes, b) addressing the significant amount of unused

and underused parish property and reducing the costly footprint, and c) strengthening our Catholic community into the future through intentional stewardship of its times, talent and treasure. To that end, Fr. Lioi and Fr. Gathenya met in **July 2020** to work on a tentative process for accomplishing this task.

A meeting of all the Parish Pastoral Councils took place on **August 4, 2020** to acquaint Council members with the changing demographics, diminishing Mass attendance, financial restraints and unused buildings. Fr. Lioi & Fr. Gathenya also were holding Zoom meetings with diocesan officials.

In **September**, Fr. Gathenya and Fr. Lioi met together to choose representatives from each church to serve as a planning group: from **St. Mary's** Penny Goodsell & Ed Fenzl; from **St. Francis of Assisi** John Camardo & Paulo Saltarello; from **St. Hyacinth** Dan Szozda & Jim Malinowski; from **St. Patrick, Cato** Joan McCadden; from **St. Joseph, Weedsport** Jim Scanlon; from **Holy Family** Deacon John Tomandl & Timothy Kelly; from **St. Alphonsus** Nancy Camardo & Michael Keegan; from **Sacred Heart** Paul Ringwood & Frank DeOrio; from **St. Ann's** Janet Zane & Charlie Greene. Mr. Dan Fessenden was asked by the pastors to chair this group.

These parish representatives met with Dan Fessenden on **October 28, 2020**. Each person was given the opportunity to share his/her thoughts on what would be best for Auburn and Northern Cayuga. From among that Group, Mr. Fessenden has chosen five individuals to work with him and come up with realistic scenarios. The five individuals making up the small working committee are Ed Fenzl, Joan McCadden, Nancy Camardo, Frank DeOrio, and Janet Zane.

This committee will meet by zoom in November and December to come up with realistic scenarios. The results of this small committee will be shared with the large group for their comments sometime in **January 2021**. When consensus is reached, a meeting will take place with the Pastoral/Finance Councils of each parish or perhaps a "town-hall" meeting of parishioners from all the parishes could take place. However, this latter option may not be practical given the covid-19 pandemic. The Diocese hopes to have a recommendation in

November 1, 2020: Pastoral Planning Update

This past Wednesday on October 28th at St. Mary's Church hall, a meeting took place of representatives from all the churches in Auburn and Northern Cayuga County. The purpose of this meeting was to discern what the Catholic community in Auburn needs to be a vibrant Catholic presence in "the service of the evangelizing mission of the Church."

Those representing each parish are the following: **from St. Mary's:** Penny Goodsell & Ed Fenzl; **from St. Francis of Assisi:** John Camardo & Paulo Saltarello; **from St. Hyacinth:** Dan Szozda & Jim Malinowski; **From St. Patrick, Cato:** Joan McCadden; **from St. Joseph, Weedsport:** Jim Scanlon; **from Holy Family:** Deacon John Tomandl & Timothy Kelly; **from St. Alphonsus:** Nancy Camardo & Michael Keegan; **from Sacred Heart:** Paul Ringwood & Frank DeOrio; **from St. Ann's:** Janet Zane. **Committee Chairperson:** Dan Fessenden.

From this group, five or six members would be chosen to work with Mr. Fessenden in developing a proposal that would evidence a vibrant Catholic Community. Then, at a follow-up meeting of the whole group, the work of the small group will be bounced off the entire group for discussion.

When consensus is reached, a meeting could take place with the Pastoral/Finance Councils of each parish or perhaps a “town-hall” meeting of parishioners from all the parishes could take place. However, this latter option may not be practical given the covid-19 pandemic. Fr. Lioi and Fr. Gathenya were present initially at the meeting but then departed but would remain available to the group for consultation and advice as needed.

November 2020: Guiding Principles Document (attachment)

October 28, 2020: Meeting at St. Mary’s parish hall

Chairperson

Dan Fessenden – djfessenden@gmail.com 315-730-2000

St. Mary’s

Penny Goodsell – pjgteach@gmail.com 315-252-8841

Ed Fenzl – edfenzl@gmail.com 315-436-9813

St. Francis of Assisi

John Camardo – jcamardo@verizon.net 315-436-0353

Paulo Saltarello – psaltarello@rochester.rr.com 315-252-7778

St. Hyacinth

Dan Szozda – dnszozda@gmail.com 315-406-9057

Jim Malinowski – james_ski45@hotmail.com 315-776-8080

St. Patrick, Cato

Joan McCadden – jkmccadden@gmail.com 315-447-9053

St. Joseph, Weedsport

Jim Scanlon – grandparentscanlon@gmail.com 315-834-9784

Holy Family

Deacon John Tomandl – john.tomandl@dor.org 315-729-4668

Timothy Kelly – Kelly1958@verizon.net 315-252-1916

St. Alphonsus

Nancy Camardo – NancyCamardo@Camardo.com 315-729-1659

Michael Keegan - rmkeegan1@gmail.com 315-730-7507

Sacred Heart

Paul Ringwood – paul.ringwood@verizon.net 315-246-6963

Frank DeOrio - fdeorio@gmail.com 315-729-1883

St. Ann’s

Janet Zane - janetczane@gmail.com 315-730-6975

Charlie Greene – cgreene@greenemeadow.com 315-246-5727

October 18, 2020: Pastoral Planning Update

On Tuesday, August 4, 2020, a meeting took place with the members of all the Parish Pastoral Councils of the Catholic Churches in Auburn. The purpose of the meeting was to talk about a pastoral plan for Auburn and Northern Cayuga a) focusing on ministerial needs and appropriate staffing, b) addressing the significant amount of unused and underused parish property and reducing the costly footprint, and c) strengthening our Catholic community into the future through intentional stewardship of its times, talent and treasure. The goal of this joint

meeting was to have the members of the Pastoral Councils understand the situation and begin a discussion about the best options for moving forward. A summary of that meeting was printed in the cluster parish bulletins of August 16, 2020.

Subsequent to that meeting, Fr. Lioi and Fr. Gathenya had a zoom meeting with diocesan officials on August 18, met together on Tuesday, September 2, and again met with diocesan officials in a zoom meeting on September 23rd. At the latest meeting of Fr. Lioi and Fr. Gathenya on October 6th, Mr. Dan Fessenden was invited as he had volunteered to offer assistance in recommending a path forward. Although a member of St. Mary's Parish, Mr. Fessenden resides in Union Springs, currently is not a member of any parish committee, and is a well-respected member of the Auburn and Cayuga County Community.

After reviewing the documentation beginning with the Bishop's Letter of June 4, 2020 and ending with the minutes of the zoom meeting of September 23, 2020, discussion began concerning the best approach to arrive at a reasonable recommendation. Two approaches were suggested: a) start with the number of buildings/campuses and see which ones can be eliminated – more from a financial point of view, or b) start with what does the Catholic community in Auburn need to be a vibrant Catholic presence in “the service of the evangelizing mission of the Church” – more from pastoral point of view. The second of the two approaches was chosen.

To that end, representatives from each of the churches in Auburn and Northern Cayuga (St. Mary's, St. Hyacinth, St. Francis, St. Patrick, St. Joseph, Holy Family, St. Alphonsus, Sacred Heart, St. Ann) would be chosen to form a committee, chaired by Mr. Fessenden. This group would meet on Wednesday, October 28 at 5:30 pm at St. Mary's Church. After an orientation to the entire group by Mr. Fessenden, 4 or 5 members would be chosen to work with Mr. Fessenden in developing a scenario that would evidence a vibrant Catholic Community.

Then at a follow-up meeting, the work of the small group would be bounced off the entire group for discussion. When consensus is reached, a meeting could take place with the Pastoral/Finance Councils of each parish or perhaps a “town-hall” meeting of parishioners from all the parishes could take place. However, this latter option may not be practical given the covid-19 pandemic. Fr. Lioi and Fr. Gathenya would be present at the initial meeting on October 28th and would remain available to the group for consultation and advice, as needed

October 11, 2020: Pastoral Planning Update

On Tuesday, August 4, 2020, a meeting took place with the members of all the Parish Pastoral Councils of the Catholic Churches in Auburn. The purpose of the meeting was to talk about a pastoral plan for Auburn and Northern Cayuga a) focusing on ministerial needs and appropriate staffing, b) addressing the significant amount of unused and underused parish property and reducing the costly footprint, and c) strengthening our Catholic community into the future through intentional stewardship of its times, talent and treasure. The goal of this joint meeting was to have the members of the Pastoral Councils understand the situation and begin a discussion about the best options for moving forward. A summary of that meeting was printed in the cluster parish bulletins of August 16, 2020.

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To that end, representatives from each of the churches in Auburn and Northern Cayuga (St. Mary's, St. Hyacinth, St. Francis, St. Patrick, St. Joseph, Holy Family, St. Alphonsus, Sacred Heart, St. Ann) would be chosen to form a committee, chaired by Mr. Fessenden. This group would meet on Wednesday, October 28 at 5:30 pm at St. Mary's Church. After an orientation to the entire group by Mr. Fessenden, 4 or 5 members would be chosen to work with Mr. Fessenden in developing a scenario that would evidence a vibrant Catholic Community.

Then at a follow-up meeting, the work of the small group would be bounced off the entire group for discussion. When consensus is reached, a meeting could take place with the Pastoral/Finance Councils of each parish or perhaps a “town-hall” meeting of parishioners from all the parishes could take place. However, this latter option may not be practical given the covid-19 pandemic. Fr. Lioi and Fr. Gathenya would be present at the initial meeting on October 28th and would remain available to the group for consultation and advice, as needed.

October 6, 2020: Meeting of Fr. Lioi & Fr. Gathenya

Invited to this meeting was Mr. Dan Fessenden who volunteered to offer assistance in creating a path forward. Although a member of St. Mary's Parish, Mr. Fessenden resides in Union Springs, currently is not a member of any parish committee, and is a well-respected member of the Auburn and Cayuga County Community.

After reviewing the documentation beginning with the Bishop's Letter and ending with the minutes of the zoom meeting of September 23, 2020 and also in light of the documents of the Holy See (“*The pastoral conversion of the Parish community in the service of the evangelizing mission of the Church*” of the Congregation of the Clergy, July 20, 2020 and “*Decommissioning and Ecclesial Reuse of Churches*” issued in 2018 by Cardinal Gianfranco Ravasi, president of the Pontifical Council for Culture), discussion began concerning the best approach to arrive at a reasonable recommendation.

Two approaches were suggested: a) start with the number of buildings/campuses and see which ones can be eliminated – more from a negative and financial point of view, or b) start with what does the Catholic community in Auburn need to be a vibrant Catholic presence in “the service of the evangelizing mission of the Church” – more from a positive and pastoral point of view. The second of the two approaches was chosen.

To that end, representatives from each of the churches in Auburn and Northern Cayuga (St. Mary's, St. Hyacinth, St. Francis, St. Patrick, St. Joseph, Holy Family, St. Alphonsus, Sacred Heart, St. Ann) would be chosen to form a committee, chaired by Mr. Fessenden. This group would meet on Wednesday, October 28 at 5:30 pm at St. Mary's Church hall. Prior to

this meeting, Mr. Fessenden, Fr. Gathenya and Fr. Lioi will meet on October 20th to focus the agenda for the October 28th meeting. After an orientation to the entire group by Mr. Fessenden on October 28th, five or six members would be chosen to work with Mr. Fessenden in developing a proposal that would evidence a vibrant Catholic Community. Then, at a follow-up meeting of the whole group, the work of the small group would be bounced off the entire group for discussion.

When consensus is reached, a meeting could take place with the Pastoral/Finance Councils of each parish or perhaps a “town-hall” meeting of parishioners from all the parishes could take place. However, this latter option may not be practical given the covid-19 pandemic. Fr. Lioi and Fr. Gathenya would be present initially at the meeting on October 28th but would remain available to the group for consultation and advice, as needed.

August 16, 2020: Pastoral Planning Update

On Tuesday, August 4, 2020, a joint meeting of the Parish Pastoral Councils of St. Mary’s, Ss Mary & Martha, Holy Family, St. Alphonsus, Sacred Heart/St. Ann met at St. Mary’s Church. The **reason for the meeting** was to develop a pastoral plan which respected the entire city of Auburn and Northern Cayuga County, a) focusing on ministerial needs and appropriate staffing; b) addressing the significant amount of unused and underused parish property and reducing that costly footprint; c) and strengthening our Catholic community into the future through intentional stewardship of its time, talent and treasure.

Church attendance in 2011 was 4204; in 2019, it was 2694. With Covid-19 and after, it most likely will be even less. Currently, Auburn and Northern Cayuga County have nine Catholic churches operating for about 4,000 Catholic households. 25 years ago, parishes like Holy Family, St. Alphonsus, St. Mary’s each had more than 2,000 households. And the other parishes had hundreds of households. Those days are no more. The **goal of this meeting** was to have the members of the Parish Pastoral Councils understand the situation and begin a discussion about the best options for moving forward.

Agenda

Opening Prayer – Fr. Lioi
History of Pastoral Planning
Reason for this meeting (1st paragraph of handout)
Statistic & buildings per parish (back side of handout)
Goal of the meeting (last paragraph of handout)
Discussion and comments
Closing prayer – Fr. Gathenya

Attendance

11 from St. Mary’s Parish Council
9 from Saints Mary & Martha Parish Council
7 from Holy Family Parish Council
5 from St. Alphonsus Parish Council
10 from Sacred Heart/St. Ann Parish Council
All four priests were in attendance.

Remarks and Comments from the Discussion Question:

“If you were in charge, what would you do?”

Parishioners & Demographics

1. The diocese should have in every parish a comprehensive program of engaging lapse Catholics, instead of closing churches.
2. Active parishioners should contact former parishioners and invite them to come back.
3. The population of the City of Auburn is almost half of what it was 25 years ago.
4. Many outreach programs have been initiated in line with the New Evangelization, but none have born lasting fruit.
5. Parishes need to have more family-oriented activities to draw families and children into the church.
6. In the past, we have had many activities (CYO, fun nights, Mardi Gras, festivities, etc.), but none of them caused an increase in church attendance.
7. There are too many things pulling at people in our society and going to church is usually then put aside. In fact, the whole idea of religion and worship is pushed out of the public square and religion is reduced to a private affair.
8. If people are drawn to the Faith, it is because of our witness as individual Catholics. Programs won't attract people; our living of an authentic faith will.
9. Most likely, there will be a reduction of priests in Auburn.

Buildings and Finances

1. There are many buildings, but we have to be careful of eliminating those buildings that are used for vital activities of the parishes (e.g. gyms, Food Pantries, Religious Education, etc.)
2. There are too many pews in Auburn and not enough people to fill them.
3. Whether we like it or not, money is a factor in how we address the number of churches and buildings.
4. We have to look at each parish in terms of the condition of the building, seating capacity, location, parking. (Some of this already exists from previous planning processes.)
5. The reality is staring right at us; we just have to face it.
6. We have had these kinds of discussions in the past and nothing has changed.
7. We don't worship a building; we worship God. It makes no difference in which church we go to Mass.
8. If any churches are closed, it has to be a decision that we as parish council members own. It can't be blamed on the priests or the bishop.

August 2, 2020: Pastoral Planning Update

This Tuesday, August 4, 2020 at 6:30 pm, the feast of St. John Vianney, patron of parish priests, a joint meeting of the parish pastoral councils of St. Mary's, Ss Mary & Martha, Holy Family, St. Alphonsus, Sacred Heart/St Ann will take place in the parish hall at St. Mary's Church. Bishop Matano has asked Father Gatheyna, as pastor of Cluster Two, and me, as pastor of Cluster One, to provide the leadership to develop a pastoral plan which respects the entire city of Auburn and Northern Cayuga County, focusing on ministerial needs and appropriate staffing; addressing the significant amount of unused and underused parish property and

reducing that costly footprint; and strengthening our Catholic community into the future through intentional stewardship of its time, talent and treasure.

Between 2011 and 2019 in the Auburn, Northern Cayuga area, Catholic households have declined by 14%. In 2011, there were almost 5000 Catholic households attached to the Catholic parishes in the area; in 2019, that number was 4296. For sure, that number is even lower in 2021. When you think about it, 25 years ago, parishes like Holy Family, St. Alphonsus, St. Mary's each had more than 2,000 households. And the other parishes had hundreds of households. Those days are no more. Yet, today, we have the same parish buildings, much older now, to maintain with far less people and money to do so. Church attendance in 2011 was 4204; in 2019, it was 2694. With Covid-19 and after, it most likely will be even less. The purpose of this joint meeting is to have the members of the Parish Councils understand the situation and begin a discussion about the best options for moving forward. May the Holy Spirit guide us and inspire us!

July 26, 2020: Bulletin article

For Saint Matthew, faith is never stagnant. If there's faith, there's growth: good seed planted in a field, a tiny mustard seed growing into a mighty bush, yeast making the dough rise and turning wheat into wholesome bread. If I'm alive in God, there should be plenty of signs of growth in my life.

The same could be said of our Catholic parishes. If there is faith, there should be growth. The sad part is that in the ordinary Catholic parish, only about 7% of the people are actively involved in the parish. The rest just come to Church and go home and take for granted that the church and the parish will always be there for them when they need it. That attitude is no longer tenable.

Church attendance has declined by 36%; faith formation has declined by 59%; Baptisms have declined by 40%; First Communions have declined by 53%; Confirmations have declined by 55%; Church weddings have declined by 37%, but Funerals have only declined by 10%. All of these declines have affected our Sunday collections.

On the other hand, the cost of maintaining all of our church buildings has gone up, utilities have gone up, salaries and health care costs have gone up. Additionally, the covid-19 pandemic has thrown everything in disarray in terms of our church life and every other aspect of our society.

Currently, Auburn and Northern Cayuga County have nine Catholic churches operating for about 4,000 Catholic households. In 2011, there were about 5,000 households, and before that many, many more. And with Covid-19, who knows what the future would be like.

Bishop Matano has asked Fr. Gatheyna and me to develop a pastoral plan which respects the entire city of Auburn and Northern Cayuga County, focusing on ministerial needs and appropriate staffing; addressing the significant amount of unused and underused property and reducing that costly footprint; and strengthening our Catholic community into the future through intentional stewardship of its time, talent and treasure.

There is much work to do! If there is faith, there will be growth.

June, 2020 Letter of Bishop Matano (attachment)

