

**St. James Parish
Special Parish Council Meeting
November 18, 2015**

This special meeting of the Parish Council was called at the request of Bishop Perry, who wished to speak with the Council directly regarding certain parish matters.

Attendees:

Parish Council: Fr. Bob Sprott, Deacon Alfred Coleman, Eileen Quigley (Chair), Fran Williams (Vice Chair), Sara West (Secretary), Dave Bowman, Bill Kusek, Eva Leonard, Virginia Picken, Dave Samber, Werner Seyfried

Guests: Bishop Joseph Perry

Absent: Jim Sherman

Eileen called the meeting to order at 7:01 p.m. Fr. Bob led the prayer.

Discussion

Bishop Perry explained that he wished to bring the Parish Council up to date on several matters, and also to invite reflection from the Council. He noted the vibrancy of St. James parish, including its social concern efforts, senior care, and campus ministry, and described the parish as a beacon in the south loop of the city.

Bishop Perry presented several demographic statistics and predicted trends, including that the population of school age children in the area surrounding St. James is expected to increase; the African-American population has declined and is expected to decline further; and the Caucasian and Asian populations are expected to increase. The average household income in the area in 2015 is about \$38,000 and is expected to grow to about \$47,000 over the next 5 years.

There was some discussion of expected real estate development activity near the parish.

Bishop Perry explained that the Archdiocese's most significant concern regarding St. James over recent years has been parish growth. The October count of parishioners in attendance at mass has declined over the past several years, as follows:

2010: 202 parishioners
2011: 214 parishioners
2012: 214 parishioners
2013: 188 parishioners
2014: 184 parishioners
2015: 184 parishioners

Eileen acknowledged that declining attendance has been a topic frequently discussed by the Parish Council. Bishop Perry was very encouraging of Eileen's suggestion that the Council may conduct outreach to former parishioners, inviting them back to St. James. Dave Samber noted that the hall does have some current limitations but that the lift and enhancement of bathroom facilities is improving that picture; he also noted that the uncertainty of the future of the parish may not be encouraging to potential parishioners. Bishop Perry encouraged that the Evangelization Committee be revitalized.

Bishop Perry discussed the financial condition of the parish, noting that St. James has depleted its savings and is heavily reliant upon outside sources of income. With regard to the hall construction project, the original budget was about \$300,000; water seepage added \$123,000 in unexpected costs; and that a grant from the Archdiocese for these expenses had been approved.

Bishop Perry encouraged enthusiastic participation in the To Teach Who Christ Is campaign, suggesting that the funds could be used for capital improvements. Fr. Bob stated that he has met with the campaign consultant and that he and Dave Bowman have worked to prepare a list of projects and estimated expenses.

Eileen described the Parish Council's Finance Committee. She noted that the state of deferred maintenance has been very challenging, but that the hall's physical condition and appearance has changed dramatically compared to one year ago.

Bishop Perry stated that there was no question about the longevity of St. James, but reminded the Council of the challenges of declining attendance and the reliance upon outside sources of income. With regard to those sources of income, Bishop Perry noted that a two-year contract with Ada McKinley School had been signed. Fr. Bob pointed out that the school operated at St. James is the last remaining school in the Ada McKinley organization, and that some voices in the organization are advocating that Ada McKinley exit education programming altogether. Bishop Perry also noted that grants continue to provide a strong source of income to the Parish; Fr. Bob acknowledged the role of Peter Wawire in securing that funding.

Bishop Perry inquired if the parish could improve the offertory. Fr. Bob explained that he had been advised by an AOC fundraising consultant to delay any stewardship campaigns given the change in leadership. Bishop Perry emphasized the role of stewardship, and also noted that per capita giving at St. James is commensurate with other small parishes. Eileen noted that this year's Oktoberfest event was a fundraiser, a first for St. James.

Bishop Perry spoke to the future of the parish's physical home, and provided an update on the Michigan Avenue land acquisition. He explained that Cardinal George had envisioned the cooperation of St. James and the AOC in this endeavor. Bishop Perry explained that the AOC has spent upwards of \$550,000 on costs related to the land acquisition, such as environmental studies, surveys, legal advice, and zoning matters. The sale is expected to be complete at the closing on April 15, 2016, for a total cost of \$2.3 million (\$1.9 million purchase price, plus \$416,000 paid to the South Commons Condo Association). The AOC has wondered if St. James can afford a new building given the size of the parish. Bishop Perry also noted that the AOC has its own challenges with regard to liquidity.

Bishop Perry explained that if the land, once acquired by the AOC, is not used for a religious purpose, it will be subject to property taxes of about \$25,000 annually. This tax can be avoided if the land is used for an approved charitable or religious purpose; Bishop Perry suggested an urban community garden be established on the land. Other suggestions from the Council included a peace garden, a farmer's market, or the placement of the mobile food pantry on some frequency. Bishop Perry noted that St. Matthew in Schaumburg had installed the stations of the cross to establish a religious purpose at land owned by that parish.

Bishop Perry indicated that he could assist with questions around permissible charitable and religious activities for the site. The Parish Council expressed enthusiasm and appreciation to Bishop Perry and the AOC, and agreed that the opportunity presented by Bishop Perry was very positive news.

Adjournment

The next regular meeting of the Steering Committee will be at 7:00 p.m. on Wednesday, December 2 in the Rectory.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:15 p.m.

Minutes respectfully submitted by Sara West.