



A Message from our Pastor

FR. VINCE BREWER

My dear friends in Christ,

Last weekend, I had to share some information with the parishes, much earlier than I intended to do because someone released the information early. As such, not all the questions that people raised have answers as of yet, as we are still looking at what the decisions all mean on several fronts.

As you are well aware, several years ago, the two Watertown Catholic Schools, St. Bernard and St. Henry, were merged into the singular Watertown Catholic School. Two campuses were needed at the time of the merger. There were enough students in several grades that required two sections of multiple grades. You may not be aware that this is no longer the case. We now have one section of each grade.

The two parishes are also facing financial hardships. These financial hardships are not new. They have existed for years. Several pastors in the past have tapped into all the reserve funds at each parish to just pay bills each year. That is no longer an option--there are no reserves to tap into. There is no can to kick down the road anymore. The short of it is we expect for the Watertown Catholic community (both parishes) that we will be in the order of \$200,000 behind our budget needs at the end of the fiscal year, which ends June 30, 2022. We cannot continue to run those deficits. We cannot continue like we are.

The parish finance councils have met and discussed this at the last two meetings of the councils. I shared the financial information with the parishes at the end of November. I said then that hard choices were coming and some people would not like some of them. But we have to face reality, because reality is here whether we like it or not. Very gratefully, we have received some additional contributions. We are also hopeful to put programs in place that may increase future giving. But the change in giving to date is not enough and we are forced into looking into some cost savings measures.

On January 5th, I met with the bishop and the top officers of the diocese. They wanted to discuss our financial situation and our plans for trying to address it. They gave approval on a few changes that we will be implementing in the coming months. One of which involves our Watertown Catholic School.

Regardless of necessary changes, our overall goal is still to provide for the best school community that we can possibly have. To this end, we are going to combine our two campuses into one location-the campus at St. Henry, effective the start of school in Fall 2022. The St. Bernard campus is not a viable location for several reasons, not the least of which there are not enough classrooms available to support the number of grades. We have looked at the floor plans for St. Henry and believe that we can make accommodations for a PreK-8 program at the St. Henry location. We are NOT eliminating any grades at the school, the grades will all now be co-located at one campus. The St. Henry campus also has an elevator and this is becoming increasingly important for some of our school kids.

In the coming months, also with the bishop's approval, we will be consolidating the offices together into the rectory St. Henry. We will also be consolidating our religious education programs into one program, again with the bishop's approval. There may also be other things that will come in the future, if we need to cut more expenses, but the more we cut beyond this, the more painful the cuts will be.

The parish council and finance councils will look into the options that we have for the St. Bernard school building. There are several ideas that have already come to light. We will examine these options and other ideas that may emerge over the coming months. In the short term, we will idle the building and keep the expenses associated with it as low as possible.

You may be immediately concerned about what this means for staffing changes. The short answer is, that is undecided at this time. We still plan to have PreK-8, and expect to have enough students for each grade requiring the necessary teachers to cover each grade, so that probably answers part of the question. But we need to work out many more details over the next few months. These are exactly the type of questions I had hoped to have answered before this went public.

I realize this is troubling information for some. I'm sorry for that. We have to take measures that strengthens the Watertown Catholic community as a whole and sets it on a safe footing for the future.

God Bless,

Fr. Vince