



Partners in the Gospel Listening Sessions

To listen and provide input on the draft parish family configuration joining St. Therese/St. Mary to St. Joseph/St. Patrick.

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SESSION DATES & ATTENDANCE

Session 1 August 17, 2023 2 hours In-person Open only to Parish & School Staff; Volunteer Leadership of Councils and Commissions	30 members in leadership positions at St. Therese from the Pastoral Council, Finance Council, Stewardship Commission, Social Justice Commission including the St. Vincent de Paul Society, Liturgy Commission, and Faith Formation/Evangelization Commission. The Principal and Vice Principal of St. Therese Catholic Academy were also present, as well as school and parish paid and volunteer staff. Pastor Fr. Woody attended. The session was led by Steve Donaldson from the Archdiocese. There were 5 small groups in the breakout session.
Session 2 October 5, 2023 2 hours In-person Open to all parishioners	60 parishioners of St. Therese Parish attended. The Principal and Vice Principal of St. Therese Catholic Academy were also present, as well as several school parents. Pastor Fr. Woody also attended. The session was led by Rose Hesselbrock, St. Therese Pastoral Council Chair. There were 8 small groups in the breakout session.
Session 3 October 11, 2023 2 hours Virtual Open to all parishioners	32 parishioners of St. Therese Parish. The Principal and Vice Principal of St. Therese Catholic Academy were also present, as well as several school parents. The session was led by Sharon Spence-Wilcox, St. Therese Pastoral Council member. There were 4 small groups in the breakout session.



KEY POINTS OF CONCERNS & CHALLENGES

These are themes participants heard, not listed in order of priority.

- Loss of St. Therese culture and identity
- Potential loss/closure of the school if merged with St. Joe's school
- Large worship space doesn't lend itself to the more intimate feel of the St. Therese worship space
- Traumatic experience of St. Mary closure. Strong mistrust that we will truly be heard either by the Archdiocese or St. Joe's that, because of their size and income, will swallow up St. Therese.
- Unfamiliarity with Jesuits or the make-up and ministries of the St. Joe's congregation
- Lots of work to do
- Hard for small parish
- Inclusion
- Complications
- Fear
- Been there/done that
- Need to move on
- Concern that these are two very different communities, everyone should be included and considered.
- Staffing issue
- Pastor overload
- Fear that St. Therese will disappear and be swallowed by the large parish

SUMMARY OF CONCERNS & CHALLENGES

What concerns were shared about the proposed family grouping?

What challenges might this pose?

Session 1

The number one concern of all groups was the feared loss of the St. Therese culture and identity captured in our music traditions, both gospel and contemporary; our racial and cultural diversity made up of Black, Filipino and Hispanic people of color; the intimacy of our smaller worship space which encourages people to come to know each other better.

"I am Catholic because I go to St. Therese; I don't go to St. Therese because I'm Catholic. The magic that reignited my faith is what has been described here: diversity, love, connection, willingness to give, engagement, the fact that it changed how people work together, the music, the spirit of this church..."

The second largest concern was the potential loss/closure of the school. *"I am nervous money will be equated as value for this community (referring to school and parish revenue)." "I'm worried about the school and what impact St. Joe's school would have. Would we merge them? What about their cultural identity and what about equity?" "The most important mission that we have at St. T's is the school and how it impacts the community." "I am very worried about the possibility of the schools merging, that the strong difference of school cultures will be diluted, especially for STCA."*

People compared the worship spaces and voiced concern that the "mega-church" at St. Joe's would swallow up the small church feel of St. Therese. Unique liturgical practices such as lay presiders, gospel music, the St. Therese Feast Day, the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd program and the annual Habitat of Humanity program would be vulnerable to change or elimination. What would the Mass schedule be and where would it take place? *"Our community has diminished in numbers, but our cultural identity is still here. We stand for social justice, diversity, acceptance and welcome of the LGBTQIA community and have a rich history. How will that be honored if we are grouped with St. Joe's?"*

The merger of St. Mary to St. Therese was so poorly handled that there still exists a strong mistrust of the Archdiocese and its decisions. *"It is highly unlikely that any parish family will be changed." "No matter what the parish says, it's not going to be heard [by the Archdiocese]. There is nothing that you can say to change the minds of the Archdiocese." "Why wasn't there a more collaborative process to get us to this point [of the current parish family draft]? No one has had any input into these pairings."*

Several people raised the question of what would happen to the Food Bank at St. Mary's. *"Losing this needed and effective ministry would needlessly increase suffering within the parish boundaries."*

There was mixed familiarity/experience with the Jesuits and Jesuit traditions. *"I don't really know much about the Jesuits because I have not had a lot of exposure to them." "How can you become a 'family' if you don't know each other? My concerns are abstract since we don't know who those people are. I'm concerned that we're dealing with perception and not people that we really know, that people won't take the time to be discerning. I'm concerned that their perception of us is a certain way."*

Session 2

The deepest concern voiced by virtually every group was the fear of losing the intimate, small church feel of St. Therese by "merging" with St. Joe's. Many people told of being welcomed very warmly when they came to Mass at St. Therese for the first time. *"We were married at St. Joseph and felt it was a liberal parish but felt like something was missing so we started church shopping. We came to St. Therese and immediately felt like this was our parish." "Occasionally I'll go to St. Anthony's, which is closer to where I live, but St. T's feels right."*

The music of the Gospel choir at St. Therese was what drew many people to our parish. One parishioner talked about how lively the music was and her fear that it would not remain part of the liturgy in a new parish because there are not people who understand it.

Although many people admitted to not knowing anything about St. Joe's parish or the Jesuits, several people made a conscious choice to come to St. Therese from St. Joe's or from other churches nearer to where they live because they preferred the more intimate worship style.

Another person said she fears we will lose the community she feels at St. Therese – she has never been in a parish where she felt so comfortable with everybody so is really worried. Liturgy is important but it's not the same in another church. She knows we will gain new people in our lives but will lose some, too. She lives minutes from the church in Renton but comes to St. T's, a 45-minute drive one-way, but she has a sense of belonging. When she checked out St. T's, she found the music so lively and fears that will change.

The diminishment of the St. Therese community: by being absorbed into the parish family, we will lose our uniqueness and small parish feel. *"The big fish (St. Joe's) will eat up the little fish (St. Therese)." "I fear losing the DEPTH of the community we have built, via liturgies (e.g., strong challenging, homilies) RCIA, social justice, faith formation, coffee hours, and much more."*

The second largest concern was the potential loss/closure of the school. *"I am nervous money will be equated as value for this community (referring to school and parish revenue)." "I'm worried about the school and what impact St. Joe's school would have. Would we merge them? What about their cultural identity and what about equity?" "The most important mission that we have at St. T's is the school and how it impacts the community." "I am very worried about the possibility of the schools merging, that the strong difference of school cultures will be diluted, especially for STCA."*

People compared the worship spaces and voiced concern that the “mega-church” at St. Joe’s would swallow up the small church feel of St. Therese. Unique liturgical practices such as lay presiders, gospel music, the St. Therese Feast Day, the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd program and the annual Habitat of Humanity program would be vulnerable to change or elimination. What would the Mass schedule be and where would it take place?

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Session 3

Similar to the in-person listening session on Oct. 5, many people voiced concern at the expected loss of the small parish intimacy and ability to know the community at more than a superficial level.

“I was formerly an active member at St. Pat’s and now St. Therese, with some time at St. Joe’s as well. St. Joe’s is much too big for me, no warmth, no easy inclusion.”

“I loved some of the former pastors at St. Joe’s, but I can’t picture myself being at home at St. Joe’s.”

“St. Therese parish is so different than any other parish. Community is very welcoming. People give each other hugs. Concerned that this community doesn’t want to be tested again. We are the black sheep of the Archdiocese. If Jesus came back today, he’d come to St. Therese.”

"The worship space at St. Joe's is so different from the worship space at St. Therese and thinking about what liturgy is going to look like is hard to do and introduces a new vulnerability you do not want to have."

"When I first started attending St. Therese, we had a lot more people coming and we were just fine, so we can handle a larger community, but I worry that a lot of those faces I know will not want to make the transition or go somewhere closer to home."

Another common thread between the 2 listening sessions was the fear of the diminishment/disappearance of the uniqueness of the St. Therese community.

"Concern that St. Therese is a very diverse parish and St. Mary's was very diverse, with Hispanic community. Other parishes are very white and well off. Doesn't want St. Therese community to be steamrolled. How do we maintain St. Therese/St. Mary integrity? There's no money for programs, how do we choose?"

"I am concerned we will lose the depth of community each parish has become, to be watered down until another generation arrives."

"Concern that our creativity for doing something alternative will not be embraced or considered."

There were concerns about how the parish family would begin to come together. Questions were asked about both clerical and lay leadership, decision-making influence and power, sensitivity to the racially diverse community of St. Therese parish and the St. Therese Catholic Academy compared to the perception of a mono-racial (white) community at St. Joe.

"Looking at both school and parish side, the fear is staffing on the parish side. Will people lose jobs? One of the staff norms is to presume positive intentions. In the realm of finances, concerned that when merger happens, parishioners from St. Joseph might feel like they have to help the poor black folks of St. Therese Academy."

"Concern that pastor would oversee two schools and parish life of four churches. That's a lot to take on. Concern about pastor burn out."

"The organizational part is the easy part. We need to define core values and agree how to meet those core values. For example, religious education, outreach program to young people. There's nothing that appeals to them. This reorganization feels backwards."

"I don't have a problem with the four-parish family proposal, but with how the process will play out." "I wonder how they will combine long established parishes into one parish." "It will be a challenge for St Joseph being larger, balancing decisions, both at parish and schools."

"I am feeling overwhelmed by how much group work will have to be done." "I am worried that the process and outcomes will be too "churchified", too many walls and boxes." "There is lots of stress in shaping who we are to become. Are we up to the task?" "I am concerned that the skill sets of the pastors/leadership of the new parish will be inadequate." "I am starting to like the synodal style, please get the institution out and the Spirit in!"

"I'm worried about resources, questions of use/reuse of facilities. Are we really seeing the meat of all the issues with the parish families?" "Lots of housekeeping issues to sort out, not a strong history." "This initiative is taking a colossal amount of energy. This is happening at a moment where all this energy should be put somewhere else." "I don't know what is being put in place to make sure the vision is going to be executed."

"We are just trying to make the best of a bad situation, and we are barely holding on as a parish. It is exhausting getting to this point. Concern that we will try to do more than what a simple integration and partnership might bring and go through months of meetings that ultimately will be discerned and decided after the next three years."

"Looking at historical trends that people of color get cut from funding and access first, we worry that our ability to serve those furthest from justice would be hindered, as many times it is not a financially solvent model."

"Confusion around how the discernment works after parish families are set. What does that look like? Just keep talking and we will kind of feel it and sort it out? Not that there is an easy answer. Interesting to not have it be handed down from above other than the family itself but could get messy based on who has more people, more money, more power. Have seen in many different situations."

Several parishioners from St. Mary attended the listening session. Before the merger with St. Therese, St. Mary parishioners were not given the opportunity to participate in the 2022 listening sessions. The issues they raised are reflective of the way the closure of St. Mary was mishandled by the Archdiocese and the disregard for the large Hispanic proportion of the community.

"These parishes have very distinct identities; joining them based on geographical locations doesn't seem right. We need to learn from St. Mary's such as lack of outreach to Hispanic community."

"We have missed a lot of potential participants in these sessions, including the St. Mary's Spanish-speaking community, 2nd shift workers, parents of small children. This process needs to be much more inclusive-driven, including finding the resources necessary to ensure that participation, and a willingness to do the extra outreach to hear from so many more."



KEY POINTS OF HOPES, OPPORTUNITIES & POSSIBILITIES

These are themes participants heard, not listed in order of priority.

- The shared charisms and values that could make two good parishes one really great one.
- Combined financial and people resources; best liturgical practices; imagining a blend of music tradition to make room for gospel, contemporary and contemplative music. *“First step would be to have the 2 parishes figure out shared social concerns, and then move on to things that we can start to merge. Explore possibilities where there is mutual interest and strengthen those.”*
- Expanding social justice programs to incorporate Food Bank and Tiny House experience.
- *“I am hopeful that it is a life ring to lift and elevate St. T’s back to some of its former glory.”*
- *“We want the advantage of the larger community, but don’t want to lose our identity.”*
- Stronger together than we are separately.
- Opportunity to share resources and talents.
- We are closer in many personal/work lives to St. Joe’s than originally thought.
- Both parishes can have positive impact on each other.
- Change/unknown is scary but be the church that Jesus would like to go to.
- Everyone is hopeful that this is going to work out.
- Community
- Nourish
- Supporting youth development through inclusive lay-led initiatives (no [Roman] collar on lay leaders)
- Possibilities
- Improve sense of community
- Recognition of opportunity to join with a Jesuit parish. St. Therese had exposure to Jesuit preaching during Patty Repikoff’s tenure, so we are familiar with Jesuit tradition and charism and how it blended with the culture at St. Therese. We have experience at making the combination work well.

- Shared wealth between the communities, both financial and non-financial. Opportunity to give birth to a new parish that combines all our gifts and talents.
- Opportunity to help others see and share in who we are at St. Therese, to keep the spirit of St. Therese alive.
- Growth of this parish family can only help with drawing in more youth and young adults.

SUMMARY OF HOPES, OPPORTUNITIES & POSSIBILITIES

What hopes were shared about the proposed family grouping?

What opportunities or possibilities might this offer?

Session 1

Overall, there was a tentative optimism that a parish family configuration of St. Therese with St. Joe's would present opportunities for the parishes to combine the best of both and learn from each other. *"There are many similarities among the 4 parishes (including St. Mary and St. Patrick). All 4 parishes are among the most open, welcoming, and liberal in the Seattle area and likely the archdiocese."*

Several people began to imagine creative uses of the St. Therese worship space. *"St. Joe's church is large enough for the Masses, but can we use St. Therese as an activity hub for the parish?" "Perhaps having St. Therese as a "chapel" would be appealing." "Can St. T's become a mission of St. Joe's where we can maintain our space, school, culture and identity with the support, reciprocity and resources from St. Joe's?" "I hope that a parish coming together doesn't necessarily mean that a church is closing."*

Not everyone thought STCA would close and there was optimism based on a "great working relationship" with current school staff at St. Joe's. *"I am very optimistic that in terms of the school we can maintain our school identity. We have the opportunity to elevate voices that have not been heard in the past by our association with St. Joe's and their partners and community circles. We have the chance for more eyes to land on us to see what good is happening here. I have the opportunity to support and guide this process for our school."*

The size of the congregation and the financial strength of St. Joe's could be seen as an opportunity to increase programs that St. T's no longer has money or people to support. There was hope that St. Joe's shares the social justice mindset of St. Therese and may be more open to drawing back the Hispanic community that dissipated when St. Mary's closed, as well as attracting more people from the LGBTQIA community. *"This would be an opportunity for a fresh start to discern and create a new space that people like me (LGBTQIA) can feel like walking into." "I can imagine that it's possible St. J's will see the value in incorporating some of the St. T spirit and make an honest effort to do so."*

Session 2

The limitation of a small parish for expansive ministry was recognized. Combining the financial and non-financial resources of both parishes opens new opportunities to renew/revive St. Therese ministries which have not had sufficient resources to be effective. *"We need to use our resources collectively, to reach out to young people and [people of color], and better address their real needs; the youth need to be safe on the streets." "No longer a feeling of malaise because although everyone still here has been able to keep the parish afloat, a new parish family with additional*

resources allows that burden to be lifted. The relieving of that burden will be good for me. Let's get on with it!"

"Of course, we're fearful of losing what we know, but there is hope that we are moving into a community that is better than we could ever imagine."

The gifts St. Therese will be bringing are significant. *"We have a lot to teach St. Joe. Hope they see us as teachers; sometimes parishes that have gone through what we have gone through have a lot to teach. I want us to be courageous and experiment on how we gather and be in community, not priest centric."* *"We don't have the financial wealth of St. Joe, but we have riches in so many ways. I'm nervous that we won't go into this with the confidence that we have something to offer."*

"Hope that we will increase the number of parishioners or even bring back some that left St. Therese years ago."

The possibility of expanding not only programs, but inclusivity for those left out (Hispanic community, women leaders, young adults) was a common hope.

Hope that St. Joe's school can benefit from exposure to the great things happening at St. Therese Catholic Academy. *"We can increase our sphere of influence and cross-pollinate between the schools."* *"We could have joined activities with both schools."*

Session 3

There was considerable optimism that the gifts and charisms of all 4 parishes could come together well. The proposed parish family presents an opportunity to learn and grow from each other, not to have one community overpower the others, but to be creative about blending the best from all 4 communities.

"Hope there will be more opportunities to come together and join around shared commonalities; bring uniqueness of each parish and share with each other; learn and grow together. Hope that this can be collaborative process how we are going to be Church. This is opportunity to rethink it and not be bogged down by loss."

"Hope we can trust one another as humans. Hope we can adapt."

"We can be deliberate about how we bring people together and create a new entity, not just two separate entities."

"It's a huge opportunity to realize our values."

"We can increase our sphere of influence. We can cross-pollinate what St. Joe's has with what St. Therese has to offer. St. Therese can also influence St. Joe's."

Specific ideas and dreams for the future began to surface in the conversation.

"If we merge some of our resources, we can do more with the school. We could have combined activities with both schools."

"I want to see Mass available in Spanish, and a Spanish language ministry."

"I want lots of breathing room for leaders, especially women."

"We need to use our resources collectively, to reach out to young people and minorities, and better address the real needs, the youth need safety on our streets."

"It makes sense to combine resources, too many shoestring budgets right now, won't have to spend so much effort on fundraising, instead work on community building."

"Maybe together we can have young adult ministry, and we can share human resources. We can be deliberate how we bring people together and create new entity, not just two separate entities."

"This presents an incredible opportunity for lay leadership to step up in ways that maybe cannot be imagined or foreseen right now, in staff and ministerial and all leadership positions. Hope that the priest who becomes the pastor of the parish family we wind up in recognizes that he cannot do it alone and knows how to tap into the gifts and wealth that was talked about earlier."

"We are talking about Jesuit connections and the strength and beauty in the Jesuit charism and apostolates. One thing to connect with another parish, but we are being given the opportunity to connect to a Jesuit parish assuming it stays Jesuit and connect to Ignatian charism. Amazingly beautiful thing in my faith life and spirituality and it would be awesome to bring them together."

There was acknowledgement of the fear felt by many and encouragement about how to overcome it.

"This is an opportunity to rethink how to be church and not be bogged down by loss."

"Unknown causes us to fear. Our relationship with St. Joe's is already fantastic."

"This process is allowing us to think about our parish, and church, and structure; opportunity to listen and voice our fears and feelings."

"Fear of losing what we know but hope that we are moving into a community that is better than we could ever imagine. We have an opportunity to build the kingdom of God here with our experiences and talents and can bring them into our parish family. Want to believe that those at St Joe's want the same thing; I want to avoid an Us vs Them mentality."

"We do not have the money on paper, but we have riches in so many ways and I am nervous that we won't go into this with the confidence that we have something to offer."

"I hope that we will collectively take this moment to be bold and brave. The opportunity to be changed."



ADDITIONAL CONVERSATION

What other input do you want to offer?

- *“When we first came to St. T’s, there were many families that we didn’t know, but who we are very close to today. Think of the families we don’t know at St. Joe’s and the opportunity to get to know many more people who share the same Catholic faith.”*
- *“I have a lack of trust with the process. The Archdiocese doesn’t seem “zealous” about our diversity, ethnic groups. We need to be the voice pushing for these issues as a diverse parish. I hope the Archdiocese will accept our strength and listen to us.”*
- *“It can always be worse, before you think this is the worst thing in the world. St. Joe’s is a stone’s throw from us. Some communities are much longer distances from each other.”*
- *“Overall, I find this to be a sad time in the life of the whole church with less participation and practice of the faith, but I hope that these consolidations will strengthen us as a community with a common mission and shared worship.”*
- *“This is like death and resurrection.”*
- *“Let’s get started! Our Councils and Boards need to start meeting.” “There should be some urgency around this and a process for integration.”*
- *Questions about why we did not stay with Immaculate. “I’d like to include the community but not the building.” “Immaculate is structurally old and requires a ton of maintenance.”*
- *“Many children are not going to church as adults.” “The church at large doesn’t offer the experience valued by youth and young adults.” “Concerned there are not many younger people involved in this listening session. We need to make sure to spread the word more widely.”*
- *“Patty was a good example for women priests...long overdue for women’s ordination and to have priests marry.”*
- *There’s a lot of unknown and we must be deliberate about supporting each other.*
- *Why are we being joined with St. Joe’s and St. Pat’s instead of more south end churches?*

- *We don't want any white saviorism by joining with St. Joe's. Prefers to be joined with south end churches; understanding that they were already joined in other parish families.*
- *Community means many things, there is great value in what we have been and done*
- *Each community has charisms, they are living entities.*
- *Process is part of living out our lives, need to engage, time to find new life.*
- *We have long histories of social justice and community building, these must continue*
- *Lots of work to do, we have great people, we're ok, time to build.*
- *Moved by story of Jennifer Kelly from St. Joe's in Seattle Times article today, her prison ministry is great example of what we all can do and be.*
- *Inclusion is everything, lose the term "fallen away", use "non-practicing", reach out*
- *What will it take to shape the future of the church?*
- *How do we build the "long game", and do it in real time?*
- *We need a well-run process if we're going to meld communities.*
- *So much of what we are is framed for us by the Archdiocese, we need more local autonomy, I want "waivers" to traditional structures, I want our leaders to be held to strong accountability.*
- *It's up to us, we need to create our own futures.*
- *Partnering with SU and SJ to train teachers in classrooms and sell off property to provide higher salaries and/or stabilized rent for teachers, staff.*