

**Questions from the St. Patrick Advocates to the Strategic Planning Committee**  
**With Answers from the Archdiocese, and corrections made by St. Patrick Leadership**  
**May 3, 2021**

**1) In January 2021, Deacon Dennis requested that St. Patrick be given three years to demonstrate increased vitality. This request was in the Synod White Paper sent to the Archbishop, Bishop and Strategic Planning team. We understand that Immaculate Conception has been given three years to demonstrate increased vitality. Given that information, we once again request a three-year moratorium to demonstrate our increased growth and vitality.**

The most recent strategic planning process began several years ago at the deanery level with recommendations given to Archbishop J. Peter Sartain. These recommendations were created with the pastoral leaders, members of the parish communities, including (JoAn Choi and three parishioners) from St. Patrick, and the support of an outside consultant. At that time the possibility of St. Patrick's closure was suggested to the Archbishop. Many in the parish anticipated such an event might occur when Fr. Pat retired.

*Parish Advocate Clarification: The recommendation from the deanery at the time JoAn retired was for St. Patrick's to share leadership with Christ Our Hope, with the addition that if St. Pat's did not grow, we would close. JoAn and the three parish representatives believed that that the new configuration would give time for the parish to begin to grow. But 8 months later COVID restrictions began. There was no awareness by JoAn and parish leaders that the Archbishop was told that St. Patrick could possibly close, and for certain, no one in the parish "anticipated that such an event might occur when Fr. Pat retired." In fact, JoAn was asked by the Archdiocese to become Pastoral Coordinator at that time. The sentence "Many in the parish" comes from Bishop Mueggenborg's visit to St. Patrick in 2017 and conversations he had with parishioners.*

These recommendations were paused when Archbishop Sartain announced his retirement, and the recommendations were passed on to Archbishop Paul D. Etienne. Archbishop Etienne created the Strategic Planning Committee to take a holistic view of the archdiocese, recognizing that there is a concentration of resources and ministries in the South Seattle region, while other parts of the archdiocese are in need of pastoral care. The Strategic Planning Committee reviewed the previous recommendations, explored new items, and began a larger discussion around how to enhance parish vitality. These recommendations were given to Archbishop Etienne, who shared them with the Presbyteral Council, before asking the Strategic Planning Committee to begin implementing the decisions. The recommendations and decisions were already well underway prior to the start of the synod at St. Patrick's. The Strategic Planning Committee, along with the Archbishop determined that the planning process would continue as decided since input was already gathered from parish leadership, parishioners, the deanery, the Strategic Planning Committee, and the Presbyteral Council.

Overall, there is a concentration of parishes, ministries, resources and more in the South Seattle area, which required the Strategic Planning Committee to take a more holistic approach in its decision-making, which included many factors like unique and necessary ministries as

prioritized by the Archdiocese, historical significance, diversity, economics, cultural communities, campus maintenance, school presence, etc. It is important to keep this in mind and not compare one parish to another because of the multitude of underlying factors for each decision. Immaculate Conception is partnered with St. Therese. As stated, planning has been in process for years and as stated above, with the multitude of considerations the current direction will continue.

**2. Communications in October of 2020 described a parish vitality index (PVI). The vitality measures included attraction and formation of disciples, financial stability, facility utilization, liturgical engagement, lay leadership participation, Mass attendance, sacramental participation, and community outreach. The parish vitality index has been referenced as the metrics for decision making and yet an actual tool of measurement apparently does not currently exist. How is it that we are being measured with a PVI calculator that appears to have not been created yet? Why were we not advised of dimension needing improvement and expected rate of change prior to the Archdiocesan decision to close or merge parishes?**

The planning process that began in 2016 and resulted in recommendations to Archbishop Sartain did not include the PVI. Instead, it included the Catholic Leadership Institute parish metrics that were created with an outside consultant and shared with the parish leadership and the four members (JoAn Choi and three parishioners) of the parish community who participated in the process.

Once Archbishop Etienne created the Strategic Planning Committee, he asked them to begin to think about how we can measure parish vitality moving forward so that there is a more common set of data and information. This research project began winter of 2020/summer with the Parish Vitality Taskforce, which included clergy, , parish staff, Catholic educators and chancery personnel. This taskforce explored a holistic view of a parish's strengths and weaknesses in areas such as sacramental participation, the attraction and formation of disciples, community outreach, liturgical engagement, lay leadership participation and more. The goal of this work is to create standard ways for every parish to review and assess their own vitality. However, this tool will be modified and will include priorities contained in the pastoral. When that modification is complete, then this tool maybe be used by all parishes to assist them in conducting a self-audit of vitality. The PVI helped us further understand the reasons behind the deanery's recommendations. See response to question 5 for further information.

**3. Two years ago, we were paired with Christ Our Hope as an alternative solution to the Deanery deliberations. We were not given any reason to believe this would only be a three-year partnership and that St. Patrick was designated to close. In the interim, we have formed a collaborative, close and rewarding relationship with the Christ our Hope community with shared liturgies, faith formation, and social justice initiatives, and with both Fr. Bryan Hersey and Deacon Dennis Kelly. We understand the primary reason provided by the Archdiocese for not continuing is that Christ Our Hope is a personal parish. Could there be a creative pathway around that arbitrary reality? What other reasons exist for not continuing this partnership?**

Christ Our Hope is a personal parish, with a specific mission of outreach to the marginalized and evangelization specifically for tourism.

Today we face the reality that we have an abundance of parishes with declining parishioner engagement and too few priests and resources to support them all. Based on these realities the Strategic Planning Committee took a holistic approach when reviewing the original recommendations from the South Seattle Deanery. Based on the realities of today and the forecasts for the future, the team had to make difficult decisions to shift resources to better serve the entire local Church. There is a concentration of parishes and ministries in the South Seattle area, some less than 2 miles from each other. By merging parishes communities, the goal is to strengthen the new parish community to better serve the mission of the Church, while best using the resources available including pastoral care.

**4. Pre-Covid, Deacon Dennis and parish leaders were interested and poised to expand our service and ministry to individuals, families, and communities with special needs. This was also identified through the synod as a parish focus with significant energy behind it. As a parish that serves 51 zip codes and is most conveniently located at the intersection of Interstate 5 and Highway 520 for easy access, we are able to reach out to people in many locations across Western Washington that identify as a part of this demographic. Why can't St. Patrick remain a parish in our current location devoted to this work?**

As stated above there are multiple reasons why decisions were made to merge parishes. The reality is that St. Patrick parishioners (from 51 zip codes) are passing many local parishes on their way to St. Patrick. Meanwhile, in the outskirts of the local Church parishioners must travel great distances to the closest parish. Overall, the Archbishop is responsible for the entire archdiocese and is approaching strategic planning with this overall holistic view of the local Church in mind.

The effort and energy St. Patrick parishioners have for the ministry to those with special needs is wonderful. We encourage pursuing this ministry and others at your new location. However, it is important to note that a ministry such as this should not just be designated for one location. Serving people with special needs is important and should be provided across the Archdiocese.

It should be remembered that the primary mission of a territorial parish is to minister to those within the local community. If others from outside that area wish to join in this ministry, then they are welcome to do so. However, if those living within a given parish area are going elsewhere for their pastoral and sacramental needs then that may indicate that a particular parish is not fulfilling its primary mission.

**5. With regards to your aforementioned benchmark of growth and vitality, St. Patrick has seen a 6% increase in parish membership in the last year and sacraments (First Communions, Confirmations, and ministry to those who are homebound), despite restrictions and limitations caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. This is a direct result of our creative outreach, a**

**new website, and collaborative efforts. This demonstrates a nascent capacity for continued growth after Covid-19 restrictions.**

It is wonderful that St. Patrick's welcomed 12 families to the parish over the last year, which is very encouraging. It is also wonderful to see the fruits of your creative outreach, which we strongly encourage you to continue at your new location.

The decisions around St. Patrick's were based on long-term trend data, which indicate a slow but steady decline in all areas of parish life including:

- 79 families left the parish since 2015.
- Pre-Covid, the parish saw an approximately 52% reduction in Mass attendance from 1995-2019 (390 to 189), and an approximately 22% decrease from 2014- 2019 (241 – 189).
- During this same time, the percent of contributing households continued to decline from 83% in 2015 to 77% in 2020. Overall, the contributing households decreased 32% from 247 to 168. While each household is giving more, it is not enough to offset the loss of parishioners.
- Looking at the 20-year trend, all Sacraments have decreased apart from Confirmations, which spiked last year across the archdiocese due to the lowered Confirmation age.
- All educational ministries have also decreased in size over the past five years.
- Parish Vitality for the study process was intended to be shared with individual parishes. It was only prepared for those parishes that were identified for the purposes of the study due to staffing constraints.

**6. We discussed your sharing with us vitality metrics for all 15 parishes in the South Deanery. We understand that some may be more easily available than others and would appreciate receiving them as they are available and not waiting until they are all available.**

The Parish Vitality Index was prepared for the individual parish use and for deanery planning purposes. It was not developed for comparative purposes since there are many other factors that are not reflected in the general data. By showing just the numbers, people would get an incomplete understanding of the situation and other influencing factors.

**7. We anticipate receiving a graph of the US national, Washington State, and South Deanery parish statistics cited in your presentation for sacraments, membership, and financial stability, etc. as compared to St. Patrick.**

The national, archdiocesan, deanery & parish statistics will be given to the stakeholders.

**8. To better understand and be able to fully engage in the Strategic Planning efforts, we are requesting the specific statistics and vitality markers for St. Patrick that have informed your current recommendations.**

Yes. We can provide those to your Pastoral Coordinator Deacon Dennis Kelly.

**From Previous Meeting:**

**We are unclear if our parish was ever involved in early planning?**

Yes. St. Patrick's was involved in the early planning with the Catholic Leadership Institute. Your pastoral leader along with 3 members of your parish community took part in the planning sessions and the recommendation development.

Correction: See answer to number 1.

**How do we apply to be a personal parish?**

The general rule, in accord with canon law, is that parishes are to be territorial. Personal parishes are established by reason of rite, language, or nationality of the Christian faithful. They can be established for other reasons as well (canon 518). The main point is that personal parishes may be established to address a particular need of the faithful, but it is not anticipated that a territorial parish becomes a personal parish.