



Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

In conjunction with the Archdiocese and the assistance of Michael Laird, the Director of Missionary Planning and Leadership at the Archdiocese of Milwaukee, St. Bernadette and Our Lady of Good Hope began an analysis of the strengths and financial challenges facing the parishes in 2021. Saint Catherine of Alexandria joined this effort in 2022. As you know, all three parishes have successfully found ways to collaborate, to create efficiencies, and to avoid duplication of services. As the Combined Steering Committee grappled with understanding the realities of our situation and trying to develop a plan for the future, they realized that they needed further information about the parishes' facilities and financial well-being. They reformed the Facilities & Finance Workgroup (FFWG) with members from all three parishes, and also hired an outside consulting firm, The Concord Group, to provide an unbiased evaluation of our facilities.

All parishioners were invited to attend the Town Hall Meeting on November 6, where we presented the information that has been gathered so far, in particular: I) The Concord Group's Facility Condition Assessment, and II) conclusions and recommendations by our FFWG.

I. The Concord Group completed a very extensive evaluation of the assets and systems at our parishes in early October.

2-Year Capital Costs Projections

St. Bernadette	St. Catherine of Alexandria	Our Lady of Good Hope
\$3,088,056	\$1,749,790	\$2,594,566

10-Year Major Assessment Replacement and Capital Maintenance Repair Costs

	St. Bernadette	St. Catherine of Alexandria	Our Lady of Good Hope
10-year major asset replacement cost	\$7,661,900	\$4,702,900	\$8,926,350
10-year capital maintenance repair cost	\$52,600	\$15,930	\$39,200

The Concord Group report also estimated the financial gain/loss under possible scenarios for us to move forward together as a cohesive group:

1. Keep all current campuses and continue operations - **Estimated Net Capital Loss** (\$8,813,000)
2. Keep St. Bernadette Parish and sell the other campuses - **Estimated Net Capital Gain** \$3,781,450
3. Keep St. Catherine of Alexandria Parish and sell the other campuses - **Estimated Net Capital Gain** \$6,349,950
4. Keep Our Lady of Good Hope and sell the other campuses - **Estimated Net Capital Gain** \$4,155,600
5. Sell all three campuses and acquire a new facility including a church, school, and parish administration space - **Estimated Net Capital Gain** \$12,518,786
6. Sell all three campuses and build a new facility including a church, school, and parish administration space, building cost estimated in the range of \$300 - \$600 per square foot of space. - **Estimated Net Capital Loss:** (\$6,002,014)

*The gain/loss calculation for selling any campuses is highly dependent on fluctuations and trends in the real estate market. The actual gain/loss could vary greatly.*

II. At the end of August, the FFWG submitted their report to the Steering Committee. This report included the following conclusions:

1. We have fewer parishioners and declining revenues.
2. Administrative costs are too high.
3. We have too many facilities.
4. The support we provide to Seton Catholic Schools has a negative impact on our resources.
5. We have limited opportunities for growth.

The same report provided the following recommendations:

1. Merge our three parishes into one financial corporation.
2. Reduce our physical footprint to one campus.
3. Negotiate a more equitable agreement with Seton Catholic Schools.
4. Develop a parishioner retention plan.
5. Nurture opportunities for growth, especially within the Hmong community.
6. Implement the life center strategy to help build vibrancy.
7. Find other opportunities to grow the number of parishioners (and revenue).

While no final decisions have been made, the parish leadership recognizes that we must change in order to become more vibrant, and that we can't afford the capital needs for all three parishes. Working together we, the NWMCP, will move into the future as a Catholic presence on the northwest side of Milwaukee serving our parishioners and our community.

**Questions and Answers from the Town Hall Meeting**

Q: Is there any kind of timeline, and who makes the decision about a merger?

A: There is no specific timeline yet. Discussion is ongoing as we continue to get more data. The Archdiocese prefers that the decision to merge or close campuses be made by the parishes. Seton will also be a factor as we determine the direction ahead.

Q: Will the Archdiocese honor any decision we make?

A: We are in close communication with the Archdiocese, so they will have the chance to weigh in before we implement any plans that move us forward.

Q: Does the Concord Group analysis include the school buildings?

A: Yes.

Q: Do we have any idea about how much each parish could sell for?

A: A commercial realtor provided a range of three to four million dollars, based on comparable sales in Milwaukee.

Q: What happens to the cemetery at StCA? Will we still own it or will it go to the Archdiocese?

A: The cemetery would remain with the parish and would continue to be our responsibility to operate.

Q: One slide in the presentation said there was a need for volunteers. Was that only pertinent to this project or was that in general?

A: Both. We do need help specifically with this project, and we always need help in general.

Q: What is the enrollment at NWCS?

A: Enrollment has been holding steady at around 150 students.

Q: Will getting a new archbishop delay any of this process?

A: We don't think so. People have been working on our behalf behind the scenes at the Archdiocese.

Q: What happens to the Love One Another pledges if a parish closes?

A: Those pledges would stay with the new corporation. We have been spending some of those funds already at the parish where the money was collected.

***A Reflection by Diane Govern, Director of Finance, NWMCP***

Max Lucado is a pastor and best-selling author whose basic message is, "God loves you. Let Him." He has written many books, including a number of children's books that are written in the style of a parable. One book I loved to read to my children is *The Oak Inside the Acorn*, a story of growing up and leaving home. Early on in the book, Little Acorn wants to stay within the safe, nurturing canopy of his mother's branches. She consistently tells him, "Within you is a great oak...Just be the tree that God made you to be."

While Little Acorn's coming of age story leads to his life as a Big Oak, I was reminded of this story because of its similarities to where we find ourselves currently. In the beginning of the story, Little Acorn is afraid to leave his mother. He does everything he can to stay with her, holding tight through the wind and the rain.

We, as parishes, have the same reluctance to and fear of change. We want to cling to the familiarity of our own parish, and we want our own traditions to continue without change. It can be frightening to contemplate something new: perhaps no longer being able to sit in our usual seat in our church, losing contact with our cherished friends from church, or even experiencing long-standing special liturgies in a way that is different than before. But the truth is, our parishes were already actively changing long before we even thought about strategic planning. Think about all of the people who have left our parishes or who have passed away. Each departure has left a gap that may or may not have been filled by a new face. None of us has our own school anymore. Festivals and other fundraising events no longer happen. Parish groups, such as Christian Mothers, youth groups, Holy Name Societies, athletics, Knights of Columbus, and so many others, have disbanded or moved elsewhere. The statistics that were presented at the Town Hall Meeting on November 6<sup>th</sup> demonstrate the need for us to come together as a community to be a more vibrant Catholic presence on the Northwest side of Milwaukee. It is up to us to define that vision and make it a reality.

Within each of you is a great faith. Just as our forebears set out from other parishes to establish these three wonderful communities, we too need to set our sights on the future. Let us move forward to fall on fertile ground (at whatever address that may be) and germinate into one strong community. Let's be the People that God wants us to be-vibrant, welcoming Catholics working together to bring about the Kingdom of God. Like the Little Acorn, we can rise and grow, together creating a strong, vibrant, and united church that is a shining example of the glory of God's love.

