



NWMCP Strategic Planning Update January 2025

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

As we transition from the Advent and Christmas seasons into Ordinary Time, I want to update you on the strategic planning happening on the Northwest side of Milwaukee and share some of the challenges ahead for us in the upcoming months.

We have been working on strategic planning since September 2021 when St. Bernadette and Our Lady of Good Hope, along with the Archdiocese of Milwaukee, committed to work together to develop a plan for the betterment of our Catholic community in Northwest Milwaukee. In June 2022, St. Catherine of Alexandria Parish formed a separate steering committee and assembled workgroups following the model of St. Bernadette and Our Lady of Good Hope. In November 2022, the two steering committees combined, as well as the workgroups, to help us move forward as a tri-parish community.

Over the past number of years, the Archdiocese of Milwaukee has been addressing strategic planning issues more closely in different areas of the Archdiocese. For example, last year the Archdiocese was planning in the parishes of Dodge County and Racine. This year, the Archdiocese is focusing on Northwest Milwaukee and Kenosha. One rather shocking statistic for the parishes in the Northwest Milwaukee area (St. Margaret Mary, Blessed Savior, and our three parishes) is that on any given Sunday there are about 1,150 parishioners who attend a Saturday evening or Sunday service. The utilization rate for the churches is only 14% across the five parishes. It dramatically shows the need for deeper collaboration.

In November, we held a Town Hall meeting. A number of people feared that they would be hearing a decision to close a parish at that meeting. Our communities are beloved by their membership, so I understand the trepidation they were feeling. The intention of the meeting was to give people an understanding of the realities that we are facing: declining membership, aging facilities, and the costs to repair each campus.

Even though we are facing these harsh realities, we continue to be churches that are serving the needs of the parishioners and reaching out to the larger community in different ways. We have seen the decline in membership coming for many years as the younger generations choose not to join or attend services in an organized faith community. Let's face it, COVID-19 didn't help; it accelerated the trend as some regularly-attending parishioners did not come back to Mass.

Our Town Hall Meeting presented data and recommendations to move forward. The people who attended had excellent questions and recognized the challenging truth of our current situation. Even though there are difficult decisions to be made, there is a glimmer of hope. I truly sensed the unification of our parish communities as together we address our future challenges!

Throughout the last several years, I have seen a rising tide of working and worshipping together. I no longer feel like our parishes exist completely separate and worlds apart from each other. In 2023, we implemented a Mass schedule that rotated through our campuses. In the beginning, we did not see an even representation of attendance from each parish at our joint celebrations; however, on New Year's Day, our most recent Holy Day of Obligation, Mass was well attended by members from all three parishes. I understand that this is difficult for everyone as our hearts naturally pull us toward our home parishes, and I am proud of you for opening wide your hearts to literally step into unfamiliar territory. We are stronger together!

The Steering Committee, along with Michael Laird from the Archdiocese Missionary Planning Office, are focusing on three objectives in the upcoming months.

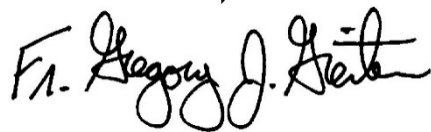
1. Develop a parishioner retention plan: How do we build up and unify our parish communities? How do we engage people in the planning process? As we seek to downsize our parish campuses, how do we maintain our dedicated parishioners? How do we build the vibrancy that we so desire for the future?
2. Clarify the future mission and the space needs for the parish: If in fact we are going to reduce to one parish site in the future, then what are the needs for space and ministries at that future site (for example, space for Christian Formation classes, accessible parish offices, etc.)?
3. Engage with one or two realtors to get a more accurate picture of what each property is worth and which properties might be easier to sell in the market today. The Steering Committee has begun speaking with realtors about working with our parishes and will select the best realtor to carry out this task.

Strategic planning is not an easy or fast process. Four years ago we were fighting over why we needed to collaborate and plan together. Two years ago we were challenged by the new Mass schedule and whether or not we really needed new hymnals. Today, we have strengthened our communities of faith: we have one Pastoral Council and one pastoral staff overseeing the parishes and ministries, we have common celebrations throughout the year, we implemented a new Mass schedule, we have new hymnals at all three parishes, and we are worshipping and praising the Lord together. Now we are talking about the possibility of closing and selling off parish sites and moving toward merging the parishes together. Over four years, we actually *have been* moving at a rapid pace. We know that we have a future when we are working together for the greater good and glory of God!

On January 14, our Archdiocese welcomed Archbishop Jeffrey Grob as our new leader. As with any new change in leadership, it will take him time to settle in and get to know the people of our Archdiocese. During this time, Michael Laird has urged us to keep moving forward on the great work that we have been doing in our collaboration. He shared with the leaders of our parishes that the merger will happen when the leadership is behind the project and supporting the plans in coming together. Until then, we must keep building up the community and unifying the parishes.

In summary, the only way forward is to keep collaborating. I have always pledged to be honest and share pertinent information with you as soon as possible. I will continue to do so in the upcoming months. We are making progress and we are moving forward TOGETHER! Let us pray each day for the success of our collaboration and the wisdom to make decisions for the betterment of our faith communities on the Northwest side of Milwaukee.

Yours in Christ,



Fr. Gregory J. Greiten

“Consult not your fears, but your hopes and dreams. Think not about your frustrations, but about your unfulfilled potential. Concern yourself not with what you tried and failed in, but with what it is still possible for you to do.” ~ Pope Saint John XXIII