

Dear Parishioners,

Last week I announced at the end of Mass that I had created a Long-Range Planning committee. Mr. Patrick Skain, a parishioner who is also a civil engineer and does this kind of work for his living, has agreed to be the chair of the committee. There are several reasons I created this committee with one of them being most immediately important, namely to help facilitate a discussion of whether or not it is prudent and possible to expand the current number of students in our parish school.

While our school enrollment has more than doubled in the past 10-15 years, a check of the number of baptisms that have been celebrated in our parish indicates that we may be looking at a potential enrollment of over 25 students in our combined 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> grade classroom. The School Advisory Council (parish school board) has done some significant preliminary research and proposed 3 options for addressing this issue, primarily because they and our school administration believe that trying to educate that many First and Second graders at one time in one room would not be an ideal situation. One of their proposed options is that we add additional classrooms to our newer education building so that the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> grade could be split into 2 classrooms with two teachers. Other options were explored but were found by them to be distasteful (limiting class size, putting them all into one room with a teacher's aide, etc).

I am somewhat supportive of their suggested proposal but know that additional research and planning is necessary before a final decision is made by me and the Bishop. One thing the Bishop will require before signing off on the proposal is a check against the parish's long range plan and whether or not the proposal aligns with it or conflicts with it. Since we do not have a comprehensive long range plan for the parish, we need to create one and thus my creation of the Long Range Planning committee. I have asked the committee to look at all aspects of parish life as the parish school is a major part of our ministry, but is certainly not all of it. If you have ideas for our parish physical plant over the next 5-50 years, please let Mr. Skain, the parish office, or me know. I have told the committee to dream big and to not worry about whether we have money on hand or not (that is a different set of questions versus what we would hope to do). The items may be built in the future or not, but immediate needs and concerns should align with an overall plan or have really good reasons for why an exception to the plan should be made (and thus readjusting the overall plan). I have asked the committee to move as quickly as they prudently can as the potential class size problem is rapidly approaching (one and a half years from now).

Changing anything can be difficult for some people and it is not always easy for me either. I try to remind myself of some words from St. John Henry Newman: "To live is to change." He continues the quote and I paraphrase it as: 'And to be perfect is to have changed a lot.' Thus I am trying to be open to all possibilities – long and short term – so that we can live and live well, moving closer and closer to what God hopes and desires for us. I ask all of you to pray for our efforts, so that we can truly let the Holy Spirit be in charge and thus do what we prudently can do to form our next set of parishioners and thus the next set of disciples of the Lord.

Know of my prayers for all of you and God bless,

Fr. Mark