



A Pastoral Letter

Monday, November 27, 2023

Dear Parishioners,

As we end the liturgical year and begin the Advent Season on Sunday, December 3, 2023, I would like to share with you important news affecting our parish community.

The Future of the St. Agnes Campus

As you know, the parish has been deeply involved in a heartfelt conversation over the past several months on the future of the St. Agnes campus. It was important for me as pastor to hear the thoughts and opinions of everyone in the parish, including the Parish Council and Finance Council. To this end, I held a parish leadership meeting on August 23, 2023, in which I presented the recommendation to close the St. Agnes campus. Attendees at this meeting included members of the Finance Council, including Bob Rooney, George Erensen, and Bob Howe; members of the Building and Grounds Committee, including MJ Desnoyers, Althea Howe, Eileen Grasso and Kevin Ruebenstahl; parish trustees – Jeannemarie Baker and Kevin Erensen; members of the Parish Council, including Evelyn Wilson, Rhonda Morley, and Tom Gallagher; and Anne McCrory, the Chief Legal and Real Estate Officer, Diocese of Bridgeport, among others.

Subsequently, I published a Pastoral Letter to the Parish Community dated August 24, 2023, in which I shared some important developments in the life of the parish, including the acquisition of 19 Riverside Avenue and the possible closure of the St. Agnes campus.

We then held four open meetings in September and October 2023, in which any parishioner could attend to offer their thoughts about my August 2023 proposal to Bishop Caggiano to close the St. Agnes campus and consolidate parish activities at the St. Catherine campus. Over 200 people attended the four meetings. In view of the fact that about 500 people attend Mass on any given Sunday at both campuses, this represents a significant direct representation of the people of the parish.

I also followed up those general meetings with a number of personal meetings for those who had lingering questions about the rationale that has prompted my August 2023 proposal to Bishop Caggiano to close the St. Agnes campus.

Further, Bishop Caggiano visited the parish for a meeting of the Finance Council on September 14, 2023, attended by Bob Rooney, Kevin Erensen, Tom Raymond, Bob Howe, George Erensen, Jessica Baehr and Tom Gallagher. Subsequently, on October 7, 2023, Bishop Caggiano met at the parish with the broader parish leadership, including the two trustees – Jeannemarie Baker and Kevin Erensen, joined by George Erensen, Bob Howe, Jessica Baehr, Sandra Marr, Kevin Ruebenstahl, Tom Raymond, Tom Gallagher, and Rhonda Morley, among others, as well as parish staff.

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At each meeting Bishop Caggiano asked a series of questions in order to better understand the nature of any objections to the proposed closure and sale. Bishop Caggiano found the interchanges to be very helpful and informative. Subsequently, the Finance Council and the Parish Council – both advisory councils, voted 6-4 and 11-1-1, respectively, to move forward with the closure and sale of the St. Agnes campus. According to canon law, such votes of both councils are consultative in nature. This means that the vote is meant to help guide me, the pastor, in whatever decision I make in this regard. This is the case because the pastoral life and welfare of the people of the parish are the paramount responsibility of the pastor, whose perspective is naturally different from the perspective of individual parishioners, or even groups within the parish. In short, these votes do not dictate whether to close the St. Agnes campus. They are meant to give additional guidance to the pastor who will make the decision and send it to Bishop Caggiano for ratification.

The Role of Bishop Caggiano in the Process

Bishop Caggiano received my proposal to close and sell the St. Agnes campus in August 2023. He then undertook broad consultation with the parish, as outlined above, and with his diocesan advisors. The bishop's role is to either ratify or overturn the pastor's recommendation.

One might say that the bishop is making the decision. In fact, it is significantly different for two reasons. First, it is always presumed that any pastor, having heard his people, once he makes a decision and sends it to the bishop, does so because he has concluded that the action is in the best interests of his people and his parish. What is essential in validating any pastor's proposal is that he has spent time listening to his people and reflecting upon what they have said, both publicly and privately, and in good faith makes his decision and can articulate the reasons that motivate his decision.

Bishop Caggiano has met with me three times and I have answered all of his many questions. In addition, I have presented Bishop Caggiano a pastoral plan that articulates my vision for the parish. A copy can be found on our parish website. As such, my decision to close and sell the St. Agnes campus is not arbitrary or motivated to hurt the people of the parish. Bishop Caggiano has found no canonical grounds that can justify overturning the proposal.

Bishop Caggiano believes very strongly that the principle of subsidiarity must be respected in the proper governance of the Church. What does this mean? Essentially, what this implies is that the pastor has true leadership over his people precisely because he is on the local scene and knows the people, issues and problems facing his community better than the bishop.

To ensure further due diligence, Bishop Caggiano brought my proposal to consultation at the diocesan level at the Diocesan Finance Council (composed of lay business leaders from throughout the Diocese), the Presbyteral Council (composed of 24 priests, the vast majority who serve as pastors and deans throughout the Diocese) and the College of Consultors (seven priests who serve as the highest body with which the bishop consults). All three bodies heard the proposal, read my rationale for a pastoral vision moving forward, and asked a number of clarifying questions. All three bodies voted unanimously to recommend the proposal be ratified.

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A Changing Landscape for Ministry

Over the past few months, some have commented on the statement that Bishop Caggiano made at the time of the merger that the St. Agnes campus would not be sold. At the time of the merger and capital campaign, Bishop Caggiano made those comments in good faith and meant what he said. However, what is now changed is the situation we face as a Church. The situation that existed four years ago is radically different coming out of the pandemic. Given the lack of recovery in the post-pandemic Church, what is clear to Bishop Caggiano is that the principles upon which we based our past planning and ministerial activities are insufficient to revitalize the Church. If they were effective, then those who saw no reason to return would have returned. However, they have not returned.

The birth of the “One” is the Bishop’s direct response to this essential change. As you may know, the “One” refers to the one priority that will reorganize and advance all pastoral ministry in every parish and school, providing every believer with opportunities to re-encounter Christ on a daily basis and to be accompanied in discipleship. Over time, this single priority will reshape almost every aspect of parish and diocesan ministry. Thus, what was inconceivable even four years ago may now be viable within a larger plan for revitalization. In other words, the question whether the St. Agnes campus is sold or not must now be seen against this new context - a context that no one, including Bishop Caggiano, could have imagined we would face just four years ago.

The Closure of St. Agnes Campus

After much deliberation and discernment among the Parish community and with me, Bishop Caggiano has ratified my decision to close and sell the St. Agnes campus.

We Stand with Christ Capital Campaign (WSWC)

Donors to the We Stand with Christ Campaign will receive a separate communication shortly regarding how the St. Agnes campus closure may impact their gift to the capital campaign. We are mindful that some donors, large and small, in light of the decision to close the St. Agnes campus, may feel differently about the donations given to support the St. Agnes campus project. The specifics on requests for return of campaign donations are clearly explained in this separate communication.

Discussions with Greenwich Country Day School

The parish is in formal discussions with Greenwich Country Day School (GCDS) about the sale of the recently appraised St. Agnes campus to GCDS. We have just received an updated appraisal, which confirms that the current sale being negotiated with GCDS is well within the range of the appraised value of the land. The sale of the St. Agnes campus would require agreement by both parties through a fully negotiated Purchase and Sale Agreement.

The Reinterment of Monsignor James J. McLaughlin (1913-1985)

A former St. Agnes pastor, Monsignor James J. McLaughlin, was moved several years ago from his original interment at the Priests’ Circle at St. Mary’s – Putnam Cemetery and reinterred in the front lawn at the St. Agnes campus. Independent of the decision regarding the St. Agnes campus, the diocese determined that in order to be consistent with its policies governing the respectful burial of priests in Catholic cemeteries, the issue needed to be addressed. The diocese has reserved, dignified burial graves for all diocesan priests, given to them as a gift, to be their final place of rest. Therefore, Monsignor McLaughlin was reinterred at the Priests’ Circle on November 14th. The respectful transfer was handled by a team from the Diocesan Cemeteries office in association with Hoyt Funeral Home.

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Advent and Christmas Services at the St. Agnes Campus

Mass during Advent will take place each Sunday at 10:00am at St. Agnes. The 8:30am Sunday Mass at St. Agnes has been discontinued. The Spanish and Korean Masses will be relocated to the St. Catherine campus for the first Sunday of Advent.

Children's Christmas Pageant

As we enter the Advent season, there will be much activity at the Parish, and we encourage you and your families to participate and be present for these events. On Sunday, December 10, 2023, at 1:30pm, there will be a bilingual Christmas Pageant at the St. Catherine's campus. More information will be available soon.

Final Mass at the St. Agnes Campus

The final Mass at St. Agnes will be on Sunday, December 31, 2023, at 10:00 am. A Parish celebration of the legacy of St. Agnes will be planned and more information will be forthcoming on this event. We encourage suggestions from parishioners as we plan this event, particularly those with long histories at St Agnes.

The St. Agnes Campus Grotto

In the coming weeks, the St. Agnes campus grotto will be moved to the St. Catherine's campus and stored until a fitting location is established as its new home.

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This has been a trying time for all of us at the parish as we, along with Bishop Caggiano, discerned a way forward. It is no doubt particularly difficult for those whose lives have been intertwined with the St. Agnes campus for many, many years. The parish is going through a transformational moment in time. My prayer is that each of us will embrace this transformation and contribute to it with our time and talent.

We pray, especially during the Advent Season, that we will be well-prepared to welcome the Infant Jesus on Christmas morning.

Very truly yours in Christ,



Reverend William F. Platt
Pastor