

Bishop Matthew Clark
Diocese of Rochester
1150 Buffalo Road
14624

June 14, 2005

Re: Pastoral Plan 2005

Saint Augustine Parish Council Addendum to Pastoral Planning Task Force Recommendation

Dear Bishop Clark,

St. Augustine parish council has reached a consensus to submit this addendum to the Pastoral Planning Task Force Recommendation. We are unable at this point to concur with the selection of St. Monica's as the single campus site. We have serious concerns about the process that led to the campus selection, the feasibility of a single campus solution, the need to explore a fund drive, and the impact that vacant churches would have on the Southwest area neighborhoods and the 19th Ward neighborhood in particular. St. Augustine's parish council fully recognizes the seriousness of the cluster's financial situation and the shortage of priests. We realize that difficult decisions need to be made and that the St. Augustine parish may have to make major sacrifices in order to ensure the Roman Catholic community of Southwest Rochester thrives in downsized facilities. However, we do not believe that the Task Force recommendation is the best solution, and we do believe that this Addendum is in the best interest of the entire SW Roman Catholic community and the neighborhoods we serve.

Saint Augustine Parish Council Recommendation:

St. Augustine Parish Council is recommending that the Diocese of Rochester seriously consider the following (in order of preference):

1. Using the St. Augustine campus as the location of the single SW campus. The St. Augustine Campus, including the school building, offers more space in a more centrally located site than the St. Monica's campus (see discussion in the "Issues Involving Space" section of the lists of concerns). St. Augustine has the strongest vitality statistics of the three parishes in the current Roman Catholic Community of the 19th Ward cluster, and hence using the St. Augustine campus for a single-campus solution would result in less disruption.
2. If the Diocese does decide that the St. Monica's campus would be the primary SW campus, we urge that St. Augustine church remain open as a second worship site for Parish X for at least two years. During which time aggressive fund raising efforts would be conducted and the St. Augustine's community would engage in dialog to determine the best long-term solutions for the new parish X. St. Augustine's location in the northern section of the 19th Ward and centrally to our Southwest area neighborhoods would continue to affirm our commitment to our urban communities through it's connective presence, allowing continued outreach efforts. A St. Monica's and St. Augustine combination would provide the greatest convenience to 19th Ward residents.
3. In the event that St. Monica's is selected as the single campus site, we urge that a small portion of the St. Augustine campus be retained for youth activities and a chapel area. This would address a portion of the square footage issues associated with the St. Monica's campus. This would provide a comfortable location for our youth and their very exciting ideas for future growth. This would attest an acquainted Catholic presence in the northern 19th Ward and Southwest area neighborhoods. This facility could either be the School Annex (A.K.A. Duffy Center and former 1st Grade building), the rectory, or a portion of the church building.

Concerns about Task Force Recommendation:

Process and Information

The single-campus scenarios presented to the parishioners for consideration did not include St. Augustine's school building as a part of its campus. Without the school building, the St. Augustine's campus would not have adequate space for ministries, and as a result, was not a strong candidate for a single-campus location. By the time the St. Augustine option was changed to include the school building, the surveys had been returned. As a result, some St. Augustine's parishioners felt alienated from the process. This option (St. Augustine campus with school building) was also omitted from the surveys given to parishioners at St. Monica, Our Lady of Good Council, Emmanuel Church of the Deaf, and St's Peter and Paul. This additional information would have provided a whole different ranking system in the review of campus sites to all parishioners.

Many people in St. Augustine's parish were not aware of the dire financial situation of our churches, and fewer parishioners were aware that the closure of cluster churches was seriously being considered. The first time that all parishioners were made aware of the situation was the May 15th letter that stated only single-campus scenarios were now being considered.

We have heard consistently that the Diocese believed that our individual parishes (RCC 19) had an awareness and an understanding of the financial deficits we currently face and that the parishioners have had the opportunity to process these closures for five years. The reality exists that our cluster parishioners did not have knowledge of this. Therefore, our parishioners were only given a few months to appreciate the idea of a single parish (which many people concluded would use more than one worship site), and then only one week to digest the idea of a single-campus option, discern solutions and give informed input. Again, acknowledging that during this week the St. Augustine option did not consist of the entire campus, including the very large and vacant school building.

The Pastoral Planning Group did a commendable job collecting information. Time constraints did not permit them to adequately disseminate the information and involve parishioners in the decision making process. This was an essential part of pastoral planning due to the fact that some of the diverse communities were not represented on the Planning Group or in the parish councils. Additionally, the time constraints did not permit the Pastoral Planning Group to reach a true consensus on the decision. Selection of St. Monica's as the single site was determined by a weighted vote that took place after less than an hour of discussion. There was no time as a group to focus on our mission as church in the 19th ward and to review what buildings are essential for us to carry out that mission. There remain significant questions that have not been explored including the cost to renovate a new single campus to meet the needs of the parishes, the likelihood of each property to sell, the effect of our decisions upon the poor in the surrounding neighborhoods, the effect of our decisions on the diverse parish communities and where do we want to be as a community in 10 or 20 years and what decision can we make now to help us on our way?

Issues Involving Space

The Task Force recommendation would result in gathering the functions of four separate campuses into a single one. While we recognize that RCC-19 facilities will need to be downsized, we have questions as to whether the space provided at St. Monica's be sufficient to meet the needs of all the ministries. Not including the school building space (approx. 38,000sf) that is currently used by the school and for CYO activities, the St. Monica's campus has the smallest amount of square footage available for parish-dedicated ministries and activities (the 14,461sf church and 16,516sf rectory). This does not include the growth potential for community/neighborhood building activities. It is our

commitment to continue to stabilize our neighborhoods and develop relationships with our 19th Ward and Southwest area communities, prayerfully inviting their gifts and talents.

What will be the impact on the CYO program that will lose the space in OLGK if that campus is sold, and will now have to share the St. Monica's Gym with both the School and the parish?

Will there be sufficient space for the youth of the parish where they are able to feel welcome, included, havened in Christ's presence and at home? Our children need a vibrant community of their peers. They are vital to the survival as our church grows.

Interfaith Action has been an invaluable way for the parishes to be actively involved in the needs of the community. Their presence gives a pulse in the neighborhoods, local issues and a solid connection with other churches, organizations and businesses. Having it located at our single site would be a large asset. Will space be offered to Interfaith Action at the new single site?

Will there be a dedicated and secluded space/ apartment available for priests to live? The combined parish ministries from all the sites converging on one location will increase the traffic and noise and leave little room for privacy.

Even if a majority of cluster activities are relocated to a single primary campus, it may be desirable to locate some functions (e.g., daily mass chapel, youth activities) at a section of another campus to maintain our vitality in the community.

The Portuguese Community/ Fundraising

The Portuguese community has offered to raise major funds and to contribute volunteers to maintain and improve the St. Augustine campus. The Portuguese community has been a presence and an asset to St. Augustine's parish for over a century. Their connection with the building that was built with the help of Portuguese immigrants in the early 20th century is strong. Their community is both local as members of the parish and spread throughout the Rochester diocese. They gather regularly at St. Augustine's church to celebrate and worship.

The Portuguese community would like to have presented their commitment to fundraise and put in sweat equity in building maintenance and repair. The original plans to involve parishioners in scenario building would have offered them this opportunity, but due to time constraints this process was dropped. As a result, there was little opportunity for the Portuguese community (or any of the vibrant diverse communities) to make their voice and ideas known. Attached is the commitment letter from the Portuguese community.

In addition to the Portuguese community, other parishioners have stated that they would have contributed to a St. Augustine fund drive. A proposal for a fund drive was discussed prior to the Diocesan Partner's In Faith capital campaign, however the fund drive was cancelled due to probability of conflict with the diocesan campaign. There were several major contributors in the parish that did not want to contribute to the diocesan campaign but who would have contributed to a parish campaign. Capital projects to rehabilitate facilities and improve the energy efficiency of parish buildings would have resulted in lower maintenance and utility costs.

Impact on Neighborhood Stability

The closure of a city parish has a much greater impact on the surrounding neighborhood than the closing of a suburban parish. St. Augustine is a force for stability in the northern 19th Ward and Southwest area neighborhoods. A number of parishioners who live in the neighborhood are concerned that closing St. Augustine would destabilize a neighborhood that has worked hard to

improve itself. While the possibility exists that the church building could be sold to another denomination or re-used creatively, the fact is that the simultaneous closing of a number of churches would likely result in a glutted market. Our experience with the attempt to sell the former St. Augustine school building has illustrated the difficulty with selling large facilities in our neighborhoods. If the St. Augustine church building were to remain vacant and vandalized for a number of years, this would be devastating to the neighborhood. Our church bells must continue to ring to bring a consciousness to the neighborhood.

The St. Augustine, St. Monica and Ss. Peter and Paul church buildings are architectural masterpieces that strongly reinforce the urban fabric in their neighborhoods. Allowing these beautiful buildings to deteriorate would tear the urban fabric and run contrary to our commitment to social change. We must exercise proper stewardship over all buildings currently owned by Catholic parishes in Southwest Rochester. And we must meet our obligation to act as a positive force in our neighborhoods. It is inevitable that some buildings will have to be sold; however, it is essential that these buildings will not be allowed to remain vacant for a length of time or fall into disrepair. While it is true that the foundation of the church is its parishioners and not its buildings, it is equally true that the church community has a responsibility to the neighborhood community.

The St. Augustine Parish Council has developed this addendum after prayerful and careful consideration, seeking guidance from the Holy Spirit, and consultation with parishioners.

Mary Fran Kolbuc, Kate Kremer, DeWain Feller
June 14, 2005

cc.

Sr. Marie Susanne Hoffman

Sr. Pat Flass

Fr. Ray Fleming

William Pickett, Director of Pastoral Planning

Deborah Housel, Pastoral Planning liaison

Parishioners of Emanuel Church of the Deaf, Our Lady of Good Counsel, St. Augustine, St. Monica and Ss. Peter and Paul