

SAINTS ISIDORE AND MARIA TORRIBIA PARISH

St. Catherine of Siena, Addison NY

St. Stanislaus, Bradford NY

St. Joseph, Campbell NY

**Ss. Isidore and Maria Torribia Parish Planning Committee
Recommendation to Bishop Matano**

October 25, 2019

Dear Most Reverend Bishop Matano:

The Planning Committee of Ss. Isidore and Maria Torribia Parish respectfully submits the following recommendation for your consideration:

History:

By the end of February 2019, parishioners of Ss. Isidore and Maria Torribia Parish were informed that the parish faced a dire financial situation in which the parish would deplete its on-hand operating revenue and reserve funds in an estimated six to nine-month period. In order for the parish to remain solvent, immediate action would be required.

To meet this challenge, a Parish Planning Committee was created consisting of representatives from the three worship sites to include parish staff, our deacon, and pastor. The committee's work is being facilitated by Karen Rinefierd, Planning Consultant for the Diocese of Rochester.

Planning Committee Focus:

This committee met for the first time on March 4, 2019 and developed the following goals:

- Research and consider ideas for worship and community for parishioners in light of the attendance and financial challenges facing the parish.
- Ensure regular two-way communication with parishioners.
- Prepare a recommendation to Bishop Matano for the future of the parish.

Beyond the three initial identified tasks, the committee quickly realized the current fiscal and attendance challenges would not be fixed with short-term solutions, but rather long-term strategies were needed to focus on not just preserving but also *revitalizing* the parish.

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The committee identified these factors/obstacles that had contributed to our current situation:

- Migration of attendees/financial support to other parishes
- Dwindling attendance
- Financial instability
- Reduced staff
- Reduced Mass schedule
- Communication resources/tools
- Parishioner perception
- Lack of active involvement in parish activities and needs
- Cultural/Parish climate
- Lack of information about parish operations (e.g., staffing, finances)
- Lingering resentment/mistrust among merged worship sites
- Mistrust of the Diocese and fear of closing
- Lack of internal unity
- Parishioner apathy

Accomplishments:

The committee has made significant gains in a broad spectrum of areas since its establishment.

A summary of these accomplishments includes:

- Creating a unified parish planning committee with representation from all three worship sites to help create a thriving Catholic Community.
- Taken interim steps to help overcome the current financial crisis and lay the groundwork for a stable financial future:
 - Increased CMA involvement/participation through additional publicity and awareness to reduce the amount needed to be made up from parish savings. In February 2019, the parish collected \$12,931 toward the \$30,186 goal. By the end of the campaign, the parish collected \$23,872 or 79% of its goal.
 - Conducted a successful Parish Appeal to replenish dwindling accounts. The campaign goal was \$35,000. However, 153 households contributed \$36,892 which is 105.4% of the goal. This response shows that our parishioners want to keep the parish open.

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- Increased awareness of stewardship responsibility.
- Increased collection envelope suggested offerings.
- Increased visibility of donation memorial opportunities (sanctuary candles, Mass memorials, planned giving, etc.)
- Through repeated publicity and publicized reporting, encouraged increased weekly collections.
- Through increased communication and education, increased parishioner knowledge of collection options when not in attendance at the worship site, i.e., utilizing our envelopes at neighboring parishes, monthly envelopes on request, etc.
- In the past 6 months, the parish lowered expenses as an interim step by utilizing shared services with a neighboring parish.
- Ensuring regular, two-way communication within the parish:
 - Increase transparency to overcome mistrust, lack of knowledge, etc. between parish leadership and parishioners.
 - Publish all Pastoral Council, Finance Council, and Planning Committee meeting minutes on the parish website.
 - Increase bulletin communications regarding parish issues.
 - Revamped parish website for a user-friendly format.
 - Increased use of parish website for informational purposes.
 - Held town-hall style meetings for information sharing and feedback with careful planning so each worship site would be given equal opportunities and timely access to information regarding current status and offer an opportunity to gather questions/input. This gave parishioners a chance to come together to receive information beyond the initial bulletin.
 - Distributed feedback on the information gathered during the town hall meetings.
 - Established a social media presence by creating a parish Facebook page/account.
 - Utilized free community publications such as the community calendar options on local television and community newspapers.
 - On September 28-29, a fiscal update was presented at each worship site during Mass and was accompanied by a full financial report in the bulletin.

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- Continued work to unite three worship sites as one unified parish.
 - This effort has been ongoing work since the merging of the St. Catherine, St. Joseph, and St. Stanislaus parishes to overcome any territorialism and negative attitudes about preserving only the “home” worship sites.
 - Examining our options, the committee has been clear from the beginning we are “all in this together” and that closing one or two worship sites was not a viable solution for preserving our parish.
 - Presented informational sessions to the Parish that were instrumental to understanding the financial and relational support for this stance.
 - Our successful, annual parish picnic in early September brought together parish members from all three worship sites.
 - Continued monthly Eucharistic Adoration that rotates among the three worship sites.
 - Increased awareness of our roles/duties as Catholics (e.g., evangelization, charity, community, spiritual, etc.)
 - Many questions were raised in this area regarding support of second collections, charity work, etc. with our own financial crisis at hand. Understanding and education about our Catholic duty to support those in need was an additional benefit of crafting discussion and ideas to address our spiritual and fiscal needs.
- Worked on steps to increase presence within community, making churches more welcoming, increasing volunteer opportunities within parish and thus increase weekly attendance at Mass.
 - Adding welcoming language / greetings to the start of Mass.
 - Creating a ministry of greeters to hand out bulletins and welcome worshipers at Sunday Masses.
 - Publicizing Rosary Society gatherings/opportunities such as Euchre nights, Pilgrimage visits, and fundraising to increase attendance and encourage membership.
 - Encouraging parish involvement opportunities to help build community / sense of belonging within parish.
- Conducted informational gathering of parishioner input to address the latest Mass schedule to best accommodate parishioner needs with current staffing concerns.
- Adjusted Mass schedule to reflect feedback response.

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Current Financial Status:

The parish ended the 2018-19 fiscal period with a net loss of \$9,348. This included \$30,363 that was collected in the Parish Appeal. Without the Parish Appeal, the net loss would have been \$39,711. There was an additional \$6,529 collected after the 6/30/19 date. The major driver for the loss was the decline in collections. Collections have declined \$65,000 in two years from \$307,000 to \$242,000.

The 2019-20 budget has a \$19,000 deficit. However, the parish expects that this gap will be closed by June 2020 (see list of future plans below). The budget incorporated the expense reductions that were made in the last 6 months. These reductions include the increased job sharing of the Business Manager and Maintenance person with a neighboring parish, as well as replacing a paid Faith Formation position with a voluntary position.

Looking into the first quarter 2019-20, the parish has a net operating income of \$10,442 which included \$6,609 of Parish Appeal donations. In the first three months, collections are \$7,873 higher than the same period last year. Operating expenses are \$15,248 lower than last year.

Future Plans / In Progress Goals:

The committee has the following goals in progress and/or slated future plans:

- Welcome signs or banners outside each church location.
- Enhance the parish's faith formation for children and adults.
- Establish a fundraising committee.
- Conduct professional stewardship campaign.
- Utilize paid advertising near holidays once financial stability has increased.
- Expand social media presence by creating a parish Instagram account.
- Encourage and expand volunteer opportunities within the parish utilizing the time, talent, and treasure of our parish family.
- Overcome projected budget gap for this fiscal year. (We have made gains already.)
- Work to establish consistent weekly collection through both increased donations and increased attendance.
- Encourage and help parishioners to use their bank's online bill pay system for regular contributions to the parish.
- Continue posting Pastoral Council, Finance Council, and Planning Committee meeting minutes on the parish website.
- Provide quarterly financial updates to parishioners.

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Planning Committee Recommendation:

With much prayer for God's guidance in informing our work, the Ss. Isidore and Maria Torribia Parish Planning Committee has worked diligently to consider spiritual and physical needs of our Catholic Community and recognize the reality that financial stability is critical to the viability of our parish.

It has been a relatively short time frame (six months) between the public identification of our financial crisis, leading to the creation of our committee, and the date we began crafting our recommendations. We have made significant gains in financial status, laid the groundwork for many practices to increase attendance and financial support, and encouraged a more welcoming church environment and a more involved parish membership. In addition, we continue to strive to increase awareness of each individual's role and obligation in a Catholic community in the areas of spiritual growth, worship, evangelization, and charity.

Most notably, significant progress has been made in the long-standing goal of unifying the worshippers of three different churches (St. Catherine, St. Joseph, and St. Stanislaus) into a cohesive, single parish of Ss. Isidore and Maria Torribia Parish.

Taking all this into consideration, the committee believes it would be premature at this point to discuss closing the parish. We respectfully request an additional year to allow time for the changes made to come to fruition and the opportunity to implement the additional goals identified by the committee. We would reevaluate this position in October 2020, at which time we can make a further determination of our stabilization and sustainability.

We continue to have faith that, with the help of God's grace, our mission to revitalize Ss. Isidore and Maria Torribia Parish will be successful.

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Very Respectfully,
The Planning Committee of Ss. Isidore
& Maria Torribia Parish

The Very Reverend Patrick L. Connor

Deacon Douglas Farwell

Kathy Bailey

Anna Bauer

Nicolette Butler

Greg Cacace

Joseph Crance

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