

VISION FOR THE BETTENDORF CATHOLIC CHURCH

DECISION PATHWAY

When faced with making a complex decision, a certain path of logic often leads the way, with each decision leading inevitably to the next one. Analysis and decisions by the Bettendorf Vision Committee in five areas – **Catholic Mission, Catholic School, Facilities, Bettendorf Population, and Priest Shortage** – have led to a “short list” of three options that will be presented to parishioners and ultimately Bishop Zinkula.



Catholic Mission

In its recent teaching, the Catholic Church tells us that parish communities must “come out of themselves” to collaborate in works of mercy and proclamation of the gospel. They must also become “true missionary outposts,” characterized by hospitality, a life of prayer, celebration of all sacraments, and attention to the poor.

What is needed to attain these worthy goals in Bettendorf? A good start would be vigorous new ministries for vocation formation, outreach to the poor, and evangelization of the unchurched and Catholics who no longer attend mass. Youth ministry and young adult ministry are also areas to grow in. But these would need space

and staff, which are commodities currently in short supply in the two parishes. Cooperation and perhaps merger would better meet the needs of the expanded concept of mission. Merging and clustering of parishes is a growing practice, not only locally but across the country. This provides for better stewardship of parish resources.

Catholic School

The path of logic tells us that faith formation is part of the mission, and Catholic schools are part of faith formation. This was affirmed by the Scott County Catholic Schools study in 2019 and supported by the Diocese of Davenport; and it called for continuation of the four parish-based Catholic grade schools in Scott County. Going west to east, these schools are JFK on Division Street, All Saints on Marquette, St Paul’s on Rusholme Street and Our Lady of Lourdes.

It has also been concluded by diocesan review and the Bettendorf Vision Committee that Catholic schools should be an integral part of the future church in Bettendorf; that is to say, grade schools should not be at a remote, separate location decoupled from a church.

Facilities

A detailed review showed that bringing the current Our Lady of Lourdes (OLOL) facilities up to code, upgrading the technology, and simply making them meet safety standards would be quite costly. The current buildings also have a substantial amount of asbestos, and abatement is extremely expensive. Upgrading of HVAC and electrical systems are needed. Due to multiple additions there are multiple stairways. Several levels have been added. Handicap accessibility is lacking except for the first floor. The school and church buildings have been expanded where possible over time, but the layout of patchwork additions does not provide for efficient

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use. The roof needs substantial work, or full replacement. This, coupled with the challenges presented by the proximity to the new bridge, makes relocating and new facilities designed for 21st century learning the logical solution.

The St. John Vianney (SJV) facility has its drawbacks too. Space to accommodate youth ministry, adult meetings, and administration are in short supply. Even though Covid-19 has changed patterns of gathering for now, space is at a premium and will be important to facilitate ministry growth in the future. The current building footprint does not allow for horizontal expansion because the required parking area must be preserved. The current building was not initially designed to support a vertical expansion.

Bettendorf Population

Bettendorf finds itself in the enviable position of having a projected population gain of 8,000 people by 2035, with most of that growth occurring in the northeast part of the city. Since one in four residents are Catholic, this could represent an additional 2,000 new parishioners.

A study done for this project recently showed that the geographic distributions of the congregations for both SJV and OLOL were virtually identical. The Committee concluded that a church located in the northeast part of the city would be closer to anticipated growth, while still being able to draw people from the entire city. Another advantage to the northeast is availability of large tracts of unbuilt land.

Priest Shortage

The reality is the Diocese of Davenport is facing a true lack of ordained priests. In the diocese there are currently 55 active priests. By the year 2030 only 22 will be under the retirement age of 70. Already, 52 of the 72 parishes in the diocese share pastors. While fewer priests is not justification by itself to look at new configurations for parishes, it is a significant factor.

Bringing priests from overseas has proved difficult. At some point in the future, it is likely the parishes in Bettendorf will share a pastor with some priest assistance. Because the administration of parishes is one of the called duties of a pastor, only certain men are gifted and prepared for this role, particularly in larger parishes that by nature are more complex. New models of priestly ministry are defining how priests and pastors best care for the administrative (temporal) and the pastoral (spiritual) needs of people. While a shortage of priests is not the main reason relocation is under discussion, it is a reality and one of the many reasons for a possible merger. Regardless of whether it is part of this discussion, the shortage will be determined by the diocese and very well could be a part of both of our futures within a few years.

Funding

Financial feasibility studies would be conducted to identify the potential for raising significant capital dollars. Depending on the outcome and potential measured, this would impact the style of the buildings, the materials that can be used in construction, and possible phasing of the project.

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OPTIONS

Option	Advantages	Disadvantages
<p>1. Relocate Lourdes Church and School toward the growth area of Bettendorf and St. John Vianney remains at its present location.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Same parish names, Separate churches • Each has a pastor for now • Separate staff, Separate councils • Cost for construction is responsibility of OLOL • All Parishes in Scott County will be assessed for the operations of the Scott County Catholic Schools. Formula-TBD 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New state of the art buildings for parish ministries • Location in growth area 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does not address building needs for SJV • Does not account for future priest availability • Financed only by OLOL
<p>2. Parishes merge and are given a new name with Lourdes relocating to a new site and St. John Vianney remaining at its present location.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One new parish name • Two worship sites/other facilities • One pastor and parochial vicar • One staff team • One parish and finance council • Cost for construction is responsibility of new parish • All Parishes in Scott County will be assessed for the operations of the Scott County Catholic Schools. Formula-TBD 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help in transition to a common site • SJV site can serve as church and for ministries as it does now, allowing for project to be phased and diversity in liturgy • Maximize the ministry of the priests • Combine resources to evangelize, reach youth and young adults • Can share ministry for the good of the whole community • Sale of present church site can help to finance the new construction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parish identities will change – individuality of each parish may be modified • All finances will be shared • Challenge to create and build a small community environment and a feeling of welcome and belonging • Priest and staff must navigate between two facilities • Possible confusion of Masses, activities and events between two sites. • Housing staff at two locations
<p>3. Parishes merge and are given a new name with both relocating to a new site.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New parish name • One church • One pastor and vicar • One staff • One parish and finance council • Cost for construction is responsibility of new parish • All Parishes in Scott County will be assessed for the operations of the Scott County Catholic Schools. Formula-TBD 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parishes become one with a new name • Save money with a smaller footprint and newer buildings - cost savings and efficiency, reduce redundancy • Minimize the travel for the priests. Staff all on one campus. • Ability for both parishes to fund a new site and benefit from new buildings • One cohesive leadership group • Create a greater presence and visibility in the city because of size and influence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SJV site will be phased out of use. • Change in identity with a larger parish - what will that look like? • Large capital expenditures from both parishes • Challenge to create and build a small community environment and a feeling of welcome and belonging

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QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

How urgent is it for the parishes to consider future construction?

There are many compelling reasons for moving forward with the decision-making process. Here are the ones which have surfaced most among both parish's leadership. The parishes have already invested three years in gathering the information and detail to make an informed decision.

Fr. James Vrba, the pastor of St. John Vianney, will be retiring in June of 2021. It is very important for St. John Vianney and the Diocese of Davenport to know what the future plans for the parish will be as a new pastor is assigned.

Once a parish decides to construct a new facility, it usually takes from 3 to 5 years before the shovel is literally "put in the ground." Why? There are a number of diocesan approvals which must be requested as well as financial feasibility studies and architectural renderings. A capital campaign will need to be conducted and the project cannot begin until 60% of the total cost is contributed not pledged. Unless there is a parishioner who can fund the whole project by writing a check, the project will take years rather than months.

Every month that a decision is delayed will add increased costs to the construction because of inflation and building demand in the area.

Why is Catholic School part of the future?

Catholic schools do what no public or secular institution can do, extend the ability of parents and families to form the faith and character of young people from prekindergarten through 12th grade. Catholic schools are part of the lifelong faith formation mission of the Catholic church reaching from "womb to tomb". Our Catholic schools in the Diocese of Davenport have an excellent track record of preparing students for success in life academically, morally, and spiritually. Prekindergarten through 12th grade are the most formative years for future generations. Catholic schools in Scott County are accomplishing this with academic excellence and an individualized learning experience that meets student needs within a strong Catholic faith-based community. The faculty and curriculum in Catholic schools have the unique ability to influence students 6-8 hours per day, every day of the week during the school year. Schools are a special mission of the Catholic Church to form young people into adults who will lead in the church and bring the Gospel of Christ to the world.

What is the enrollment trend for Catholic schools in Bettendorf? For Religious Education?

For Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic School, the 5 year average is 227 and enrollment was 229 last year, up from two years prior. For fall 2020, enrollment at the school opened with 226 students in Kindergarten through 8th grade plus 86 children in PreK. The overall trend is stable, with K-2nd grade being up 10% this year. Enrollment for St. John Vianney preschool is 36 students for fall 2020. New site and facilities that expand offerings should increase Catholic School enrollment. The total number of Catholic school students in Scott County last school year 2019-2020 was 2,267 in K through 12th grade plus 368 in PreK.

Religious education enrollment is certainly a larger program at St. John Vianney than at Our Lady of Lourdes. Enrollment has been rather steady at Our Lady of Lourdes and was higher the last two years at St. John Vianney. K-12 religious education enrollment for 2019 was 164 at OLOL and 540 at SJV.

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How do the facility needs of OLOL Catholic School compare with the other Catholic schools PreK-12 in Scott County?

All Scott County Catholic Schools facilities of each school are aging, have deferred maintenance that needs to be addressed; and in some cases are inadequate to meet their current needs or provide the full range of quality programs a 21st century educational institution requires. Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic School and All Saints Catholic School were highlighted by the prior Catholic School Study as having needs that must be addressed. Both schools are landlocked and short on space to meet current needs, as well as providing or expanding their academic and co-curricular programs. It should be noted that each school in Scott County has varying levels of facility needs and a master plan is needed that foresees strategic investments at all school sites once the regional system is in place. The co-chairs of the Scott County Catholic Schools initiative believe that any initiatives that address facility needs prior to regionalization will help with the implementation of the new system.

Keep in mind any new buildings are likely going to be designed with the idea of lifelong faith formation and evangelization, meeting the total needs of the parish. New facilities are not intended as single use buildings, which has sometimes been the case with historical design thinking. New flexible learning areas combined with design goals to serve multiple parish needs will make many parts of buildings useful and safe for a broad range of programming including religious education, youth ministry, and adult programming.

What is the financial feasibility of options being considered?

Adequate facilities are a major issue affecting ministry, present and future, at both parishes in different ways. Because facilities require major capital investments, the financial feasibility of raising money to build and maintain new facilities will be studied with survey and interviews when we have completed our recommendation and have architectural renderings.

One challenge we face now is that each option provided has an independent financial footprint, all involving capital costs. It is impractical to give a thorough analysis of the cost of each option without proper architectural renderings.

Our immediate goal in this process is to provide a recommendation in favor of one option. When there is agreement about a recommendation, a next step will be to engage professional architects and planners who can build a master facility plan that shows options for phasing construction, options for expansion, and options for all one site or utilizing two sites even as a transition plan. New construction will happen in proportion to the measured capability to raise the needed capital.

What does the word “merger” mean exactly?

In a merger process, two or more parishes become a new parish with a new name, one pastor, operate as one financial entity with one finance and pastoral council, unified parish staff team and office functions. There can be additional worship sites for Mass and other celebrations as well as facilities at multiple sites used for various purposes.

A merger can keep many ministries feeling similar to what they are today with changes in how the operational support behind the scenes happens. They can also produce new ministries or shared ministries for the entire Bettendorf community. Merger can continue many of the traditions and liturgical styles of each parish, some coming together and some still unique to each site. There are many possibilities that may or may not feel all that different to parishioners depending on how it is put together and how pastors/priests are assigned.

Mergers happen over time, generally over a few years. It is not assumed a merged parish has to be all on one site, as there are many successful mergers that use multiple churches and sites.

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With a move to a new location, how will the parish still care for the needs of all parishioners, particularly those in the downtown area?

Currently we do not minister on site like St. Anthony's with its window lunch program. Both parishes use their buildings to gather resources and then go forth to distribute them at other locations. So, we go to those in need, we don't expect them to come to us. With the new construction of the bridge, gas stations, hotels, and typical places for people to gather downtown have been replaced by condos and new establishments.

Coming together as parishes with combined resources and coordinated outreach can allow for an even greater care to the poor and those in need in the community.

If we were one parish, how would we compare from a total number of members to other parishes that have merged? Would we be at the small, medium, or large end?

Parishes differ in size across the country and the average size of parishes has been increasing. In 1995, the average size parish had 2,969 members. In 2019, the average size parish had 3,875 members (*source: Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate, Fast Facts on the Catholic Church*). Parishes in the southcentral and southwest regions of the country tend to be the largest. For example, parishes in Texas can be as large as 30,000 members or, in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, parishes are in the 15,000 member range. Parishes of a size comparable to the combined memberships of Our Lady of Lourdes and St. John Vianney almost always “thrive” in dioceses across the country. The main reason, they are of a size that can offer more ministries which generates enthusiasm, vitality and funding. Many of them also achieve a sense of being smaller by working to develop small Christian communities within the parish so that people are known personally and feel a connection in small group settings. Today Our Lady of Lourdes and St. John Vianney parishes together have memberships of 2,968 households (spring 2020), about 9,195 parishioners.

Will the small group meetings, parish-wide zoom meetings and survey be sufficient to engage parishioners?

Engaging the parish community on a broad level is important so excitement and ownership are deeply felt for whatever direction is taken. The process is attempting to reach out on many levels and provide multiple opportunities for listening and discussion. Most engaged are parish leaders. Of greater concern is engaging the wider parish community. Getting to the right decision certainly benefits from broad input but will also be possible with the collective knowledge and wisdom of the hundreds of people already involved. An evaluation will be made in November, if more time and more discussion is needed, or if the decision should wait until a future time when and if larger gatherings of people are possible.