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Collected Parishioner Input for the State of the Parish Presentations (74 Participants)
Published on 7/25/2025, after two in-person State of the Parish Presentations

Part I: Positive Changes in the Parish since February 14, 2018.

In Community Building:

- ✓ My wife and I lived in Portage for many years, moved away and moved back before the mergers happened. We understand that the combining of facilities had to happen and if people are willing to adapt, it can make us a better and stronger faith community.
- ✓ Several responders expressed that although we still have issues over hurt feelings and unresolved anger, they sense progress has been made in bringing the people of the various parishes into one.
- ✓ Generally, the atmosphere is more positive.
- ✓ It seems the relationship between the pastor and the parishioners is better.
- ✓ It seems Fr. Tom and the Sacred Heart Ushers Club are working well together and that is good for both the Parish and the Club.
- ✓ With the help of the Sacred Heart Ushers Club, brought back (after Covid) Lenten Fish Frys.
- ✓ With the help of Parishioner Volunteers, we brought back (after Covid) the option to provide a meal to families after a funeral.
- ✓ With volunteer leadership, we can play pinochle just for fun and not as an attempt to raise funds.
- ✓ Established a monthly "Donuts and Coffee Social" after all the Masses.
- ✓ It seems there are more events like the Parish Pool Party happening.

In Liturgy and Worship:

- ✓ It seems that attendance at weekday Masses and Adoration has increased.
- ✓ Trained more Liturgical Ministers and organized Extraordinary Ministers of Communion to regularly visit our parishioners who are homebound and those in care facilities.
- ✓ Though not perfect, a concerted attempt has been made to provide educational, relevant, challenging homilies based upon the Scriptures and Church teaching. This included a series on the Mass over several weekends.
- ✓ Improved the weekly Friday Holy Hour to Liturgical norms and with weekly themes.
- ✓ Statues that were in storage were placed into classrooms or our Church and found homes for other sacred furnishings in local parishes or missions.

- ✓ Renovated one of the confessionals into a “shrine” with two Franciscan Saint statues and designed a display case of the many Saints Relics from the four parishes, with a binder of explanation of each Saint and Devotion of Relics.
- ✓ The removal of or selling of or donation of or storing of or placing into consignment of as many of the church furnishings from the closed Churches as possible. This includes Altars from both Churches, pews, the pipe organ from Sacred Heart and many statues, candle sticks, etc. The marble Altar from Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary was moved and installed at Holy Family.
- ✓ When the number of weekend Masses was reduced from 5 to 3, a musician resigned and we were able to hire Sara for all three Masses, we gradually expanded options for choir participation from just adults to children and youth.
- ✓ Updated and expanded the annual Children’s Christmas Eve Presentation of the Nativity to celebrate it as a pre-lude to the “Children’s Mass” instead of within the Mass.
- ✓ Have been able to engage children and other groups to be more active in Liturgical celebrations such as leading the Stations of the Cross.
- ✓ Liturgically we celebrate significant anniversaries of all five (including the re-named Holy Family Church) Churches.

In Pastoral Care:

- ✓ During Covid shutdown, Fr. Tom called every household (840) to check on each family.
- ✓ Fr. Tom has tried to follow up with each family after a funeral.
- ✓ Acquiring of volunteer couples and getting them trained to work with engaged couples preparing for Marriage.
- ✓ Our parish has consistently nominated Young Adults for recognition by Proclaim! since the annual honor was begun.
- ✓ We are new to the parish and are excited about the expressed desire to improve the parish. We found the parish staff very helpful and those in the Adult Confirmation class very welcoming.

In Finances:

- ✓ Paid off the debt to the diocesan offices and have remained debt free.
- ✓ Successfully applied for grant money from the Independent Catholic Foundation and Oregon Catholic Press, which helped pay for parish projects.
- ✓ Out of the generosity of people Fr. Tom knows from other places he has served, we received unrestricted donations totaling around \$60,000.
- ✓ With help from the diocese, the parish participates in the annual #iGiveCatholic (aka Giving Tuesday) campaign.

In Communications:

- ✓ It seems communication between the pastor and parishioners is positive and more frequent.
- ✓ The development of Holy Family Parishes’ presence in social media with an official website, Facebook pages and Mass videos uploaded to YouTube each weekend and Holy

Day. These are regularly updated and contain important information for the Parish Family and local community.

In Leadership/Administration:

- ✓ Fr. Tom did not do away with the good things that were happening before he arrived and listened to staff and parishioners while researching local history.
- ✓ Inventory and proper accounting of all Sacred objects from Sacred Heart of Jesus and Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary Parishes.
- ✓ Completion with Bishop Mark all the documentation to relegate the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary Church and to sell that property. Removing from our expenses the cost of upkeep and taxes.
- ✓ Completion with Bishop Mark all the documentation to relegate the Sacred Heart of Jesus Church and to demolish all but the garage buildings on the site. The hope at the time was that this lot could be used to build a "Family Life Center" that would replace the old school building and offices at the old Saint Joseph site, renamed Holy Family Church. Removing from our expenses the cost of upkeep for these buildings and a significant reduction in taxes.
- ✓ Reconfigured the Parish Finance Council and Parish Pastoral Council to operate more efficiently.
- ✓ Established a Parish Strategic Planning Committee to discuss long-range planning.
- ✓ Established a Parish Fundraising Committee to plan fundraising events creatively.
- ✓ Fr. Tom asks for suggestions and input in advisory committee meetings and does listen and act upon other's ideas.
- ✓ Found homes for the many office and rectory furnishings that had been moved and stored at the 509 Caldwell location when the three parishes were combined.
- ✓ Cleaned out the attic and basement of the Rectory (509 Caldwell Ave. location) of items accumulated over many years; some from Pastors long-gone.
- ✓ The blessing of being able to hire Sister Vivian, a Sister of Saint Ann Community, as our DRE, after Missy moved on to other employment.
- ✓ Upon Julie Gressick's decision to retire, the hiring of Kelly Yancey in a relatively seamless transition of a key staffing position.
- ✓ Re-established presence/participation with the Portage Area Ministerial Association.
- ✓ Since Fr. Tom was appointed as Dean of the Prince Gallitzin Deanery, our parish has had a more productive connection with other parishes and the Diocesan Offices.
- ✓ Deliberate efforts have been made to make it easier for parishioners to be compliant with Diocesan Protecting God's Children trainings and obtaining documentation of clearances. We have a parishioner who is now the only person in the entire diocese who is certified to do both required trainings in-person.
- ✓ The process of the questionnaires to parishioners and the State of the Parish Presentations is a new experience of leadership and communication for this Faith Community.

In Religious Formation (Children and Adult):

- ✓ Subscribed to Flocknote as a means of communication between the offices and families.

- ✓ Subscribed to FORMED as a means for parishioners to learn more about their faith and for Religious Education Teachers to have as a resource in their classrooms.
- ✓ Subscribed to Word Among Us for homebound and any parishioner wanting the daily readings and reflections book.
- ✓ Even though it is not used very much, the establishment of the Sister Celeste Parish Library is a great resource.
- ✓ We changed Religious Formation books to a better series from a different publisher.
- ✓ Our parishes' moving forward with the changes in the process of preparation for Teen Confirmation have been a good thing (training Mentors, Service Projects, etc.).

In Technology Upgrades:

- ✓ Upgraded office technology including networking computers, installing a new phone system and printers.
- ✓ Upgraded internet technology across the entire site.
- ✓ Acquiring equipment to live-stream and record weekday Masses and a weekend Mass which is also available as a recorded posting on YouTube (weekend) and Facebook.
- ✓ Updated the sound system in the Parish Hall as well as technology (projector and internet).

In Facilities and Grounds:

- ✓ Completion of the installation of air conditioning in Holy Family Church and Parish Hall which was begun by Fr. Andrew Draper, TOR.
- ✓ Numerous upgrades to the Holy Family Parish Hall kitchen, with the help of the SHUC.
- ✓ The parish property at Holy Family site has been improved with landscaping, gardens and signage.
- ✓ Fr. John Miller's grave was relocated to one of our cemeteries.
- ✓ The safety and accessibility of the Holy Family site has been improved with hand railings, wider push-button entry doors, renovated the parish hall restrooms, improved lighting and better walkways.
- ✓ New roof shingles have been placed on the rectory.
- ✓ Security cameras installed across the property.
- ✓ Organized and displayed archival history of the five Roman Catholic parishes in Portage.

Part II: Concerns, clarifications, suggestions of things to do, suggestions of changes to be made and reasons parishioners have left the parish/Catholic Church.

Concerns:

A) About Liturgy:

- Our Music at Masses is beautiful, but sometimes the keyboard is too loud, and we can't hear ourselves singing. Sara does her best to balance the volume. How loud it sounds to you depends on where you sit in the Church since the speakers for the keyboard are on the ledge of the choir loft.
- I do miss hearing and singing some of the songs from my childhood, even if our Mass music is very nice. Sara selects the songs based upon the Liturgical Season, the part of the Mass, what songs she knows people like and will sing, the ability of

the choir members at that Mass, she tries to mix contemporary music & more traditional ones, and if we have the legal right to use a song. Are the songs you miss in the Breaking Bread book we use; some have been removed? If so, suggest those to Sara.

- Play more uplifting music that people know and they might be encouraged to sing. See the answer above. What is uplifting to some is not to others. Remember, appreciation of a song has a lot to do with one's personal preferences, age, culture, etc. Sara considers all factors in selecting songs and mixes it up, as appropriate to the Liturgical Season. Remember, we also want younger people to want to be at Mass and to sing. What some consider the preferred traditional songs are the very ones that some of the younger parishioners consider to be slow and boring.
- When a new song is introduced, practice it before the Mass and only introduce a new song every few weeks. Even those who will sing will only sing the songs they know. Sara did this for a while at Fr. Tom's request. Praying the Rosary and fitting in the announcements and how close to the start of Mass time people arrive in the church makes this tough. I have already spoken to Sara and we will try this practice again.
- The song for the Communion Procession ought to be one that everyone knows the refrain of and can sing without having to carry a book with them. I heard and understand this principle. It is and is not accurate. When it is feasible, it works out fine. However, selecting only Communion hymns that everyone knows greatly limits the options and people complain that we only sing the same songs all the time. Sara and the choir members do not all come down for Communion at the same time so that the singing of the Communion Procession Hymn is sustained even if a portion of the Assembly is occupied with processing. Since not all parishioners are in the aisle at the same time, those still in the pews can be singing while others are processing and preparing to receive the Eucharist. When they return to the pew, they can join in the hymn.
- One parishioner observed situations that were not welcoming/respectful to the involvement of children. 1) An older couple made fun of a child who had spoken at Mass about their Community Service Project. 2) Fr. Tom turned away a child who volunteered to serve a morning Holy Day Mass. 3) At one of the monthly RE Masses, the children who were to bring up the gifts at the Offertory missed their queue, but while they were moving into position, a parishioner jumped in, brought up the gifts and then scolded the teacher. As to the first and third point, yes, people can be rude. If you witness this, then charitably say something to the person, if you can. This far after the incident, all we can do is generally encourage people to be more welcoming and kinder. As for the second point...I do not remember this happening, but accepting the observation made, all I can say is that Ron is very happy to have a day off from serving. We invite Liturgical Ministers to sign up in advance of the Holy Days. I guess that the Server came into the Sacristy only a few minutes prior to the start of Mass. The time for that child to get vested and receive instructions of what is different (a weekday Holy Day Mass has some differences

than weekend Masses) was likely deemed by me to delay the start of Mass. That is the only reason I would have “turned away” a volunteer. I will do better.

- Some from the Parishes other than Saint Joseph do not feel welcomed in ministries at Holy Family. I have volunteered to help on committees, and I know of others too, who were told they had enough members, and we were not needed. This makes people feel unwelcomed/unwanted. Not a good message to send. I want to know what ministry you or someone else recently volunteered for and were told you were not needed. I have informed several of the committees that they are not to turn anyone away. Some committees/councils do require knowledge or skills, but we work with whoever comes forward and is at least willing to learn.
- I volunteered to be a substitute for RE and was only called one time. I asked this person to call Sister Vivian when she is back and discuss this. I know she is very grateful to have volunteers.
- Concerned that so many leave Mass as early as Communion. This is one of the things that gets under my skin as pastor and presider at Mass. I have explained proper Liturgical principles many times and it does not seem to make a difference. A few parishioners told me they MUST leave to get home because they left an ill family member with a home health aide and cannot be late getting home. I have also been told that some people must get to work. As for the rest, I guess it is a bad habit that can only be broken if the person with the bad habit realizes it and wants to change.

B) About Facilities:

- Parking is always a problem and might cause a decrease in attendance. Several parishioners told me they left the parish because of the lack of parking that is accessible to those who are mobility challenged. The hosting of events here lacks in appeal for the same reason. More on this in the questions section of this document concerning our facilities.

C) About Engagement and Belonging:

- Find more ways to revitalize engagement, especially with young families and teens. We have been trying to do this. Getting volunteers to step up to take the lead has been difficult. We have not given up. If we can get a couple people who are willing to put forth a reasonable suggestion for these ideas, be willing to promote it at Mass and facilitate a brainstorming meeting to get it off the ground, then it has a chance of success. As for getting younger volunteers to help at events, it seems that when those events impact on their own families (the Community Service Projects for example), they are better able to prioritize getting involved. Perhaps the key is to target the recruitment of volunteers by the type of event that best suits the life demands of that age bracket.
- A sense of “ownership” of Holy Family Parish by our parishioners is lacking. Too many people are still identifying with the Parish Church they grew up in. Until people “feel at home” at Holy Family and own it as their spiritual home, unity will not

happen. This is a powerfully true statement! “Belonging” is the vital key to building a healthy relationship between persons and the organization (faith community) they are part of. Help me and our community to figure out how to facilitate this happening here. If and only if, someone or something means something to you, then you will be involved and engaged with that person or group.

- Too many complain about what they do not like or what should be different, but they will not volunteer to help. Research and statistics suggest that in most cases, getting 1/3 of a group of people involved/engaged is normal. If you have a new idea or try to start something new, only about 16% of the group is likely to be onboard from the start. Over time you might get another 34% who are supportive. 34% of the group remain neutral and about 16% remain opposed. Considering that data, if something is worth doing, then those who believe in it and who will be committed to it have to get it started regardless of any lack of buy-in. Let the Spirit lead, plant the seeds and keep working at it. If it is from God, it will bear fruit!

D) About Building Trust:

- Although the trust level between the people of the parish and our pastor has improved, this cannot be said about parishioners and the diocese. I have heard this from several parishioners. We as a parish do not exist except that we are under a Bishop and belong to a diocese. In Catholic Church law, the “local church” IS the diocese which is made up of branches or parishes. We do not get to choose our Bishop, but the Bishop is the one who by virtue of his office, is responsible for the policies he sets and is answerable to the Vatican offices. We really need to work on this “problem” of trust for our own good and that of the diocese of which we are a part. What is needed by those who do not trust the Bishop/diocese to build trust? As a parish community and as individual parishioners, we need to come to terms with why the rift exists.

Clarifications:

A) Protecting God’s Children Requirements:

- What are the policies (rules or guidelines) of the Diocese for Protecting God’s Children relative to volunteers? Is Holy Family Parish (Fr. Tom) requiring more than the Diocese and/or other parishes? If a person has clearances from P.A.S.D., for example, isn’t that enough? We do not want to lose volunteers. You can find the full policy/guidelines of the diocese at ([Employees / Volunteers – Youth Protection Altoona Johnstown Diocese](#)). In summary, every employee must be fully trained in the two training courses (State Mandated Reporter & VIRTUS) and have all the background checks and clearances (total of 5). “Volunteers who work with minors and vulnerable persons...” in the duties of their ministry, must also complete the full training and clearances, less fingerprinting. We at Holy Family Parish (HFP) are following those directives. The “issues” seems to be that 1) some interpret their ministry does not include the level of involvement with minors stated above (such as a choir member), and 2) the perception is that other parishes are not asking the

same things from their volunteers, so why is HFP? As to the first issue, every ministry at HFP will place a volunteer near minors, even if that ministry is not specifically with minors. Since the main goal is to create and maintain an environment throughout our campus that is as safe as possible, I expect every volunteer to complete the full training and obtain all the clearances. My basic rationale in this...why on God's good earth and in this sacred space of our parish would anyone NOT want to be as fully prepared as possible to help protect minors and vulnerable persons? The expectation to be compliant in this is not an accusation or suspicion that a person who wants to volunteer is unsuitable. Rather, it is a statement of our faith that we are, by God our Father's expectation, the keeper of our brothers' and sisters' wellbeing. Abuse of the vulnerable, in all its forms, is a problem of our society and not a problem only in the Church. Therefore, the more people who are trained and cleared means the less able predators will be able to get away with their crimes on our Church property and in the community at large. It is a fact that predators carefully research where there are weaknesses in a system or organization and will attempt to gain access in the easiest paths. Much like the behaviors of a thief. As to the second issue, if other pastors or the diocese are not interpreting the policy as broadly as I am, why are you angry with me? Would you rather we as a parish community behave in a manner that facilitates the opportunity for predators to find openings to hurt the vulnerable people in our community? My experience in several dioceses, firsthand knowledge of how far the pain and damage can reach when an abuse has occurred and my conscience formed from those, convinced me that we can and need to be doing better than the minimum. Please put it in context. You are being asked to get training that can help "save" the life of a vulnerable person that will take you about 4 hours and be valid for 5 years! I am asking you to spend less than an hour a year getting training to help protect those who are vulnerable...how is that unreasonable?

B) About Liturgy:

- I believe that the Eucharist is the true presence of Jesus (body, blood, soul and divinity of Christ). However, it seems some only recognize Jesus as present in the Eucharist and not that he is with us always. I think the distinction being made between these two is that of a Sacramental presence and the other ways that the Catholic Church teaches that Jesus is present to and within us. For example, when we come together to celebrate the Mass, theologians teach that Jesus is present to/with us in five ways. 1) In the collective body of the faithful, who are the Body of Christ and in whom, by Baptism, is the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. 2) In the priest who is a visible representation of Jesus, the other Christ (from the Latin), who invites the Body of Christ to assembly and hosts that gathering. 3) In all the sacred texts (other than the Scripture readings themselves) used in the celebration of Mass (prayers and words of songs). 4) The Scripture Readings are the voice of God spoken to the Body of Christ (assembly) and the audible presence of the Lord himself. 5) The Eucharistic presence, the Sacramental presence in the appearance

of the consecrated bread and wine. All of these are important and powerful. What makes the Eucharist particularly significant is the “degree” (my word here) of presence. You can be physically away from a dear family member but still experience their presence with you in memories and affection for them, but when they are all those things, AND, physically present, you experience that presence in a more profound way. It is similar with the Eucharistic (Sacramental) presence of Jesus when celebrating Mass. Think of a person who for some reason has been unable to receive the Eucharist (excommunication, imprisonment, illness, etc.); they may sense that the Lord Jesus is with them, but when they are able to receive Communion, they are “joined” once again with the Lord of Life in a very personal way.

- I thought the Sanctuary Lamp had to be 100% beeswax and be in a clear holder because it represents the presence of Christ. The standard for candles used at Mass and for the Sanctuary Lamp has varied over time from 100% beeswax to as little as 10% beeswax. As to the color of the glass holder for the Sanctuary candle near the Tabernacle, a very old tradition has it as red in color. This is to recognize the suffering (Passion) of Christ. The current General Instruction of the Roman Missal (the “rulebook” for Liturgy) is now less detailed. The presumption is still that the candles used at the altar should have a percentage of beeswax. We have been using liquid paraffin to fuel the candles at the altar for the sake of the cost and cleanup. FYI, on a trip to Rome, I and my fellow Friars got to celebrate Mass in a chapel only a few feet from the tomb of Saint Peter. The candles they used in that chapel were liquid paraffin.

C) About Holy Family Parishes’ Future:

- When the parishes merged, some said it was only a matter of time before Holy Family Parish would also close. I thought they were wrong. In your (Fr. Tom’s) comments in those Homilies leading to this questionnaire, you seemed to suggest we indeed might close. Are we on the verge of closing? I put this “question” into the clarification category intentionally to make sure everyone understands why I am asking for your input through this process. I do not believe we are on the verge of closing and although it seems inevitable that additional mergers and closures will take place in the diocese, I do not believe that Holy Family must be one of them. However, as the responses to other questions and concerns raised in this process indicate, I do believe that if we do not take action to make as many improvements as possible, when the comparisons are made between parishes are eventually made, we might be found “wanting”. What might have to happen with the limited number of priests is that this parish will have to share a priest with one or more other parishes. See the response to the questions answered on pages 31ff.

Suggestions:

A) About Liturgy:

- Move the Sunday 10:30 AM Mass to 10 AM. The short answer, the times of the Sunday Masses were set based upon fitting RE between the Masses. An hour and a half between the Masses is essential for that to work. Scheduling all RE classes

on Sundays was done to make it easier for families with children in multiple grades to get their children to class with the fewest trips to and from church. When that change was made, attendance went up significantly.

- I would like to hear the organ (rather than electronic keyboard) used more often. Sara agreed to use the organ for music at Mass more often. FYI, we are blessed with the choir members we have, but please understand that many of them do not read music and some can sing in a limited range. Sara likes to use the electronic keyboard because at the push of a button, she can lower the key or raise the key of a song to accommodate those she has singing in the choir loft at each Mass. The pipe organ does not have that feature.
- Place the Christmas Eve Play back within the Mass, not before it. Sorry, but this will not work, and the previous way was against Liturgical Directives. The way it was done before, the children read the Gospel. This is not allowed; it must be a Priest or a Deacon who proclaims the Gospel. The text was from one and only one of the Gospels so not all the parts were included (Luke has Shepherds and Matthew has Magi), so assigning the parts and having a narrative that fit those parts was not possible before. Also, the way we are doing it now – as a prelude – allows for the backdrop and more props that cannot be maneuvered if it was within the Mass. Also, when done as a prelude, we have the time to get the children out of their costumes and safely back to their parents without any disruption to the flow of the Mass.
- Return Christmas Eve “Midnight Mass” to a later time (9 or 10 PM) for those of us who celebrate “Holy Supper,” since 7 or 8 PM do not work. I do not understand the question. Looking back at the Masses celebrated on Christmas Eve for the past several years, there was only one time when the final Christmas Eve Mass was earlier than 9 PM. That year it was due to the celebration of Christmas Masses and a regular weekend of Masses sat back-to-back. Since it is difficult to get other priests to help, the number and times of the Masses that year had to be adjusted. The “usual” Christmas Eve and Christmas Day Masses have been, 4 and 9 PM on the Eve and 9 AM on the day. We had a third Christmas Eve Mass for several years between 4 and 9 PM, but attendance was dropping, and three Eve Masses were not needed.
- Continue monthly “Children’s RE Masses” with them doing Liturgical roles. Instead of the children sitting as a class, seat them with their family since they should come to Mass as a family every week. Fr. Tom and Sister Vivian will discuss this suggestion to see if it can work. If attendance at Mass is considered “mandatory,” and you release them from their classes, then trying to take attendance when they are scattered throughout the Church would be difficult. Lastly, if they are sitting together, those who are to have specific roles within the Mass are together and can be given their queue more easily by an adult.
- Have the monthly “Children’s RE Masses” all year long, encouraging children to take part in doing being altar servers, doing the readings, bringing up the gifts, acting as greeters. This too will be discussed. Offering it as an option all year

would probably be feasible, but a challenge would be finding adult volunteers who will work with the children to prepare them for the Liturgical roles all year round. The RE Catechists are the ones who work with their students during the in-school sessions.

- Celebrate May Crowning at all the Masses on a weekend (earliest one?) in May so that more children can participate and parishioners at all Masses get experience it. I will investigate this suggestion with Sister Vivian. The problem we have had is getting children (really parents who are willing to bring their children) to volunteer for this devotion. We seemed successful for a while when we had the devotion close to the celebration of First Communion; having the First Communicants being the procession participants. As classes got smaller, so did the volunteer pool.
- Offer a “Children’s Church” during one scheduled “Family Mass” per weekend in which children between ages 4 through 2nd grade can be dropped off in a safe space at the Church to get age-appropriate instruction on the Gospel message and the faith while their parents attend Mass. This seems to be suggesting what some regions of the country call, “Children’s Liturgy of the Word.” If so, during the time of the readings and up to the praying of the Creed, children within the predetermined age range, whose parents are willing, allow their children to be dismissed with a prayer just before the first reading. They are then taken to a safe environment area where adult volunteers work with them in age-appropriate groupings to “study” the readings and/or the theme of the readings that Sunday and do activities to reinforce what they learned (a craft, learn a song, etc.). Another good idea. For this to work, we need volunteers who are willing to be trained.
- Celebrate a Healing Mass (with the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick offered) each year for those who are ill, those with chronic conditions, etc. A nice idea. We did this where I was in Texas twice a year, on a weekday and offered lunch afterwards. I will bring this up at the next Liturgy Committee meeting.
- Alternate which side of the main aisle you (Fr. Tom) stand each week so that children who are pre-Communion age can get a blessing from you. Where I stand to distribute Communion varies every Mass. I go to the opposite side of where the Extraordinary Minister of Communion happens to line up in the Sanctuary. There is no reason an Extraordinary Minister of Communion cannot give a blessing to the children. The wording of it is different if it is coming from a non-ordained person but still is a blessing – in the same way that a parent can rightfully bless their children regularly. I will arrange to teach that formula to the Extraordinary Ministers.
- Instead of recorded music playing before Mass, can we have quiet time? Fr. Tom started playing religious music before Masses because there was a lot of conversation and a lack of sacred silence. On Saturdays, during Confessions, people would sit right outside of the Confessional curtain and the penitents would be afraid to say anything over a whisper for fear of someone listening in. The Gregorian Chant helped set a reverent atmosphere and provide good background “noise” for Confession time.

- Instead of public praying of the Rosary before Mass, can we have quiet time for people to pray the prayers they want to pray? This question and the one before it show that no matter what I do, someone will be unhappy. Several people asked to be able to pray the Rosary together before Masses, in response to a request received at the start of the war between Russia and Ukraine. Tough to say, “no,” to such a request when such prayer is highly encouraged by the Church.
- It was suggested that we host a Holy Thursday supper before the evening Mass. In the clarification section below, I addressed the question about the wine and cheese social that was celebrated after Holy Thursday Mass when Our Lady of the Sacred Heart merger was active. Like the answer to that question, a Dinner before Holy Thursday, unless it is in the manner of a cedar supper (a sort of re-telling of the Passover Meal from the Book of Exodus), would, I believe, be disruptive to the Liturgical and spiritual mood of the Triduum. In addition, the parish hall, the only place where such a meal could be held, is taken up with the space needed for Adoration after the Mass of the Lord’s Supper. And, lastly, the suggested meal would have to be over in enough time for the hour fast before the start of the Mass of the Lord’s Supper.
- Can we add “Greeters/Hospitality Ministers” at the doors of the Church to make the atmosphere more welcoming? Bring back the collecting of money offering as part of the offertory procession. This is a ministry Fr. Tom wants us to have. This is more than just someone to take up the collection. It would include a cheerful demeanor to welcome regular parishioners and visitors. Ideally, some would be trained in CPR and the use of the AED device. Those to whom he spoke, testing the waters, said they did not want to go through Protecting God’s Children. Before Sister Celeste’s passing, she was working with him to design a Hospitality/Greeters Ministry, but we never finished the project. He hopes that in the fall, we can do an all-out recruiting for volunteers in all Parish Ministries, Liturgical and all organizations of service here.
- How about getting those involved in the various Liturgical Ministries to speak at the Masses to recruit more volunteers of all ages? A great idea that we will try. Understand, however, that I have found very few Holy Family Parishioners who are comfortable speaking in public at Masses.
- I think we need a “cry room” for a parent to use when their child is out of sorts. It needs to be such that the parent can still hear the Mass and maybe big enough that another family member can be present – attending Mass without stress is important. Perhaps a portion of the choir loft could be used? I thought about this as soon as I arrived at the parish 7+ years ago. However, when I suggested this to members of the advisory committees and councils, I received ZERO feedback on the idea. It was only after I was here for about a year, that a few parishioner leaders told me it was a bad idea. They feel that if such a space was created (not an easy thing for us to do with the layout of the Church), the families we are talking about would be offended that a message was being sent that their children are not welcomed in the main body of the Church. They observed that those families might go so far as to

leave the parish over it. I dropped the suggestion. I feel what the person who asked the question feels. What is wrong with having a comfortable space for a family to occupy for a part of the Mass if/when their child gets fussy, if it is clear it is an option, not a “penalty box?” Perhaps we need to revisit the idea and at least talk about our options to build such a space?

- Can choir members visit other Churches and listen and learn from their choirs? Absolutely. Talk with Sara and maybe if the times of services at other churches works out, interested choir members can go together to those other churches.

B) About Children & Youth:

- Have pick-up (and drop-off?) of CCD (RE) students in front of the school building instead of the back, so there is less congestion in the alley. Our priority must be the safety of children in RE. The alley road is much easier to monitor and get children to and from class. Using the front doors of the school building would mean using Caldwell Ave and could lead to the blocking of that road to normal traffic as well as creating safety risks as children try to get to their parents’ car. Also, the two sets of steps out of that school doorway are many and steep. Mark does a great job of clearing the walkways, but the risk of tripping or slipping on an icy step would be increased.
- Are RE students still taught the Rosary and importance of praying before meals? It is part of the curriculum in RE to teach the prayers of our Catholic faith.
- Recruit more children altar servers from RE classes. We have been trying by going to RE classes each year to invite children as early as third grade. We only get a few volunteers each year. In some cases, the children say they want to, but their parents do not follow-through by returning the paperwork needed.
- Hold Vacation Bible School in the summer. When we were able to get the volunteers to do this, it was a success. We need at least a coordinator and a few volunteers to make it happen.
- We need a youth group. I totally agree. My previous attempts with a few willing volunteers were a total bust. Not one parent or teen came to the organizational meeting. I have not given up and am networking with Sister Vivian and a few catechists who have been successful in their parishes to give it another try here.
- How about a children’s BINGO night and a faith-based concert on the lot of the former Sacred Heart Church? If someone wants to facilitate the planning and carrying out of these ideas, I am open to it. Considerations that come to mind are we do not have electricity or restrooms at the Mountain Ave. address right now.
- If Confirmation is celebrated with younger teens, getting them more involved with the parish is possible, before they decide to drift away. As teens are close to being Confirmed, encourage them to declare/commit to a ministry in the parish. This is already on our “radar.” Sister Vivian and Fr. Tom have been discussing ideas like these. It would help if parents and sponsors also suggest this to their teens who are in Confirmation prep.

- Can we host a day with Portage Police and other First Responders for our children to learn about safety and what to do in an emergency? A great idea if someone is willing to plan it out, contact the presenters and coordinate the event. I know that some school districts have done something like this. Also, perhaps it is something the Portage Area Ministerial Association would like to sponsor for a larger audience on this important topic. It was suggested for children, but why not families and all ages, since it is so important?

C) About Community Building Events:

- We are new to the parish. We would like to see more activities after regular hours of Mass for children and adults. More spiritual enrichment offerings would be helpful to us as a young family. Also, as a new family to the parish, there was nothing available for us to get connected to parish life. Maybe a welcome packet with the history of the parish and a list of organizations, activities, fundraising events, contact people, etc., could be given to new families. The first part of this suggestion is answered in several places in a similar way...many things can happen, if volunteers will step up. As for the suggestion of a “welcome packet” for newly registered parishioners, I have already asked Kelly to create a document as described.
- Welcome new families, personally. I have been calling people who register. Anyone interested in forming a welcoming committee who would sort of adopt a new parishioner and/or family? They can introduce the new members to other parishioners, show them around the parish, show them around the area and help them to integrate into the community and maybe even a parish ministry.
- For those who are missing their ethnic customs/traditions, could we have an annual ethnic dinner to feature each culture (Italian, Irish, Polish, Hungarian, Slovak + {German & Lithuanian})? I have suggested this idea several times in several circles, but no one has volunteered to chair such an event. I believe strongly that it could be a great idea if it can get off the ground. It might be workable if combined with the annual picnic idea, nine bullets below. Anyone want to volunteer?
- Invite those who do not know how to make haluski to get the recipe and be involved in making it with the Sacred Heart Ushers Club (SHUC). A way to celebrate and keep alive one of the ethnic traditions in Portage. Great idea! Are the SHUC members willing to make this happen? They have a lot to get done in a short period of time, so the number of observers would need to be limited.
- What happened to the “Wigilia” (the traditional Christmas dinner that we used to have in the Church basement)? The simple answer is that whoever was willing to coordinate it in the past no longer is. Does someone want to volunteer?
- What happened to the wine & cheese get together on Holy Thursday? I am confused as to how such an event ever got started. The practice ended before I got here so I do not know who stopped it or why. No offense to anyone, but the entire mood of the Liturgical celebration of Holy Thursday paired with a wine and cheese social is a major contradiction. The Triduum (Holy Thursday, Good Friday and the

Easter Vigil) is one three-day long Liturgical celebration such that one celebration leads into the next. Holy Thursday ends with the mood of somberness, sadness, that the Lord has been taken from us. The proper activity on the Church grounds at the end of Holy Thursday Mass is to process to a place other than the regular tabernacle and spend time with the Lord in prayerful silence. To hold a wine and cheese social borders on disrespect for the Lord and what sacrifices he made for our salvation. Why not a wine and cheese social at a more appropriate day and time?

- Launch fun, low-pressured social events (chicken fingers, fresh cut fries, BINGO nights, parish carnival) to build community and draw in families who may feel disconnected. The Parish Leadership Team that has been formed has been brainstorming possibilities of community building events. The monthly Donut Social and Pool Party were their ideas, and they got it started. Maintaining the volunteers to plan, prepare for, run and clean up after the events are crucial for success. I am open to all good ideas for which we can get the volunteer pool needed.
- It was suggested that we host a dinner for seniors, ethnic dinners, Feast Day celebrations and periodic potluck dinners. I totally agree that events like these will build community and a sense of belonging. Without a chairperson to take on each event it will not get off the ground. For some reason, events like these that were routine in the past and especially at one or another of the parishes, disappeared. Only parishioners can decide if they want them again and if they want them bad enough to step forward.
- More parish social events and trips; like a visit to Sight & Sound Theater or a New York City pilgrimage to St. Patrick's Cathedral during Christmas. This suggestion seems great, too. What is needed would be someone or a team of volunteers who will act as an event coordinator. If such a person is willing and able, call the parish office.
- Can we have a Soup Sale during the Fall Season? Is this as a fundraiser or simply to share cooking skills with fellow parishioners? Either way, I am okay, but someone needs to put a suggestion together and be willing to coordinate it. If it is as a fundraiser, I would want the Parish Fundraising Committee to be in the loop of planning to avoid conflicts with their events.
- Can we have an adult Wine and Cheese tasting night? I understand one of the parishes used to have these. If someone steps up with a plan and is willing to coordinate it, that would be great.
- Start the annual picnic up again. Will someone step up to volunteer to coordinate an annual picnic? It was discontinued before I got here. I was told it was because it was a lot of work and not enough volunteers would come forward to make it possible. Has that changed?
- Can we facilitate the creation of small groups who would meet for social and spiritual enrichment? This would help build a sense of community and belonging. Reply included in next bullet.

- What we can do better is to offer more activities of interest to the various age groups that make up our parish (children, youth, young adults, young families, empty-nesters, seniors, etc.). Some suggestions are: Men's (and Women's?) prayer breakfast once a month or quarterly on a Saturday morning. Vacation Bible School for children. Activity or game event for families on a day and time that is best for them. An adult Bible Study led by Fr. Tom (or guest clergy) or Sister Vivian, that is more instructional and not so much faith sharing. Offer adult faith formation events on selected topics on a regular basis. Great ideas suggested in the above two bullets. I agree totally that if we could pull these off, it would be a positive force in transforming the parish for the better. Honestly, I am extremely busy and am not sure how I can add something else to my calendar. Sister Vivian is limited in the hours she can work for us and getting guest clergy as presenters is a challenge. With that said, I believe this suggestion bears high priority of importance and I will do what I can to get it started, even if it is a test run.
- We need to offer a support group for those who are going through or have gone through a divorce. Some have left the Catholic Church because they feel or they have been made to feel that they are "less than," or have failed the faith in some way. If I can find someone who is willing to facilitate such a gathering, I would do all I could to support it. Let's not forget, similar groups are needed for those with addictions of all kinds.
- Young families who want to remain active and faithful face incredible challenges in the world we live in. They need to have a way that they can be supported and encouraged. As above, if it is possible to get such a Young Families group going, I would do all I could to support it.
- We would do well to host parish missions on a regular basis and on a variety of topics (hope, forgiveness, God's love, etc.). This would mean bringing in a person knowledgeable on the topic, so maybe the Sacred Heart Ushers Club (who are always so generous) could help fund such events. As part of the Pilgrimage of Hope for "Divine Renovation" we are beginning, I plan for us to do what you suggest. My thoughts are for a Parish Mission that would focus on Reconciliation, Healing and Forgiveness.
- Identify motivational young people who can act as peers/mentors for those who are not very committed to their faith. We are trying to do exactly that. If such young people see this suggestion and want to step forward, I and some others would love to talk with you about how we can facilitate this happening. Peer to peer ministry is one of the most effective ways of sharing and growing faith.
- Might sponsoring family community service projects/activities inspire and bring more people into the community? The new process of preparing teens for Confirmation requires community service projects. So far, many of the teens have been including their family members, classmates and friends in the completion of those projects. As a parish community, we must be encouraging in order for this to progress naturally and have a chance to bear much fruit.

- Host more community events at Holy Family that can include not only our parishioners but be welcoming of people from other denominations in Portage. What kind of events are you suggesting? We need a specific idea and someone who is willing to take charge of that event. This is a great idea, we just need more details for the idea to become an event.
- Host more non-denominational prayer events at Holy Family to draw in our other faith brothers and sisters. As an active member of the Portage Area Ministerial Association, Fr. Tom has hosted, on behalf of this parish, several prayer events here. He is open to more, but what are you suggesting? Are there particular holidays that come to your mind? This too is a great idea that would facilitate a cooperation between our brothers and sisters in Christ as well as be able to demonstrate our hospitality. What kind of prayer service would our own parishioners attend and for which there would also be an interest for those of other denominations?

D) About Facility Improvements:

- The front (main entry) doors are heavy. Can they be changed to make it easier for seniors to open them? The doors we have are about as lightweight as we can get for metal framing and glass. It seems what would meet the request is to have automatic door openers installed. We will investigate it for at least one of the sets of three front door sets.
- Is it possible to install an elevator to reach all floors? An architect told me pretty much everything is possible, but not all things come at a reasonable cost. I discussed installing an elevator that would cover the first floor of the Parish Hall, the main Church level and the choir loft. The estimated cost would be well over \$100K. The only place it could be built and reach all three floors is attached to/or near the stairway to the left of the Church vestibule as you enter that space.
- Accessibility for those who are mobility impaired is still a problem because of all the steps and that the parish is built on a hill. I investigated the possibility of replacing the walkway and steps from Caldwell Ave up to the main Church doors. It was impossible to build a ramp that would meet ADA guidelines due to the slope of the hill. The project that would only partially remove steps would cost over \$53K. I also investigated creating parking spaces along Rose Alley and behind the Church. We would only gain a few parking spaces and the cost per parking spot came to over \$6K to \$20K if placed along Rose Alley and more than \$20K if behind the Church. Is this a reasonable use of parish funds? We are unfortunately limited in what we can do on the property we have.
- Buy old houses close to the Church and turn them into parking lots. This, I believe was the original plan of action when the Saint Joseph Church site was selected as the location for the location of the last Catholic Church in Portage. The properties that have become available near us are small. The cost of purchase, abatement of asbestos (most older homes have it), demolition of the buildings on the property and paving for parking would likely be an extremely high cost per parking spot.

- Why don't we pave for parking the area where the original Saint Joseph Church was? Do we really want to give up the very little "green" space we have on our property? Besides environmental considerations, I understand that this idea was proposed to the Borough Council several years ago. It was rejected for a permit because it would increase traffic/congestion at the corner of Caldwell Ave. and Orchard St. A new Borough Council might see it differently, so it could be researched and if we really want it, propose it again.
- Can the vestibule (lobby) of the Church be expanded? The area is small, and people do not have space to visit before and after Masses. The idea has occurred to me, but my hunch is that it would be extremely expensive. That area is directly over the kitchen and the outside steps are part of that "second" story. Weight-bearing considerations might impact the kitchen below. Still, it is worth a consultation with an architect/engineer.
- When the AC is needed, turn it on earlier and have it set to a lower temperature. When the AC system we have was proposed by the company who supplied it, they did their best to consider the square footage and other space considerations of the Church. I have been informed that they told us at the time that the system with a total of 5 units in the Church space would not be able to maintain the acceptable level of temperature and humidity that everyone would like, if the outside temperature and humidity got and stayed high. It would be difficult to put more than 5 units in our facility. It is critical that it be turned on early enough to reduce humidity and lower the temperature...we can probably do better than we have been. However, parishioners leaving the Church consistently prop open both the inner and outer doors of the Church. This dramatically changes both the temperature and humidity inside the Church.
- The sidewalks that were replaced are great...time to replace the rest of them. The replacement we did was in those areas where the concrete under the carpeting or exposed, was clearly deteriorating. The company we decided to employ for that project helped us decide which areas needed to be replaced and which areas were probably intact. That company could have tried to make more money by recommending much more work...I trust them in that they were not trying to cheat us. Although I would like to improve the look of our sidewalks and fix the sections that are uneven, I also have as a goal to be a good steward of our finances and not repair or replace what is okay.
- I am happy that the Statues of Our Lady of Fatima were repaired and placed on Holy Family Parish grounds, but they should be in front of the Church, not facing the alley. Mark Stefanko repaired the Fatima Statues from Sacred Heart Parish after we found out it was extremely expensive to have professionals do it. They are not in very good condition. After considering options, it was decided to place them where they are for their own protection, i.e., in a more sheltered area.
- Construct a columbarium (structure like a mausoleum, but for ashes) in one of our cemeteries. We have a standing Cemetery Committee that meets regularly to ensure the proper maintenance of the cemeteries, review policies and procedures

and costs and to advise on issues as they arise. We are currently investigating options of columbarium styles and costs. Since we do allow a family to bury up to two urns of ashes over a body burial, part of the consideration is both the cost to build and how much we would have to charge for the purchase of a niche in the columbarium. We are certainly interested in the idea; we have to make sure it is the wise thing to do.

E) About Communication and Working as a Team:

- I am concerned that we have only one priest and the shortage is widespread. The clergy need to make more efforts to train the laity to take on more responsibilities in the parish in those ministries and duties that do not require a priest (or deacon) to do. This is exactly why my leadership style from the beginning has been to involve parishioners in decision making and encourage them to take on more responsibilities. There has been considerable resistance to this approach in favor of a model that takes for granted that the priest can do everything and that is just not possible. As noted in this suggestion, the more traditional model will not work in these changing circumstances. Ideally, as pastor, I should be doing only those things that a priest has to do while other duties appropriate to all the baptized are done by others, paid and volunteer. This model would allow for more creative leadership instead of energy spent on completing tasks.
- Compose and publish a list of projects (events) planned and need to be done and invite people to sign-up to volunteer. This is a great idea, and we will see if we can plan ahead to make this possible. The logistics are the tricky part. Sometimes, the date and details of an event are not set until we know we have the basic number of volunteers needed to make it work. Once we are sure we can do it, we will open it up for additional help. If we set a date and time for an event and cannot get the volunteers we try to recruit, it will be an embarrassing bust. One of the things I want to do is add a calendar to our website on which we can publish upcoming events and a link for each of them that would have other details and contact persons for those who want to volunteer. Since I am the webmaster right now, I have not been able to get such a feature activated. Without a dynamic tool like that, I am not sure where we could publish a list or have an interactive capability for needed dialogue.
- Similar to the bullet above but pertaining to actual parish improvement projects...please publish a list of the proposed projects, their status, money raised and when completed. People get confused as to what a fundraiser is expected to accomplish and how much it costs. This is a fair expectation and reasonable request. It is not easy to fulfill, however. As mentioned below when addressing the questions about our facilities, even getting an estimate of the cost for a proposed project can be very time-consuming. I am an organized person but one needs the facts and figures to plan and to execute those plans once formulated. From the time I begin to inquire about costs for a possible project to when I finally get an answer, it can be months. For the more costly projects, it is desirable to get a couple of contractors to provide their proposals so that we can compare not only the

total cost but the facts about how they see the project best done and the materials to be used. Gathering those proposals, discussing them with the Parish Finance Council, getting approval from the diocese, if needed, and coinciding that with dates planned for the fundraisers is a monumental task. I understand the request and will try to do better with a report on proposed projects and the status of those in process. Let me at least provide here a kind of “wish list” of projects. Please understand, none of these are decided upon as of this date and are not listed in priority.

- >Replace and/or legally cover all the asbestos tiles in our Church Building and replace the carpeted areas.
- >Determine if some of the physical plant suggestions in this document are feasible.
- >Determine the appropriate action to take on the former Saint Joseph School (renovate or demolish?).
- >Determine the appropriate action to take on the Rectory Building (renovate or demolish?).
- >Determine if it is feasible to construct a new and useful building on the Mountain Ave. site.

- To better communicate all that is happening in the parish and among and within the lives of parishioners, how about publishing a Parish Newsletter, quarterly? An editor would combine all information submitted by parishioners for informing fellow parishioners. I see it including all significant events and activities and anniversaries which touch parishioners’ lives. It could be attached to the bulletin and sent to the homebound as well. Maybe since we have a Facebook page and a website it could be done via social media or both printed and virtual. It seems like a good way for us to connect with each other. Sounds like a great idea. Any volunteers want to step forward to give it a try for the first edition? The person who submitted this suggestion is willing to volunteer and we will be talking soon!
- Publish more family events in the bulletin, such as weddings and baptisms. We have published, since I arrived, the celebration of baptisms and weddings in the bulletin. The sad thing is, roughly, for each baptism we celebrate, there are 7 funerals. I have no weddings on the calendar for this year. We don’t have them listed in the bulletin because they are not happening!
- The website is nice, but can you add more information on Catholic topics? I am the webmaster, which means nothing goes on the site or comes off unless I do it. I do the best I can to keep it up to date and to include items of interest. I need a volunteer who can take on what I have been doing, and others need to step up to submit to that person timely items of interest.
- We have not done a pictorial directory in a long time and never as Holy Family Parish. Can we do one? I get calls from companies every so often asking us to contract them to do this. Each time I asked a few people if they would volunteer to coordinate it (directories are a lot of work) and I was never able to get someone. Privacy laws now read that we can only publish for each person and/or household what they want us to publish. Obtaining permission and the correct information is very labor intensive, plus the companies require the setting of appointments for a sitting with the professional photographer. I would like such a directory for the sake of being able to connect names with faces, but I cannot take it on. Any volunteers?

- Keep in contact with homebound parishioners by sending Christmas Cards. People Helping People does this at Christmas. All homebound parishioners receive a copy of the Bulletin and a Birthday Card from the Parish Office. Those over the age of 90, listed as homebound or not, receive a Birthday Card. Through the Extraordinary Ministers of Communion who visit the homebound on a regular basis, we maintain contact and communication. Those ministers are often the ones who let Fr. Tom know if someone wants a visit from him (Confession, Anointing of the Sick, etc.). For those grieving the loss of a loved one, for whom we provided funeral services, we send a series of letters for about a year after their loss and invite them to the annual Memorial Mass in November.

F) About Our Finances and Fundraising:

- Provide a printed copy of the Parish budget. I would be happy to supply a printed copy of financial information to those who ask for it. I am trying to be a good steward with your money and not waste paper and ink. On the Parish Budget...the diocese has not been consistent in asking parishes to provide a budget. At Holy Family Parish we have been operating, year to year, on a “budget” based upon what we are likely to expect as expenses and our expected income. We are out of all debts, staying that way and only spending what we can afford to when it comes to projects. All expenses over \$10,000 must be approved by the Parish Finance Council and any expenses over \$25,000 must also be approved by the Diocese. When the Parish Fundraising Committee meets, we usually identify what improvement projects are desired and plan the events to fund those projects. It has been extremely difficult to even get contractors to make and then keep appointments to discuss a proposed project, let alone to get an actual written proposal from them. This is stated to convey that it is difficult to plan and set a budget with so many moving parts. All the time I have been here, when there has been a major expense, I informed the whole parish of the project and provided details of costs, etc. Every time I made such an announcement, I invited parishioners to call me if they had any questions. We are working on one for this FY.
- Publicize a specific project for #iGiveCatholic this year. If possible, we will. As mentioned above, identifying a project depends upon getting information needed from a potential contractor, getting approval of the finance council (and diocese?) and signing a contract. Unless those three steps are completed, it is impractical to publicize a project we do not know the cost of and do not have approval for.
- Can we try a “Queen of Hearts” fundraiser this year? The person who asked this was unable to clarify it for me before I was typing my answer. Now, the best I can say is that this person can submit the idea to our Parish Fundraising Committee (via my email) we will consider it when we discuss each year’s events.
- Saint Joseph Parish and other Portage Parishes had a regular BINGO and Holy Family continued it for a while. Why did it stop? I was here when it was discontinued. Two main reasons. First, the volunteers were getting worn out and

we were not able to compete with other parishes where they drew bigger crowds and could give bigger prizes. We (the Fundraising Committee) decided to go to the seasonal BINGOs and expand into other fundraising events.

Why do people say they left the Parish and/or Church?:

A) Spirituality Issues:

- I know dozens of people who have left the Church. It is our responsibility to help others know when they are on the wrong path. Jesus said that if we see someone in sin and do not warn them, then we will be held accountable. How about a draft of a letter we can sign and send to our family and friends who we know have left? I am willing to work on a ROUGH draft of such a letter, but each circumstance and each person is different. A generic letter might make things worse rather than better. If I can come up with such a letter, you must pray about its contents and tailor it appropriately. With only a little thought on my part so far, I believe any letter must be invitational, kind, non-judgmental and without sounding like a threat. The point Jesus was making in the quote was mostly about our realizing we are the keeper of our brothers' and sisters' wellbeing than it was about pointing out their faults.
- People have told me they stopped coming to Church because they don't need to go to a building to love God. This attitude is rising greatly in our world. There are many people, the majority even, who when asked in polls if they believe in God will answer, "Yes," but also state they do not believe any organized Church offers the truth about God. Other than our commitment to be true and genuine disciples of Christ in everything about our lives, and prayer, we cannot do much to convince anyone else. On the other hand, every hypocritical thing we do will fuel those persons' determination that we as a faith community have nothing to offer them.
- Some stopped coming during Covid and never returned, believing watching it on TV is good enough. We all must do our part in inviting people back who fit in this category.

B) About Belonging and Christian Outreach:

- I don't know why, but I do believe that if we can create a parish community environment that is about belonging and not about fulfilling one's obligation, then people will want to be part of such a community of faith. This comment hits the issue distinctly! If a person feels like they belong and are welcomed and they enjoy being present, they will be engaged and active and less likely to walk away. As a parish community, WE (all of us) need to be more welcoming and friendly. I shared in several homilies how weekend visitors to the parish told me they liked our church and the celebration of Mass, but not one person welcomed them in any way. We still have parishioners who will not share the Sign of Peace with those around them! That part of our celebration of the Mass is intended to be a sign of our unity not only with each other but BECAUSE we are first united in Christ who called us to worship together.

- Some told me we only preach about money, but of course that is not true. *We all know that is not true!*
- I heard people say the other Churches in town do things for the community (free meals at Hammer Street Church of God and Community Clothing Closet at Portage Community Church) and they want to be part of their outreach. Can't we do more and let people know what we do? *I do believe we do a lot and perhaps from a good sense of humility, we don't blow a horn about it. However, people are looking for their faith to have a practical outreach and they also want their Church to be of practical help to them. I know we lost parishioners who needed a sense of community from which they felt accepted and could find healing from issues such as grief and addictions. We would do well to improve our community outreach and be more attentive to our brothers and sisters in need.*
- It seems Portage Community Church was formed from former Catholics. I have tried to find out why but still don't know. Some say they are being "fed" in the churches they now belong to. *The word "fed" is key. Some of the meaning is as in the previous bullet – a sense of faith in action as well as finding support that comes from faith in action. Some use the word to mean the preached message while others mean the sense of a family-like faith community. Others like different music than traditional Catholic hymns (more contemporary and praise style). Still others, like a church that is more easy-going in its rules and even in the style of worship (we are too Liturgical and ritualistic). I can accept that we cannot please everyone, and some will not want to be part of us no matter what we do. My deepest concern is for those who walked away for the "wrong" reasons, such as misunderstanding Church teaching or being hurt by someone. These later ones are the people we might be able to bring back into the flock, if we make the right changes and convey the right message.*

C) About Scandals and Rules and Trust:

- Some say the sexual abuse scandal turned them off. *Some of my own siblings and their families fit this grouping. We can still invite them back and pray for them to come back. People heal at different paces. They cannot be rushed, but if/when the healing takes place, they must know we want them back, we missed them and we will welcome them back.*
- Some left during Covid because they did not want to be forced to wear masks. *I know this was a factor. I know personally the effects that the deadly virus had on lives. I was extremely ill and have damage to my heart because of it. I also celebrated many funerals of victims of the pandemic. Just as we should stay home when we are ill, so wearing a mask to reduce the chance of passing on the virus or contracting it was a simple gesture of charity that was not too much to ask. Tragically, a world-wide public health emergency became a political issue.*
- Some say the Catholic Church does not welcome divorced people or makes it too difficult for them to return. *There are some who in error believe that because they are divorced, they cannot receive the Sacraments. We must correct this error. Although the Church did operate that way for a time, it has not done so for many*

decades! The only situation that would prevent a divorced Catholic from receiving the Sacraments is if they entered a second marital union without having completed the annulment process with a decree of nullity. One of my most painful and difficult meetings in pastoral care of a person is when as a divorced person they met the “right” person and must petition for an annulment. Either they are not emotionally ready to complete the process or for some reason they feel they cannot do so. I make every effort to explain why the Church says it must be done and to help them through it. It truly breaks my heart when they determine they cannot proceed. They feel punished by the Church, even if that is not what is happening. I would love to offer a presentation on the theology of marriage and annulments to correct the erroneous ideas and maybe open the path for those who are ready, can come to a place of healing and reconciliation with the Church. I hesitate because our tribunal is very small and has only one priest who can process the cases. If through the presentation many cases surface, we would overwhelm our tribunal. If you know of someone who needs to know the facts, refer them to me and without any pressure or judgement, I will meet with them so that they will know what the truth is about their situation. Knowledge is power and the truth will set you free.

- Some have dropped out of involvement due to requirements of Protecting God’s Children; thinking the process is too demanding. I will leave my comments on page 7ff above to cover this concern.
- Some say some former priests were not kind and drove parishioners away. I have heard this several times. I also know that there are times when I have offended someone without intending to do so and they would not allow me to explain or resolve the conflict with them. Life is messy, to say the least. Life is also too short to hold a grudge that just keeps on hurting only ourselves. Refer to the bullet just below on forgiveness. Also, remember that when we pray the Lord’s Prayer, we give God permission to forgive us our wrongdoing to the extent that we are willing to forgive those who wrong us. If we want forgiveness, we must be willing to give it.

D) About the Loss of Their Ethnic Church:

- Some have not recovered from the closing of their Church and do not want to move on. My sense is that this and the abuse scandal are the main reasons people have left the practice of their Roman Catholic Faith. One of my goals through the process we have begun is to offer a parish mission focused on the theme of forgiveness, healing and reconciliation. To forgive does not mean we say the wrong that was done is okay or does not matter. Rather, forgiveness means we are turning over to God our thirst for justice and are no longer going to allow the injustice we perceive done to us or those we love, to continue to hurt us. {Saint Augustine said, “Holding on to anger/resentment, is like drinking poison and expecting that the person we are angry with will die.”}
- The loss of the connectivity of ethnicity/traditions when the parishes were merged and then closed is a major factor. We must find a way to bring back that connection with faith and culture. This is key to parishioners feeling as though they belong. It

will probably take a variety of events and efforts to accomplish this. What we first must decide is if it is a priority we will set? I may be wrong about this, but I don't think so. Of all the parishes in town, it seems those who belonged to Sacred Heart and then to the combined Our Lady of the Sacred Heart Churches are the ones grieving the most. From the stories I hear that parish was the one that had the most scheduled meals and culture related events. For whatever reason, those events decreased each time a merger (first into Our Lady of the Sacred Heart and then into Holy Family) took place. Just a thought, but if "they" really did lose the most, in a sense of identity, in the mergers and closures then perhaps a meeting in which all former Sacred Heart Parishioners are invited to express what they miss most and would like most to see be returned is needed? Think of what needs to happen if a blended family is to work out such that no member of the family is allowed to feel as though they are a second-class member of the new family. When parishes merge, a similar thing needs to happen. My observation is that what took place 10 years ago could not accomplish this goal.

- After the mergers, friends of a parishioner from Sacred Heart Parish said they wanted a smaller parish and decided to go to Saint Bartholomew. It makes sense that if the place you called your spiritual home closes, you will want the new home to be like the one you lost. With that said, what about the importance of supporting your own parish in your own town? It's kind of ironic that the first Church in Portage (Saint Joseph) was started as a Mission of Saint Bartholomew and after about one hundred years, people from Portage choose to return to Wilmore!

Part III: Questions asked:

A) About Liturgy and Sacraments:

- Why in the Prayer of the Faithful is there a regular entry only for victims of sexual abuse? Can we expand it to inclusive of victims of all forms of abuse? I could not find the documentation, but I and a number of other priests recall that around the time of the sex abuse scandal hitting the news, the Bishops (all US Bishops or those in the States most effected?) directed that a petition be added to the General Intercessions (aka, Prayer of the Faithful & Universal Prayer) at each Mass, praying for healing for those effected by the abuse scandal. Further, we recall that we were instructed that we were to continue that practice until notification otherwise. No other notification has been given. Some parishes have dropped it, some have modified it, some have included regularly, but not at every Mass. Not long after I arrived here, I recall a weekend when we had several special intentions we were told to include (right to life, vacations, relief from some crisis in the world, etc.). It is the norm to have no more than 10 petitions (from the model of Good Friday's Liturgy) but usually around 6-7. On that weekend I asked the staff person to remove for that weekend only the petition on the abuse scandal. I nearly lost my head over it when verbally attacked by a parishioner as they left Mass. However, based upon what other parishes have done and a few recent comments on the issue, I have already instructed the staff person who types the petitions up to vary the wording to be more inclusive of all forms of abuse, and, to sometimes not include such a petition at all. Let's see how it goes. Remember, at all Masses,

there is as the last petition a moment of silence for us to include our personal prayers of need to God!

- On Holy Thursday, why don't you use the monstrance and have adoration in the Church instead of the basement? Current Liturgical directives of the Church define how Holy Thursday is celebrated. The end of Holy Thursday's Mass has a totally different mood than that of a Eucharistic procession that is an option on the Solemnity of Corpus Christi (the Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ, the second Sunday after Easter). As mentioned above on pages 12 & 14, the mood of Holy Thursday is that the Lord has been taken from us and so is hidden. The monstrance is used expressly so that the Eucharistic Host can be seen. On Holy Thursday, the Eucharist is placed into a ciborium and covered with the humeral veil so that it cannot be seen. The procession is to end at a tabernacle setup in a place other than the usual church tabernacle to drive home the fact that our Lord was betrayed, arrested and imprisoned out of our reach, because of our sins. If we had a separate chapel on our property, that would be the place where the procession would end. The parish hall is the most suitable alternative.
- Are there more items from the closed Churches that we can incorporate at Holy Family? I do not know how we can incorporate more right now without the church becoming cluttered. I did recently move the statues of Saints Peter and Paul that came from Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary Church to the Sanctuary for the Solemnity that fell on Sunday, June 29th. The statues that were placed in storage closets in the school building have all been brought out and placed in the classrooms so they can be used as a source of devotion and instruction for the RE students. I do have plans for the only bell remaining from the Roman Catholic Churches in Portage to be displayed with the original cornerstones of the four Churches. If we had been able to follow through with the tentative plan to build a family life center at the former site of the Sacred Heart Church, I would have incorporated stained glass windows and statues from the closed Churches. I had tentative plans to build a shrine at that same site to remind everyone that it is still sacred ground and place in a gazebo-like structure, the Sacred Heart Statue from the face of the Church. The inability to identify a contractor who would construct such a thing has put the idea on hold.
- Is it possible to bring Communion up to the choir loft at the Masses, as it used to be done? I can and will discuss this with Sara. Honestly, I think what we are doing seems to be working. Am I missing something?
- Does everyone who asks to have a funeral Mass get to do so even if they never attended Mass or gave to the collection? The short answer is, yes. One of the basic principles of Christian charity and works of mercy is that the dead be buried. We have modest requests for offerings for services and fees for our cemeteries that are applied to everyone equally, depending upon if they are a parishioner or not. I have witnessed what amounted to an absolute lack of Christian charity to families over the issue raised by this question in other places I have been. In conscience, I

cannot agree to a policy that would refuse services and provide a proper burial to anyone who is dying or any family who has lost a loved one.

- Can we have a regular (Seasonal) opportunity for RE students to go to Confession? I have mixed feelings regarding this question. It is the responsibility and obligation for every Catholic to go to Confession on a regular basis, when they know they are in the embrace of serious sin and at least once a year. Parents are responsible to see to the religious education and proper faith practices of their children. If I do provide the opportunity of Confession for RE students a couple times a year, would I not be conveying to the parents that they can disregard their responsibility? Would I not also be conveying to the children that going to Confession is only connected to RE attendance and not one's family? I must think about this more, but if I were to make a concentrated effort to change the existing dynamic, it seems it would need to include re-educating parents on the Catholic teachings on the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

B) About Finances:

- We are solicited by many charities. How can we make good decisions about who and how much support to give? Unless you are exceptionally wealthy, you cannot help everyone. Sort out all the solicitations you get into categories, such as the parish, the diocese, children, missions, education, helping the poor, helping the ill, etc. Decide how much in a year you can and want to contribute. Apportion from the maximum you want to give to charitable causes to those charities who are close to your heart. Each year you can determine if you want to keep the same donations going or switch them out. You can check out the ranking of charitable organizations via the web, if you want to know which ones are ranked as most effective or low in administrative costs. For Catholics and many Christians, the norm is 10% of your income before taxes should be given back to God (and other charities) since we are only stewards of what God has entrusted to our care. A suggestion several years ago from the USCCB was that 5% would go to the Church (parish and diocese) and the other 5% to worthwhile charities.
- How much money do we pay to the Diocese each month? Funds that go to or through the diocese fall into four categories.
 - 1) What is called cathedraticum, our parishes' share of financial support to the operation of the diocesan offices. This is billed to us by the diocese once a year and we pay it in 12 installments because that works for us. For the past 5 years or so, it was determined for each parish based upon the formula, 19% of the 3-year average of the parishes' regular offertory receipts. Regular receipts consist of Regular Offertory, Special Collections (for parish), Perquisites, Ordinary Donations (Fuel, Mother's Day, Father's Day, Flowers, etc.), Net Votive Candle income, and other Miscellaneous Regular receipts. Basically, most donations made to the parish through the offertory envelopes are subject to this assessment. Other sources of parish income, such as fundraising donations, are not included in the calculation. For the FY 2024-2025, our cathedraticum was \$69,587.17. The FY 2025-2026 Cathedraticum assessment has not yet been announced.

2) What parishioners of their own freewill decide to annually pledge to specified ministries sponsored/supported by the diocese, called, Catholic Ministries Drive. The goal for this annual campaign is set by the formula, 10% of the 3-year average of the parishes' regular offertory receipts (i.e., the same parish income as for the cathedraticum formula). For FY 2025-2026, the CMD goal is \$37,600. CMD funds pay for direct program expenses to promote evangelization, vocations, missionary efforts and community, and does not include salaries, which are paid by Cathedraticum. Programs that are supported include: youth camps (Camp Zacchaeus and SHYCON), Men's and Women' Conferences, Cathedral and shrine support, Proclaim broadcast and magazine, Eucharistic Revival, marriage preparation, Catholic Charities, St. Leonard's Home for retired priests, retired priest care, campus ministry at five non-Catholic campuses, International priests, Jubilee 2025, Respect Life, vocations, Diaconate education and support, seminarian support. There is no penalty for not reaching the goal, but when a parish reaches 70% of their goal, they will receive a check for \$1,000 to use in a Parish ministry of the pastor's choosing. Also, funds received over the goal are returned to the parish.

3) Special or "2nd Collections that are for national and international needs. All the monies parishioners choose to donate in these collections go directly to the cause for which the collection was taken, excepting that for the Catholic Communications Campaign, from which the diocese is permitted to retain a portion for their communication expenses. The parish and diocese act as the facilitators of those special collections. Each calendar year there are about 13 of those "2nd" collections.

4) Collections that are taken when an assigned (by the diocesan missionary cooperation office) Missionary makes an appeal for that Missionary organization. Each year, Missionary Organizations can apply to the diocese for the privilege of being assigned to a parish or parishes to make an appeal for donations to their organization. All funds collected in each parish go to the diocesan offices where those funds are totaled per parish and organization represented. The diocese sends 10% of the total to the Propagation of the Faith Office who provide those funds to the Missionary Organizations who did NOT get to make an appeal that year. The other 90% goes directly to the Missionary Organization who made the appeals. As for the Catholic Relief Services Rice Bowl Collection through Lent, each diocese is allowed to retain a portion of what is raised and use it for charities within that diocese.

- Why wouldn't Bishop Mark let Fr. Andrew sell Sacred Heart Church to the Polish National Church (PNC)? Two parts to this answer. First, apparently, due to a misunderstanding or miscommunication, Fr. Andrew put Sacred Heart Church and property on the market for sale before it was possible in Canon Law (Catholic Church Law). Before a Catholic Church can be sold, it must be relegated (layman's term...decommissioned) from its status as an established Catholic Church by the Bishop responsible for that Church. There are many factors that must be satisfied before relegation can be done, including, all sacred furnishings and objects must be

accounted for and removed. Only when that and other provisions are met, can the bishop issue a decree of relegation. Therefore, one of the first directives I received from Bishop Mark was to complete an inventory of all sacred objects and supply a written report accounting for those objects. Second, Bishop Mark was aware that some of the people representing the PNC were making public statements to the effect that the original Polish Church in Portage will be opened again and inviting those who were members of the Roman Catholic Sacred Heart Church to return to their Church. The PNC is a schismatic Church that has separated themselves from Full Communion with the Roman Catholic Church and the Pope. Desiring to facilitate union of the Roman Catholics of the Portage area and avoid disunity and confusion, it was decided not to sell the former Sacred Heart Church building to the PNC.

- **Why didn't we sell Sacred Heart Church buildings rather than demolish them?**
When it was possible to put the former Sacred Heart Church building and property on the market, an acceptable buyer did come forward and was willing to make an offer that was in the range of what the building and property were assessed. Bishop Mark gave approval for the sale to be made, if Holy Family Parish leadership (I pulled together the members of the Finance Council, Parish Pastoral Council and the members of the Merging Committee as my advisors) wanted that sale to take place. I was the one who asked those advisors to consider demolishing the buildings on the former Sacred Heart Parish site that needed costly repair/renovation (the PNC reported that the repair/replacement of the roof of the Church and Rectory buildings would cost \$300K!), with the tentative plan that we could make use of the lot for the good of the new Holy Family Parish. The idea was that we build a "Family Life Center," as described on page 33 below. That was what was approved by Holy Family Parish Leaders and agreed to by Bishop Mark.
- **Who got the money from the sale of the buildings and property of Saint John the Baptist and the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary Churches?** Bishop Mark decided that both the debts and funds in the bank that each of the closed parishes had would be inherited by Holy Family Parish. Also, all funds received from the sale of the holdings of those two former parishes, buildings and property, would belong to Holy Family Parish. This is what was done.
- **What is our current financial status?** We are paying all our bills and are debit free. How much do we have in the bank? We have five operating accounts, funds with the Diocese (sort of like a CD) called MAPT (Diocesan Mutual Aid Plan Trust), and three Endowments. The balances for the first four accounts are as of 7/8/2025.
 - Parish Account includes wages, utilities, operating expenses for the church, rectory, office, diocesan bills, taxes and miscellaneous. Balance = \$339,000.
 - Activity Account includes what we raise in fundraisers and donations. It is from this account we would usually fund our improvement projects. Balance = \$91,787.
 - Hospitality Account includes Funeral Luncheons and Parish Hall Maintenance. Balance = \$18,957.

- Stipend Account is a restricted account in which the money a person gives for the celebration of a Mass is deposited and kept until that requested Mass Intention is satisfied (i.e., the Mass has been celebrated). Balance = \$1,804.
- The MAP accounts balance as of 11/18/2024 = \$667,328.
- About the three endowment funds. The first two are with the Independent Catholic Foundation. 1) Holy Family Parish Endowment, at \$1,873.54. This was created many years ago for the former St. Joseph School. We were able to re-assign it for the use of the parish and need to build it up. 2) An endowment fund for the perpetual care of the three cemeteries we are responsible for, at \$446,084.33. Each year, we have the option to use the interest that is raised from these two funds or roll over the interest. 3) Through the generosity of the Randy Stager family an endowment fund was established for Holy Family Church by the Community Foundation of the Alleghenies and is worth over \$10,000. I am working with the parties responsible to publish a brochure or separate brochures that would be available to parishioners and other potential donors to these endowments.
- With the decline in membership, are we going to have less money to use for operations? As you can see from the data below, we did suffer a decline in offertory donations around the time of the Pandemic, otherwise, even with a decline in the number of families registered, we have been blessed with an increase in revenue. For comparison, the type of offertory donations is reported in two groupings by type. In 2018 we had 648 families registered. In 2025 we have 594 families registered.

Weekly Offerings + Easter + Christmas

- 2018 Total = \$297,311
- 2020 Total = \$271,063
- 2024 Total = \$331,649
 - 2018 First Six Months = \$146,126
 - 2024 First Six Months = \$162,000
 - 2025 First Six Months = \$154,764

Holy Days + Church Improvements + Energy + Missals + Diocesan Collections + Painless Picnic + Mother's Day + Father's Day

- 2018 Total = \$41,185
- 2020 Total = \$32,732
- 2024 Total = \$48,705
 - 2018 First Six Months = \$21,601
 - 2024 First Six Months = \$26,868
 - 2025 First Six Months = \$28,353

- How much does it cost (utilities, taxes and property insurance premium) to run each of our four buildings each year (& average per month)? Data for what is technically listed as Our Lady of the Sacred Heart (OLSH) is also included.

<u>Church</u>	<u>Annually</u>	<u>Monthly</u>
○ Water	\$1,107	\$92

○ Electric	\$6,140	\$512
○ Gas	\$3,874	\$323
○ Insurance	\$4,915	\$410 (rounded up)
○ Total	\$16,036	\$1,337
<u>Rectory</u>	<u>Annually</u>	<u>Monthly</u>

○ Water	\$778	\$65
○ Electric	\$1,198	\$167
○ Gas	\$2,817	\$235
○ Wifi/Cable	\$3,216	\$268
○ Insurance	\$985	\$83 (rounded up)
○ Telephone	\$2,580	\$215
○ Total	\$9,252	\$771

<u>School Building</u>	<u>Annually</u>	<u>Monthly</u>
○ Water	\$730	\$61
○ Electric	\$1,462	\$122
○ Gas	\$3,427	\$286 (Nov-Mar, School uses more gas than the Rectory)
○ Telephone	\$2,580	\$215
○ Insurance	\$3,823	\$319 (rounded up)
○ Total	\$12,022	\$1,002 (rounded up)

<u>HF Garage</u>	<u>Annually</u>	<u>Monthly</u>
○ Electric	\$272	\$23
○ Insurance	\$111	\$9.25
○ Total	\$383	\$32.25

<u>OLSH Garage</u>	<u>Annually</u>	<u>Monthly</u>
○ Electric	\$467	\$39
○ Insurance	\$130	\$10.84 (rounded up)
○ Total	\$597	\$49.84

Annual Taxes (Real Estate and School)

- HF: Church, Rectory, Garage & School = \$836
- OLSH: Garage and Parking Lot = \$408

Annual Casualty Insurance for all Buildings/Properties

- \$12,671

C) About Demographics:

- Please provide a breakdown of our parish membership by age groups. We have 594 households registered. The age breakdown by age is as follows. Children up to age 18 = 145. Parishioners between 19 and 21 = 35. Parishioners between 22 and 39 = 154. Parishioners between 40 and 65 = 262. Parishioners over 65 = 469.

D) About Facilities/Property:

- Should the former Saint Joseph School still be in use? Replace it? Over the time I have been here, I have provided information on the condition of our buildings. In summary...Saint Joseph School was "closed" in about 1999, when a combination of

misfortunes came together. The last religious sisters to run the school announced they had to pull out. Knowing that it would cost much more to hire lay teachers and staff, tuition would have to increase dramatically. It was clear that the building needed upgrades, repairs and improvements for safety. Around that time, all the structures on this property (509 Caldwell Ave.) were inspected and a report was provided to the pastor and the diocese on recommendations for repairs that were considered essential and those that were desirable, but still optional. The cost of the essential, let alone the optional renovations was presumably higher than the pastor, parish and diocese thought to be feasible, since few of those recommendations were completed. Here we are 26 years later. The life expectancy of the current roof (shingles) is only a few more years. If we were in a city where regular safety inspections are required to use a building, I have no doubt that we would be prohibited from using parts of the building or in totality. I personally pray for the safety of all who are in that building every time it is used. Very rough estimates in more current funding standards suggest that to get that building up to code, energy-efficient and a comfortable place to be, would cost us half a million dollars. The architectural firm we worked with recommended that unless we had an enormous amount of money to spend and desired to keep that building out of a sense of historic significance, we should replace it, not renovate it. If we could move RE classes to another location, we could raise the former school and put in the parking lot(s) we need in that location (see page 33).

- While we figure out what to do about identifying a building to rent/purchase or building a new building for RE classes, can we use the current parish hall for classes, tear down the school building and put in the needed parking lot? Classes could be scheduled such as grades 7–11 from 7:30 AM to 8:30 AM, then for grades 1-6, from 11:30 AM to 12:30 PM. Inexpensive, free-standing partitions could be purchased and sold when we no longer need them. [We thought of this, too. Here are factors that make the idea not ideal and maybe even highly problematic.](#) 1) The current schedule for RE was set because the parents said it would work for them, we listened, and enrollment is high. If we split the grade levels to different times it means multiple trips to and from the property, splitting up the family on what should be a family day, and the schedule you suggest starts too early in the morning and goes too late in the day for a family that has students in both age brackets. 2) What has been working well to get all the students to Mass together once a month would be more difficult if we split up the age groups. 3) We are trying to use the parish hall more frequently for community building events, like the coffee and donut socials, offering a meal after funerals, etc., and if we must do set up and takedown for classroom set ups, this effort might get derailed. There is also the consideration of where to store all the desks, “black boards,” books and other items needed for RE. 4) The partitions you mentioned are not at all soundproof and so we can reasonably expect that the quality of the learning experience for the students will be compromised. Note, if we knew that the suggested parish hall use for RE was temporary (we had a start and end date in mind), we might be able to pull it off by

adjusting and making sacrifices. Otherwise, I am concerned that we will take a risk toward reaching one goal and suffer a great loss in not reaching another important goal.

- I heard that there was some kind of restricted donation or trust connected with the former Saint Joseph School that would prohibit it being torn down. Is there anything to this story? I heard this in various versions over the years I have been here. I have tried everything to see if there was truth to this. There are no records in our files that indicate this nor does the diocese have any record of any such thing. The best I can figure is that it might refer in some way to someone's memory of that endowment fund that was started in the 1990's (see page 30 above). As it was set up, all funds donated to it had to be used for Saint Joseph School. When the school was closed that endowment continued earning interest with nothing being added to it or removed from it. As stated above, we have been able to appropriately rename and repurpose it for this parish.
- What is the condition of the Rectory? Replace it? Like what is written above about the school, the same report identified many things the rectory (Parish offices and residence of the clergy) should have done in renovation. Few of those, but more than for the school building have been done. We do not know for sure when the rectory was built; no one has a date that we could find. It is likely close to the age of the first portion of the school to be built (1916) or when the second half of the school was built (date not recorded). Mark Stefanko deserves incredible credit for these two buildings still being in use. His knowledge, ingenuity and resourcefulness have made it possible for us to make use of the two buildings as safely as possible. Although the electrical system was upgraded in the 1970s, the wiring in the house was not upgraded. The circuit breaker box that was installed is manufactured by a company that went out of business for faulty designs. I was assured that the box we have is not one of those but also told that if we were in Altoona or Johnstown and wanted to sell the building, we could not do so unless we replaced that box. Most of the wiring is over 100 years old and few outlets in the building are grounded. The attic and the walls are not insulated. Less than half of the windows in the rectory can safely be opened and few are sealed to the cold or hot weather. The kitchen is in desperate need of renovation. Nearly all the rooms need new wall treatment (new paint) and flooring. We are using a few window and floor units for AC, but they are not efficient and barely cool enough to make it bearable to work. The southeast side of the rectory needs re-pointing of the bricks. Very rough and probably very low estimates for some of the renovation costs are: windows between \$38K-\$43K, electrical between \$30K-\$36K, kitchen renovation, \$10K-\$18K, an upstairs kitchen, \$15K-\$20K. Considering that there are four parishes combined into one such that the population of the parish is roughly 3-4 times what any one parish used to be, the rectory of the original Saint Joseph was not constructed to house the staff and files and normal parish activities for which is demanded of it. Not a final, but a working conclusion is that the Rectory could be renovated, but at a high cost.

- I know there was discussion about construction of a new building on the site of the former Sacred Heart of Jesus Church. Can that be revisited? We need more accessible parking, and we should not be sinking more money into buildings that are old. The above two questions lead us to this one. Yes, when the decision was made to not sell the buildings and property of the closed Sacred Heart Church complex and to demolish what was not likely to be repurposed, we had a tentative plan for that site. We employed an architectural firm to do a feasibility study for the construction of what we called a “Family Life Center.” It would include classrooms (intended to replace the ones we use in the old St. Joseph School), parish office space, restrooms, and hopefully a small chapel and meeting rooms dedicated to youth and seniors. The delay we endured because of the appeal to the Vatican Court over the decisions concerning Sacred Heart Church and the pandemic, resulted in costs for construction escalating to between 2.5 and 3 times higher. The firm estimated (in May of 2023) the cost for the building described was around \$2,601,931 with everything we wanted. \$2,303,755 if we did not include the parish offices, meeting rooms and a fireproof safe. Without the delay, we may have been able to afford the new building, but it is doubtful now. I have not given up, but there are a lot of factors that are not on our side. We need a parking lot at the Caldwell site. The place to put it is where the current old school building sits and maybe it should also include the current rectory footprint. It will cost around \$102K to take down the school building, \$41K for the rectory and around \$173K to construct a parking lot (2 levels with a total of 60 parking spots). We still must have classrooms, a place for the priest to live and office space, so maybe the rectory should remain and be renovated? To make the right decisions we need to know all the facts, especially what each option and portion of the renovations will cost. As stated earlier, getting contractors to make and keep appointments and to supply proposals is a time-consuming nightmare. FYI, the more renovations that are done to an existing structure, the greater the likelihood that inspections will be required and maybe compliances with additional codes will be required, increasing the cost of a renovation project.
- Why not consider constructing a “pole barn” or “barn dominium” for that “Family Life Center and replacement classrooms since it is less expensive than a traditional new building? We discussed this option with a contractor that builds such structures. After he inquired about what we would use the structure for, he said we should not go that route. He added that those structures are less expensive because they usually do not include the “creature comforts” of regular buildings (insulation, windows, HVAC, etc.), which we would need in the structure we want, and they are not intended for long-time use. He said that once you add in all those items, the cost per square foot would be pretty much the same as a standard new building. We would not save anything and have a less durable building.
- Can the Sister Celeste Parish Library be moved to the vestibule of the Church? For those who do not know, Sister Celeste’s community gave the parish her library of books. We have those cataloged and available for checkout in the former school

building with the list of holdings available on our website. The space you suggest for the relocation is an area I am considering as a possibility for moving the Confessional. Also, I am trying to clean up the vestibule area of the Church from the tendency of some to use it as a dropping zone for religious stuff they don't want. I am concerned that placing bookshelves in that area without anyone monitoring them will result in books not worth keeping being added to the shelves and those in the library being hopelessly mixed up on the shelves. If someone is willing to be a "librarian" to keep the shelves in order or perhaps put out a small selection from our library on a rotating basis, that might work.

- What is the status of putting a sign in front of the Church property? Funds were raised to pay for a sign that would face Caldwell Avenue and Orchard Street and include the basic information about our parish. The plan is to have it lit for nighttime visibility. It also seems that we raised enough money to put a sign on each of our buildings so a newcomer or visitor would know how to get to where they want to be. The delay is that it took a while to get data on companies who could do what we envisioned, and it ended up on the pastor's desk to get it designed, ordered and installed. In the interim, Mark was kind enough to design and build temporary signs. The project needs to be brought to completion; I just need to find the time to do it.
- Does the diocese have plans to close or merge other parishes? At present I can say with confidence that Bishop Mark has no plans nor the desire to close or merge any other parishes in the diocese. The dioceses surrounding us are facing situations like our own and have acted on a plan they believe is necessary to best serve the people of their diocese and maximize resources. It seems inevitable that unless there is a dramatic increase in Catholic population/participation, and an increase in the number of clergy and financial resources, more mergers and closures must happen in this diocese. When and how that will happen is unknown.
- Would this parish be more likely to remain open if we did more renovations (new flooring, sidewalks, etc.)? There are no guarantees in life and there are unforeseeable circumstances we cannot predict or control. Even so, it is perfectly reasonable to presume that if/when mergers and closures are decided upon, the parishes determined to be in the best position will likely be the ones to remain open. By best position, I mean (not listed in order of priority), no debts, financially sound (money in the bank, paying their bills, etc.), vibrant community (good attendance at Mass, participation in Ministries, vibrant RE program, census that includes all age ranges, etc.), facilities that are in good maintenance and have accessibility, adequate parking, adequate capacity in the Church to accommodate parishioners' Mass attendance with the fewest Masses possible, location that is proximate to Catholic population and historical significance of that Parish.

E) About Parish Operations and Organizations:

- Can we be told more about the Parish Organization, People Helping People? What do they do – who do they help? When we get that "Welcome Packet" put together for new parishioners (mentioned above on page 14) descriptions of our parish

ministries and organizations will be part of that. In summary, through the generous support of the members and friends of Holy Family Parish, the PHP organization carries out the works of mercy, feed the hungry, clothe the naked, shelter the homeless, visit the sick, and bury the dead. It is through your loyal support that allows PHP to pay the rent for the Portage Food Pantry, provide winter clothing, assist with utilities, visit the home bound, and have Masses offered for deceased members of Holy Family Parish. This is only some of the works' PHP provides. All those who come for assistance are treated with kindness, respect, and all requests are held in strict confidence. It is on my to-do-list to engage in a third party (the Director of the Dorothy Day Outreach Center at SFU?) to review PHP policies and procedures toward the goal of using donated funds to PHP in the best possible way.

- Are the children and youth encouraged to participate and are they rewarded for their participation in community service projects? Yes, we take every opportunity to encourage the participation of children and youth. Not sure what you mean by "rewarded." If the projects are done as part of their requirements for Confirmation, we express appreciation and provide recognition for their charitable actions. What they do is supposed to be an outward expression of living their faith, so the built-in "reward" is the satisfaction of knowing they have done that. A "reward" of another type seems like a contradiction to the whole purpose of the activity.
- What can the laity do to better support the clergy? Jesus started with just 12 apostles. 1) A willingness to be trained to lead services (funeral home services and cemetery services) that do not require a priest or deacon would be helpful. 2) A willingness to be a "program manager" for projects in process would be helpful. This would include understanding the scope of a project, identifying and meeting with potential contractors, obtaining needed data and communication with the pastor and Plant Manager along the process. Parishioners understandably want things done, but if everything depends on the pastor to see it through, then projects will take longer than they need to. 3) Pray for vocations, promote vocations and be willing to serve on a Parish Vocations Team. 4) Sort of repeating from above, if you have a great idea, put the idea into writing after thinking it through, be committed to at least getting the idea started, meet with the pastor, set a date for a brainstorming and informational meeting with others who might be interested, introduce the idea at the weekend Masses and help it get off the ground. "Dumping" it in my lap is not at all helpful.

F) About Cooperation Between Parishes and the Diocese:

- What does the diocese provide for the mutual support of the priests and deacons of the diocese to supply cover when a priest is away or ill? The short answer is that each priest who needs and/or wants to have some time off, is responsible for finding a replacement. Some of the senior priests (sort of semi-retired, but healthy enough and willing to fill-in) and retired priests will help, but some cannot drive long distances and live in Johnstown or Altoona. Those who are willing and able are few and are booked months in advance. As to my getting my fellow Friar Priests to

help, there are not that many able and willing since we already have several places that the friars cover on a regular basis.

- Maybe give Permanent Deacons more responsibility to help alleviate the effects of the priest shortage? Part of the problem is there is also a shortage of Deacons. A few years ago, when the diocese was about to start another cycle of forming more men for the Permanent Diaconate, I invited 5 of our parishioners to consider it. None of them discerned that they were being called. The diocese did discuss a process that would prepare some of the existing (and future) Permanent Deacons to take on the role of Parish Administrators, but it was never implemented. In a few instances it has been done. Another diocese in which I served has done this.

Respectfully presented by Fr. Tom Stabile, T.O.R., on July 13th and 23rd, 2025 at the State of the Parish Presentations which were in response to the questionnaires/surveys submitted by parishioners. It is also posted on the Holy Family Parish website (www.holyfamilyportage.org) as of July 25, 2025, for all parishioners to read.

Sincere thanks to all of you who participated in the process by completing the questionnaires and/or attending the in-person presentations. Many thanks, too, for all those who helped pull together the data to answer the questions. If there are further questions or a need to clarify anything in this document, please call Fr. Tom at the parish office. You may also talk with any of the members of the Parish Leadership Team who are working closely with Fr. Tom. They are Julie Goisovich, Tonilyn Kargo, Amber Phillips, Matt Phillips, Patty Roberts, Marty Rosemas and Marsha Troxel. This project was initiated to provide facts and figures about Holy Family Parish and to dispel false rumors. We will not be able to move forward as a vibrant Faith Community unless we learn to trust one another, work together and set attainable goals.

As the first three and a half pages indicate, we can accomplish a lot of good, if we trust one another, pray, follow the Holy Spirit's lead and decide we want our Parish to be a place to which others are attracted. That is, we want to actively live out our Baptismal calling to be Disciples of the Lord, who by our way of life, will help others to know, love and serve the Lord.