

Ascension and St. Bernard Town Hall Recap

Published: May 4, 2018

Thank you to all that were able to attend the Town Hall Meetings at Ascension and St. Bernard. Here is a summary of what was talked about and responses that we received, including the Town Hall meeting minutes and parishioner responses. Transparency is VERY important which is why comments have not been altered unless indicated by the respondent. Our intention is to review all comments. If you would still like to provide feedback, we are still looking forward to hearing from you.

At each parish we had about 75 people in attendance. Participation was engaging and thoughtful. A variety of opinions and questions were shared. Updates were given on the progress of the Joint Leadership Team and a presentation of the current state of each campus.

Joint Leadership Team (JLT):

The focus of the JLT has been to find opportunities between our clustered parishes to maximize efficiencies. This began with addressing the needs of our shared Faith Formation program (STBAFF). We are now assessing our shared ministries with the intention to develop an organizational chart of shared resources, including our pastor and business administrator. Finance councils and campus specific needs will remain separated. We would like to gravitate towards a Joint Mission Team (JMT), which would replace our individual parish councils as the pastoral focus of both parishes are essentially the same. Beginning stages of this development will start with our ministries. In the coming weeks, each of the ministry leaders will be interviewed by a member of Joint Leadership Team to assess the ministry leader's perspective and willingness to collaborate with their counterpart at the other parish. We anticipate the development of the Joint Mission Team to take, at minimum, a year to get off the ground.

Campus Challenges:

Ascension:

- Handicap accessibility to the church, current elevator is not user friendly
- Main floor bathroom for handicap accessibility
- Need for narthex-type gathering space
- Need to expand space to comfortably host year-around STBAFF, along with large funerals and annual fish fry.

St Bernard:

- Handicap accessibility of the school building
- School roof needs to be replaced within 2 years
- School boiler is aging and needs repair during the year
- School restrooms need updating
- Safety concerns with the hill during the winter for STBAFF
- Aging rectory and convent

Cost estimates for a variety of options were presented (see next page). These options were meant to give the parishioners an idea of costs rather than to indicate a direction that the individual parish councils/finance councils are directing our strategies. Our hopes were to stimulate thought and conversation. We intend to hold future meetings to discuss our strategy further.

Availability of Town Hall Meeting Recap & Parishioner Responses:

In an effort to maintain transparency and conserve paper, the recap and comments are located on our parish websites; ascensionnya.org and st-bernard-cologne.org. There will be some paper copies placed on the shelves in the back of church at Ascension and in the Narthex kiosk at St. Bernard. Please reserve these copies for parishioners that do not have access to internet. JLT members, Brian Willems (Asc) and Kelli Starkey (STB), recorded the notes at each respective meeting. Their notes have been included with the responses.

ASCENSION Update:

The Ascension Finance council is currently exploring options to address the elevator entrance accessibility by eliminating the slope and having an automatic door opener installed. This option would retain the current lift. However, the ushers have been contacted and will have someone available to assist with the elevator for weekend Masses and most other events.

ST. BERNARD Update:

On 4/28/2018, the STB Finance council approved the following expenses: replacement of the school roof and the repairs to the church steeple. These were viewed as repair expenses that cannot be held off any longer. Though the school roof expense was presented to at the Town Hall as an option as an upgrade, the finance council, trustees, business administrator and Father Gregory agreed that we cannot prolong these repairs. We value your input to our long term strategy for our campus. To allow for any potentials of Option 2, we needed to replace the roof now. Therefore, we are proceeding with repairing these two structures. We will announce the start date of these projects once we have received confirmation from the contractors.

Ascension High Level Estimates:

Improvement	Square Footage Estimate	Total Est. Cost
Address handicap accessibility: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New elevator • Main floor restroom • Enclosing outside steps 	\$550/ square foot Est. 40 x 80 = 3,200 sq ft	\$1.76 Million
Classroom Expansion - Narthex Addition	\$350/ square foot Est. 60 x 100 = 6,000 sq ft	\$2.1 Million
Handicap Accessibility & Classroom Expansion-Narthex	Est. 9,200 sq ft	\$3.86 Million

St. Bernard Estimates:

Options	Upgrade	Estimated Sq Ft Cost	Estimated Cost
Option 1: Lease out the current school building	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facility Updates • Insurance Liability • Potential challenge to use for parish activities/events/STBAFF • Suitable tenants • Parking limitations • Change of property tax status 		
Option 2: Upgrades to the existing school building	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Elevator addition • Restroom upgrade <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Downstairs remodel ○ Additional unisex restroom on main floor • Roof replacement <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Done in the next two years 		\$350,000 \$150,000 \$55,000-65,000
Option 3: Build a new parish center connected to the current narthex	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Addition to facilitate social events (not including additional classroom space) • Addition to facilitate social events and classrooms • Demolition of school 	\$350/sq ft 40x120 =4800 sq ft \$350/sq ft 50x 150 =7500 sq ft	\$1.68 Million \$2.635 Million \$81,400
Option 4: Renovate parish rectory, convent and lower level of narthex to accommodate Faith Formation	*Estimated expense is dependent on what would need to be done to the facilities as they are of varying ages. These cost estimates were not obtained, however, we want to present this as another topic for discussion to gauge the appetite for this option. Demolition of school		\$81,400

Ascension Town Hall Meeting Notes March 18th, 2018

Questions and Comments Raised by Parishioners at Town Hall

(In the order with which they were discussed. Parishioner comments in bold. Response in italics.)

- **The parish councils are currently separate. How can they be replaced by the JMT?** *We explained that the Finance Boards would remain separate and that the JMT would replace the parish councils for pastoral and ministry. Parishioner also later questioned the costs and if either Church was going to be around for long – would they be closed by the Archdiocese?*
- **Expressed “sticker shock” over the numbers presented. Questioned if a parish our size could support such a large project.** *We acknowledged the large numbers and also pointed out that we are considering all options – cheaper options. We were trying to get a sense of which projects were the most important to the parish.*
- **How much reserves the Church currently had in CD’s.** *Approximately \$80k in CD’s and about \$250k from Fr. Ardolf.*
- **How we could have a Joint Council and keep finances separate.** *Parishioner shared that his past experience was that the Parish Council decided how to spend the money. We clarified (hopefully) that the roles of the Parish Council is supposed to be pastoral focusing on ministries. The JMT would assume this role from the existing parish councils. The JMT would inform the separate finance boards what they need to carry out the ministries. The separate finance boards would decide how to best spend the money.*
- **What is the timeline for a decision?** *We wanted to pursue the JMT ASAP, but any capital campaign was off in the future. We are just at the early stages of determining the parish goals and what viable options are. We did indicate that we would likely have follow up meetings before decisions were made.*
- **Expressed positive support for combining ministries. “JMT and sharing ministries is a good thing.” Was surprised by the cost of the projects that we presented. Wanted to know the demographics of the parish and community.** *We had no demographics for the community or parish and indicated that we would research this for a capital campaign.*
- **Who is going to pay for this? The church is not getting any younger.** *We reiterated our response for the question above.*
- **Stressed that Masses at the local parish are important. Wanted to see at least one Mass at both parishes for all Holy Days and especially on holidays.**
- **What are the age demographics?** *This was the third time this question was asked in some form. Sherry Witte stepped in and gave some general information while acknowledging that this is not concrete: 1/3 give no financial support, 1/3 give less than \$1k. Had some discussion on younger parishioners and how they are “Roaming” Roman Catholics.*

- **Thinks the St. Bernard narthex is beautiful. Loves our music at Ascension – can tell when the congregation is more familiar with the songs. Would like an elevator that goes to the choir loft.**
- **Supports the JMT (joint council) to make life easier for Father. Would like to see Fr. Ardolf's gift to go to capital projects. Suggested a columbarium or a basement renovation.**
- **In favor of a new entrance the Church but is concerned about the cost. Most interested in a cost effective way to improve handicap accessibility.**
- **Ascension is the smallest parish this parishioner has ever been in. "We are lucky to have this Church." Pool our strengths and coordinate activities between the parishes will make it stronger. Expressed that the JMT would be the best way to do that.**
- **Handicap accessibility is the most important. Shared a personal story about bringing mother to Church. It was very evident that the lack of better handicap accessibility was a struggle for both her mother and herself.**
- **Expressed concern about Mass schedule and the demand on Father's time. We are the walls and the priest is the roof. Take care of the priest.**
- **Comes from a community of clustered parishes. Have we reached out to other clustered parishes to see how they operate? *Laura field this by explaining the Churches that we have spoken with. Also, clarified that some of the Churches were merged and not clustered. It has proven difficult to find similar size parishes in our situation.***
- **Has led bible study classes for 12-13 years. Feels that the CGS program is a great thing for the youth. Have we considered saving for 10 years before taking on a large project?**
- **Has been a parishioner for 40 years and has been very grateful for the support from the parish community. Handicap accessibility is important. But, who are we doing this for? What we do now is for the future.**

Feedback Form Comments

Question 1. How do you see God working in our Parish?

- Looking back at the church restoration, it took a few years to accomplish what seemed to be a huge undertaking. (AC/heating, windows, complete outside restoration, new pews, all done and done right. It all came together. The skeptics were there too. It was God's will.
- There seem to be more volunteers than ever before.
- In the Faith Formation program I have seen a lot of collaboration. Love the greeters.
- He has blessed us with Fr. Gregory, who has breathed life into our parish. I also see him working through all of the people who volunteer in all the many programs and ministries.
- I see it thru all the volunteers and willingness of the Parishioners when help is needed.
- God works for the poor, needy, vulnerable. And through the rest of us, He accomplishes this. Guided by the Ten Commandments and His Church – the Roman Catholic Church.

Question 2. We spoke of many ideas today, what option(s) do you feel is/are completely off the table and something you would not support?

- I wouldn't want to go beyond what we can't cover financially at the time. I would be in favor of addressing accessibility to the church first (new elevator, front steps covered, restrooms, social hall accessibility) with expansion in mind, but only when it's doable.
- None are completely "off the table".
- The "ideal" solution (3.86 mill.) I believe is too high and I would not support it.
- The only option that I feel we really need is someone to be a greeter and elevator operator on week-end and Holy Days. Maybe some ushers could take turns doing that job. The door to the basement by the elevator should be a push button to open that heavy door or maybe an elevator could be added to the outside of the north side of the church and go all the way to the choir loft.
- Spending 2.1 million for rooms that would only be used for a couple of hours once a week for about 4 months of the year.
- Cannot do anything major until bankruptcy is settled. A handicap lift at the entrance of the church should be installed as soon as possible. It should be big enough to lift a casket or several people at a time. An outdoor model that is inoperable when the church is locked up. (Possible Storms Welding or some commercial Model.)
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Question 3. Additional ideas, suggestions, comments:

- The Faith Formation should look at splitting between the two churches – ½ at one and ½ at the other rather than move it back and forth to get best use out of the areas.
- While you continue to gain feedback, suggestions, costs, etc. a suggestion may be to put a focus on membership/new parishioners. In general we want new or younger parishioners. New and younger parishioners could help with funding as well as further suggestions and solutions. New and younger parishioners could add to the overall spirit. Perhaps ask other churches how they have increased their membership.
- Church entrance – making the steps less steep. CGS program – expand if at all possible.
- I think we should expand out to the sidewalk, add a more regular kind of elevator all the way to the choir loft. I think we should renovate downstairs social hall and expand the kitchen. Moving rectory to add more space for Faith Formation. When we add on – some space for storage. Some new music to make the youth feel more welcomed. I do like the idea of 2 Masses on some days like was mentioned before.
- Is there a reason for both sites to upgrade area for Faith Formation?

- I think we need to come up with a few less expensive solutions for our parish to think about. We should keep in mind a BALANCE of the handicap needs and Faith Formation needs. We have to think of both, not one or the other.
- We could use more Masses on Holy Days, like the week-end Masses. Add a 8pm Mass the night before the Holy Day. Also a half hour a week for confessions is not enough. Maybe have an extra time earlier some Saturday a month. Like at 1pm to 2pm.
- If we could get someone to do what Elmer Dawson did before he die. Greeting the people, holding the door and running the elevator for the handicapped. I would also like an 8pm Mass on Holy Days. Not everyone has an 8 to 4 job.
- There is immediate need for traffic control system at Wednesday religion classes at Ascension. Cars are driving every which way with students darting in between them. Accident waiting to happen! And lastly, if you could hire a retired Priest for Holy Days of Obligation to help Father so we can Adore the Lord in Both Churches at the same time. Someone said it's only \$75 fee.

Parishioner Emailed Response:

Thank you for your time listening and speaking to our parish today at our town hall meeting! Hope you don't mind receiving some feedback via email. Below are a few thoughts:

- Try to accomplish a little bit of everything? Where most needed...seems to make for being good stewards of Fr. Ardolf's generosity...replacing social hall carpeting, replacing basement windows with larger casement windows, making water-runoff improvements in basement (tiling, etc.)
- Groups of folks (KC's, et al.) can definitely provide more consistent help for those entering/leaving church...escorting to/from cars, opening the exterior door to/from elevator, etc...helping with the elevator itself...wherever and however folks say they need the help.
- For improved handicap access, I would think modifying/replacing that exterior door to the elevator at 'the middle floor-level' should be near the top of the list (where folks can press a big silver circle and have the door auto-open).
- Exterior ramp at front of church that winds up to the main entryway doors (possibly also with a modest overhang?)
- Do we need more handicapped parking spots along Wilson St., with a sidewalk wrapping around the back of the church? Or maybe additional curb cut-outs on Reform St.?
- In the Rectory, are there any non-load bearing walls that could be knocked down upstairs to open things up for FF classes?
- My son thought of investing 50% of Fr. Ardolf's gift, although our non-profit status likely prohibits most avenues here? But I like being conservative with a chunk of the money (in CD's or whatever) for 'a rainy day' like severe breakdown & subsequent required replacement of elevator, etc. How about a modest "Fr. Ardolf scholarship fund" that gives annually for HS graduates, etc.?

- My son was also thinking of revenue-generation and/or savings...LED bulbs throughout building, added insulation...would establishing the Rectory as a storm shelter for folks living in mobile homes across from Midtown put us into position to receive city/government funding?
- I don't feel that spending 1.75 to 3 million dollars is a viable option for us...although I'm guessing there's a possibility our parish might be okay with contributing a modest amount towards updating the St. Bernard school building's roof/boiler...maybe even well-up into 5 figures?
- When hearing talk that the faith formation is short on space, I can't help but think about only one of our two campuses is being used for this program at any given time. Wouldn't the cost of busing between campuses be a very small compared to the cost of additions? Even in Winter, wouldn't a school bus be a safe option to transport over to St. Bernard and back? Admittedly, I probably don't appreciate the synergy and family desires/benefits of having all their children in one location (and the difficult logistics of busing). How about all CGS levels being permanently housed at the St. Bernard school building? Or having pre-K to 5th permanently at St. Bernard, and 6th to 10th at Ascension?
- I hope we can find a way to accommodate and support a CGS level 3, it really seems wonderful and is drawing in younger families...even if they stay only a few years, they are being wonderfully catechized for their futures, and for the future of the Church.
- Upgrading the elevator? Although quite manual in operation, it seems that it works well enough as long as we have someone there to help, and it would be expensive to replace I'm sure. But I think if we had a strong coalition of older folks wanting it, we should consider it.
- Utilizing more of St. Bernard narthex and both church's pew areas for classrooms? Probably not viable as other classes should be able to use these areas?
- Home-schooling our 9th and 10th grade classes (rotating to different family homes)? Or having our 9th and 10th grade classes be even more service-oriented...spending more time in younger grade classrooms?
- I like what I was hearing about the Joint Mission Team...it sounds like it would be mutually beneficial to both our parishes.

Thank you for reading my meandering thoughts. I'd be happy to print-out and submit somewhere if that is preferable. Feel free to forward/share as you wish.

May God richly bless you and your families!

St Bernard Town Hall Meeting Notes March 18th, 2018

Questions and Comments Raised by Parishioners at TownHall

(In the order with which they were discussed. **Parishioner comment in bold.** *Response in italics.*)

- **How many square feet is the existing school building?** *6,300/floor (18,900 total sq ft)*
- **Is our goal to have faith formation at one church?** *the movement of the Catechesis of the Good Shepard is a lot of work, producing another two atriiums is a lot of work, we do not want to wear out our catechists.*
- **If we go with Option #4, with a social hall, where would FR live?** *There is no intention of tearing down the rectory.*
- **Our goal vision should be to draw all people to God. Young people are drawn to beauty and to a program that is strong based on the right values, which is reverent and based in truth.**
- **What is the size of the Convent?** *7+ bedrooms with kitchen, two bathrooms, study etc.*
- **Does it seem like the school needs \$75+K per year in maintenance per year between normal and unforeseen? What additional items are needed?**
- **Confirmation students preferred the intimacy of the classrooms at Ascension (in rectory)....let's not assume small is negative.**
- **Could we convert the convent in to a retirement home or temporary housing for needy people?** *We looked into leasing options, but due to insurance costs, administrative costs, etc. is was not an ideal/workable.*
- **Could we replace the boiler and go to electric heat?** *The company that has repaired the boiler has indicated that it can be repaired for many years to come (\$5k per time, ½ times per year), new boilers costs appx \$100,000, have a 10 year expected life and if they break, may not be able to be fixed. Est annual costs of \$10,000. In comparison, maintaining the old boiler seems like an economically good decision.*
- **In regards to re-shingling the school roof, the existing dormers increase the costs significantly, what if we removed the top floor and reconfigured the room to make it easier to shingle/re-shingle in the future?**
- **If people are demanding new and modern facilities, are we considering closing down both churches and building one brand new church?** *What do you think about this?*
- **I am passionate about the school building. For a modest price of \$600,000, it could be renovated (boiler/heating/cooling systems are all good). Option #2 is a good value proposition.**
- **Were asbestos issues covered in the cost to renovate the school building?** *Removal of any asbestos would be an additional costs.*
- **The upstairs bathroom in the school was renovated, it cost \$3,000 to remove the asbestos.**
- **Can we really remove these old buildings? They are beautiful.**
- **How many quotes were obtained on the school renovations (option #4)?** *Only one has been obtained at this time, just to give us an estimate. We need to have more direction before formally engaging multiple firms for quotes.*
- **Who shared with us that it was cheaper to maintain the old boiler versus buying a new one? Should we get a second opinion?**

- **At one time I understood there was a church beautification project discussed, when will this be done?** *Efforts have been focused on Faith Formation, building up our faithful, and creating a sense of community. Recent investments made in the facilities has remained structural / necessary.*
- **Option 2 to is the best option**
- **Convenience for Faith Formation staff is important, but is it supposed to be all about them, or the students? In terms of having FF at one parish, we want both parishes to be living parishes, if the kids aren't at both, one parish won't be living. Keep FF at both parishes and renovate what we have.**

**** When Laura was talking about adult missions and missions focused on other demographics beyond young parishioners, there were several heads that were nodding.**

- **What if we make a full list of what our needs are (Social Hall, space for FF, etc.), wouldn't this guide us to the best course of action?**
- **Can we keep the level of volunteerism going?**
- **In the Cities, they renovate old buildings and they become marvelous buildings. We have one of our own here. Option #2 provides a good value. The school building provides adequate space.**
- **If we were to use the school building, we could do renovations in stages.**
- **Does the JLT have a timeline to make decisions on the building?** *Not a hard deadline, however, the roof of the school needs to be address in the next 2 years.*
- **Is there a timeline for formation of the JMT?** *No, we are continuing to seek input and pray on best course of action.*

Feedback Form Comments

Question 1. How do you see God working in our Parish?

- I see God at work through our Pastor, and through all the willing volunteers. The JLT was, and is, a welcome group and much needed – thank you.
- Provides us with great volunteers to carry out his mission.
- By our volunteers working to stretch our resources as far as possible. Our parishioners with their in kind donations in building, repair and maintenance of our facilities.
- In tradition and ministry.
- Not very well.

Question 2. We spoke of many ideas today, what option(s) do you feel is/are completely off the table and something you would not support?

- Option 3 – too much in one space and still no classroom space. I think it would spoil the beautiful worship space/building we have now – too busy.
- Option 3.
- I would not suggest tearing down the school building.
- I don't believe that tearing down the school would be a good option – fixing it would be cheaper than a new building.
- Tearing down the school building for \$81,000 and building a multi-purpose building for over a million dollars is not what I would support. I know some want a building connecting and under one roof but this is one of those things "What we want versus what we need".

Question 3. Additional ideas, suggestions, comments:

- I can see the school lunchroom floor raised to kitchen level – knock out some walls and have a greatroom for social events. Stairs reworked with ramp/deeper steps, elevator. Some kind of a covered walkway to the school from the church?
- Nice presentation. Would like to see Mass times changed yearly.
- Bring back vacation Bible School for our children. More promotion of Catholic School education.
- Can St. Bernard be repainted?
- Has there been thoughts about using the convent for classes? If some of the walls were taken down upstairs, we would have several large classrooms. Right now, the convent is probably the soundest building we have.

Parishioner Emailed Response:

Thank you to all who participated and prepared the presentation.
Methods that should be considered as we go forward.

Two comments on our site regarding the hill. We should not compromise on safety regarding ice. Second I developed a proposal to build a parking ramp into the hill attached to the church, cost 12 years ago \$1,000,000.00

Last fall a census was taken of the parish what were the results?

How many children are included in the census, pre faith formation and faith formation age?

What is the square footage need for the program? Number of class rooms needed?

What is the square footage of the existing St. Bernard School building? I understand it is close to 18,900 square feet. The proposed new construction totals 7,500 square feet., how do you make up the difference?

Have you considered a Faith Formation program for post Confirmation through “age 25” parishioners in the second half of the year when youth program does not use the facility? To be successful this would require having a “youth minister”.

Catholic School students should be included in the student count of each parish.

Using census projections for western Carver County what parish growth could be expected in the next 10 -20 years?

Regarding the concept of new versus remodel old, I would not support a new facility. Primarily because of cost, and experience of what it took to develop the church building expansion and refurbishing of the church.

I would test the statement of useful age of new boiler, 10 years seems low.

I do not like the idea of a new elevator shaft on the south side of the school building. Mainly because of accessibility from our hill. Has cost of drop off and parking been studied? Does the proposed cost include new stair well?

I believe an elevator could be constructed at the front door of the school building. The space would be immediately to the south of the entry lobby (ladies rest room and cloak room on the second and third floor.

If this idea is workable you would remove the ventilation shaft when the new roof of the school is installed.

The new ladies restroom could go in the area of the existing boiler room now used for storage. Wall between boiler room and storage area may need to be relocated; an Architect would also address the need for outside entrance. Additional items that could affect this, new boiler may take less space.

New heating/ventilating system, consider ground source heat pumps. This system would be energy efficient and provide both heating and cooling with zoning of individual spaces. Large duct raceways would not be needed. Existing ventilation shafts could be used for fresh air and exhaust. The southwest corner of the building would not have the old ventilating shaft because this is where the new elevator is, so a corner shaft in the rooms would have to be constructed.

Has a review of building codes been addressed? Fire Sprinkler system, Fire doors off the elevator shaft?

A plan was developed and is available to tie the rectory building and church addition together. 10 years ago the cost estimate was \$60,000.00.

How to approach the project whether it is build new or refurbish existing.

Hire an architect to do design concepts. Parishioners need this to visualize and contractors need it to develop competitive and accurate estimates.

Benefit of refurbish existing. Project done in phases as resources are identified.

If the existing boiler design is retained, this is my idea of schedule.

1. New roof shingles and repair dormers.
2. New heating system decision may or may not need to be done in this phase.
3. Build new ladies restroom lower level
4. Install new elevator, consider benefit/cost of extending elevator into attic.
5. Refurbish men's restroom lower level.
6. Install new restroom on main floor.

How do I see God working in our parish? Survey Question

I think we need to consider Pope Francis statement of “smelling like the sheep”. More engagement with our community, consider providing a free meal for homeless/need.

Using our church for inspirational presentations that will bring visitors to our facilities.

Using the convent building for needs like discussed at the meeting and/or I was once approached by the Southern Alliance for Battered Women needing a safe house. Or it could be leased out for daycare center. Changing tax code cost is not a problem the tenant would have this cost added to the rent.

I pray that Father Gregory continues as our Pastor.