

FRIENDS OF SACRED HEART UPDATE

Lexington, Massachusetts

www.sacredheartappeal.org

January 21 and 22, 2006

CHURCHES VOW TO CONTINUE PARISH APPEALS

On Wednesday, Jan. 19, the Boston area Council of Parishes met to discuss ongoing efforts to protect the assets of parishes in the Archdiocese of Boston. With hundreds of outstanding sexual abuse cases, plans to suppress at least 12 more parishes in the near future and a warning from the Meade Committee that this is only the first wave in an ongoing process, the council dealt with issues beyond their own parish properties. They expressed hope that their efforts might help to protect the assets of every parish in the Archdiocese rather than just those currently targeted for suppression.

While representatives of parishes whose appeals were denied expressed some disappointment with the Vatican decisions to deny the appeals, most were committed to proceeding with the next step in the canonical appeal process. The details of the appeal process were discussed including costs, deadlines, and issues to present. The appeals to the Apostolic Signatura would delay disbursement of parish assets while other efforts are pursued.

Attorneys and other participants discussed strategies for proceeding in the Massachusetts Court system with an Omnibus civil suit. The most likely course at this point is to file a civil suit with a large group of named parties that would attempt to clarify the fiduciary relationship between the Archbishop, pastors and parishioners. This type of suit was thought to be most useful in protecting parish assets from both the Archbishop and outside claimants.

Legislative efforts are currently focused on dealing with misinformation and misperceptions regarding the pending charities bill, authored by Rep. Marian Walsh. Donna Bosco noted that Rep. Stanley called to let her know that he is having some doubts about the bill. She encouraged the many residents from his district present at the meeting to contact Stanley and encourage him to support the Charities bill. It is requested that you call your legislative representative and support this important bill.

All of this work continues with the hope that the Archdiocesan hierarchy will eventually realize that demanding that pastors deliver parish assets to the Archdiocese violates their responsibility to parishioners. The meeting ended on a hopeful note, with plans for a press conference the following day.

WHY THE LACK OF SACRED HEART PPC MEETINGS?

Since September of 2005, there have been meetings of the joint Parish Pastoral Councils (PPC) for St. Brigid and Sacred Heart, but only two meetings of the Sacred Heart Parish Pastoral Council (SH PPC). Despite promises of openness and transparency, all but two of the joint PPC meetings and all of Sacred Heart Parish Pastoral Council meetings have been closed to parishioners. At the joint PPC meetings, the agenda of the meeting has focused only on aspects of the master planning process, not on the concerns or needs of the individual parishes.

Several SH PPC members have expressed frustration at the lack of discussion about the current and future operation of Sacred Heart. Under the Archdiocesan guidelines for PPC's, the pastor must be present for an official meeting to occur. PPC members have frequently requested meetings of the SH PPC, but these have not been scheduled on a regular basis. By the Mandate of Archbishop O'Malley, we are still a separate parish, but we are being treated as though we are already merged with St. Brigid. SH PPC members have received numerous requests from parishioners who want to have their elected representatives provide input on their concerns and issues regarding the parish.

In order to highlight their demands, a letter was sent requesting the scheduling of regular meetings for the SH PPC. The letter was signed by seven members of the PPC and delivered to Fr. Colletti on Monday, Jan. 16. A copy of this letter is provided with this newsletter.

Continued on Page 2

On Wednesday, Jan. 18, PPC members were notified that a meeting of the SH PPC was scheduled for 7 p.m. on Sunday, Jan. 22, at Sacred Heart. Unfortunately, this meeting will be closed to parishioners. It is promised that the joint PPC meeting for 7:00 p.m. on Sunday Jan. 29, at St. Brigid, will be open to parishioners. As of this writing, no agenda has been delivered for either meeting. The major focus of the joint PPC meeting on Jan. 29 will be a report on the costs for maintenance to various buildings in both parishes. It is the intention of the SH PPC to continue to demand that all meetings be open to parishioners and that regular meetings of the SH PPC be held.

DIPIETRO REMOVED FROM COMMUNICATIONS

Fr. Colletti has removed Frank DiPietro from the Communications Commission. Fr. Colletti appointed DiPietro to chair the commission at a joint Pastoral Parish Council meeting in July. No reasons have been given publicly for this removal.

The Communications Commission was created to provide for the open and free flow of information from the various commissions, councils, and groups within both St. Brigid and Sacred Heart parishes. Among its tasks were to make information available from the various meetings being held by commissions and the Master Planning Committee, to note and publicize upcoming events, to prepare a comprehensive calendar detailing activities and meetings, and to publish a newsletter for the two parishes on a regular basis. Longer term goals of the commission include working with local media and eventually videotaping parish programs to show on local CATV.

While initially a number of individuals were interested in working on the commission, only a few actually took an active part. Attendance at the five commission meetings held between September, 2005 and January, 2006 was limited to DiPietro and from one to three members. The commission suffered from a lack of information to publish, as most commissions and councils do not provide meeting notes. It was also difficult to get schedules and dates for meetings and other events within the parish. Whenever these were obtained, they were posted to the parish calendar for the Lexington Catholic Community.

Despite the shortage of members and lack of information, the commission continued to plan for the future and work to accomplish its goals. The commission's goals and mission statement were finalized and submitted to the pastor, PPC's and MPC, meetings continued and were scheduled on at least a monthly basis into 2006, changes to membership were updated, and regular communications between members and the parish staff were maintained.

In late December, Fr. Colletti asked to meet with DiPietro. DiPietro said that he had been told that this meeting request was to discuss his possible removal as the chairperson for the Communications Commission and that if this were the case, he would prefer that this be done in an open public meeting so that the propriety of the action could be assessed by those present. No further response was received, until Friday, Jan. 13, when Fr. Colletti sent a one sentence e-mail to all members of the Communications Commission noting, "Frank DiPietro is no longer head of communications commission." No further information has been provided regarding the reasons for this action or who will replace DiPietro on the commission.

The new parish administrative staff person, Susan Barry, has been given the responsibility for parish communications, including coordinating with commissions, councils, and other groups regarding meetings and meeting notes, providing support to the MPC and parish commissions, and preparing the parish newsletter, which debuts this week. Ms. Barry is not a member of either parish, nor has she been involved in this process prior to her recent hire. The SH PPC will address these communication issues at the PPC meeting scheduled for Sunday, Jan. 22.

FOSH Meeting: Tuesday, January 31, 2006
7:15 p.m. Prayer Service (Church)
7:30 p.m. Meeting (Parish Center)

PARISH SURVEY MOVES AHEAD AMID CONTROVERSY

The Parish Survey is moving ahead without the final approval of either PPC. The survey, initially intended to be sent out last Fall, is to be mailed to parishioners in both parishes in mid-February. It has been prepared by the Survey Committee, a volunteer group under the direction of the Master Planning Committee. Fr. Colletti appointed the Master Planning Committee (MPC) to help reconfigure the current two parishes into one Lexington parish. The survey is intended to provide information to support the conclusions of the joint Master Plan.

The Survey Committee put in a considerable effort in preparing the questionnaire. While various groups within each parish initially provided questions to the Survey Committee, many submitted questions were rejected or edited out of the survey. The Master Planning Committee directed the Survey Committee to remove or reject questions. However, as work on the survey progressed, it was apparent to the MPC and PPC's that the input of an outside consultant would be needed to finalize and evaluate the survey. A PPC co-chair contacted a private survey consultant with whom she had previously worked. This survey consultant, Discovery Surveys, Inc., (DSI), submitted a bid proposal to assist in the preparation of the parish survey.

At the open joint PPC meeting on Nov. 14, a proposal from a private survey consultant, DSI, and the draft of the survey document, were reviewed. PPC members had numerous comments and questions. Additionally, a number of PPC members had concerns about the cost of the private consultant and survey, which is in excess of \$20,000. The joint PPC unanimously voted to solicit two additional bids from other private survey consultants and to get an estimate of the complete costs for other aspects of the Master Planning process such as focus groups and "town meeting" type parish gatherings. The joint PPC also requested the opportunity to review the Parish Survey again, when it was revised.

After the presentation regarding Canon Law by Fr. Mark O'Connell, Canon Lawyer for the Archdiocese of Boston, on Nov. 21, a number of PPC members raised serious additional concerns about proceeding ahead with the Parish Survey.

Copies of the revised Parish Survey were not provided to PPC members. In an e-mail cover letter from the Survey Committee, it was noted that the initial private consultant was hired and the survey was being finalized. No competitive bid solicitation was conducted and the SH PPC was not consulted about the content or proceeding.

On Dec. 12, a presentation was made at a meeting of the joint Parish Finance Councils with Fr. Colletti and the PPC co-chairpersons regarding the funding of the Parish Survey. While no specific meeting notes have been issued for this meeting, representations were made that, with few exceptions, the joint PPC members were in favor of moving ahead and funding the survey. The joint Parish Finance Councils voted to recommend the funding of at least \$17,000 for the private consultant's work on the survey, and asked for information regarding future costs of the Master Plan.

Since mid-December the Survey Committee and Master Planning Committee have held a number of meetings to further refine the Parish Survey document. As announced in a recent "From the Pastor's Desk," Fr. Colletti has indicated that the Parish Survey is moving ahead. In January, there have been several meetings with DSI, the survey consultant. On Jan. 15, a pre-test of the latest Parish Survey was conducted. The initial feedback from this pre-test was that the survey was too long. Protests from members of the SH PPC have been ignored.

No further input is being sought from PPC members, who have not been provided with a copy of the updated Parish Survey document since the Nov. 14 meeting, despite several requests for copies to review. Some SH PPC members have concerns about the content and context of the questions that comprise the Parish Survey. Additional concerns exist about the large expense for a consultant that was hired without competitive bids. A number of parishioners, who have never been provided with copies of any of the draft versions of the survey, have also expressed concerns as to the validity and legitimacy of the survey. The major concerns relate to the nature and content of the survey questions. Are the questions orientated to a specific conclusion and do they address the real concerns of parishioners of both parishes?

Many important questions continue to be left out of the survey, such as "Do parishioners support maintaining Sacred Heart as a separate parish?" Since the purpose of the survey is to ascertain the real needs and desires of parishioners, these questions are necessary, and should be included.

January 15, 2006

Dear Fr. Colletti,

We, the undersigned, elected members of the Sacred Heart Parish Pastoral Council, are writing to you as a follow-up to the joint PPC meeting which was held last Monday evening, January 9. The meeting was a step towards addressing issues that pertain to the continued operation of the Joint Parish Pastoral Councils and the Master Planning process.

The end agenda item for the joint PPC gathering included scheduling meetings with each of the two PPC's to address individual parish operational issues. Due to time constraints, this portion of the agenda was not addressed, although the facilitator, Tiziana Dearing, did indicate that these meetings could be set up by you via e-mail.

As you are aware, there are a number of critical issues that need to be dealt with at Sacred Heart Parish, both now and throughout the coming months. We respectfully request that you coordinate with us to schedule regular meeting dates over the immediate future so that we can all actively participate and collaborate in planning, organizing, initiating, promoting and reviewing both the day-to-day operations of Sacred Heart parish, and work to implement and coordinate evangelization, worship, religious education and service activities for our parishioners through the parish commissions, committees, staff and programs

In the spirit of cooperation and faith which was maintained during Monday's joint PPC meeting, we believe that it is vital for our parish that we meet within the next two weeks, preferably with a facilitator in attendance. It is understood that all are busy, but, as the elected leaders and representatives of Sacred Heart, we can not function effectively unless we get together. As individuals, we will work to be as flexible as possible to accommodate any scheduled meeting

We await and appreciate your prompt reply to our letter

Signed:

Anna Heuchling
Paul D. Toffey
Frank D. Puetter
Dan Ludwig

Fr. Colletti
John L. Mahoney
Marybelle