



Joint Parish Planning Town Hall Meeting Saturday, September 14, 2024 St. Peter's Church

The third Town Hall meeting regarding the planning for the Greater Rome Community parishes was held on Saturday, September 14, at 2:00 PM at St. Peter's Church. Approximately 50 people were in attendance.

Father Robert Kelly, Father Seán O'Brien, and Father Immanuel were present. Introductions were made by Father Seán O'Brien. The opening prayer was offered by Father O'Brien.

- Father O'Brien spoke about the Buffalo Diocese closing 78 out of 196 parishes because they lost 95,000 parishioners. Their rightsizing process started this spring and ended on September 9, 2024. Fortunately, Bishop Lucia has adopted a slower process in which we are allowed to listen and express our thoughts.
- Every October, a parishioner count is taken to find out how many Catholics are attending mass. St. Peter's has lost 415 parishioners from 2020. He added, it is not about the shape or condition of our churches, but rather about the number of priests available and the number of people attending mass and receiving sacraments. Statistics on all the parishes can be found in the March 28, 2024 issue of the Catholic Sun. He furthered stated that in the past priests would get stipends for the number of masses they said for funerals and special intentions, but now the monies are put into the Parish's general account.
- The recurring topic of closing St. Paul's was addressed. There are so few parishioners attending St. Paul's for mass, that it will not be used for weekend mass (Bishop's decision), but its programs will continue. St. Paul's has a great educational facility, a parish hall and a chapel.
- Faith formation will be conducted in locations that best meet the needs. For example, there are 11 adults in the RCIA program scattered among the parishes, it should be consolidated and offered at one church.
- Father O'Brien requested that town hall attendees help stop rumors currently circulating.
- Transfiguration will be merged with the new Parish. The Rectory is being leased to Oneida County and ICAN for creation of a transitional home for homeless women and their children. They will have an option to buy the property. Uses for the Church are being explored. It is noted that when the bishop agrees with the sale of a church, the Vatican receives the request. The sale must follow the rules for profane use (use that is not sacred) but not for sordid use (for example use by planned parenthood). An attendee made a comment about how the closing of Transfiguration was mishandled. Father O'Brien stated that he could not speak to this issue. The decision to close and potentially sell this church was made by the Bishop.

- As far as handicapped access is concerned at St. Peter's, there is a wheelchair lift available, but the handicapped button to open the doors does not work.
- A comment about the number of special intentions per mass was made. Priests must discuss this issue with the Bishop. The current policy is only 2 intentions are allowed per mass.
- It is noted that less people attend mass and donations are down. Yet, the costs of utilities, maintenance, mass supplies, office supplies, and employee costs are increasing. Parishes are barely covering expenses. Cost efficiencies for all the churches in the new Parish will help make us stronger financially and more efficient. It is hoped that the new Parish will increase its outreach, retain the youth and be a more welcoming community to all local Catholics.
- Father O'Brien feels that it was a good sign that all the churches were represented and worked together on the Honor America Days float.
- A question was asked about how the priests feel about the changes. Fr. Kelly feels that a church might close. Fr. Immanuel said that he trusts Jesus with the process.

Father Immanuel ended the town hall meeting with a prayer.

The next **Town Hall will be held on October 21, 2024, at 6:30 PM at St. John's.**

(This summary of the Town Hall was prepared by a member of the Communications Subcommittee who was in attendance.)