

January 28, 2019

On behalf of Father Tom, Father Paul, Deacon Rich, our Trustees, and Parish leadership and staff, we want to thank each member of our parish community for their participation in this discernment process. We know that it has not been easy.

A complete description of the process and our discerned judgment led by the Holy Spirit, to consolidate our worship space at the St. Bridget campus will be inserted in this weekends bulletin, February 2, 2019. You may also request a copy by calling the parish office. As January draws to a close, we will then begin to hold all Masses at the St. Bridget campus and allow groups that regularly meet at the St. Austin campus some time to transition as we figure out the details of exactly where groups will meet at the St. Bridget campus. On a case-by-case basis we will accommodate parishioner funerals at the St. Austin campus as long as we maintain the space appropriately for the purpose of a funeral Mass. The transition may take a few months and we hope to have both a healing ceremony for the St. Austin campus as well as a rededication for the St. Bridget campus.

Much more remains to be done and worked out. These are just some of the things that many of you may have immediate questions about. We encourage you to ask Parish leadership as questions arise.

Again, thank you for your continued participation in the Parish Community of St. Bridget. All is in God's hands.

We believe that all will be well.

Peace,



Joni Sandlin
Parish Administrator
Parish Community of Saint Bridget

Discernment Process/Report St Bridget Parish Community

Introduction: The process of discernment that was entered into by the parish community of St. Bridget was set into motion as a result of the PARISH SURVEY. This survey, conducted by phone, was envisioned as a pastoral response by the ministerial staff/trustees, to determine the needs of the people of the parish. Each registered member of the parish, in so far as possible because of the lack of an accurate record and data system, was contacted to the best of our ability. Within the context and the content of the discussions that emerged a persistent need was identified: the need to form a single parish unit, in one campus, after the experience of seven years and a two-campus system.

A secondary trigger, but by no means the primary impetus for the expressed need to move to one campus, was the difficulty of financially supporting two campuses. The offertory plate collection at both campuses continued to erode and the primary contributor to the financial stability of the parish was the monthly rent paid from *Sojourner Truth Academy* on the campus of St. Bridget. A stark reality emerged: without the rent from the charter school, neither campus would be sustainable. There were/are no significant cash reserves to be used for this purpose.

The Process/Issues:

It was determined by the parochial administrator (pastor) that a theological process would be engaged in order to determine the outcome to the question at hand. There were other processes suggested and considered. After discussion it was determined that the discernment process would be used in order to place the conversation that would take place within the context of a single question: *How do we believe that this parish community should be Church in North Minneapolis?* This singular question provided the focus and the emphasis of the process but it did not ignore the other realities that were also part of the lived experience of the People of God gathered together as church:

1. Canonically the parish community is the community of St. Bridget. Although there is a campus that is named "St. Austin" there is no parish of St. Austin. (Process started in 2010 and has been a reality for the last seven years.)
2. The priest, the parish administrator, the staff, the records of the parish, are all located (primarily) at the St. Bridget campus.
3. The lived reality of the "coming together" of two parish communities into one parish community over a period of seven years was "uneven". Despite the best of intentions and despite the many efforts that had been engaged in support of the formation of one parish, in the opinion of some parishioners, the one parish idea was/is not a reality. For example, select parishioners, originally from St. Austin, continued to make their offertory contribution by designating the contribution for "St. Austin only."

4. The unease and the dissatisfaction of the reality of “one parish but two campuses” was further complicated by other issues that were unresolved and in need of healing/closure. In no particular order these issues included: a) the abrupt closing of St. Philip, b) the closing of St. Isidore, c) the issue of predatory clergy, d) Archbishop John Nienstedt, e) the transfer of land from St. Anthony of Padua to Catholic Eldercare, e) the merger of other parishes in North Minneapolis, f) the bankruptcy of the Archdiocese, g) the abrupt departure of the TOR Franciscan community from service in the Archdiocese, etc. Since these issues still come to mind and are referenced in conversation, they have not therefore been resolved and contribute to a feeling of anger and resentment on the part of some parishioners.

Certainly, more examples could be referenced at this point, but it is hopefully sufficient for the purposes of this report to reference the above. Hopefully the understanding of each person reading this report will include the perspective that this list is not exhaustive and is not intended to be exhaustive but rather illustrative at best.

Discernment:

For the purposes of this process discernment is understood as a positive expression of faith in the presence of the Spirit of God at work in the People of God. Discernment is understood as an active process of inviting the Spirit of God into the decision-making process. It is an attempt to set aside personal opinion, judgment, collective memories that are both healed and those that are yet to be healed, fear, anxiety, and all other emotions and feelings in the service of permitting the truth to emerge. As such it is a process that invites patience, reflects the human condition as both active and passive, admits to the reality of feeling and emotion, memory, hopes, dreams, expectations (both met and unmet), in short, the whole range of what it means to be a human person. In faith, what emerges from the process, is a direction that seems to be “the will of God.”

Discernment does not shelter a person from disappointment. It does not mean that there will not be both anger and disappointment. However, if the discernment process has been entered into with a real sense of openness to the activity of the Spirit of God, acceptance of the direction that has emerged is often possible, even when strong feelings remain that are not supportive of the decision that has emerged.

One other caution needs to be referenced. In community discernment there is an operating assumption that each member of the community is actively engaged in the process. That being the case, it is not at all uncommon that some members of the community are incapable of sustaining an attitude of discernment and soon abandon it, returning to a process with which they feel more comfortable. The discerning community recognizes that this is a reality, accepts the reality as it is played out, but does not permit the reality to disrupt the discernment process or the decision that emerges. Perhaps even more important the discerning community does

not judge those who are unable to sustain the process as difficult, disruptive, noncooperative, but rather as men and women who are also of the journey with them.

The discernment steps implemented:

1. Father Thomas Santa, C.Ss.R. preached at the Sunday liturgies at both campuses, announcing the process and introducing the question that was to be discerned: *How do we believe that this parish community should be Church in North Minneapolis?*
2. An “All Parish Meeting” followed the preaching event in which all parishioners were invited to attend and to express their concerns and to help determine the next steps. Attendance at this meeting was robust.
3. It was determined, by a vote (show of hands) of those attending the meeting, that for the process of discernment liturgies would be held exclusively at one campus each for a period of one month. The hope was that the experience of one campus would be helpful. Liturgies were held during the month of November at the campus of St. Austin. During the month of December at both campuses. During the month of January at the St. Bridget campus.
4. Parishioners were encouraged to engage in conversation with each other and to discuss with each other, with members of the staff, with representative councils, the question under discernment: *How do we believe that this parish community should be Church in North Minneapolis?*
5. Homilies during the discernment period stressed the hope/need for a sense of unity and an openness to the process. The parish community prayed a prayer before each of the liturgies that expressed the power of the Spirit of God at work in the process and in the community who gathered to discern.
6. Repeatedly the people of the parish were assured that this process was essential and that no decision had been made. The Archdiocese and the parish leadership had no expressed preference for either campus. In addition, parishioners were encouraged to ask the difficult questions, to feel what needed to be felt, to express what needed to be expressed.
7. The final weekend of January 2019 the parish community at St. Bridget gathered together and, after a homily by Father Thomas Santa, C.Ss.R., reminding them again about the process of discernment, to submit the discernment form that reflected their “discerned decision about the question that was under consideration, *“How do we believe that this parish community should be Church in North Minneapolis?”*
8. Every person that asked for a discernment form, including all those who were homebound or unable to attend the gathering of the church meeting for discernment, were provided with an opportunity to register their discernment.
9. At the conclusion of the weekend liturgy, and after the time for registering the discerned opinion had expired, the pastoral staff and the trustees gathered together to receive the results. The results were reported as 57% discerned that the campus of St. Bridget was their choice. 43% discerned that that campus of St. Austin was their choice.

The Process Continues:

After the reception of the discernment results that pastoral staff and the trustees engaged in a discussion about the process, what had been learned, what concerns remained, and finally, was a discerned decision possible at this point? The discussion that followed was very serious, reflective, and honest.

One concern soon emerged. It was obvious, from the discernment forms received, conversations that had been engaged, and emails received, that there remained a small, vocal group of parishioners who were unwilling to accept any decision other than a decision in favor of the St. Austin campus. Tellingly, to the best of our knowledge, there was no such opinion expressed in favor of the St. Bridget campus. It was further revealed, in the conversation that followed, that there was some evidence of an organized “boycott” of Sunday mass during the month of January at the St. Bridget campus, by parishioners who favored the St. Austin campus. The pastoral staff and the trustees judged that this effort indicated, not only a strong preference for the St. Austin campus by those who chose to participate in the boycott, but also indicated that despite all of the efforts that have taken place over the last seven years to build a single parish community, that effort had proven to be ineffective for some parishioners. The staff and trustees acknowledged that this kind of resistance was/is not unexpected within the experience of the discernment process and is understandable because of the depth of emotion that is expressed within the process.

The question that needed consensus at this point was whether or not the staff and trustee leadership of the parish felt confident enough to register their discerned opinion in answer to the question: *How do we believe that this parish community should be Church in North Minneapolis?* A second question was, “Is there any value to postponing the decision or the implementation of the decision, for a period of time in order to allow for some much-needed healing and a slow process of acceptance?”

The discussion that followed revealed that there was unanimous agreement that the discerned process and answer to the question, *How do we believe that this parish community should be Church in North Minneapolis?* was in favor of the St. Bridget campus. It was further discerned that postponing the implementation of the decision in order to provide more time in the hopes of enabling healing where needed would more than likely not be effective. If it had not taken place over the last seven years, the chances of a couple more months would probably not make much if any of a difference.

The decision to designate the campus of St. Bridget as the place where the St. Bridget community will continue to witness as Church in North Minneapolis affirms:

1. That the perceived value, expressed by the vast majority of parishioners, is for one campus as the physical space for our shared experience of church;

2. That our mission as Church, as discerned by our faith community in the process that we shared, can be best expressed in North Minneapolis with a single campus;
3. That our liturgical life as a faith filled community can best be experienced and manifested within the atmosphere provided by a single campus;
4. That our best expression of stewardship, now and in the future, is largely dependent on a permanent foundation at one campus;
5. That with a focused effort we can create a worshipping community at the St. Bridget campus that will be reflective and respectful of the faith heritage and contributions of all our parishioners, including those who identified with the St. Austin Campus;
6. That we share a belief that one campus will enhance our ability to form a unified community and enhance our liturgy, our participation, and provide an opportunity for growth;
7. That our decision to come together in one campus is a decision for life, not a decision for death.

It was determined, as planned and shared with the members of the parish community, that the results of the discernment of the parishioners would be reported to the Parish Council and Finance Council meeting together, on Monday evening, January 28, 2019. The decision would be reported and feedback received. Pending a favorable outcome from this meeting the discerned decision would be immediately shared with the St. Bridget community. If the feedback received suggested a different response the announcement would be postponed and further action steps will be implemented.

Next Steps:

Pending a favorable result as referenced above, the Archdiocese will be informed of the discerned decision. A process would be engaged to begin the process of repurposing the St. Austin campus. A committee of interested parishioners will be formed to help in the transition process. It is the hope of the staff and the trustees that there will be some sort of shared representation of the history and the tradition of the St. Austin community to be included in the St. Bridget church building. All of this is yet to be determined.

The entire process will continue to be shared with all of the parishioners of St. Bridget. Necessary time for grieving is essential. Necessary plans for a vibrant future need to be implemented.

All is in God's hands.

We believe that all will be well.

Meeting of Parish Council/Finance Council:

The pastoral leadership of the parish, the trustees, the Parish Council, and the Finance Council gathered together on Monday, January 28, 2019 for the purpose of reviewing the report that was submitted. The report was reviewed, clarified, and discussed. After the review was concluded, and there was general satisfaction expressed in the process that was used, the Parish Council and the Finance Council accepted the report. It was further determined that providing additional time for discernment would not be productive.

The Council(s) discussed the need for a sensitive and a pastoral approach for the implementation of the recommendation. Particular examples were noted and commented on favorably. There was a general recognition that although the process of discernment was concluded that the process of implementation would require the same amount of pastoral care and patience. There was a general sense of relief expressed and acceptance of the direction that was discerned.

The report, in the final edited format, will be duplicated and distributed to all members of the parish at the weekend masses of Feb. 2-3, 2019. The unedited version of the report will be distributed by email to all parishioners who provided an email address at the end of this meeting. The final report will be submitted to the Archdiocese and the process will be implemented over a period of the next several months.

Rev. Thomas M. Santa, C.Ss.R.
Deacon Rich Heineman
Joni Sandlin
Gerri Hare
Michael Johnson
Christina Maas

St. Bridget Parish
January 28, 2019