

Frequently Asked Questions

Question: Why are we considering closing St. Agnes church after four years of the merged parish? What has changed during this time?

Answer: A lot. A number of factors have emerged that compel us to consider this possibility, especially considering our stewardship of parish assets, for example:

- i. The parish has one full-time priest trying to cover two campuses and nine (9) Masses, with the help of three retired priests and two priests in-residence (who have full-time jobs outside of the parish). This two-campus, 9-Mass dynamic places a tremendous burden on our pastor and takes away from his ability to grow the parish community and faith formation mission. The schedule and logistics for one leader is simply not sustainable over time.
- ii. Mass attendance at St. Agnes continues to be extremely low relative to the size of the church building and the costs of celebrating each Mass (priest stipends, utilities, ordinary wear and tear, etc.). Attendance has not meaningfully changed in four-years.
- iii. Preserving and maintaining a campus on 6.3 acres to serve fewer than 100 parishioners for only Sunday worship does not seem to be in the best interest of the parish as a whole.
- iv. Having two locations for our parish churches on two campuses takes away from building a more cohesive parish community.

Question: During the capital campaign, some \$2 million was raised to renovate St. Agnes church building. What happens to those funds?

Answer: That is correct. At the time the Diocese of Bridgeport directed the merger of the two parishes, Bishop Caggiano granted the newly combined parish a one-year reprieve in its obligation to undertake the capital campaign mandated for every parish in the Diocese. The pandemic resulted in additional delay, until Spring of 2021. By that time the merger was two years old. As an attempt to make a good faith effort to support the St. Agnes campus, the parish leadership, both ordained and lay leadership, thought it best to identify projects on both campuses. This was despite the fact that Mass attendance at St Agnes remained very low and attempts to enhance the ministry at St. Agnes had not gained momentum. While any donor that restricted their gift, or a portion thereof, to the proposed projects at St Agnes will be given the opportunity to request the refund of their donation, the parish will invite all parishioners to allow their donation to be redirected to other mission-critical needs of the parish.

Question: Can the St. Agnes campus be put to a different mission-critical use?

Answer: It is important that all parishioners are aware that several initiatives have been pursued since the merger to enhance vibrancy and ministry at the St Agnes site. One idea was to convert

the church building into a spiritual care center of some sort. Pre-Covid pandemic, this idea had some merit. However, the parish leadership spoke with staff of multiple retreat centers who said that programming related to retreats and spiritual development moved online during the pandemic and has shown no sign of returning to in-person gatherings anytime in the foreseeable future.

Question: Doesn't the parish have urgent office and educational space needs, and can't St. Agnes solve some of these needs?

Answer: Yes. The parish faith formation program is facing urgent space needs. These needs will be addressed with the acquisition of at 19 Riverside Avenue property.

Question: What may happen to the St. Agnes campus if a decision to close is made?

Answer: The parish plans to explore the interest that has been expressed by Greenwich Country Day School in acquiring the St. Agnes property to further its educational mission. It is important to note, however, that no commitments have been made or have negotiations occurred to date.

Question: How would a sale of the St Agnes campus further the long-term goals of the Parish, and therefore its mission?

Answer: The mission of the Parish has suffered over the last four years by the extraordinary events we have all experienced. A merger, a pandemic, and then a capital campaign. Renewal of a long-term lease with Children's Day School and a newly signed long-term lease of the O'Connor school building with the Japanese School have dramatically changed our ability to provide adequate space for staff needs and teaching space. From the standpoint of our stewardship responsibilities, we must seriously consider thoughtful, honest and well-reasoned decisions despite the difficulty of doing so.

We need to once again focus on our mission of bringing souls to Christ through the Sacraments and faith formation for both adults and children. One of the unique aspects of St Catherine's has always been its strong sense of community. There is an urgent need to build on that legacy for our children and grandchildren. A continuation of the status quo impedes our abilities. We need to embrace the future and take the steps necessary to succeed.

Question: What are the next steps regarding the St. Agnes campus?

Answer: Now that the recommendation of considering the viability of the St Agnes Church has been communicated to the parish, there will be a series of opportunities for both the leadership and the parishioners to weigh in on this recommendation. Each of you are welcome to present any questions or thoughts on the recommendation to the Pastor, the community at large and to the Bishop. More details on these opportunities will be available in the coming days. Given that the process to close a church involves several required steps, it is difficult at this time to predict the timing of any closure.

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