



(Report for the Parish)

Dear Friends,

At my request, Bishop Lennon graciously agreed to meet with me on Tuesday, April 14. John Maimone, the director of the Diocesan Finance Office, was also invited to attend the meeting. The purpose of the appointment was to fulfill my responsibility to make sure that he had accurate and complete information about our Parish financial situation as well as to bring him up to date on Parish statistics. I also wanted to share with him what I considered to be significant correspondence that I have received since the March 14th announcement of his administrative decision to merge St. Colman and St. Stephen using the St. Stephen worship site.

With regard to finances, I told him that there were three ongoing strategies to improve our income:

- 1) We have been making an effort to reduce dependency on bequests and extraordinary donations by emphasizing regular collections with defined purposes, e.g., The Parish Improvement Fund, The Roof Debt Collection and the Outreach/St. Vincent de Paul Collection. The results have been that we have received a combined regular collection annually:

2005 = \$149,249 2006 = \$136,497 2007 = \$146,352 2008 = \$151,678

For the first nine months of the **2008-09** fiscal year, our total of collections is already **\$152,979**.

- 2) A second strategy has been to engage or re-engage persons whose roots are here in the Parish and persons who are attracted by the opportunity to participate in our mission to the city. The St. Patrick's Day celebrations as well as the Church in the City partnership with St. Christopher and Our Lady Help of Christians, the neighborhood meal volunteers and the institution of the celebration of St. Colman Day each November, as well as other fund raising events, are beginning to yield results. Our Net Fundraising was as follows:

2005 = \$27,021 2006 = \$26,050 2007 = \$25,998 2008 = \$68,868

To date in the **2008-09** fiscal year, St. Patrick's Day and St. Colman Day fundraising alone provided a combined gross income of **\$75,146** of which less than \$25,000 was used for expenses and prizes.

- 3) The third strategy is to continue our 125th Anniversary "Ensuring the Future Campaign" to build a fund for capital improvements. The preservation, modernization and upkeep of our landmark and old buildings continue to be the Parish's major expense. Easier access to our Hall for people with disabilities and creating ramps into the Hall and Church are priorities. At the same time, we plan to create a memorial wall and garden on the south side of the Church that includes the Lourdes Grotto that is now behind the wall in the Hall. This could easily produce a gross capital improvements income of \$500,000. This process could be repeated in future years using the Sorrowful Mother Shrine and dedicating a Veterans Memorial Wall at the east end of the Church surrounding an expanded parking area and better handicap access to the Parish Office and Church on the north side. A third possibility exists in having a campaign around the building of a suitable and beautiful structure to support the bell from our first Church, which is now in storage.

With regard to Parish statistics, I used the information from the "Annual Report of Ministries and Finances" as given to the Parish and to the Cluster Team last Fall. Specifically I commented on the five Cluster goals.

For the goal of **Vibrant Eucharistic Services**, I mentioned that our Choir often includes 5 or 6 different musical instruments, singers from 6 different countries, adults, older adults, and teenagers and the music is always of good quality and inspirational. Likewise our servers and Eucharistic ministers grow in number and ethnic diversity each year.

For the goal of **Evangelization**, I pointed to sharp increases in the number of older children and adults who have been baptized, received First Communion and were confirmed. I explained that extended families that attend these Sacramental celebrations are invited and encouraged to re-engage in Parish Life by our welcoming and joyful Parish. Additionally, our Parish Council began calling families of the newly baptized to invite and encourage their own older children and adult family members to come for First Communion or Confirmation preparation and to continue their own spiritual and sacramental journeys with us. In 2008 there were 14 more Baptisms of older children than in 2007. Likewise in 2008 there were 18 more children who received First Communion and there were 12 more teenagers and adults who received Confirmation. In October of 2008 we counted 90 more persons attending weekend Masses and that number has stayed consistent through 2009.

For the goal of **Outreach**, I called his attention to the number of volunteers who help us from more than 25 Churches and schools and to our leadership role in the countywide program to help people get their birth certificates and State ID cards. The involvement of

seniors is paramount in our fundraising activities and the bereavement dinners we provide after funerals.

I made a special point of emphasizing how our whole Parish welcomes new immigrants and how they have a place at the table serving in various leadership roles in our liturgies and in the Parish activities. The use of the school building for our after school program for young immigrant children, the job preparation and training programs for adults and the use of the Parish Hall for the National Liberian Association convention two years in a row are significant activities that help us fulfill the command to “welcome the stranger in our midst.”

I also presented the Bishop with copies of three significant letters that have already been sent to his office. A letter from Sister Ann Maline, SND, the Principal of Metro Catholic School on the St. Stephen property, expressed her concerns for maintaining a safe campus and adequate supervision for children in the midst of “people with various needs (who have a right to be ministered to) ...on the property at the same time.” A letter from Isaac Dweh, the President of the National Liberian Association, begs the Bishop to “keep in mind the African refugees” when he thinks of closing St. Colman Church. A third letter from the residents of Colman Court lists their anxieties, fears and disappointments at the thought of the Church closing. The final letter was from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). This letter was sent to me at St. Colman asking me to remind the Bishop that they invested \$7,000,000 in Colman Court based on “the spirit of the people of St. Colman coupled with their outstanding community services.”

In the dialogue that followed, the only new information that I received was that the Bishop indicated that he was moved to keep the St. Stephen worship site because it is appropriate to have a Catholic Church on the same property as a Catholic School. He also reminded me that I should be gathering a committee of informed leaders of the Parish to meet with the committee of people of St. Stephen to begin planning how the merger would be worked out, making the best use of both campuses but with one worship site at St. Stephen.

In response, I asked him to make clear his rationale for the decision he made despite the long discernment and considered recommendation of our Cluster Team. I reiterated many of the concerns that you have so excellently expressed in your appeal forms and letters, such as: “How do we raise money without the Church and Hall (St. Patrick and St. Colman Days ... \$80,000+)?” “How do we find the resources to pay off the St. Stephen \$600,000 debt to the Diocese?” “How do we get the people to walk to or from a Church on a side street, especially after dark in the winter and even in broad daylight in the summer?” “Where is the space to do the ministries that we now offer?” “What about the safety of the residents of Colman Court?” “What happens when we do not have space to welcome the immigrants whose presence continues to grow in our midst?”

His response was never more than that this must be worked out in the creative thinking of the committees from the two Parishes. He suggested that we research the model that Holy Spirit Parish has provided in the creative use of the property at St. Henry.

During this dialogue, I said several times that I had not come to argue with him. (It was my thinking that these points would more properly be discussed with the leadership of the Parish in the mediation which they had respectfully requested). In point of fact I was actually too tired to argue or argue well and I told him that. I also said that he had added 20 hours to my workweek by the havoc and shock that his surprise decision had caused in the last four weeks. I repeated that **I had come to make sure that he had sufficient accurate information about the state of our finances and our Parish life to help him to make his decision on the appeal with the due diligence and prudence required by Canon Law.**

On April 15th, I received a call from the Reconfiguration Coordinator of the Diocese informing me that the Bishop would visit me to see the Parish facilities on Friday, May 1 at 3:30. It is my hope that the information that I relayed to him and his visit to our campus will give him a new appreciation of the importance and appropriateness of the St. Colman site for our intrinsically linked worship, ministry and mission.

I also hope from the letters and messages he has received that he will be able to understand the importance of our **solidarity** with the people and institutions of our neighborhood and city; that he will come to know how we value our right of **free association**; and that he will appreciate the value we place on the principle of **subsidiarity**. This last principle requires that the higher level of administration in a society never interfere with the internal life of the people of the community at a lower level in the society, thus depriving the lower order of its functions; but rather, the higher level should be supportive of the lower order in case of need. **These are principles that together with respect for the common good are regarded by Catholic Social Teaching as part of the natural law, written on the human heart and the laws of all institutions must be interpreted in light of these principles.**

To fulfill the Bishop's request, I am inviting any of you who are in parish leadership who are also interested in being part of a St. Colman team to help implement the merger with St. Stephen's to call me so that I can set a meeting. The Bishop wants us to meet before April 22, 2009. You can reach me at the Parish Office at (216) 651-0550.

Sincerely,

Father Bob Begin
Pastor