

Summary of Parish Community Meeting, October 29, 2018

We had a well-attended and candid gathering of parishioners Monday evening in church, including school parents and other parishioners, our school principal, teachers and staff, our parish staff, our finance council and school advisory board, our auxiliary group leaders, members of the Vicariate staff and Office of Catholic Schools and our Vicar, Auxiliary Bishop Mark Bartosic. We began with a prayer led by our Bishop and then proceeded with a presentation from Tim Cawley, head of school and parish operations in the Archdiocese, detailing financial and enrollment data and trends regarding our school and various options going forward. Our Finance Council president, Dan Schermerhorn, also presented additional information of our school and helped lead the discussion in a heartfelt and fruitful way. Ideas and comments from over 40 parishioners who took the opportunity to speak and ask questions over a 2+ hour period rounded out a productive, spirit filled parish community meeting. I believe all who gathered were pleased to have this opportunity to share their thoughts, feelings, criticisms and hopeful comments and I felt it was a positive and healthy experience overall.

To summarize the suggestions going forward, four paths were the focus of the discussion:

1. A cash infusion into our school of \$250-300K, above our current fundraising activities, by January 2019.
2. Integrate SJA School into St. Athanasius School.
3. Integrate SJA School and St. Joseph School in Wilmette into a new entity.
4. And then the least desirable path, close SJA School with no further action.

Integrating or merging schools offer a combination of strengths and challenges, unique to each option under consideration. The possible joining up with St. Joseph's School becomes a little more complicated given the announcement last year that both St. Joseph's and St. Francis Xavier parishes in Wilmette will come together to create a new parish with a new Pastor in July 2019. St. Athanasius is ready to welcome our students, however, they are not able to commit to a full merger at this time. So, we are doing our due diligence by establishing a SJA School Strategic Leadership Committee, headed by our Finance Council president, Dan Schermerhorn, with members from our School Advisory Board, PSO and parish auxiliary groups. They will be exploring these options, identifying the pro's and con's and report back to the parish and school community to help parents evaluate what may be best for their families. Acknowledging time is of the essence, this committee is already active in getting and evaluating the information desired to make the best recommendations for our parish families and later, give to the Archdiocese for the Cardinal's decision. You will be kept informed.

In the meantime, let's pray up a storm in our homes, in our school and at the Sunday Eucharist where the community gathers in vibrant worship of our God and to be nourished by the Word proclaimed and the Sacrament received. God's hand is surely in this as the Lord walks with us and the Spirit guides our open minds and hearts. Thanks to all who are involved and helping along the way. And, thanks be to God for all of our blessings!

Fr. Dan, Pastor

Dan Schermerhorn, Finance Council President