

Dear Parishioners of the Church of St. Mary,

Since March 11, 2016, all of us in the Parish of the Church of St Mary have been through a challenging and painful time as a result of the intentional destruction of our beloved and beautiful church. It was thought and expected that our severely damaged church structure would be restored to its former glory. The Parish Council proposed a plan to restore our building to our diocese building commission. This proposal was not accepted by the diocese. The Parish Council has worked hard to find the best solutions. This has taken a long time.

The Parish Council is hopeful as we look to the future. We have felt much energy from the volunteers of our parish as we consider what is next. We want to take this opportunity to give you some updates regarding our process and site selection.

The Parish Council and Church Building Team are working with our Architect and Liturgical Design Consultant to evaluate our building site options. This has included a survey of our property and current church building site. This has been very informative and we have discovered concerns related to our current church building site. Eleven concerns have been identified with this 1.5 acre lot. These would need approval and variances by the city planning and zoning commission and the Melrose City Council. These include issues with our property lines, parking availability (150 off-street spots will be needed), coverage of property by structure and other impervious conditions, water runoff, building height, setbacks from property lines, etc.

These issues then led to exploration of other options on our current property. The second option being explored is the land adjacent to St Mary's School (SMS). This option has some benefits as it could create a unified campus with all facilities attached to or near SMS. This option also brought up concerns with property lines, setbacks, issues including the building now housing the Museum, parking near the school, soil conditions, access, entrance and visibility of the church and the length of time this project would affect our school lunch issues, Friday Masses, etc.

A third option has led to our property just south of the cemetery with entrances off Kraft Drive. Our parish owns 6.5 acres of property that is attached to the cemetery. It can be easily accessed and is visible. This green space would give us a blank slate to create a new worship space, gathering space, fellowship hall, offices and give us room to grow in the future. The Parish Council has been working closely with the SMS Board and our Cemetery Board as we explore this option. Obviously, being a bit farther from SMS creates some challenges for daily meals and weekly mass. Although not perfect (no option has been), this scenario may open some other possibilities. SMS School Board will look into options for their needs now and in the future. The Parish Council has worked with the cemetery board as this site would obviously affect future growth of our cemetery.

Another issue that affects the parish of the Church of St. Mary is the lawsuit. Any plan that includes our current site, structure or elements of our structure is vulnerable as any lawsuit can be unpredictable. Collaboration continues with our legal counsel in this matter.

At this time, the Parish Council, in continued collaboration with the St. Mary's School Board, Cemetery Board, Finance Council, our Architect, our Liturgical Design Consultant, and Church Building Team has selected this site south of the cemetery as the most suitable option for our new worship space.

Title work and the soil testing has been initiated. Some questions still exist; but research and conversations thus far have been encouraging.

We are grateful to all who have given so much of their time and talent for the future of our parish.

We are companions on the journey.

With much thanks.

Parish Council,

Church of St. Mary