

*Dear Parishioners,*

I write to inform you about the pending sale of the Saint Mary of the Assumption property on Conarroe and Carson Streets. Over the past year, through different venues, I have tried to keep the parish community aware of this possibility.

In early August, as part of an annual fiscal report (August 1, 2015) I presented some significant real estate decisions that were suggested and undertaken by the Real Estate Subcommittee of the parish Finance Council. Namely, securing "appraisals for parcels of real estate that belong to the parish and were under consideration for development or sale." This decision was based on the reality that the parish could not retain all its combined real estate assets resulting from the 2012 merger of Catholic parishes in Manayunk. "To try and do so would financially cripple the parish and its future pastoral efforts, goals and mission." The actions of the subcommittee were also focused on some major goals, especially, to ensure that the timing of any revenue from such sales would serve the overall current and urgent practical needs of the parish while remaining mindful of the long-term pastoral planning and spiritual needs of the parish.

On the weekend of October 17/18, 2015, I also shared the news that Archbishop Chaput and the Council of Priests had responded in agreement to a petition for the relegation for Saint Mary of the Assumption Church, effective November 1, 2015. The relegation of a church is a conical process and designation effecting the formal status of a church building "from sacred to profane but not sordid use" and marks its closing as a Roman Catholic church and worship site opening it to the possibility of future development for secular use. This news was also carried by the local and city media.

Once the petition for relegation of Saint Mary of the Assumption Church was accepted, I entertain serious interest from outside developers for the property. On Friday, March 4, 2016, as pastor of the parish I signed an agreement of sale for the former Saint Mary of the Assumption properties inclusive of the church building, rectory, school, convent and parking lot. This will be followed by several weeks of "due diligence" on the part of the buyer with an eventual "closing date" schedule in early to mid July. The buyer is planning an introduction of himself and a development plan at a future community civic meeting. Please note that this sale of property does not include Saint Mary's Woods on Port Royal Avenue or the parish cemetery on Cinnaminson Street. With an eye toward maintaining some of the legacy of Saint Mary of the Assumption for the community, at the pastoral council meeting on Tuesday it was suggested that partial proceeds from the sale be put aside to help make repairs and maintain Saint Mary Cemetery as well as plan for the future use of the Woods. A very good idea which I will present to the parish finance counsel and put into practice.

Any decisions to sell parish property is very significant and can have huge implications for our church community. This decision is rooted in many hours of discussion and prayerful discernment. As you can imagine, efforts like this are also steeped with many archdiocesan, real estate and legal procedural requirements. Pastorally, my intention with major decisions and actions on behalf of the community is always to try and keep the parish informed and to seek advice as thoroughly as possible and reasonable from parish leadership and professional consultants. Even so, the decision to sell the Conarroe and Carson Street properties at Saint Mary took many months to make and complete. While I do believe the decision makes good practical sense for the overall welfare of the parish, I also found it a very difficult decision to arrive at knowing the important and meaningful role that Saint Mary of the Assumption Church and parish has played in the lives of the members of our community whose life of faith began and grew there.

I ask all in the parish to be mindful of and pray for our brothers and sisters who have deep roots and loving memories of Saint Mary parish community. This news can be especially sad for them to hear and a difficult cross to bear.

During the Lenten Season in the church we pay particular attention to the cross. Strangely enough, deep within our faith, at the core of Catholicism, a religion of hope, joy, love and life, is an image representing death, failure, struggle and pain. This paradox is central to the meaning of who Jesus is as Divine Savior and who we are as believers and followers. In our second reading this weekend, Saint Paul makes it clear that the cross is not simply an abstract doctrine but a reality to which his whole life as an apostle of Christ is conformed. Only by becoming like Christ in his death, only by sharing his suffering and by living in the ambiguous "not yet" present can the Apostle know the power of Christ's resurrection now, and hope to attain it fully when Christ returns.

I hope that all the decisions that I implement on behalf of the parish, some difficult to make and even more difficult to hear, help us to know God's plan for our community better, accept the invitation to conform ourselves to Christ by joining our struggles to the cross of Christ, as we bear them together, and as Saint Paul suggest, giving us the ability to "strain forward to what lies ahead, toward the goal, the prize of God's upward calling, in Christ Jesus."

Sincerely, 