

Future of Warwick's parishes the focus of "Town Hall Meeting"

Feb. 19, 2017—It was more than a full house! On Wednesday, Feb. 8, as had been announced, eight of 10 pastors and parishioners from across Warwick gathered at Bishop Hendricken High School for a "Town Hall Meeting" to discuss with Diocesan officials, and with each other, the future of the parish structure in Warwick. As we all know from the most recent data, our city's population—as in many RI communities—is diminishing. Parish churches and schools, most of them built in the '50s and '60s, are aging and resources are scarce in some parishes.

This meeting was a pro-active and first step toward addressing the issues facing us before they become problems, and further prevent them from becoming crises. Thanks to all those from Saint Kevin's who attended the meeting and then offered their suggestions advice afterward.

Bishop Tobin has mandated that we not take a "top down" approach, but rather, that it be a collaborative effort that includes clergy, religious, parish staffs, and parishioners. As a result, a committee comprised of Warwick's Catholic parishioners and pastors will be created. This group will research and provide recommendations and options to the Diocesan Pastoral Planning Committee. The Planning Committee will then review the plan and forward it to the Bishop. Once these recommendations are approved, steps will begin that will make the Catholic community in our city stronger and more viable for the future.

When you think about it, we are in a better situation than our founders—whom we honored this past October. They started out with only a big, empty piece of farmland on which to build. Masses were celebrated at the Knights of Columbus Hall and later at Bishop Hendricken. Finally, those ambitious construction plans were completed, resulting in churches and schools that continue to stand strong and are still spiritually, fiscally, and pastorally strong.

Here are the data for the entire Diocese: In October 2005, Sunday Mass attendance was 126,500 people. In 2013, attendance was only 105,000. Sixty-four percent of baptisms in 1975 were Catholic, while in 2012, Catholic baptisms were down to 28%. Lastly, in 1975, 52% of marriages were celebrated in a Catholic church, but in 2012, only 16% were held in a Catholic church. The reasons are many, but the reality is that the challenges facing us can also provide exciting opportunities for all of Warwick's Catholics to work together across parish boundaries. This will certainly lead to a future as bright and vibrant as in the past.

Our next step is to initiate a small group study. All pastors and 4-5 parishioners from each parish will meet to begin discussing and researching possible solutions. If you are interested in participating, please call Lisa in the parish office. If there is an abundance of volunteers, a lottery will determine the representatives from Saint Kevin's. We will continue praying at all of our weekend Masses that the Holy Spirit may guide us to make our Catholic community a place for many to find inspiration, strength, and faith now and in the years to come.

—Father Bob Marciano