

‘Growing Disciples’ Data, Comments, Questions and Answers for Holy Trinity Parish and Historic St Patrick Parish Town Hall Meetings (October, 2023)

Dear Fellow Parishioners of Holy Trinity and Historic St Patrick Parishes,

As you are likely well-aware, both our parishes are directly affected by virtue of the ‘Growing Disciples’ proposal to have a newly formed parish between the parishioners of St Mary, Historic St Patrick, and Holy Trinity. St Mary’s (SM) site would be designated as the “primary site,” Historic St Patrick (HSP) as the “secondary site,” and Holy Trinity (HT) as “not to be open.” Undoubtedly to many of us, this is challenging news! Especially in regard to Holy Trinity church building designated as “not to be open” serves as a sad proposal, to say the least. Please know of my shared sadness as well as my prayers for all of you who are struggling with this proposal in this point of the Growing Disciples process! I would most assuredly appreciate your prayers for *me* as well! As a result of HT being the most impacted by the Growing Disciples proposal, I will spend a majority of my time on it versus that of HSP.

I must admit I feel like a contractor for an interstate highway, which has just been proposed by a city council to include that interstate to go through a neighborhood that includes a close family member’s house, that must be moved, sold, or demolished to make way for the interstate highway: I understand the overall *wisdom* of the need for the interstate highway but it directly impacts people with whom I am close and care deeply for; those family members and I have many years of memories, experiences and emotions about the house. Additionally, I would very much like to maintain the status quo: having two great parish families, worshiping in two beautiful churches, working with fantastic people (who put up with me!) and in a great community (B-N) and living in a beautiful rectory. But my understanding of these statistics and this proposal by the Diocese is growing in agreement as I ponder these stats and proposal.

As I mentioned at all the Masses last weekend, I will be compiling a number of facts and figures for your consideration in order to better understand why the proposals from the Growing Disciples leaders were put forward in the manner they were. Below are not only those facts, figures, and comments but also FAQs and answer to those questions, to the best of my ability at this time. I would ask that you carefully read these facts, figures, comments and FAQs and “sit with them.” Additionally, please consider attending the October 22nd town hall meetings for our two parishes---per the bulletin times and venues---but before doing so please apprise yourself of them so we have more fruitful meetings. Also, please go to our parishes’ website (hsp-ht.org) to obtain access to helpful and relevant information about the whole Growing Disciples process. Lastly, I would please ask you not to jump to conclusions or make sweeping assumptions about the proposals that directly affect our parishes but rather, be open to the perspective of the Growing Disciples team. One way of looking at what Growing Disciples is seeking to help Bishop Louis Tylka and our Diocese to be good stewards of what we Catholics have in tangible things (real estate, buildings, and monetary assets) and to “right-size” these things so we can re-invigorate our communities to be missionary disciples: being faithful disciples of our Savior, Jesus Christ, and to help *make additional* active and faithful disciples.

Let us continue to all pray the Holy Spirit continues to guide this process as well as all of us! ~Fr Stirniman~

Some general demographics and historical facts for our consideration:

1. In the western nations only about 20% to 25% of Catholics practice their Catholic Faith (ie, mainly worshiping God at Holy Mass weekly); arguably this is the most impactful statistic that has directly affected us in our parishes. If this trajectory continues, we will obviously have considerably smaller-sized parishes and thus will need less and less space and fewer and fewer buildings.
2. Of young Catholics who are Confirmed, 85% of them will cease to practice their Catholic Faith by the time they are 21 years of age. Do we have any reason to believe this is different in our parishes or this statistic will change?
3. In 2010 we had an average of 1480 worshipers at Holy Trinity church building; in 2023 we have an average of 430 worshipers. [cf. graph of all parishes in the Bloomington-Normal area] What would that number be in five years? Some would argue that the drastic reduction of HT worshipers on any given weekend was primarily due to the reduction of five Masses down to two Masses. One could argue this point conversely: due to the ever-declining number of worshipers, priests throughout the years reduced the number of (needed) Masses.

4. The demographics of the B-N area is that most of the growth is eastward. Additionally, the demographics of a “downtown parish” such as HT has drastically changed (ie, much fewer Catholics living in and around HT campus).
5. Over the decades, HT’s campus has “lost” the following buildings/ministries: Grade School; Convent; High School; and most recently, the Junior High School. Out of necessity these were moved “off campus” or done away with definitively. FYI, whenever schools are removed from a parish campus it does two things: it shows the demographics in and around the school campus has changed such that the school is seriously diminishing; and, once the school(s) are removed, there is much less incentive for young Catholic families to join that parish.
6. There has been a significant decrease in the number of students from HT at our shared school of Corpus Christi as well as in our HT CCD program. In 2010 enrolled in HT’s CCD there were 150 and, in 2022 there were 37. HT’s First Holy Communions in 2010 was 49 and in 2022 was 12. HT’s # of students at Corpus Christi in 2010 was 228 and 88 in 2023. HT’s # of students at Central Catholic in 2010 was 99 and 55 in 2023.

FAQs and some answers, when possible: [NB: these do not include all the questions that I have heard being asked. Also, there is speculation in my answers to a lot of these questions.]

Q: Is this proposal final. **A:** No. Will this proposal likely change, depending on what parishioners send to the Bishop/Diocese? **A:** I don’t know.

Q: Why did I hear of this proposal from the paper rather than from our Pastor/Parish? **A:** I could not divulge anything about this before it was officially released on to the diocesan website (Oct 1). During bulletin announcements I prompted parishioners weeks in a row to check out the proposals on the diocesan website. [As a sidenote, I believe the proposals info on the diocesan website is difficult to maneuver.]

Q: What does Fr Stirniman think about this proposal? **A:** See first two paragraphs above.

Q: Was Fr Stirniman part of the team who made this proposal? **A:** No. There was a lot of information our front offices had to collect and then we had to send it to the Diocese, as did all other parishes. The diocese took it from there.

Q: Why is the largest church of the three churches being closed? **A:** My guess: because it has had the largest declines (worshippers, CCD, Schools, FHCs, etc) and it is the most expensive to operate.

Q: Will the newly configured parishes be re-named? **A:** I don’t know; perhaps that will be up to the newly-formed communities.

Q: To what parishes will HT parishioners go? **A:** To whatever parishes they wish.

Q: What happens to families from HT and HSP with students at Corpus Christi; will they be required to go to St Mary School? **A:** No; the grade school you wish your children to attend will determine at what parish you will be required to register.

Q: What happens to families from HT and HSP with students at Central Catholic HS? **A:** It will continue to be required that they are registered at a local parish.

Q: What about the \$350K/year that HT pays to Corpus and \$150K/year HT pays to Central for their financial well-being? **A:** Options are available to address this issue, including earmarking significant monies for years to come to the schools.

Q: How are HT and HSP financially? **A:** They are both doing fine. Both regularly meet their operation expenses. **A:** HT has \$2.1M in DLF; HSP has \$815K in DLF.

Q: Where would this money go if HT were closed? **A:** To the newly-formed parish and its ministries. **A:** The proceeds from any/all sales goes to the other grouped sites.

Q: What would happen to our buildings (Church, Parish Center, Rectory) and real estate if HT were closed? **A:** One or more of the following four things: Sell as is; tear down and sell parcels; continue to use some for benefit of other parish sites until no longer needed; let dilapidate

Q: What is likely to happen to the St Vincent de Paul Ministry and buildings and grounds? **A:** SVDP will continue their ministry; a number of good options are being discussed and the Diocese of Peoria is involved in that discussion.

Q: Would HT church remain open for special celebrations/needs such as weddings, funeral, baptisms, concerts, etc? **A:** I do not know; we would have to consider many facets to determine that.

Q: What is the time-line for this consolidation? **A:** The Diocese speculates up to two years after May 19, 2024. In my opinion, that would be the longest time-frame; ‘likely shorter for closures of church buildings due to prohibitive costs of heating, cooling, liability insurance and maintenance.

Q: What priest or priests would be associated with this new configuration? **A:** Fr Greg and Fr Peter and I do not know.

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
St. Mary	1280	1323	1260	1276	1221	1249	1149	1138	1071	979	432		684	
Holy Trinity	1409	1253	1148	1127	1086	1085	1043	773	684	595	271	359	426	428
Epiphany	1480	1711	1766	1756	1745	1821	1920	2007	1835	1833	631	1023	1233	
Historic St. Patricks	412	455	418	400	463	488	504	496	442	388	193	293	316	368
St. Patrick of Merna	2033	2282	2085	2120	2181	2030	1980	1974	1950	1899		997	1281	
St. Mary Downs	251	251	251	288	210	230	246	236	223	207			167	
	6865	7275	6928	6967	6906	6903	6842	6562	6205	5901	1527	2672	4107	796

