

Dear Parishioners,

As you well know, we had an open parish meeting regarding Sacred Heart this past week. I would like to thank the 80+ people who attended this meeting and those who have shared other thoughts. Your questions and comments were insightful.

As you are also aware, St. Benedict Parish has a number of buildings, including four church buildings. Care for our properties has been a financial challenge to the parish. At Sacred Heart Church alone, the exterior brick needs nearly \$60,000 of care soon. A fuller, but older preliminary budget for the care of all that is needed to be done at Sacred Heart listed an estimated cost of over \$430,000. (The 2018-2019 fiscal year budget for parish-wide maintenance needs is a little over \$50,000.) Taking into consideration the known maintenance needs that have been deferred, especially those at Sacred Heart Church, the parish Facilities Visioning Team recommended various triggers leading to deeper investigations and possible building closures. Those triggers, one priest assigned to the parish and \$50,000+ of repairs needed to the church building, have been met for Sacred Heart Church. After consulting with the Finance Council, the Pastoral Council, and the people of St. Benedict Parish during the open parish meeting, I, on behalf of St. Benedict Parish, Atchison, have officially recommended that the Archbishop consider beginning the process leading to the closing of Sacred Heart Church.

Fr. Gary Pennings, who as the Vicar General of the Archdiocese attended the meeting on behalf of the Archbishop, mentioned that he will be sharing the feedback from the open parish meeting with the Archbishop. The Archbishop also must consult his Presbyteral Council before he will make any decision. The timeline on when his decision will be made is unknown.

On behalf of the entire parish, I would like to thank all of those who gave so much to Sacred Heart Church. We recognize that this is a moment of sadness for you and for the entire parish. Yet, it is also an opportunity to celebrate how God has blessed us through those who have attended Sacred Heart for the last 125 years.

In light of the proposed closure of Sacred Heart, I would like to ask for your help.

We have begun forming three committees:

- Celebration Committee – This group will determine what an appropriate celebration, which gives thanks for all the ways that those who attended Sacred Heart have built up and continue to build up God's kingdom here in Atchison, would look like. They then will plan and coordinate that celebration.
- Heritage Committee – This group will explore how we can make sure that we remember the heritage of Catholicism in Atchison that has been passed on to us. As part of this, they will be investigating what items may be considered of significance to those who attended Sacred Heart Church and how they may be incorporated into our parish in a way that makes sense. They also will explore ways we can redecorate the St. Joseph Church basement to better acknowledge our history.

- Care of Material Goods Committee – This group is to assist me in determining what should be done with the material goods at Sacred Heart, assuming the Archbishop approves the closure. They will gather information and assist me in the sale and dispersal of the property and other items.

If you would like more information or may like to help any of these committees, please contact the following people: Sarah Peitsch (426-0975), Darlene DuLac (426-0708), or the Parish Office (367-0671).

Also, we realize that the proposed closure will lead to some changes. A couple of the topics we have been exploring include:

- Mass times and locations – As you may realize, the number of people who attend the Saturday Masses at Sacred Heart and St. Joseph are greater than the number of seats available at St. Joseph. Additionally, you may realize that over this summer there are eight primary Masses in Atchison. But, during any given weekend any one of us could only attend three Masses fully. This is because the non-school year schedule has two Masses during the 4 o'clock hour on Saturday, two during the 8 o'clock hour and four during the 10 o'clock hour on Sunday morning. I am working with both the parish Pastoral Council and the superiors and chaplains of the other Catholic institutions to examine Mass times in Atchison. My hope is that we may have a greater diversity of opportunities to attend Mass. Within the next few weeks, I hope to have a proposal for a new Mass schedule. I will welcome your feedback on it. We are considering instituting the new schedule around the beginning of the school year.
- Parking – I also have had some conversations with parishioners and also with the city and the college about parking near St. Benedict Church to see in what ways we can better protect and accommodate those attending Mass, especially the handicapped and elderly. Hopefully, the resolution will be positive.

We recognize that this is a sad moment for many parishioners, but also an opportunity for grace and growth. Catholics in Atchison have faced many changes over the last 165 years. The changes have been difficult. We have not just survived them, but we strive to thrive. As Fr. Gary reminded us at the meeting, the grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies before it bears great fruit.

I ask for your prayers, your courtesy, and your work so that this change too will go as smoothly as possible. I also ask that you help me in reaching out to others and helping to spread the Good News of Jesus. Maybe you would even consider joining me in asking those who attended Sacred Heart before us and now have gone on to their eternal reward to ask our Heavenly Father that He will send His Holy Spirit to guide and strengthen us.

Know that I am here for you. Feel free to bring any questions and concerns you may have to me.

Shalom,

*Fr. Jeremy*

06/30/18