

Greetings in the Lord's Peace!

"Dream big! Nothing else is worthy of us." That is what our fore fathers and fore mothers of faith told each other as they arrived in Oswego and built this faith community from a tapestry of nations.

In recent decades, much has changed in the landscape and texture of the Catholic Church in Oswego. When we contemplate the future, what will a dynamic, healthy, vital Catholic community look like as we move forward in faith?

The Catholic Community has made a generous contribution to the culture, faith, and tone in Oswego and helped to set the pace here since the community celebrated its first recorded Mass in 1830. The Hewitt history published in 1909 on the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the diocese reports that the then worshipping Catholic population of the parishes of St. John 3050; St. Louis 1300; St. Mary 3396; St Paul 3908; and St. Peter 1118. Things change. The registered parishioners in the Oswego Catholic community in 1910, was 12,772.

The most recent October Census Mass (2017) count tells of the change with a worshipping Catholic congregation in the Oswego parishes of 1107 supported by church buildings with a seating capacity of 3360. We have no doubt that you see the implications of this truth. This trend informs us. We are asked to make wise decisions about the future. We Catholics want to assure the vibrancy and life of the Catholic community. Our patrimony is a significant presence in the life of the local community and in its living of the Gospel of Jesus Christ brings the Good News into the Oswego context.

The facts tell us to look further. Many factors provide insight into the health of parishes. Among them those which point to the real presence of Jesus Christ in the heart of our daily lives, Mass and the Sacraments are of particular importance in seeing the patterns of parish health. As witness to the change in the Catholic Community of Oswego, witness this telling chart of Sacramental activity in the Oswego Parishes of St. Paul, St. Stephen, St. Joseph, St. Peter, and St. Mary.

	<b>1987</b>	<b>1997</b>	<b>2007</b>	<b>2017</b>
Baptisms	175	124	111	62
First Communions	177	130	72	46
Confirmations	48	139	81	22
Weddings	100	64	36	16
Funerals	133	115	143	77
Student in RE Gr. 1-8	225	150	100	72

Given the reality that our beloved Oswego community has significantly changed during the last three decades, likely in equal parts due to the movement of business and industry which leads to our young people finding jobs in other parts of the nation, the aging of the local community and a measurable nation-wide shift in religious attitudes a transformative shift is taking place. On Ascension Day, Angels appeared to the disciples and said, "men of Jerusalem, why do you stand here looking up."

These facts invite a dialogue among us that will be focused. A study of the certified human and financial resources that are available for the mission of the Church in Oswego will need to be candid and the solutions creative and visionary. We will be considering the needs of an Oswego Faith community that is yet to be born. This is fair when we consider the present that we inherited from our predecessors who risked much for the Catholic Community.

The trustees of our parishes, the clergy, the parish pastoral councilors and members of the parish finance committees have seen and will share the candid assessment of the infrastructure, the realistic "footprint," and fiscal resources of our current situation? To be candid, precious resources that may be used for the mission of the Church are maintaining our many properties. These facilities are well beyond our needs. We need to pray, dialogue, pastorally plan, and to look forward.

**We began with a simple invitation. Dream big! Nothing else is worthy of us! When we contemplate the future what will a dynamic, healthy, vital Catholic community look like as we move forward in faith?**

On July 1, 2018, we will begin a year-long effort which will define the future of the Oswego Catholic Community. This effort will begin with the naming of a patron for the entire Catholic Community. Each of our parishes will use the same identity, let's, for the moment, call it "our patron at Name of Parish." By 1 July, 2019, the patron will become the name of the church campus that remains to be selected as our new parish home. The trustee groups with Father Hogan, Father Baccaro, and Deacon Alvaro will guide the work in the "steering (a.k.a. trustees)" committee. The members of the joint leadership taskforce (Parish Pastoral Council Members and Parish Finance committee members) will form four keep standing committees focused on 1) Parish Life; 2) Prayer and Worship; 3) Evangelization and Community Building; and, 3) with outside expertise Parish Facilities and Real Estate.

To be clear:

**The Steering Committee** will be focused on administration, communication, site selection, and structure.

**The Parish life Committee** will likely have several sub-committees and ad-hoc groups. These will be among the Parish Life standing committees A) Full Life Faith Formation including youth and young adult ministry, family ministries, inter-generational programs, etc. B) A ministry team dedicated to assuring that no one and no important traditions are left behind as we move to the

future. C) The Prayer and Worship Team will engage the community in weekly prayers for our efforts. The psalmist writes, "unless the Lord build the house, I vain to the builders labor." (Psalm 127). This team will invite us into Holy Hours, weekend prayer, times of recollection and, perhaps, retreats as we strive to come together in faith.

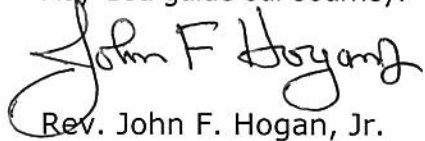
**The Evangelization and Community Building Committee** will focus on enhancing this community of disciples of Jesus as we welcome one another a community dedicated to continuing His mission in our area. This group will focus on bringing people together from the Oswego parishes to provide ample opportunity the we are a community of friends. This leadership team will also focus on ecumenical and community outreach.

**The Parish Facilities and Real Estate Committee** members will have professional expertise in evaluating all current properties, and recommending a site for the community that we are becoming to the Trustees group, exploring future uses of properties that will not be used and assuring that the yet to be determined location has all that it needs for the Catholic Community to carry on the life and ministry of Jesus, here, now and in the future.

We hope that this information is useful to you. We pray that it will take our conversation out of rumor and into the light of day. We simply must respond to the issues that have been evident to us for many years. There will be opportunities for your thoughts to enter the process for prayerful consideration. Our parishes will share information as it becomes available. Ultimately the recommendations that arise will be presented to the bishop for his prayer, discernment and actions.

Now we ask for your prayers and support as we give thanks for all that has been and move into God's good future. As we do, we hear the voices of our predecessors saying, "Dream Big! Nothing else is worthy of us."

May God guide our Journey!



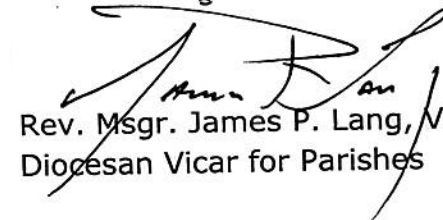
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