

14 Holy Helpers Parishioner Meeting

A parishioner meeting was held on 6-27-24 starting at 7:00 pm in the Church. Our objective was to give our parishioners the opportunity to ask any questions that they may have on the Diocesan Rightsizing process and its impact on 14 Holy Helpers or to just express their concerns about the process and the status of our parish. We asked that other issues, such as the Diocesan bankruptcy or sexual abuse claims, be addressed at a future date since we were under a deadline to respond to the Diocesan recommendation from the Rightsizing process.

The questions below were asked by attendees. Questions asked may have been included along with their concerns or several people may have asked similar questions. Those noted below would represent a combined and clarified version. The responses would have been given at the meeting and may have been updated below as we try to provide the most accurate information to our parishioners.

Overall and Process

1. Question: What is the timeline for the Rightsizing process?
 - a. Response: The process is certainly subject to adjustment by the Diocese, but based on our understanding at this time date –
 - i. Now - July 15 ... Deadline for the submission of alternative proposals to the Diocesan recommendations
 - ii. July 16 – Aug 15 ... Meetings with the Diocese and Parish Families including those submitting alternatives to review their proposals
 - iii. Aug 16 – Aug 31 ... Diocese to finalize decisions
 - iv. Sept 1 ... Announcement of the final decisions
 - v. Sept 2 through to Pentecost 2025 ... implementation of the final decisions
2. Question: Are there additional documents available to provide clarification to parishioners?
 - a. Response: All the documents that have been provided to our parish have been posted to our parish website ... 14hh.org. We will continue to post new materials as we move forward through the process. At the June 13 Vicariate meeting, all parishes were encouraged to be open and honest with our parishioners. In addition to the documents posted on our website, the Diocese has information about the process and data used to develop recommendations posted on the Diocesan website ... [DOB Rightsizing LINK](#).
3. Question: Is this proposal just a short-term proposal where we may be closed within a year?
 - a. Response: At the June 13 Vicariate meeting it was stated that the Diocese looked at their recommendations as valid for the next 10 years based on the data currently available to them. As long as our parishioners continue to use and support our parish services and facilities, the Rightsizing process decisions should be valid. Drastic changes in the underlying data or reductions in parishioner support could cause a re-evaluation of circumstances for us, and any other parishes in the Diocese.
4. Question: Why is Fr. Greg not in attendance?
 - a. Response: Fr. Greg had a previously scheduled engagement this evening. He is fully aware of this meeting and will be updated as to the discussion.

14 Holy Helpers Status under the Diocesan Recommendation

1. Question: Please clarify, under the Diocesan recommendation, what will happen to 14 Holy Helpers if we merge with another parish?
 - a. Response: As previously posted on our parish website, the Diocesan recommendation is for 14 Holy Helpers to merge with St. Gabriel's and to stay open as a secondary worship site.

2. Question: Are we losing money as a parish?
 - a. Response: No, our parish has not shown a deficit on our year end financials in the time frames reviewed by the Diocese for the Rightsizing process. Also, through the continued generosity and support of our parishioners we have been lucky to accumulate some savings intended to help us address capital projects or unexpected expenses in the future. These savings have been invested through a large financial firm and are regularly monitored by the Finance Council.

3. Question: If 14 Holy Helpers is not losing money, how can the parish be closed?
 - a. Response: First, the Diocesan recommendation is not to close 14 Holy Helpers. Second, in developing their recommendations a number of factors in addition to financial condition were taken into consideration. While 14 Holy Helpers was not recommended to be closed, it is possible that a parish which is not losing money could have been recommended for merger and closure if it was warranted based on the other factors.

4. Question: Will our weekly collection envelopes still say 14 Holy Helpers on them?
 - a. Response: Wording for the envelopes after a merger has not been discussed yet. We would expect that 14 Holy Helpers will be prominently noted on those envelopes in the future.

5. Question: Will we continue to hold our regular fundraisers such as Summerfest, the Christmas Bazaar and Bingo?
 - a. Response: YES. These fundraisers are a very important part of the current financial budget and will remain that way into the foreseeable future. Our parish can only remain viable as long as we provide funds for its operation and maintenance.

6. Question: As a secondary worship site, who decides the Mass schedule for the weekdays and weekends?
 - a. Response: We expect that the Priest in Solidum of the parish merged into in consultation with the Family Moderator will determine the Mass schedule.

7. Question: Will weekday Masses be eliminated?
 - a. Response: We have not been notified of any Mass schedule changes at this time. The best way to maintain Masses is to attend Mass and encourage others to attend as well.

8. Question: As a secondary worship site, will we be required to support the primary site along with our site?
 - a. Response: This is an area where we have received no definitive guidance. As a member of Family #7 we should support events at all the parishes in our Family. We have had no discussions as to whether we will be required to financially support the primary parish from regular collections, our fundraising events or from our assets.
9. Question: Where will our regular collections be going?
 - a. Response: We believe that a shared parish business office will manage collections and account for our regular collections. We expect that those funds will be available for the support and operation of our secondary site. Again, these procedures have not been discussed in detail with us at this time.
10. Question: Will our collection money be going to St. Gabriel's after we merge with them?
 - a. Response: Again, we believe that if a shared parish business office is set up, it will manage collections and account for our regular collections. We do expect, however, that those funds will be available for the support and operation of our secondary site. Again, these procedures have not been finalized at this time.
11. Question: What will happen to our parish assets on Sept 1?
 - a. Response: It is our understanding that our parish assets will be dedicated for use by our parish to meet future obligations. We will be looking for confirmation of this..
12. Question: What will happen to the Deaf Community?
 - a. Response: Our parish sees our relationship to the Deaf Community as mutually beneficial and has openly welcomed them to our parish. The engagement of an ASL interpreter for Masses has been supported through grant funding. Our desire would be to continue our relationship with the Deaf Ministry for the Diocese which is led by Fr. Jerry Skrzynski, Director of the Deaf Ministry for the Diocese of Buffalo
13. Question: Will we be able to maintain our parish properties in the future?
 - a. Response: Our Finance Council oversees the maintenance of properties on the parish campus. As long as our parishioners continue to provide their financial support, we should be able to continue the maintenance of our campus.
14. Question: Could we expect to keep our current parish staff?
 - a. Response: At the June 13 Vicariate meeting it was explained to us that the merging of parishes presents an opportunity to better utilize the administrative resources of the combined parish. The goal would be to reallocate parish resources to evangelization from administration. Bearing that in mind we still need to operate and manage our parish facilities. Final decisions on staffing have not been discussed at this time.
15. Question: What would happen to the Food Pantry?
 - a. Response: Our Food Pantry provides a valuable service in West Seneca as it is the only food pantry servicing shut-in clients in the 14224 zip code with food deliveries. As long as we have the facilities available to operate the pantry we want to continue with our mission to "feed the poor".

16. Question: Will our Parish Finance Council continue on after the merger?

- a. Response: The need to maintain a separate Finance Council if we are merged into another parish has not been discussed with us yet.

Pertaining to Alternative Proposals and Future Conditions

1. Question: In addition to the Diocesan recommendation, are any other alternative proposals being considered?

- a. Response: Two alternative proposals have been suggested so far –
 - i. Merge with Queen of Heaven and become a secondary worship site
 - ii. Stay as a distinct parish and merge St. John XXIII with us

2. Question: Will the alternative proposal be available for parishioners to see before it is submitted to the Diocese?

- a. Response: The Diocese has encouraged us to share information on this process with our parishioners. We are trying to be as transparent as possible with them. If we develop an alternative proposal, we do not see any reason for not sharing it.

3. Question: Is the Diocese aware that there were healing miracles performed at 14 Holy Helpers?

- a. Response: People in the early 1900s came to 14 Holy Helpers on healing pilgrimages. Numerous people claimed to be healed of their afflictions after coming to our parish and praying to be healed. We continue to house artifacts left by some of them to denote the healing, ex. a carving of a foot from someone cured of a foot ailment. While we do not have documentation that these healings were ever confirmed as miracles, people attributed their healing as miraculous after praying to the 14 Holy Helpers. The Diocese would certainly be aware of those healings.

4. Question: Is the Diocese aware of the historical nature of our church as the first Catholic Church in West Seneca and mother church of both Queen of Heaven and St. Philips?

- a. Response: The Diocese is fully aware of the history of our parish and its role in the development of Catholic parishes in West Seneca and the surrounding area. The Bishop attended our parish's 150th Anniversary dinner in 2014 where he reviewed the historical materials which were on display.

5. Question: Is 14 Holy Helpers designated as a historic site?

- a. Response: 14 Holy Helpers is listed in the National Historic Marker database. We are not included in the National Register of Historic Places.

6. Question: Can our Rectory be rented to a retired priest?

- a. Response: There are several living quarters available in our Rectory on the second floor that have been used by priests in the past. While we would not be able to provide the same services available in the Diocesan retired priest homes, the Rectory living quarters could be available if there was interest.

7. Question: Could a priest be assigned to live at our parish?

- a. Response: Living quarters for a priest are available in our Rectory. If an active or retired priest was looking for new living quarters, we would welcome him if he could accept the conditions in our Rectory.

8. Question: How do the priests in solidum feel about other parishes merging into their own parish?
 - a. Response: Different merger situations (merger and closing of the merged parish, or merger and maintaining of the merged parish as a secondary worship site) provide different challenges and responsibilities. This question would need to be directed to the priests themselves.
9. Question: Could we sell some of our buildings?
 - a. Response: Yes, we could sell some of our buildings. Currently, however, they are all being used and we are operating programs in all of them. A complicating factor in the sale of any buildings is that all the buildings on our campus share a common parking lot.
10. Question: Can our parish cemetery be sold?
 - a. Response: There are so many significant issues involved in the transferring of ownership of a cemetery that we do not consider it available for sale. Additionally, we have made a long-term commitment to the grave holders to maintain the cemetery grounds. A perpetual care fund, separate from our other accounts, has been established to finance the long-term maintenance of the cemetery. That commitment would need to be adhered to by any other organization that would try to purchase or acquire control of those grounds.