

*The following presentation regarding the ad hoc committee's formulation of the Preliminary Plan for Parishes & Facilities was made by Mr. Matt Toscano at all Masses the weekend of August 3-4, 2019.*

Good morning. My name is Matt Toscano. I am a loving husband to my amazing wife Natalie and a blessed father to my two wonderful children, Peter, who is 3, and Gabriella, who is 1 ½. I was also a member of the Ad Hoc Committee which was tasked with proposing a plan to not only stop the rapid decline of the Oil City Catholic Community but to begin to prepare for a brighter future. This was no easy task, as we were confronted with some major staggering data and information on our Catholic community, that, with plenty of prayer and thought helped us to craft what we believe is the best plan for the long-term sustainability of our Catholic community.

The most immediate problem facing our community is the condition of our church buildings. Consider the situation at St. Stephen's. There is dire need for emergency repairs. The critical repairs to the towers and front steps alone are nearly three-quarters of a million dollars. Furthermore, in the words of Building Systems Incorporated (BSI), "The exterior face is visibly falling off and severely damaged," which is an additional repair project. And this is just the beginning. There are also other concerns brought to our attention by BSI, including serious questions about the boiler that we will have to face in the very near future. All-told, St. Stephen's requires around one-million dollars in the short-term, with costs that could soar to \$3.1 million over the next 10 years.

Furthermore, our Catholic Community experienced a \$100,000+ operating deficit last year. Let me repeat that – our income fell more than \$100,000 short of our operating expenses in the last fiscal year. Following the merger of Assumption and Help of Christians with St. Joe's and St. Venantius with St. Stephen's, St. Stephen Parish has access to \$1.2 million unrestricted assets in reserve and St. Joseph Parish has \$356,000 unrestricted funds. However, the short-term critical repairs to St. Stephen's Church combined with our operating deficit will deplete all of our combined reserve funds very quickly. With our costs continuing to rise and our income continuing to decline, how will we lay the foundation for the future of our faith in this area in 5, 10, 15 or 20 years?

St. Joseph Church is not in perfect condition by any stretch of the imagination. The maintenance costs at St. Joe's could easily rise as high as \$2.5 million over the next ten years. However, there are currently no emergency repairs needed at St. Joe's. While there are some large projects that should be completed over the next 1-5 years to prevent any serious damage to the church, the costs over a longer period of time are not as high as the cost of the emergency repairs at St. Stephen's that need to be completed immediately. Doing what work is necessary to make St. Joseph Church the home for our Oil City Catholic Community will not drain our resources like St. Stephen's Church would and it will give us time to continue planning so that we can build a sustainable future for our faith in Oil City.

I love this Catholic Community. I love the compassion we show to each other and to our community. I love how we work together to make this a better world. I love this community

because when people are down or in a dark place in their lives, the Catholic Community is there to help them with open arms. I have been there, and I have felt that love of Christ in this community. To try to put the feeling of that experience into words would not do it justice. And this is something that I want my children to feel, to be a part of. I want this community to grow so that my children can experience this same feeling that I just tried to describe. And not just my children, but my grand-children, and great-grand-children and so on. And not just my children and yours – but also the people who will live in this town whom we will never meet. The generations to come who deserve to know a growing and thriving Catholic faith in this town.

I want all the people of this town – all the people we help – not just parishioners – to have a chance to experience the love of this Catholic community. Every day we help the suffering, the down-trodden, the poor, and the victimized. We are there for them; we *are* them.

God doesn't care if we go to St. Joe's or St. Stephen's or St. Venantius or Assumption or Help of Christians. No. God cares about what we do here – in our hearts. Walls, bricks, and wood don't make our faith. Our love of God and our love of neighbor make our faith.

I encourage you again to review the data available on the church website. I encourage you to offer feedback to present an even more sustainable plan for the future than we have developed. I encourage you to ask questions in order to do so. Please – if you have questions, reach out to someone who has answers. Call the priests. Talk to a committee member. We are all in this together.

I'd like to close with a quote from Pope Francis. "To change our world we must be good to those who can't repay us." That can be said of helping the people in need now as well as for our future parishioners we may never meet. Thank you.