

Chippewa Falls Area Planning Updates #1

February - March 2021

As part of the comprehensive study of parishes and schools in Chippewa Falls, this update is provided as an informational resource so that all parishioners and school parents are made aware of the developments in the process. All three parishes in Chippewa Falls have contracted with Meitler, a Milwaukee-based national Catholic school and parish consulting firm, to facilitate the process. The complete report, **Key Findings and Observations Report**, can be accessed on the McDonell Area Catholic Schools website.

What Has Been Learned About Community Demographics?

A study of the Chippewa Falls area, based on the boundaries used by the school district and Chamber of Commerce, revealed these projections and forecasts for the next five to ten years:

- **Population Growth:** Population is forecast to grow by over 6%, potentially increasing the population by over 2,000 new residents. A projection of 1,500 new housing units in the area indicates that the number of summer residents will also increase.
- **Fastest Growing Age Groups:** As part of these projections and forecasts, the age 65-plus group and the 20's and 30's age groups will increase more than other age groupings.
- **Income, Adult Educational Level:** In general, the area has lower household incomes than the State of Wisconsin as well as lower levels of adult educational attainment than the State.
- **Poverty:** The Chippewa Falls area has a poverty level lower than the State of Wisconsin but the City of Chippewa Falls has a higher level than the State.
- **Catholics in the Area:** About 26% of all residents are Catholic, down from 29% ten years ago. The parishes have registered about 63% of all these self-identified Catholics or 2,234 households. There are another 1,321 unregistered Catholic households in the area.
- **No Religious Involvement:** About 28.5% of area residents have no religious connection whatsoever. Right now, that amounts to approximately 9600 people.

What Has Been Learned About MACS (McDonell Area Catholic Schools)?

For this part of the study, data was collected, parents were surveyed and stakeholders were interviewed. Here are some of the highlights.

- **Enrollment is Healthy:** Over the past five years, the elementary grades have increased by 11%, middle school by 13%, and high school by 2%.
- **Capacity Levels:** Both the Primary and Elementary school buildings are at capacity; and, each of the facilities have varying degrees of upgrades as noted in the MACS Buildings and Enrollment report 2019-20 dated 1/10/2020. The Primary School (early childhood - 2nd grade) located at St. Charles Borromeo Parish School building has 16 classrooms. The cost to replace or fully repair major systems is estimated to be in the 1.8-2.2 million dollar range. The Elementary school (grades 3-5) located at Holy Ghost Parish School building has 11 classrooms and recently replaced the roof, boilers, and renovated the gymnasium. MACS Middle and High School building (grades 6-12) has 26 classrooms plus band room, commons, gymnasium and chapel recently updated their security, A/V system, boilers and gymnasium. Notre Dame Parish School building has 17 classrooms (not currently used by MACS). The cost to replace or fully repair major systems is estimated at 1.5-1.8 million dollars.
- **Retention Levels:** Retention of students from grade-to-grade is very high, always above 93% and often at or above 100% (due to additional student transfers into the school).
- **Parental Satisfaction with the School:** A survey of parents revealed strong satisfaction with MACS. Parents are so satisfied with MACS that 82% of parents of a current student who have another child(ren) younger than kindergarten age indicated that they would enroll their other child(ren) in the school.
- **Why Parents Like the School:** The highest rated aspects of the school were the faculty and the academic rigor.
- **Tuition:** 74% of all MACS students receive some tuition assistance. The school provides aid to 178 students or 38%. The Wisconsin Choice Program provides vouchers to 137 students or 29%. Other public scholarships were given to 32 students or 7%.
- **Revenue:** 52% of the MACS income comes from tuition and fees. The parish subsidy accounts for 17% of revenue. Another 10% comes from fundraising and the balance is derived from a variety of small revenue sources.
- **Facilities:** The facilities for the elementary and middle schools are old, in need of repair and updating, and near capacity, which limits future expansion. Because the high school depends on the elementary and middle schools for its enrollment, limiting the lower grades also limits the high school.

What Has Been Learned About the Parishes?

For this part of the study, parish data and information on the basic makeup of each parish generated from the parish census revealed these key insights about Holy Ghost, Notre Dame and St. Charles Borromeo Parishes:

- **Membership:** Registered parish membership has been stable in all three parishes. The parishes are relatively close in the number of members at each parish.
- **Sacramental Reception:** With a few exceptions, sacramental reception is decreasing at all the parishes.
- **Religious Education Enrollments:** Enrollments on the elementary and high school levels are both decreasing.
- **Ratio of Baptisms to Funerals:** Church planners look for parishes to have a ratio of two baptisms for each funeral. All three parishes have varying ratios of more funerals than baptisms.
- **Older and Wealthier Than the Area:** When comparing registered parishioners to the residents in the area: parish members are older, there are fewer young people, and parish households have higher incomes. The total household incomes from all three parishes are over \$150 million dollars.
- **History of Collaboration:** Going back to 1987 when MACS was born, the parishes have a long history of collaboration on ministerial efforts and, over the years, have expanded the number of shared ministries.
- **Need for Facility and Financial Strategy:** Leaders from all three parishes expressed a need to incorporate new financial and facility strategies for the future. The main driving factors for their analysis are aging buildings and expenses increasing faster than contributions.

What Are Parishioners Thinking as Possibilities for the Future?

Virtual parish gatherings were held for each of the three parishes. At the end of those meetings, parishioners were able to discuss various possibilities for the future in each of seven ministry areas. These possibilities either flowed from what the data had revealed or had been suggested by parish or school leaders. All the possibilities can be viewed on pp. 30-31 in the **Key Findings Report** and the results of the polling can be viewed in the **Polling Results Report**. While many of the possibilities in the poll will be addressed in the Pastoral Plan, at this point, the preferred option in each ministry area is:

- **Catholic Schools:** Develop a stronger advancement stream of revenue through the addition of personnel and training to build the annual fund and donor relations.

What Are Parishioners Thinking as Possibilities for the Future? *(continued)*

- **Parish Outreach:** Combine all parish outreach committees and projects under common leadership for all three parishes.
- **Faith Formation and Evangelization:** Add a ministry for young adults, age group of 20's and 30's.
- **Stewardship and Communications:** Develop an area-wide approach to communications.
- **Worship and Prayer:** Offer area-wide prayer experiences and devotions for parishioners from all three parishes.
- **Finances and Facilities:** Assess all parish and school facility needs and develop a long-range strategy and master plan.
- **Parish Organization:** Determine staffing needs for all three parishes and move to one staff at one parish office.

What Happens Next?

Throughout this process, the consultants and representatives from the Leadership Team will meet with Bishop Callahan and his team to keep the Diocese informed about any developments. The Leadership Team, comprised of the three pastors and leaders from MACS, as well as the Planning Task Force, made up of lay representatives from each parish and MACS, will now begin to develop a vision for the future and draft a long-range plan. The responsibility to develop and recommend a final plan rests with these groups but input from the parish and school gatherings is essential to shape the drafts. Here is what parishioners can anticipate for their next steps.

- **Parishioner Review of the Draft Plan:** By April or May of 2021, a draft will be ready for review. Another round of parish gatherings as well as ones for school parents will be scheduled. It is likely that these will be virtual because of ongoing safety concerns.
- **Regular Communications and Access to All Data and Released Drafts of the Plan:** Updates such as this will be made available as the plan develops. All the data which has been compiled and the draft of the plan can be accessed on the webpage at MACS.
- **Approval of the Plan:** By May or June of 2021, the final plan will be approved. Parishioners will have an opportunity to participate in this rollout event virtually or in-person.

Please keep this important planning process in your prayer. Fr. Justin Kizewski, Pastor of Holy Ghost Parish, has composed a prayer for the Chippewa Falls area, "Prayer to Our Lady of the Falls." The prayer can be accessed on the webpage. The leadership team and task force begin each meeting with the prayer.