

## Journey of Faith Town Hall Meeting: Community Input

1/3/23

Below is a recap of the input from our St. Bernard Community members that attended the Town Hall Meeting:

Fr. Gadache: Community of OLA and Michael the Archangel-celebrating as a community while navigating how to blend all three communities. African community is spread throughout Metro area. To keep the community intact, it is vital to keep the African culture of celebrating the liturgy. In the future, there may be just one parish. As of right now, we have separate infrastructures. Must create the African community at Bernard's before being able to blend as one community. Does not foresee many families moving their children to the school as of right now. Don't go away because of this, let's continue our rich heritage and history of STB going. Focus on the love you have for this parish, the love you have for Jesus. Will our love of Christ change because of a Mass time?

Why the move from St. Gerald?

- The community was not welcomed as part of the larger church community of St. Gerald.
- The community felt as if they were tenants instead of actual members.

Sunday Masses explained. The decision came about when answering the question of whether three Masses were needed to accommodate the STB community. Attendance at Masses are not high enough to need three Masses plus one OLA Mass (Four Masses for Fr.). Even if the African community were not coming to STB, the 10:00 am Mass would probably still be discontinued. Initially the parish family for STB was going to be St. Phil's and Holy Name with just one pastor amongst the three churches resulting in losing two Masses per weekend. With our new family, we get to have our own pastor. Some parishes losing their church, losing all their Masses. Masses must be taken away from most parishes in order to combat the priest shortage.

**When asked:** How to incorporate all three communities while maintaining each community's identity

**Community members responded:**

1. OLA choir for 5 pm Mass once per month, possible 8:30 Mass, our choir can still sing, too.
  - a. Rotating choir schedule.
2. Community of the school and childcare should also be considered as many families join the parish because of the childcare and school, i.e., Dinner Auction.
3. STB parishioners should be understanding and welcoming of the new culture and participate within it and vice versa.
  - a. What are some of the customs of the African community?
  - b. Is there an event that OLA puts on that our community can learn and participate in, as well?
4. Understanding from STB parishioners that both OLA and St. Michael the Archangel communities are losing their home, which can be difficult. Let's ensure a safe space for them to build or rebuild their community within our church. Allow time for the communities to define their individual sense of community here before incorporation of STB parishioners and the African communities.
5. Difficult to bring together OLA and St. Michael the Archangel as one community. The slow evolution of the three individual communities into one will take time, years.
6. STB parishioners do not know what differences are between the African Mass and the STB Mass.
7. Concerns for our parish are that we will lose people because of the loss of the 10 am Mass. What can we do to help with the transition for current parishioners?

**When asked:** Clear path to discipleship? What new things must be imagined?

**Community members responded:**

1. Our parish puts a lot of energy into the school. We should put more energy into the parish to gain a deeper sense of discipleship. Archdiocese should take over the schools and be separate from the parishes

so churches can focus on discipleship. This would take a financial weight off the churches as well as allow a focus to be on discipleship.

2. Have Father speak to the parish/school families about why we attend Mass (see above).
3. Visiting our physical neighbors and letting them know that we are a safe space to pray and help support them.
4. We need to meet people where they already are that are here in the parish. How do we get those parishioners to participate more fully and help them deepen their relationship with Christ?
5. Christ Life (St. Leo's). Small groups. Starting a small group on Wednesday nights 1/11 with John Keyser.
6. Small groups started from a grass roots movement, word of mouth. Go from a quick ten-minute meeting after an event to attendance at Mass bit by bit.
7. "Little steps": prayer cards at events, coffee and donuts, small groups.
  - a. Keep the door open, literally.
  - b. Need people. Welcoming committee needs more volunteers.
8. Invitations: welcoming new people. Introducing yourself.
9. Supper club. Families getting dinner together and inviting the priest.
10. Phone calls. When you haven't seen someone at church in a while, reach out. How are things going? Are you okay? Let's get breakfast, etc.
11. Social activities. Community days. Different ministries have "party times" that everyone is invited to. Activities that are not just prayer/prayer group.
12. Stay connected to entire life of the Church.
13. Adult formation needs.
14. Ministry fair.
15. Sharing of members of groups when needed. Choirs between groups (St. Leo and St. Pius X, too) helping each other out when needed.
16. Being disciples in small ways. Telling someone that Jesus loves them. The way you act/treat people may be the only version of the gospel someone knows.
17. From a note card: What about youth and Littles ministry? We used to have youth group. Used to have "littles" leave before Mass started to go with a "minister" to the Clairvaux Center for their own understanding session of the Gospel.
18. From a note card: I don't know how to say it without sounding like "Us vs. Them", but it FEELS like the culture of STB is being cavalierly cast aside to ensure that the African community is not lost. I am truly concerned that the current STB parishioners are going to become the collateral damage permanently lost...(and NOT merely because of a change in Mass times or disbanding the choir.)
19. From a note card: As Fr. Gadache stated tonight, the individual members of the African communities already belong to various parishes. It seems as if, *as a group*, OLA and SMA have no desire to be full members of any one parish but rather more of a social group connected by their shared African heritage. If after 14 years, they still "feel like tenants" the question becomes "Why?" How is relocating to St. Bernard going to change that?