

Dear friends of St. Colman Parish:

Saturday, March 14, 2009

We are truly saddened to learn of Bishop Lennon's decision to merge St. Colman Parish with St. Stephen Parish and to keep St. Stephen Church as the worship site. He has given us the rationale for the part of his decision that has to do with downsizing, but has not given us a rationale for the choice of St. Stephen's as a worship site. After 16 months of deliberation, discussion and discernment, our 25 member Cluster Team from our five Parishes decided that St. Colman's would be the appropriate site for future mission and ministry. We followed the process he prescribed.

An inner-city Parish involves much more than a beautiful worship space and this was something that our Cluster Team acknowledged from the outset of our discernment. The Cluster Team decided that in order to reach our goals the chosen site would need ample and easily accessible space for the Outreach Ministry to the needy, older residents, young people and the new immigrant population, for ongoing collaborative leadership training, formative catechesis and other evangelizing efforts.

The Cluster Team rejected early on the option of merging Parishes. The major reason was that the Cluster would be severely hampered by assuming the debt of closed sites and secondly, maintaining empty and shuttered sites would be a misuse of the Cluster's limited time, talent and treasure. Thirdly, arranging for the sale or new use of the closed sites would stretch our resources and detract from energy and resources we need to do the mission of Jesus to the poor.

We provided him with our Cluster goals, our Cluster priorities and a sound rationale for our Cluster Team's decision to use the St. Colman site for effective ministry that better serves the needs of the people of our Parishes and our neighborhood. Our process resulted in 14 votes to retain St. Colman, 7 votes to retain St. Procop and only 4 votes to retain St. Stephen.

Canonically, St. Colman is a territorial Parish with a Pastor and a consecrated Church building. The Parishes of St. Stephen, La Sagrada Familia, and Our Lady of Mount Carmel are physically within St. Colman's boundaries.

St. Colman's is a Parish that works to invite and include all of those who come to it in spiritual or physical need, and through that welcoming attitude, it is a Parish that evangelizes at all times. In the last fiscal year we reported 66 Baptisms, 23 First Communions, 18 Confirmations, 10 Marriages and 27 Funerals.

Our Neighborhood Outreach Ministry raised and distributed more than \$27,000 to provide help with rent, utilities, transportation, medicines, clothing for work, books and tools for vocational and higher education, and help with birth certificates and State IDs. Up to 15 neighbors in need visit

our Parish Office every day and an estimated 30 telephone calls for help come to us every day -- many of these referred by the Catholic Charities Office (which is also within our boundaries.) The Outreach Ministry connected its hundreds of callers and guests to further resources throughout the City, ensuring that everyone that comes in need is served in some way. Because of this volume of need and the response our Outreach Ministry has built through the years, we use Parish Office space, meeting rooms, the Parish Hall and meeting space in our School Building and at Colman Court. Just this last year, more than 300 volunteers found a place to practice their faith with us by helping with this Ministry.

A major factor in our Cluster Team's decision to retain the St. Colman site was that the space at St. Stephen's was inadequate to meet the goals that we discerned together, including this extensive Outreach program and the newly developing ministry to the vast immigrant and refugee population living within our borders. We anticipate this ministry will increase as the war in Iraq winds down and refugees from that country are welcomed. Our 10-classroom school building offers a welcoming space for our large combined PSR program as well as for adult programs. It is already in use as well for parish sponsored African immigrant programs and arts and counseling sessions for Latin American immigrants.

The space available at St. Stephen's cannot possibly accommodate these ministries and our other Cluster goals and priorities. Furthermore, there is no recent history at St. Stephen's of any effective outreach program that approaches the scale of St. Colman's Outreach Ministry. St. Colman has developed an extensive volunteer corps over 10 years with our Church in the City Partners, other suburban and outlying parishes, and Catholic High Schools.

To close the St. Colman site is effectively to eliminate these ministries to the neighborhood and would give a message of abandonment to the people to whom we minister. The message to our volunteers is clearly that the way they have chosen to practice their faith through our neighborhood ministries is not a priority for the Diocese.

Another factor in the Cluster Team's decision was the physical location of St. Colman, easily accessible next to a brand-new Rapid Station, at a major intersection. St. Colman's has demonstrated its ability to attract volunteers and raise money because of its active ministries, its rich heritage, its longstanding tradition of welcoming Irish immigrants and its more recent tradition of welcoming immigrants and refugees from other countries.

Additionally, the residents at Colman Court chose to live in that building because it is a vital part of vibrant parish campus. The decision to leave Colman Court as the only occupied structure left for any period of time would be irresponsible because this vulnerable population would be even more vulnerable if they were surrounded by empty buildings on an abandoned site.

All of this requires much more than a beautiful worship space.

The Bishop has asked us to make public that those who wish to appeal his decision or request that he revoke or emend the decision notify him within 10 "useful" days or by March 27. We invite all of you who are stakeholders in St. Colman Parish to advise us as to whether to

appeal the Bishop's decision or not. (This is according to Canon 1734.2 of the Code of Canon Law.)

Please use the form attached and return it to us as soon as possible so that we can inform the Bishop of our decision about whether to appeal or not.

For the purpose of this effort we will consider the stakeholders in the mission of St. Colman's to be of two groups:

- Group one (1.) are those of you who are registered members and participate regularly in liturgical celebrations and Parish activities.
- Group two (2) are those of you who are not registered, but who are integral parts of our St. Colman family because this is the place where you and your families celebrate your rich cultural heritage, because you moved to Colman Court Apartments to be part of our St. Colman family, because you are living at or are a graduate of our Edna House residence, because you or members of your family received Sacraments here, because this is the Church that welcomed you or your family as immigrants, because you participate in our activities for recent immigrants in our School Building, because it is the Church where you do volunteer ministry, because you live in this neighborhood and believe in St. Colman's role and continued deep involvement in the successful future of the neighborhood, because this is the place where you can receive the assistance you need or because of other personal reasons.

Thank you. Please help spread the word and feel free to copy this message. We want and need to know what our Parishioners, our friends and our neighbors think, because making an appeal WITHOUT the support of all who are affected by St. Colman would be a losing cause. Encourage your friends and families and neighbors to make their opinions known to us and to the Bishop through us. Please check our website at www.stcolmanparish.org for a complete copy of the Bishop's letter, for updates and more information. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to call me at (216) 651-0550 or email me at saintcolmanparish@gmail.com.

Father Bob, the Staff and Parish Council