

**FINAL**  
**CONCEPT STATEMENT**  
Church of St. Mary, Melrose, Minnesota  
October 7, 2016

## **INTRODUCTION**

This Concept Statement is the culmination of a three step process initiated by parish leaders, and particularly the Steering Committee to identify a range of potential facility improvements with input from the broader parish. The Committee is charged with responsibility to deal with facility issues made necessary by the fire in the church on March 11, 2016. Royce Yeater, a semi-retired historical architect and liturgical consultant, was engaged to facilitate a participatory listening process.

Approximately 400 parishioners participated in each of three sessions, which were held at the Melrose American Legion Hall over the month of September, 2016:

1. **Session One** broke the attendants into small groups of 6-10 to discuss each person's perspective on
  - **NEEDS** that will enable our facility serve a vital parish life
  - **VALUES** by which the parish is defined and we affirm
  - **TREASURES** that represent us as a community in faith.Each group came to consensus on their priorities in each category, which were then reported to the assembly and recorded.
2. **Session Two** presented the priorities of all groups in an unattributed format and asked all participants to indicate their personal priorities by placing three dots next to statements they thought should guide the way forward.
3. **Session Three** focused on an analysis of the results of the two previous sessions prepared by the facilitator and presented to the assembly as a draft Concept Statement which was reviewed in detail to assure it could represent a general consensus of the congregation. With input from the assembly, the document was revised to guide the next steps of facility improvements.

The Concept Statement represents no decision nor is it final. Rather it will serve to narrow the range of potential facility solutions needs that can realistically be explored in sufficient detail for a decision to be made. Thus, it will be employed by the Steering Committee to develop concrete proposals, with plans, images, and costs, for consideration by the parish as a whole. With another round of invited input from the parish to those proposals the Steering Committee will make a recommendation to the Pastoral Council, the Finance Committee and Reverend Enneking regarding the scope and nature of a construction project that will reestablish adequate facilities for the Church of St. Mary.

### **About Consensus**

The listening sessions that generated this document have been based on the principle of consensus, defined as general agreement and acceptance of a position, path, or proposal. Consensus functions only when the dialog occurs in a tone of mutual respect and a sincere search for the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Consensus is not about voting

which splits communities into winners and losers. It is about adults of faith sharing opinions over time to find the wisest course of action for the good of the whole community. Consensus does not mean everyone need agree with 100% of every aspect of the proposed direction forward. It does mean that most all can see the logic in the proposed course and acknowledge the general wisdom it represents. It means that while the direction chosen may not be our personal preference, we can accept it as a reflection of the group's will. Accordingly, the process employed in this exercise should not be taken as a "vote," but rather a way for the community to express itself in consensus when hundreds of voices and a wide variety of opinions are involved. The result is an expression of a consensus of the community regarding their preferred direction. No formal vote has been taken, or will be taken.

## **FIVE STAGES OF GRIEF**

It must be acknowledged that the parishioners of the Church of St. Mary are still in grief over the loss of a much beloved worship facility. The grieving process is generally found to have five distinct stages: **Denial, Anger, Bargaining, Depression, and Acceptance**. Each stage has its own impact on our moods, attitudes, interactions, and behaviors. These five stages are experienced differently by each person. There is no formula, timetable, or shortcut. The five stages are useful only to help us understand how we are responding to a significant loss in our lives. Grief is a personal experience, but it is also a communal one when the loss is shared by a large number of people, as is the case here at the Church of St. Mary.

We must recognize that decisions we make during this period may be influenced by the various stages of grief being experienced by each of us individually, and all of us collectively. We must guard against turning on each other to deal with our grief; rather, we should support one another through the process. We must be careful about making long term decisions based on short term moods alone. We must allow time and the Holy Spirit to heal our grief and guide us to a wholesome future. While each of us is in our own stage, collectively we sense we are somewhere in the middle, still experiencing flashes of anger, negotiating life back to the way it was, and slipping in an out of intense sadness. We know that "Acceptance" will not mean being "over it." The loss is real and will remain with us forever. We can, however, come to live with it, recognizing that life moves on, and we must too.

While the grieving process will take time, we agree we cannot ignore our facility issues until healing is complete, that we must begin to take steps to remedy our needs in a way that will fully support our sense of community and the robust liturgy, sacraments, and programs upon which it thrives. We note that building for that purpose may actually aid the healing process. Thus we affirm a patient, thoughtful, and deliberative process, implemented in a thorough and unhurried manner, to enable our grieving to continue even as we make critical decisions that will shape our future and that of our children. We must be open to the possibility that the loss we are suffering may also present opportunities, and weigh them in the balance.

## PRIORITIES

Through this process, we can articulate consensus on the following ordered priorities:

- A **Worship Space** that fully supports a robust liturgy, the celebration of the Sacraments, and an active prayer life in a setting rich in the architectural and artistic character traditionally identified with St. Mary's.
- **Dining and Kitchen** facilities to support fellowship activities, funeral and school lunches, festival events, meetings, and a myriad of social gatherings.
- **Gathering Space** that welcomes arrival and invites lingering after liturgies in a winter climate, and links together other functions. It will also improve accessibility.
- **Full Accessibility** to all levels and spaces, including easy access to restrooms for all parishioners, and accommodations for the elderly and handicapped.
- **21<sup>st</sup> Century Technologies** that support all spaces and functions, including state-of-the-art security systems, audio-visual systems, adequate and efficient lighting, energy efficient heating, ventilation, and air conditioning, and other modern conveniences.
- **Music and Organ** that support our liturgies and enrich community life.
- **Elements of Prayer and Devotion**, including the stations of the cross, altars, shrines (including a prominent shrine to Our Lady of Guadalupe), statues of the saints, the tabernacle of repose, and other elements which remind us of our faith stories.
- **Functionality of the Overall Church Campus** to enable safe and easy access and flexible use of worship, fellowship, education, and administrative areas.
- **Community Landmark** which stands as a beacon of our faith in both sight and sound, and an identifier of St. Mary's and Melrose through day and night.

## POINTS OF CONSENSUS

From our discussions in this process, we can express a very strong desire at this time to restore our facilities to the condition they were in before the fire, or as close to that state as can be achieved. . We value, treasure and want restored the beauty and character of our historic church, which stands as a landmark in the community, and was enriched with an array of traditional church elements like arched ceilings, stained glass, statuary, murals, carved wood pew ends, altar pieces, shrines, and stations of the cross. Those elements should be salvaged and restored for reuse whenever possible, along with other decorative architectural elements.

We recognize however that some accommodations must be made to modern codes and construction practices, and others should be made to better serve our functional needs in the 21st Century. We are aware that our historic church was not perfect.

Accessibility for an aging community posed obstacles, restrooms were remote; exterior stairs posed risks; social spaces were minimal; some functions were isolated from others; many technological systems were outdated. To the degree possible, we would like to see these issues remedied.

We wish to build not a museum but a church that can honor the past while also serving the future. We wish to integrate to the restoration process whatever aesthetic, liturgical, and technological improvements can be made without destroying the essential character of the church we knew.

## **NEXT STEPS**

We recognize that there are still unknowns relative to the restorability of the historic church and that can only be determined through analysis of a forensic engineer and experienced contractors only recently engaged by the Steering Committee. Thus, we ask the Steering Committee to first explore a restorative approach and determine the cost of that work, including whatever enhancements are reasonably achievable.

We recognize this will take some time and may generate costs not covered by insurance, and we are prepared to undertake a capital campaign to cover those costs if within reason. During the period that restoration is under study, the Steering Committee can explore whatever options that might be assembled without great cost to stand in reserve for consideration should the historic church somehow prove un-restorable. We ask that the congregation be kept informed regularly of progress down this path. We ask that when the studies are ready, they be posted and distributed to all parishioners, and that an all parish meeting be set to allow questions and concerns to be addressed before any final decision is made.