

Catholic Sentinel

Parish post-COVID planning – 10 steps to move forward

By Chris DiLoreto

As we begin to emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic, many parishes will think about improvements to campuses. At the same time, the pandemic has suggested new design trends for gathering and worship.

Because of how long it takes to plan, fund and construct improvements to a church campus, this fall may be the right time to begin a visioning and planning process. An added benefit: the process offers a positive way to reengage members of the parish.

Here are ten steps to get you started:

1. Select an energetic and competent committee

Reconvene an existing or set up a new planning/building committee. Generally, this should consist of eight to 10 key individuals active in the church community and interested in the future. Ideally, the group is multigenerational, men and women, and, if possible, includes a couple of members familiar with buildings and construction. One to two parish staff should sit in on meetings to advise and inform the committee. Energy, time to invest and an open mind are crucial requisites.

2. Clearly define your needs

Embark on defining potential parish needs. The planning/building committee should interview staff, leaders of individual ministries and lay elders. A crucial aspect of this work will be the review of existing buildings and site conditions. Seek out parish members who are in the building trades for potential help with this task.

3. Involve your people

Develop four to six parishioner focus groups. Charged with discussing parish issues and needs, groups of 10-15 members also will be presented with information gathered by the planning/building committee for review. A primary task for each group is to review the work, help set priorities and tabulate their comments to share with the overall congregation.

4. Document your results

Compile the information gathered into a document that lists the vision, goals and needs for the future. Include the broad scope of changes for ministries' physical needs and types of space required as well as necessary improvements or upgrades to existing facilities.

The Martha Terrel Community Services Center at St. Andrew Parish in Northeast Portland was the result of a two-year planning process. (Courtesy DiLoreto Architecture)



5. Consider hiring an outside planning professional

If steps 2 to 4 seem too daunting for your parish group, it may be more productive to engage a professional church master planning firm. Check with the Archdiocese of Portland for a referral list. Whomever you select, they need expertise and experience in guiding the committee members through the entire process. The correct professional will lead you through evaluating existing buildings, help develop interview surveys, facilitate focus group discussions, and guide preparation of the final vision document.

6. Build community by sharing information

Invite the entire parish to a town hall meeting to share the results, elicit their input and gauge parishioner interest. Welcome participant feedback and document their comments. This parishwide meeting is the perfect opportunity to reengage your parish community and build excitement for positive future improvements.

7. Determine whether to move forward

Parish leadership, together with the planning/building committee should assess all information, set a priority for improvements, and decide whether to proceed to the next stage of fundraising and designing the first phase of work.

8. Select your fundraising help

Most church projects — whether new or remodel — need the assistance of a professional church fundraising consultant. Finding the right one for your project is one way to ensure success. Reach out

to other parishes' leaders to get referrals and suggestions for individuals and firms with a proven fundraising track record. These professionals can lead the parish through an accurate marketing campaign to determine the viability of raising funds, a crucial step in moving forward.

9. Select your design consultant

Once the decision is made to proceed, it is time to think about outside help for design and cost estimating. The archdiocese has a database of selected individuals and firms that understand parish needs and fundraising opportunities and have experience successfully taking parishes through the often challenging design and construction process of a worship facility.

10. Follow a plan

Develop a master plan. All successful projects know where they are headed before starting. In this way each phase will fit into a comprehensive whole. Use your consultant to help you determine a long-range plan for changes to your parish campus that address the goals and needs you have previously defined. Then create a budget that is forecast out to the year work will be completed so you know how much money to raise.

While deciding to re-engage your parish community in a process to remodel or build new facilities may seem intimidating, it is also incredibly rewarding. Select a committed committee, engage the parishioners, and follow a plan to ensure success.

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