

St. Joseph, St. Ann, St Thomas More Cohort Team Response

THE WHAT

Our response to the Preliminary Recommendation is...

We agree with recommendations one (1) through twelve (12) listed on the Preliminary Recommendation. Early in the *Connected in the Spirit* process, the Cohort parishes began incorporating many of these recommendations into practice. We are committed to “enhancing the vibrancy of parish life” in our parishes – now and for our future. It is our belief; these twelve (12) goals will be better achieved by a Linked Parish Model of St. Joseph and St. Ann and a Partnership Parish Model of the two (2) linked parishes with St. Thomas More. We also believe our recommendation of linked/partnered parishes will better meet Archbishop Tobin’s ten (10) goals of *Connected in the Spirit*.

St. Joseph and St. Ann have been linking activities for many years (see below) and have recently expanded this linking of activities to include: Vacation Bible School, All Parish Catechesis, Penance Services and special liturgical celebrations, Seasons of Hope bereavement ministry, Mary’s WAY, Parish Nursing and Health Ministry, Small Groups Book Club, and various social activities.

After prayer, reflection and discussion the Cohort team, has discerned nothing would be gained with the Archdiocesan Planning Commission’s recommendation.

The Cohort team does not believe the *Connected in the Spirit* Pastoral Planning Process provided an accurate and or complete picture of the active and vibrant parish life enjoyed by parishioners of St. Joseph parish in particular. We believe the following will correct that and other misconceptions.

THE WHY

Our reasons for this response are...

St. Joseph and St. Ann History

In 1996-1997 St. Joseph and St. Ann were asked to take part in an evaluation to see if it made sense for the parishes to merge.

- A consultant was hired to help through the process.
- A formal study was done, including maps, where parishioners lived, future growth projections, etc.
- There were numerous combined parish meetings to work through the process.

The conclusion noted by Monsignor Schaedel was that the parishes needed to remain separate entities, (although continuing in a supportive role to each other) because:

- The majority of St. Joseph parishioners were located to the west, while a majority of St. Ann’s parishioners were located toward the south. Geographically, it made no sense for the parishes to merge. Although the parish boundaries were located in close proximity of each other the parishioners resided at opposite extremes of each set of boundaries.
- Each parish had a very different mission and vision, with St. Ann being land-locked and needing to move further south to meet the needs of the growing Decatur Township community, and St.

Joseph needing to expand its local community ministry (including St. Vincent DePaul, Harvest House, Crestwood and Seeds of Hope).

- It is significant to note, since the conclusion noted by Monsignor Schaedel; both parishes have had continuing success with their respective mission and goals.

St. Ann forged ahead with its plans to move; identifying a plot of land as well as planning for the new church/school. St. Joseph continued to strengthen its evangelization efforts within the community. In order to support each other as much as possible, and now sharing the same pastor, the two (2) parishes began sharing staff, formed coordinating Mass schedules – the beginning of a solid partnership.

The two parishes have worked together ever since “to enhance the vibrancy of parish life” for each of the two (2) parish families. Though each parish has a separate identity, mission and parish goals, the parishioners of both parishes have embraced this “cousin-hood” and have worked together beautifully. Some examples include:

- When St. Ann had no parish hall or place for social gatherings; St. Joseph offered complete access to its parish hall for funeral luncheons, funeral Mass, fundraisers, dinners, etc.
- When St. Ann was in the process of moving and had no place to hold its annual festival, the two (2) parishes teamed up and held a one-time joint-festival on the grounds of St. Joseph. This allowed St. Ann to continue an annual tradition and fundraiser, while supplying an opportunity for St. Joseph (who had never had a festival before) to learn hands-on how to do so. The next year, each had its own festival – with the two (2) parishes still helping each other.
- The two (2) parishes have continued through the years to help one another through shared resources, volunteerism and festival attendance.

Merger from St. Ann Perspective

- St. Ann would suffer financially by merging with St. Joseph.
 - By implementing a Linked Parish Model for St. Joseph and St. Ann, St. Joseph can continue to provide housing for both our pastor and associate pastor; and save St. Ann 50% of the pastor’s salary and insurance expense. The practice of this “good stewardship” is of primary concern to help ensure St. Ann will be “viable now and into the future”.
 - St. Joseph parish is debt-free and financially stable. This current reality is of significance to the financial stability of St. Ann. If merged the potential high loss of St. Joseph parishioners would have a significantly negative impact on the finances of the merged parish.
 - For 20 years or more St. Joseph has coordinated an annual fundraiser operating a food stand for each of the races at the Indianapolis Motor Speedway. St. Ann has participated in this fundraiser and enjoyed a percentage of the income. However, St. Ann’s ability to participate is limited and would not meet the requirements of the Indianapolis Motor Speedway in term of volunteers. Consequently, if the two parishes merge this fundraising opportunity would be lost, resulting in a loss of income for St. Ann.

- With an almost certain high attrition rate from St. Joseph parishioners, many of the benefits of shared resources, volunteerism and festival attendance would be lost by St. Ann.

Merger from Vietnamese Perspective

- Without the financial support of St. Joseph parishioners, the Vietnamese Community of St. Joseph would struggle financially to maintain the building, grounds and a full-time pastor. It is likely the building would fall into disrepair.
 - The Vietnamese Community and St. Joseph parish are not completely separate entities. The Vietnamese community does not just rent space at St. Joseph; they are a part of the St. Joseph parish community. The two (2) communities come together to participate in joint parish activities and liturgical celebrations. Some of these activities include the St. Joseph Fall Festival, the Annual Parish Christmas Party, Ping Pong Tournaments, All Souls Memorial Mass, and the Vietnamese New Year Mass.
 - When Father Mark Tranh had a stroke, St. Joseph parishioners took care of his meals, rehab and transportation. We took him to doctor visits, picked up meds and cooked for him. He was provided housing for several years until his death.
 - If St. Joseph and St. Ann are merged this current “sense of unity” among our different cultures would be lost.

Merger from St. Joseph Perspective

- By merging the two parishes, the Cohort team has identified through observation and an unofficial survey an almost certain potential for a significant St. Joseph parishioner attrition with a specifically harmful effect on the “vibrancy of parish life” for St. Joseph parishioners.
 - Many of St. Joseph’s older parishioners are founding members or have been members of the parish for 30 years or longer.
 - Many of St. Joseph parishioners have been members of St. Joseph all their lives, it would be particularly difficult for these parishioners to feel “warmth and welcomed” in a new parish with new or missing parish family members.
 - Due to the demographic location of St. Ann, its distance from a majority of the parishioners and difficulty of access from the west, north-westerly section of Marion County – particularly at night – many parishioners (who reside north of US 40 while St. Ann is south of State Road 67) are likely to either attend another parish, or attend no parish at all (see attached – Item A1).
 - The three north-south routes for St. Joseph parishioners to travel to St. Ann are prohibitive for participation of our older parishioners in liturgy, faith formation or social activities after dark.
 - Lynhurst Drive is very narrow and poorly lit.
 - High School Road is very narrow, poorly lit, contains several dangerous curves and a curved one-lane railroad underpass.
 - 465 would not be an option for many even during daylight hours.

- Depending upon the choice of these three routes, St. Ann is 7-8 miles further south for most of St. Joseph parishioners.
- Those attending another parish would suffer from a sense of “loss of unity” in a new parish environment. They would also suffer a “loss of usefulness” from losing the ministries they have either begun and developed; or faithfully served for many years.
- With the current uncertainty of the economic climate, and the unraveling of health care as we have known it, our parishioners need to feel a sense of security – not of abandonment – within their local church.

Age of St. Joseph Parishioners

- It is no secret there has been a “greying of the Church”. Statistics indicate only about 24% of Catholics attend Church regularly with fewer and fewer young adults among them. “Church Attendance: Diminishing and Greying”, Most Rev. Arthur J. Serratelli, Bishop of Patterson Diocese, New Jersey.
- We do not believe the age of St. Joseph parishioners is significantly different than any other parish its size.
- We are committed to continue the development of evangelization programs that effectively proclaim the Gospel and introduce new people of all ages to the warm and welcoming atmosphere of St. Joseph’s parish.

Geography of St. Joseph and Parish Growth

- Several families attend and contribute to St. Joseph regularly but choose not to become registered parishioners.
- The City Council is currently planning ways to revitalize the Washington Street corridor and surrounding area. We can already see preparation for this to happen with the huge expansion of the 465/Washington Street interchange, the intersection of Washington Street and High School Road, the expansion of the 465/Sam Jones Expressway interchange and the redesign of Sam Jones Expressway from the old airport property extending east.
- The old airport property is currently being redeveloped. It is anticipated this redevelopment will involve new housing development in the St. Joseph neighborhood and surrounding area. IndyGo has created a new bus line specifically with the development of the old airport property in mind. This could mean a large potential for St Joseph parish growth. If the parishes are merged instead of linked there will not be a Catholic parish in the near-by area to meet the needs of this anticipated growth.
- St. Joseph is currently serviced by this IndyGo bus route, St. Ann is not.
- Apart from the above revitalization efforts, a study for the St. Joseph parish boundaries conducted by the archdiocese in approximately 2007 shows projected population for 2011 at 26,944 an increase of 2,830 over the 2000 census of 24,114. During that same period households were projected to increase from 9,576 to 10,603; an increase of 1027 households, or roughly 10%. (See attachment – Item B1-B3)

Condition of St. Joseph's Facilities

- St. Joseph is aging, but well maintained.
 - In 2008 through *Legacy for Our Mission* the parish completed the addition of a Narthex, sacristy, vesting room, handicapped restroom and additional storage space.
 - Extensive drainage work has been completed to correct a long-term problem of rain water entering Elford Hall.
 - In recent years new windows have been installed in the church building, throughout the classrooms, Elford Hall and the rectory.
 - A new roof has been installed on both the rectory and the church building and its attached facilities.
 - A new Festival Barn was constructed two years ago with the addition of ventilation and an electrical system just a few months ago.
 - The driving/parking areas for the rectory and church parking lot have been newly resurfaced and lined.
 - New urinals have been installed in the men's restroom this past summer.
 - A sump pump was installed in the rectory two years ago.
 - Classroom space has been doubled by the construction of new walls and doors.
 - New storage space for St. Vincent de Paul has been added in one room off of Elford Hall.
 - The exterior wood and overhead door on the mower garage has been completely replaced and painted.
 - We are in the process of replacing the HVAC system.
 - We have a fully functional and stocked kitchen with industrial style appliances.
 - We are in the process of planning and designing a memorial garden to be installed in the spring of 2014.
 - To complete the parish updates earmarked by the *Legacy for Our Mission Campaign*, St. Joseph is currently waiting to hear from the Archdiocese regarding a proposed renovation of the interior of the church. This renovation would increase the seating capacity of the church from approximately 236 to approximately 300, and would include a choir area and remodeling of the current confessional. NOTE: most of the needed funds for the interior renovation have already been donated with additional funding pledged following the *Connected in the Spirit* pastoral planning process.
 - St. Joseph recently received a positive assessment from Gallagher Bassett Risk Management Company regarding the condition of our building.
- A quick look at the online calendar for St. Joseph will reveal the parish facility is used daily. Many days it is used by multiple parish and outside groups. These outside groups include: three Girl Scout Troops, 4-H (archery and classes), Central Indiana Cursillo, AA, Seeds of Hope – a halfway house for women recovering from chemical addiction, Beta Sigma Phi Sorority, other multiple private functions – host for local, national and international events.
- St. Ann has reached its limit in terms of classroom space and has limited open space for social activities. It would be very difficult to accommodate the religious education needs of St. Joseph; or many of the events or functions currently held at St. Joseph.

Adult Faith Formation – although there is currently no formal adult faith formation at St. Joseph (except RCIA), there are several opportunities intended to enhance the spiritual lives of our adults and provide life-long faith formation opportunities.

- All Parish Catechesis – a series of 4 monthly evening programs of faith, food and fellowship. Sponsored jointly by St. Joseph and St. Ann, the first two (2) evenings drew approximately 160 – 170 participants each.
- Mary’s WAY (Women Answering Yes – to Jesus through Mary) - sponsored by St. Joseph this program is open to high school students and women age 16 and above. It is designed to be held two (2) times annually and features a catered dinner and speaker. The first Mary’s WAY event had 64 people in attendance, eight (8) of which were St. Ann parishioners.
- Cursillo (<http://www.cursillo-cicc.org/>) – St. Joseph has been active in the Cursillo movement for many years. Each spring and fall, men and women from St. Joseph attend Cursillo weekends. Many of the leaders in the parish are Cursillistas. The women’s group meets monthly at the parish, the men’s group meets off-site.
 - St. Joseph hosts team planning meetings and Ultreyas.
- Soup and Bread – Lenten program with speaker, shared jointly with St. Joseph and St. Ann. Has been a part of both parishes for years and is well attended.
- The Bible for Beginners – this current mini-program is being held weekly through December.

Youth Ministry – while there is no formal youth ministry program at St. Joseph there are many regular youth activities designed to enhance the social lives of our youth, instill Catholic values and form our youth into future service leaders within the larger Church community. Some of these activities include:

- Camp St. Joe's – a cookout and camping on the parish property to kick-off the new religious education year.
- St. Valentine's Day party and sleep over in Elford Hall.
- Participation in the ecumenical Life Chain event that takes place on Meridian Street the first Sunday of October each year following the Respect Life Mass celebrated at SS. Peter and Paul Cathedral.
- Annual Christmas Party sponsored by the Speedway Exchange Club.
- Fun Day with Father Rob at Rascals Fun Zone in Whiteland.
- Service learning projects include:
 - Help at the fundraising food stand for all three annual races at the Indianapolis Motor Speedway.
 - Help at the annual Fall Festival in the Kids Tent, and in the dining area cleaning tables and trays, emptying trash and helping to keep various booths stocked with needed items, etc.
 - Help with SVDP Thanksgiving and Christmas preparation.
 - Prepare and distribute gift bags annually to St. Joseph veterans on Veteran's Day.

Non-weekend Mass Attendance

- Daily Mass: parish attendance - average of 25-30.

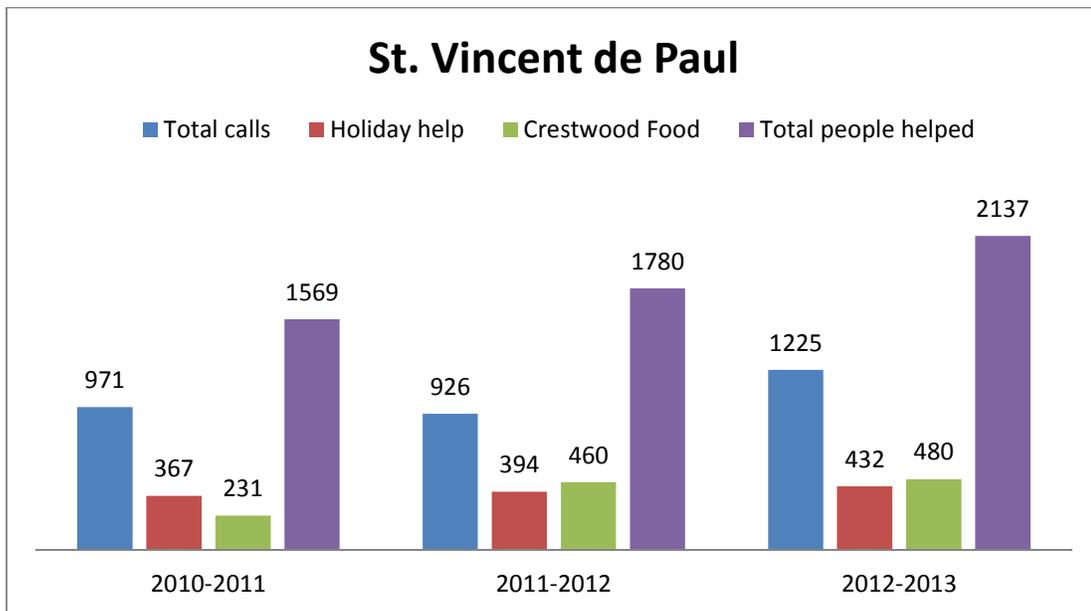
- Weekly Mass at Crestwood Village Retirement Community each Wednesday: attendance – average 25-30.

Merger from the Perspective of the St. Joseph Outreach Programs and Those Served

St. Joseph may not be as large as most parishes in the Indianapolis area, but is none the less doing very significant things; effecting the lives of thousands of marginalized and impoverished people - bringing them the love and hope of Christ and his Church, and evangelizing in multiple ways.

LOCAL

- St. Joseph currently serves the local neighborhood and surrounding urban area through multiple outreach ministries.
- The void left by the merger of St. Joseph with St. Ann would undoubtedly be filled with an increased sense of poverty and despair.
 - A loss of “service to those who are marginalized”.
 - A loss of a “vibrant” Catholic presence.



Broken down on a weekly average the figures show for the year 2012-2013 St. Joseph fed approximately 42 people per week – the number is continually increasing, and includes:

- Food help - Several “walk-ins” on a weekly basis, who are served by the pastor, secretary or the sacristan who lives across the street. Many of these people are unable to carry the food home and require the assistance of a “ride”.
- Christmas and Thanksgiving meals – 432
- Children’s Christmas gifts -245
- Home visits to assess furniture and other material items needed.

- Monthly food delivery to regular food recipients who are unable to meet monthly food needs; and do not have reliable transportation.
- Referral to St. Joseph Health Ministry when home visits reveal potential health concerns.
- Referral to St. Joseph Gabriel Project Ministry as needed.
- Crestwood Village Retirement Community food pantry stocked monthly and as needed.
- Clothing vouchers – 105 distributed and redeemable at the Hope Chest, a thrift shop operated by Seeds of Hope to supplement donations and other income.
 - Not only do the clothing vouchers help the needy of our community, but they also provide much needed income for the Hope Chest (a fundraiser for Seeds of Hope).
- Furniture Vouchers – 15.
 - Total value of in-kind goods provided by St. Joseph parishioners - \$20,515.00:
 - \$18,300.00 for food
 - \$1590.00 for clothing
 - \$625.00 for furniture
 - Total home visits – 798
 - Total service hours – 3142
 - Total Miles – 4125

Harvest House Seniors provide approximately 16-18 Christmas baskets filled with fruit, Christmas candy, cookies, nuts and other treats to our homebound and or nursing home parishioners. They also mail Christmas cards to these parishioners.

Seeds of Hope: A Women’s Drug and Alcohol Recovery Program - www.SeedsofHopeIndy.org (See attached – Item SOH)

See also <http://www.archindy.org/criterion/local/2010/11-05/seeds.html>

- St. Joseph is a founding partner of this program - started by and maintained (in large part) through the direct support of St. Joseph parishioners by way of:
 - Provided facility (former St. Joseph convent), utilities, property and building maintenance and insurance.
 - Monetary donations – 4 special collections at Mass per year.
 - Volunteerism and participation at fundraising events.
 - Volunteerism at the Hope Chest Thrift Shop.
 - Material Donations for the women of the Seeds of Hope house and to the Hope Chest Thrift Shop.
 - Donations of food.
- St. Joseph parishioners are currently on the board of directors.
- Is a 6 month intensive chemical dependence recovery program designed to lead the women to drug-free, sober, independent lives as responsible members of society; and to return them to their families as loving mothers, daughters and sisters.
- Since 1999, St. Joseph has helped 440 women successfully complete this program.

St. Joseph Gabriel Project

- St. Joseph is a member church of this Christian-based network standing together and committed to offer assistance to women and families facing difficult or unplanned pregnancies.
- Has provided \$1000.00 in 2013 to the Pro-Life "Fragile" Bill Board Fund to help ensure this bill board remains a constant presence near the Planned Parenthood facility on Georgetown Road (See attached – Item PNH).
- Has pledged \$350.00 to cover the cost of a Gabriel Project sign that will be placed on St. Ann's property.
- Provides diapers, baby food, formula, rental assistance; and emotional and spiritual support to neighborhood women in crisis pregnancy.

Communion Ministry - 5 locations plus individual residents weekly

- Lynhurst Health Care – 4 residents
- Washington Healthcare – 8 residents
- Westside Garden Plaza – 1 resident
- Crestwood (unable to attend weekly Mass) – 8 residents
- Lakeview manor – 12 residents
- Individual homes – 10 residents

Altar Society – members provide regular home cooked meals to our home bound parishioners, to help supplement nutritional needs and to help provide relief to family members and caregivers.

Health Ministry – was begun at St. Joseph at the request of the Archdiocesan Health Ministry coordinator Joni LeBeau. The program is in development. Its initial focus is on companion services to the disabled, homebound and their caregivers. Services Health Ministry will provide:

- Primary – friendship, emotional and spiritual support, particularly during major health events.
- Secondary – light housework, errands, shopping and other items to assist with daily activities.
- Spiritual formation of volunteers.
 - Small group formation.
 - Online self-study opportunities.
- Will work in collaboration with Communion Ministry and St. Vincent de Paul.

The initial program development has begun at St. Joseph, and will be implemented at St. Ann in 2014.

St. Joseph Pro-Life Ministry follows the USCCB *Pastoral Plan for Pro-Life Activities* which contains the four major "pillars" the Bishops have set forth as elements necessary for authentic Catholic pro-life efforts in America:

- Public Information & Education
- Public Policy
- Pastoral Care
- Prayer

Several weekends through the year are set aside for fundraising and pro-life awareness. St. Joseph conducts, Diaper Drives and Baby Showers to collect items to donate to Birthline and the Archdiocesan Office for Pro-Life Ministry. Conscience protection and peace and justice issues are also incorporated into the Pro-Life Ministry.

Urban Plunge - <http://socialconcerns.nd.edu/academic/winter/urbanplunge.shtml>

- St. Joseph has been a past partner with Notre Dame in its mission to provide community-based research and service-learning opportunities informed by Catholic Social Tradition to help foster understanding of poverty and injustice and to inspire the life and hope of community.
 - Parishioners provided meals and housing for students.

Ritter High School

- Past Retreat Host
- Calcutta – http://www.cardinalritter.org/assets/uploads/documents/February_Newsletter.pdf - see page 2
 - St. Joseph helped start Ritter's largest fundraiser and continued to help for 6 or 7 years.
 - St. Joseph parishioners were volunteers, emcees, sponsors and auctioneers.
 - St. Joseph parishioners provided auction items for the event (silent and live).
 - Drew up to 500 people annually.
 - Raised \$40,000.00 - \$50,000.00 annually.

Jail Ministry – Multiple inmates at Jail I, Jail II and the Women's Prison have received the sacraments and have been received into the Church through the efforts of St. Joseph volunteers:

- Rosaries provided by rosary makers.
- RCIA classes.
- Communion provided to Catholic inmates.

NATIONAL

Red Cross

- St. Joseph is a designated Red Cross emergency disaster relief shelter.
- Hosted team during the Katrina evacuation.
 - Parishioners provided housing and meals.

Catholic Athletes for Christ

- Host for Representatives from all over the US for the NFL Scouting Combine.
 - Parishioners provided housing and meals for prospective NFL draftees.

Fresh Start Prison Release Program

- Provide housing for chaplains and ex-offenders.
- Provide emergency housing-crisis intervention.

Indy Racing Ministry

- Provide housing for Ministers from all over the US the entire month of May.

Airport Ministry

- St. Joseph volunteers assist at Mass every week and on Thanksgiving, Christmas and Good Friday Service.
- Have housed and provided transportation needs for many stranded air passengers.

INTERNATIONAL

Interfaith Civil Aviation Chaplaincy

- Past Host for Interfaith Convention with participants from 40 different countries.
- Providing meeting place, sponsorship and volunteers.
- St. Joseph parishioners providing housing and meals.

Missionary Housing – at the request of the Chancery

- Have hosted and housed missionary priests and religious – some for as long as six (6) months, from Zambia, Nigeria, Tanzania, Congo, Kenya, Canada and Switzerland.

Tanzania Fundraiser

- Secured a car to raffle.
- Raised over \$30,000.00 to purchase a tractor and farm implements.
- Arranged and paid for shipping to Tanzania via truck, train, plane and ship.

ADDITIONAL THOUGHTS FOR FURTHER CONSIDERATION...

St. Joseph and St Ann have been working together for many years. A Linked Parish Model for St. Joseph and St. Ann would enhance the ability of each parish to complete its vision and mission to each of their specific demographic areas of focus, consider the needs of our pastor, and provide “good stewardship” of finances, ministries and catechetical opportunities.

We all take strength, inspiration and comfort from being members of a faith community. To lose a community is a great loss, comparable to the loss of a parent or of a whole family. There is no doubt that, if the merger takes place, there will be many who will go to other parishes. There will also certainly be some who will be so hurt by such a decision of the archdiocese that they will leave the Church altogether. How can a merger justify all the grief and losses when there is no urgent need to merge? We need to build our parish communities, not shatter and extinguish them. We fail to see how a merger would serve to evangelize and build our parishes into vibrant communities of faith.

As evidenced by the rationale contained in our Response to the Preliminary Recommendation, we believe losses from a Merged Parish Model for St. Joseph and St. Ann would negatively affect Archbishop Tobin's goals for *Connected in the Spirit* and the recommendations one (1) through twelve (12) listed on the Planning Commission's Recommendation.

The Cohort team respectfully requests the Archdiocesan Planning Commission to reconsider its Preliminary Recommendation and opt instead for a recommendation to Archbishop Tobin of the Linked Parish Model of St. Joseph and St. Ann and a Partnership Parish Model of the two (2) linked parishes with St. Thomas More.