



# Parish Feedback Summary **St. Clare of Assisi Parish**

Ellisville, St. Louis County—Planning Area 8

January 2023

## **Section 1. Introduction**

St. Claire of Assisi Parish had a 2022 mass attendance of 1,438 people. Approximately 480 people attended the 2 parish listening sessions. The online feedback survey had 299 respondents. Other feedback from Planning Area 8 as a whole, including free form feedback, totaled 3 pages, of which about 2 pages directly regarded the situation of St. Clare of Assisi. Planning area 8 has three draft models.

In all models, St. Clare of Assisi is merging with Ascension.

## **Section 2. Listening Session Summary**

The participants did not express an opinion about which option was most acceptable but did express that option C was their least favored option because leaving St. Joseph as a stand-alone didn't seem reasonable, due to low Mass attendance.

According to the Scribe, 6 people expressed the opinion that both St. Clare and Ascension should remain open since both parishes are sound financially and Mass attendance is good. 3 people commented on the emotional engagement that exists at St. Clare and a concern that if they merged with Ascension, it would create a parish that would be too big to maintain this level of engagement.

4 people commented that if the Archdiocese or laity could take care of some of the business aspects of the parish – money management, building maintenance, etc. – the priests would be freed up to focus on pastoral care and Sacramental ministry.

3 people mentioned re-drawing parish boundaries based on “where the people actually live that are currently attending parishes (many parishioners live outside their parish boundaries).”

3 people commented that since planning area 8 has the largest population, the proposed number of parishes that are set to close, should be less than what is currently proposed.

Concerns were raised about the fallout in other cities where ATK or similar programs were implemented:

1. Number of Catholics who left the Church as a result of restructuring.
2. Church buildings sold and used for profane purposes.
3. Have attendance and reception of Sacraments increased after the restructuring?

Other suggestions/comments/questions:

Focus on Vocations

Focus on children and schools

“Splitting” – 2 Masses at one parish, 2 at a neighboring parish.

St. Clare of Assisi

What is the primary determining factor in the decision-making process – number of priests, money, evangelization?

3 people asked if St. Clare's money would be combined with Ascension if the two parishes merged. What happens to the money that St. Clare has pledged to ACA?

The Scribe felt that positive comments focused on how sharing resources would help the priests, and that the changes can bring growth, if hearts are open.

### **Section 3. Online Survey Qualitative Summary**

64% comments in all three draft models stated their concern is about the size of the combined new parishes (St. Clare of Assisi and Ascension) which they called it "MEGA" church. Limitation on parking and limited expansion opportunity (landlock) are some of the concerns mentioned. Many suggested combining with St. Alban of Roe instead of Ascension if they had to merge. They were also wondering why a thriving parish (both financially and spiritually) was subjected to be merged. Suggestion was to focus on weaker parishes, not ones that are succeeding. "I am bias, but I believe that St Clare is one of the stronger Catholic Parishes in Region 8. We have 4 boys in the seminary and there are more active and engaged young families at SCA than at most Parishes. The parish is financially stable and requires no funds from the Archdiocese."

Unique point of view (5) – dedicate one campus as a "hub" for all parishes in the planning area sharing resources such as facilities and outreach programs. "If we were to open that cohort up to all parishes in the deanery by having one central hub for social events/evangelization (i.e. Catholicism 101), it would help to create that type of like-minded community that would keep me and my family engaged".

Distance between two parishes were mentioned (13) impacting elderly attending various program/service, and commute to school or PSR. Reorganize boundaries (20+) to make them equal and help distribute the attendances more evenly, less upsetting of options. "Rather than old parish boundaries, why aren't the new parishes designed based on households. In other words, look at public routes to the most accessible churches"

(36) commented on evangelization to bring back youth by providing support for young adults with children such as daycare service during special church events. "We have to understand the root cause otherwise we will be doing this again in 20 years. We must focus on the Youth. They can inspire their parents with their faith." There were also comments from young parishioners stated they felt welcome at St. Clare, how their faith growth after joining this parish, and active in adults program.

To continue evangelize and grow, they suggested NOT to focus on just one group (8), supportive of elderly and reach out programs for families keeping them involved as well as young singles and youth groups. "You NEED to keep the youth alive in the Church and make it appeals if you want to keep the Church alive. The older parishioners aren't going to live forever. We need good, holy replacements!"

Few (8) mentioned bible study group is a way to grow faith and evangelize. They find traditional bible teaching boring and need a spiritual leader like priest or respected leader or someone who can bring bible alive to them.

30+ suggested various outreach programs as part of evangelization effort to bring parishioners back to church (both old and young) such as utilizing social media + special performance through streaming media with special speaker community can related to, offer babysitting while hosting special program/service, reeducating parishioners already coming to church, visit homebound seniors, reaching out to family lost love ones, bible study leading by those qualified/inspirational, engaging new parishioner and single adult.

Removing administrative duties from priest to allow them focus on spiritual activities are mentioned (6) and setup ministries to handle non-religious duties. People follow priests they like so membership could fluctuate if significant number of priests are reassigned.

Many mentioned evangelize starting within school where classes are not regular practicing Catholics. Need ministry that supports/provides strong catechesis to young people throughout elementary/high schools before college (6). Priests should be focusing on the ministry and hire superintendent to run the school. Few suggested merging schools should be separated from parish consolidation effort. (13) mentioned school kids are scattered indicating current facility limitation and suggested moving school to St. Joseph's facilities since they don't operate school anymore. Affordable Catholic education was mentioned by 6 people.

#### **Section 4. Free-Form Feedback Summary**

Oppose creation of a mega-church of some 5000 families, dwarfing surrounding parishes making it difficult to connect with priests and other parish families, getting lost in the crowd.

Is combining St. Clare/Ascension creating capacity issue?

St. Clare would be better merged with St. Alban Roe in Wildwood. Both have schools with declining enrollment which could be maintained on one site. They have a common connecting road and already have households that exists in each other's boundaries. Municipal restrictions will impede population growth in their areas. There is a disparity between boundaries and church of attendance at St. Alban and Holy Infant (within St. Alban boundaries more Catholics are registered in other parishes and 25% of St. Alban registered households live in Holy Infant boundaries).

The merger would create an unwieldy combination between two already mission-oriented and financially stable parish and school communities. A merger would not be best for the Archdiocese. In fact, a merger of these two Parishes could actually hinder future growth anticipated for Planning Area 8.

Looking deeper into the facts, I believe that a merger would not be best for the Archdiocese. In fact, a merger of these two Parishes could actually hinder future growth anticipated for Planning Area 8.

Respondents seemed to favor 3000 as upper range for households with 1500 as the lower range for Mass attendance (Priority 1.5)

Ascension/St. Clare of Assisi was in both options, but neither church can easily accommodate the number of worshippers. Suggest new construction. Other suggest this is not a problem. Other suggest alternative mergers. (Priority 2.5)

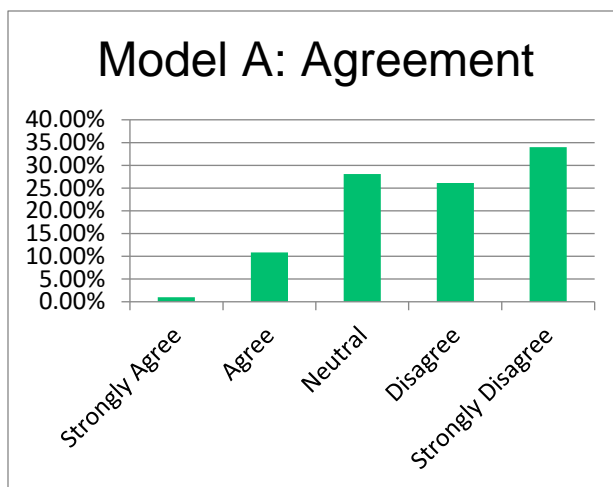
- “St. Clare, a vibrant, active, engaging parish. Their baptisms have been on the rise, the parish has a strong sacramental life and their parishioners are committed to their parish. While the school population has declined, I believe there were some extenuating circumstances that Fr. Yates has addressed and continues to confront.” - email
- “I felt confirmed in my belief that St. Clare of Assisi does not need to combine with Ascension. Rather, we need to expand our flock and become more vibrant so that St. Clare can continue to be a Parish that attracts Christians and grows Catholics within Region 8; just like Ascension. As I drove back to work, past the future “Downtown” Chesterfield, my heart stirred even more. Seeing the land right next to Ascension that will soon have over \$3 Billion worth of real estate developments, which includes more than 3,565 planned housing units, is incredible. I don’t know how Ascension’s current facilities can absorb the thousands of new residents anticipated for that area over the next 3 years... especially if another Parish is asked to combine with them.” – email

## Section 5. Online Survey Quantitative Summary

### Section 5.1 Model A

**In DRAFT Model Option A, what is your level of agreement with how the parishes are grouped together?**

Answer Choices	Responses	
Strongly Agree	0.99%	2
Agree	10.84%	22
Neutral	28.08%	57
Disagree	26.11%	53
Strongly Disagree	33.99%	69
<b>Answered</b>	<b>203</b>	
<b>Skipped</b>	<b>96</b>	



**What is strongest about DRAFT MODEL Option A?**

Answer Choices	Responses	
Shares resources effectively	37.23%	51
Builds upon existing relationships among parishes	29.93%	41
Enables a platform for more robust evangelization or social outreach	10.95%	15
Provides better accessibility to a priest	21.90%	30

**What is most challenging about DRAFT MODEL Option A?**

Answer Choices	Responses	
Brings together communities that are too different	9.14%	18
Requires unrealistic demands on the clergy	10.66%	21
Creates a lot of difficulty for accessing Eucharist and the sacraments	25.38%	50
Neglects the financial needs of the community	2.03%	4
Other (please specify)	52.79%	104

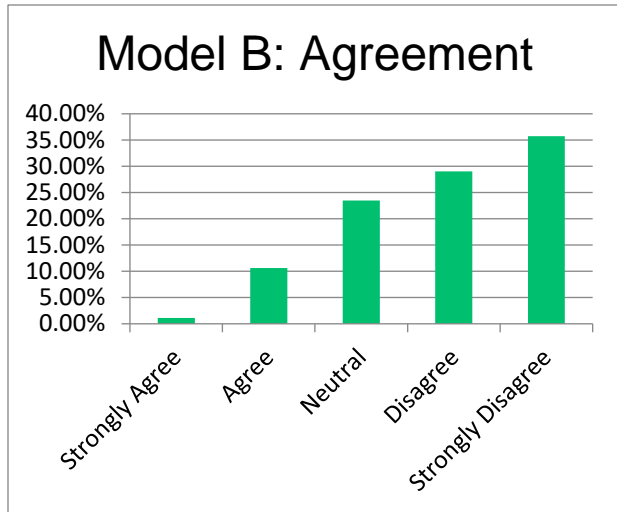
**My DRAFT Model Option A feedback is driven primarily by...**

Answer Choices	Responses	
Differences/Similarities in parish cultures	9.33%	18
Differences/Similarities in socio-economic factors	2.59%	5
Topography between parishes (hills, rivers, bridges)	2.59%	5
Distance between parishes	16.06%	31
Size of the potential parish(es)	64.77%	125
Potential or lack of potential for ministry opportunities	4.66%	9

## Section 5.2 Model B

**In DRAFT Model Option B, what is your level of agreement with how the parishes are grouped together?**

Answer Choices	Responses	
Strongly Agree	1.12%	2
Agree	10.61%	19
Neutral	23.46%	42
Disagree	29.05%	52
Strongly Disagree	35.75%	64
<b>Answered</b>	<b>179</b>	
<b>Skipped</b>	<b>120</b>	



**What is strongest about DRAFT MODEL Option B?**

Answer Choices	Responses	
Shares resources effectively	34.15%	42
Builds upon existing relationships among parishes	31.71%	39
Enables a platform for more robust evangelization or social outreach	12.20%	15
Provides better accessibility to a priest	21.95%	27

**What is most challenging about DRAFT MODEL Option B?**

Answer Choices	Responses	
Brings together communities that are too different	13.94%	23
Requires unrealistic demands on the clergy	11.52%	19
Creates a lot of difficulty for accessing Eucharist and the sacraments	27.27%	45
Neglects the financial needs of the community	2.42%	4
Other (please specify)	44.85%	74

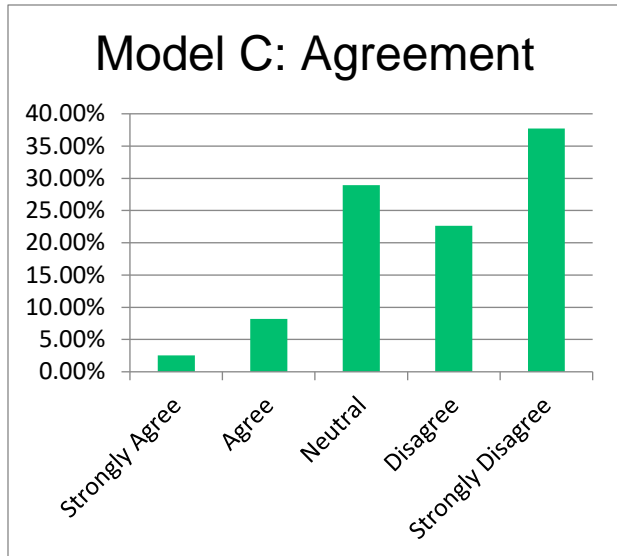
**My DRAFT Model Option B feedback is driven primarily by...**

Answer Choices	Responses	
None of the above	8.98%	15
Differences/Similarities in parish cultures	10.18%	17
Differences/Similarities in socio-economic factors	3.59%	6
Topography between parishes (hills, rivers, bridges)	2.99%	5
Distance between parishes	14.97%	25
Size of the potential parish(es)	55.69%	93
Potential or lack of potential for ministry opportunities	3.59%	6

## Section 5.4 Model C

**In DRAFT Model Option C, what is your level of agreement with how the parishes are grouped together?**

Answer Choices	Responses	
Strongly Agree	2.52%	4
Agree	8.18%	13
Neutral	28.93%	46
Disagree	22.64%	36
Strongly Disagree	37.74%	60
<b>Answered</b>	<b>159</b>	
<b>Skipped</b>	<b>140</b>	



**What is strongest about DRAFT MODEL Option C?**

Answer Choices	Responses	
Shares resources effectively	36.94%	41
Builds upon existing relationships among parishes	31.53%	35
Enables a platform for more robust evangelization or social outreach	12.61%	14
Provides better accessibility to a priest	18.92%	21

**What is most challenging about DRAFT MODEL Option C?**

Answer Choices	Responses	
Brings together communities that are too different	16.55%	24
Requires unrealistic demands on the clergy	10.34%	15
Creates a lot of difficulty for accessing Eucharist and the sacraments	28.97%	42
Neglects the financial needs of the community	1.38%	2
Other (please specify)	42.76%	62

**My DRAFT Model Option C feedback is driven primarily by...**

Answer Choices	Responses	
Differences/Similarities in parish cultures	11.81%	17
Differences/Similarities in socio-economic factors	5.56%	8
Topography between parishes (hills, rivers, bridges)	4.17%	6
Distance between parishes	15.97%	23
Size of the potential parish(es)	54.86%	79
Potential or lack of potential for ministry opportunities	7.64%	11



## **Section 6 Alternative Models**

Divide St. Clare or Ascension and combine those halves with another parish, such as Holy Infant.

Combine St. Alban with another parish because its Mass numbers are low.

If geography demands that certain parishes remain open, such as St. Alban, cut staffing at those parishes to one priest and move other clergy to another parish.

- Combine with Holy Infant or St. Alban is more accessible than Ascension
- Combine St. Clare of Assisi with St. Joseph because of school
- Spread St. Clare of Assisi into St. Alban, Holy Infant and Ascension
- Spread the school - Keep St. Clare church as is perhaps combine school attendance. Make St. Clare a middle school (grades 6,7 and 8) and Ascension house the elementary students (grades K-5)
- Split Ascension between St. Alban and St. Clare of Assisi
- Split St. Clare of Assisi between Ascension, Holy Infant and St. Alban
- Keeping both St. Clare and Ascension alone (Majority)
- Only combine Incarnate, St. Monica and Dubois
- Combine Christ Prince of Peace with St. Joseph
- Combine Christ Prince of Peace with St. Clare of Assisi
- Combine St. Alban with Ascension
- Ascension/St. Clare
- Ascension/St. Clare/St. Alban
- St. Clare/St. Alban
- St Clare/Holy Infant
- St. Clare should/Holy Infant/Ascension/St. Albans
- St. Clare may be better with HI, CPOP, or St. Joe or divide it among the three
- Combine St. Clare of Assisi with St. Joseph

## **Section 7. Further questions**

Words “closure and merger” were used throughout the survey, seems like some see closure as actual closing of entire facility including the church, and others see merger as two parishes merged and sharing facilities. I am wondering how Diocese translates and clarifies these two words? (Those sees “closure” are more disappointed and sadder than those sees “merger” as opportunity)

Many mentioned combining St. Clare and Ascension creates MEGA church. The slide from listening session stated average 1800 household per parish. That might be the reason why

St. Clare of Assisi

majority disagreed with all three models. The concerns are; the church is too small, parking limitation, too large of parish losing sense of community/belonging to name just a few.

Diocese recent decision to push the school effort till next year is a good call based on this survey group. Many feel the school has challenges and do need changes like limited facilities, and they are willing to merge with other schools or move to different location. Suggest to review this survey again when School effort resume because there are good information/suggestion regarding “school” in this survey.

Many do appreciate what Diocese is doing and why All Thing New is happening. They understand the significant of this task and offer their prayer. (Q34 – line 57 example)