

St. Benedict the Moor Parish

Summary of the July 19, 2020 Meet and Greet Q&A Session

Along with Fr. Tom Burke, Pastor, also present were Fr. David Taylor, Senior Parochial Vicar and Fr. Matt Hawkins, Parochial Vicar.

- Thirty-four people were also in attendance.

Overview of Parish Status:

- The church's assets and liabilities were merged with Divine Mercy on 01/06/20.
- St. Benedict the Moor Church was separated from Divine Mercy Parish and named a "personal parish," effective July 13, 2020.
- Fr. Tom stated that there will be an office in the rectory of St. Benedict the Moor Parish.
- There is a website and Facebook page.
- Priscilla Davis will be the Office Manager on a part-time basis and Jeanette Finch is the Sacristan.
- Fr. Tom acknowledged that Antonia Long is "pinch hitting" as music minister... Michael was laid off by Divine Mercy Parish then not re-hired by the new St. Benedict the Moor Parish due to his schedule and the inability of the parish to meet his salary request.
- The Music Director position is open again and a Music Ministry Task Force is in place.
- Fr. Tom contacted *Comcast Business* to re-establish the church phone, but for now the bulletin lists St. Mary Magdalene Parish phone number. Fr. Tom is sure the church will be able to get its old number back.
- Fr. Tom addressed the *Vagabond Ministries* currently has offices in the rectory... the group cleaned and painted the second floor. Fr. Tom met and spoke with Andy, Director of *Vagabond Ministry*. For the time being, they will remain in the rectory, but rent for the space is to be decided.
- The first floor and basement will revert to St. Benedict the Moor Parish.

Questions from Rob Copeland:

1. What is the status of the former St. Benedict the Moor school and Convent site?

- St. Benedict the Moor Parish still owns the buildings... there are two tenants who pay rent: the dance school (Ayisha Morgan Lee) and the Sisters of St. Joseph Convent. The rectory is vacant... The dance school offered to purchase the building but was declined and the property remains for sale and interested parties have inquired. The property will be sold, but no haste decisions will be made.
- The Sisters of St. Joseph reported a large branch fell after a storm, so the Maintenance staff from St. Mary Magdalene disposed of it... that staff will be shared between the two churches for the time being.

2. Who retains the funds from the sale of the property?

- It will remain with St. Benedict the Moor Parish.

3. Will another Mass be provided?

- For the time being, because of COVID19 and sharing staff, the single 10:30am Mass will remain. As circumstances change, an additional Mass will be considered. Currently, St. Mary Magdalene Parish celebrates one Mass at each of its three campuses--St. Bede Church, St. James Church, and Mother of Good Counsel Church. Prior to COVID-19, there were six Masses celebrated.
- Parish input on Mass times will be considered.

4. What is the status of the Music Director?

-The position is open. Craig will act as interim Music Director starting in August until one is hired. Currently, there are three inquiries in response to the posting for the permanent position.

5. What is the church relationship with St. Benedict the Moor School?

-It is not a parish school--it is with the *Extra Mile Foundation*, which is a separate entity. The school board and the *Extra Mile Foundation* run it. The building belongs to St. Benedict the Moor. Our priests have been working with *Extra Mile Foundation* at Sister Thea Bowman Catholic Academy.

- Throughout the Diocese, schools are separating from parishes but remain affiliated with the Catholic Diocese of Pittsburgh Schools and a regional school director... [Michelle Peduto is the Director of Catholic Schools for the diocese]

- [Although Fr. Tom indicated that Sister Thea Bowman Catholic Academy falls under the East Region (Pittsburgh East Regional Catholic Elementary School system (PERCES) whose office is at St. Bede Church in St. Mary Magdalene Parish, the schools are not listed on the PERCES website but is listed on the *Extra Mile Foundation* web page. Fr. Tom mentioned working with Joseph Rosi, Regional Administrator for PERCES...]

- The *Extra Mile Foundation* has three schools: Sister Thea Bowman Catholic Academy, St. Benedict the Moor School, and Northside Catholic Assumption Academy (Brighton). Michelle Peduto worked for the foundation as Director of Educational Programs until last year when she accepted a position with the Diocese of Pittsburgh.

- Fr. Tom intends to hold programming at St. Benedict the Moor School and invite the teachers to the church.

6. Will the church and staff have access to the parish office and how will it be shared with *Vagabond Ministries*?

- Fr. Tom wants to determine who has keys to the building. He will work with the people that have keys. The food bank will remain. St. Mary Magdalene Parish has two food banks. Shannon from *Vagabond Ministries* was on Fr. Tom's radio show this morning. A new setup of the rectory may have to be made.

7. When will the collection counters be expected to reconvene?

- Father Tom will speak with the counters about reestablishment of the Money Counters Ministry.

-The checking account was opened on Friday, July 17. Last week's (7/12/20) collection, checks made out to Divine Mercy went to Divine Mercy and those that were made out to St. Benedict went to the parish. Darrell asked about the Bishop's decree which indicated that the intentions of those donating to Divine Mercy would be considered when dividing the assets between St. Benedict the Moor Parish and Divine Mercy Parish. He suggests that the collections would be honored as of Monday when St. Benedict the Moor personal parish was created officially.

- The *Faith Direct* contributions are similarly disposed and Father Tom asked that people contact *Faith Direct* and have their contribution switched from Divine Mercy Parish to St. Benedict the Moor Parish.

8. Will there be an online donation program?

-An account with *Faith Direct* will be created

- A new parish bank account has been opened and new accounts with vendors will be re-established.

- Sacramental record books will be purchased since the old sacramental record books went to the *Diocese of Pittsburgh Archives and Records Center*.

9. What will our Parish Share be?

-It is an assessment to run the day-to-day operations of the Diocese. The parish depends on the Diocese for administrative support (legal, insurance, etc. The period is from February to February. It is 17% of the church offertory. It pays for various programs offered through the Diocese.

- St. Benedict the Moor Parish will be assessed according to the 2019 offertory for Divine Mercy Parish. St. Benedict the Moor Parish member contributions to parish share will be recovered from Divine Mercy Parish.

10. What cleaning processes were taken as it relates to COVID 19 for the church?

-Jeanette Finch is maintaining the church cleaning according to the diocesan 45-page document on the guidelines of cleaning and restoring the church for Mass.

11. Will we be sharing costs with Divine Mercy Parish and St. Mary Magdalene Parish?

-The parish will not share costs with Divine Mercy Parish. As far as St. Mary Magdalene Parish, Frank Grande, Business Manager of St. Mary Magdalene Parish will be helping with the bookkeeping and the Maintenance staff will be helping maintain the physical plant. [The cost sharing of this arrangement was not discussed.]

- Terri Price, Office Manager of St. Mary Magdalene Parish, creates a monthly Mass calendar that indicates the priests' schedule. This calendar will be posted in the sacristy as well as in the back of the church. The three priests will rotate among the four campuses. Next week Father Hawkins will be here, then Father Taylor. Father Tom will try to be here to meet and greet after Mass as much as possible.

Questions/Comments from Those Present in the Audience:

- Katherine asked about assessing talents of parishioners regarding programming as for Faith Formation and empowering members with religious education/evangelization. Fr. Tom will start with those who worked in Religious Education programs prior to the merger. He stated the *Vagabond Ministry* could assist with that and that there is a potential to partner with St. Mary Magdalene Parish's existing structure as well.

- Tony asked who is considered "paid" staff? Father Tom stated, Priscilla Davis as the Office Manager, Jeanette Finch as the Sacristan, and the three priests.

- Esa asked who is accounting for funds collected under Divine Mercy Parish and how it will be divided? Father Tom said everything given to Divine Mercy Parish except parish share will remain with Divine Mercy Parish. The Diocese will determine what St. Benedict the Moor had before the merger (12/31/19) and that will revert to the new parish. Father Tom also said that collections received after the merger but before the new parish will remain with Divine Mercy Parish.

- The envelopes are numbered and specific to parishioners so donations from St. Benedict the Moor members can be identified but since that money was given to Divine Mercy Parish it will be not separated from the envelope counts. There are 258 families in St. Benedict the Moor Parish.

- Jennifer Ritter asked if the donation information be provided for review by the priests or other persons from St. Benedict the Moor Parish? Fr. Tom indicated that this will absolutely happen as these documents are public information.

- Katherine asked about the decision made regarding Michael and the Music Ministry. How was the budget for the Music Ministry determined without specifics of church finances? She mentioned St. Benedict's identity then asks about the rectory space and re-establishing physical structure? Fr. Tom acknowledges the hurt and need for healing. Regarding the Music Ministry, after consultation with the Business Manager along with other Directors of Music, he believed that the church could not support Michael's requested salary. He also believed that Michael understood this limitation and accepted it.

- Fr. Taylor commented that “a marriage is difficult just like a divorce...” the history with St. Mary Magdalene Parish is (so far) an exemplary marriage... the parishioners there are welcoming to sharing the priests with St. Benedict the Moor Parish.

- Ryan Long asked about plans for digital giving i.e. *Faith Direct*, *Cash App*, or *Venmo*? Fr. Tom welcomed efforts to implement any of these methods.

- Jan Simmons asked if the Mass will be available on *YouTube* as it is now streaming live on *Facebook*? She also asks if *Vagabond Ministries* has a lease? Finally, she asks about financial responsibilities to St. Benedict the Moor School? Ryan began by saying that eventually the Mass will be available on *YouTube*. He indicated that live streaming has significant costs related to it and he had one quote for \$14-15k, so it was tabled by the previous administration. He mentions that live streaming also requires equipment. He is working with Melissa Viator at St. Mary Magdalene Parish to devise stop gap methods for immediate deployment. At minimum, a church iPad would be helpful. Melissa reported that a St. Benedict the Moor *YouTube* channel has been established. Ryan has been working with Cathy Raffaele, Media & Communication Coordinator at St. Mary Magdalene Parish, on the St. Benedict the Moor website, although the church does not currently have a URL at this point.

- Esa commented that there are many talented parishioners willing to share...

- Fr. Tom reported that the school subsidy assessment is being re-evaluated given the pandemic...

- Fr. Tom reported that *Vagabond Ministries* does not have a lease with Divine Mercy Parish although there will be a lease with St. Benedict the Moor Parish

- Vicki reported that previously St. Benedict the Moor was exempted from the school assessment because the bingo program provided \$30k... She mentions that the Christian Mother’s charter has a separate account and provided a \$1k scholarships to the school

- Ryan announced [during the Q&A session] that he received an email from Joelynn Parham that she will donate the necessary funds to purchase an iPad to the church.

- Ryan asked for help filming for *Facebook Live*... he asks that all those willing are to mail Fr. Tom.

Other Items of Interest and Concern:

- Fr. Tom reported that the spotlight on the St. Benedict the Moor statue is now functional... *John Buch Electric* was responsible for having the statue illuminated again. Fr. Tom commented that this is truly a “beacon of hope on the hill!”

--Fr, Tom announced that St. Benedict the Moor received a grant from *Warner Cable* for **\$100k** that was allocated to African-American churches.

- Fr. Tom stated that there are several roof leaks which are in need repair to which Esa requested that a list of “church needs” be provided so that the parishioners can understand the need for giving.

- Ann asked if birthdays will return to the bulletin... Fr. Tom responded absolutely, and that Priscilla Davis will assist with this.

- Fr. Tom asked for volunteers to serve on both the Pastoral and Finance Councils as well as on the search committee for a new Director of the Music Ministry.

*** *The meeting concluded with a prayer at 1:22 pm****