

October 19, 2020

Dear St. John School family:

In the 1960's, Canton's rapidly growing Catholic community erected two new churches. St John's original 1860 church was replaced with a new edifice and a new parish, St. Gerard Majella, was established. Masses were crowded and a team of priests served each busy parish. Today, the scenario is different. Families are smaller, there are fewer priests and Mass attendance has declined. This is not a Canton-only phenomenon but part of a larger cultural shift.

Presently, Canton has two Catholic churches, each of which can accommodate 800 worshippers. On a typical weekend (pre-Covid) a total of 900 people attend Mass at each parish, approximately 225 per Mass. As the number of worshippers decline, and offertory remains flat or drops, the burden of maintaining two houses of worship becomes increasingly difficult.

In recent months I have consulted extensively with our Parish Pastoral Council and Finance Councils regarding the growing burden of operating two parishes with diminished resources. We have concluded that a single parish can serve the Catholic Community of Canton. Toward that end I am formally asking Cardinal Sean to authorize a merger between St. Gerard Majella and St. John the Evangelist parishes.

As a united parish community we shall undertake the task of determining the best use of facilities. It is too soon to decide whether to consolidate at one of the present churches or to seek another site. It will take months if not longer to explore options and weigh ideas.

Rather than struggle to survive in what might be called survival mode, we are confident that by coming together as an invigorated faith community, we will be better able to direct our energy toward expanding life-giving educational, devotional and pastoral initiatives.

As a school family I want you to be aware of this development. Importantly, I also want to assure you that this will not impact St. John the Evangelist School. Our school remains strong and vibrant.

Change is never easy. Some families, at least initially, may be disappointed by this development. I respectfully ask for your prayers and support as we undertake this initiative.

Yours in Christ,

Reverend Thomas S. Rafferty

Pastor