

**St. Thomas Aquinas  
Parish Council Meeting  
October 3, 2023**

Approved December 5, 2023

- Opening Prayer
- Roll Call (Welcome to Rachel Hudson as Youth Representative)
  - Those present: Rocky Marsh, Fr. Varghese, Noah DeMoss, Grace DeMoss, Matt Hayes, Charles Williams, Karla Hudacek, Beth Borland, Rachel Hudson, Patrick Price, Jose Samperio, Geoff Ziegler, Mary Catherine Grau
  - Those absent: Tim Nation, Fred Chandler, Janine Bercovitz, Chris Durnil
  - Guest Speakers:
- Agenda Check
- Approval of minutes from August 1, 2023 meeting
  - Minutes are approved by Council
- Comments from pastor and/or pastoral associate
  - Administration of STA Preschool, Principal Beth Borland present to answer questions
    - More of a separation between preschool and the rest of the school because of legalities
    - Revision of document after the Zoom meetings with the Archdiocese
  - Fr. Varghese potential sabbatical
    - Conversation was had
  - Other items - COVID discussion
    - See attached document
    - Parish is seeing growth from our COVID numbers, even since this past winter
- Update on STA Plan Goals - with reference to Objectives
  - Spiritual Growth: Patrick Price
    - Ministries in need: Greeters\*\*\*, Eucharistic Ministers, Lectors, Arts and Environment, RCIA Sponsors, Sponsor couples
    - Patrick will create 2-page document summarizing the main points of *From Christendom to Apostolic Mission*
  - Stewardship: Geoff Ziegler
    - Ministry fair: Visual representation of what each ministry does
    - Things to consider: make it as easy as possible to get involved and interact with the various ministries directly, how to make it open to future ministries that people want to bring to STA
    - Rely on the rest of Parish Council for help in planning/executing the Ministry Fair
  - Community Engagement: Charles Williams
    - What do we mean when we say “secure liaisons”?
    - Brief activity about how to be active in possible liaisons
      - Which organizations do we really want to focus on?
  - STA School: Mary Catharine Grau
    - Year of the Archdiocesan Accreditation visit
      - Self-evaluation, then they come to visit, and we agree on a plan with them moving forward
      - Evaluated on these 4 criteria: spirituality, leadership, academics, organization
      - Survey and focus groups will kickstart our strategic plan
      - Strategic plan will be partially completed by the end of this year
    - 208 students
    - More parish families than usual are also school families
  - Dialogue, Truth, Faith: Grace DeMoss
    - In between February and April meetings, refresh the strategic plan to update for 2023-2024
    - Goal 6 can refer to the tri-parish relationship

- Finance Committee: Noah DeMoss
  - Financial Review
  - Questions about September 16 collections meeting (summary sent previously)
    - What are expectations around giving for parishioners?
    - \$1300 is the expectation for the parish families
    - See attached document
- Update on Members' Terms
  - We will be focusing on these in upcoming meetings
- Other Pillar Reports and Additional Items of Interest
  - See attached
- Ending Prayer - Matt Hayes

**Future meetings** 7-8:30 pm (unless otherwise noted) typically on the **first Tuesday** of the month, every other month.

**December 5; February 6; April 2; June 4**

**NOTES FROM SPECIAL MEETING CONCERNING TITHING  
ST. THOMAS CATHOLIC CHURCH AND SCHOOL  
September 16, 2023, 9 a.m.**

Father Intro:

- Prayer for the meeting.
- New pastor in north deanery – first time taking over a school. He was wondering about rules and regs. Father noted that we are thinking about the same issues.
- Our council and finance commission work well.

Matt Hayes Intro:

- Presented documentation that parishes sign.
- Topic of expected contributions have come up.

DISCUSSION:

Question 1: Should there be any changes to the STA Parishioner tithing rate?

- Currently \$1300, which is the highest in the deanery.
- Currently not stated on the website for non-school families.
- Was presented to the parish as \$25/week some years ago.
- **Noah:** giving is down. Thus the question.
- Archdiocese wide, expectation is that the parish supports 20-25% of the school. Typically, STA is 15% funded by the parish.
- 70% of the school families are parishioners.
- At STA, we have a lot of time, talent, and treasure that they contribute. Measuring sticks are quite different.
- STA School has a lot of time and talent donated to the parish.
- SausageFest and gala are disproportionately supported by the school.
- **Matt:** this is not a school issue; this is a parish issue.
- Vouchers: 42% of school families on vouchers. That has approximately doubled. We are right with St. Luke and St. Simon; others are over 50%.
  - Vouchers pretty much covers parishioner rate; non-parishioners have a delta of ~\$3,500.
- Currently, STA has about 600 parish families, ~100 of those are school families.
  - 250-300 of these families are giving.
- **On the table:** clarify the giving rate for parishioners at \$25/week.
- Noticeable at STA that school families are not present at mass. Our policy reads as parishioner in name only.
  - School families basically run SausageFest & the Gala.
  - Could recruit for other ministries through school scoops.
  - School is a ministry of the parish. If you're giving to the school, you are giving to the parish.
- Returning to the question: \$1,300 commitment, should it increase?
  - Keeping it and enforcing it sends the right message. We want families to commit in other ways and get back to the parish.
- **DECISION: Keep it the same, finance committee to reach out to non-school families about the \$25/week rate.**

- **Right after Thanksgiving, Father shall send a letter to all parishioners and name their stewardship (what they've given since 7/1) to give people a chance to catch up for the calendar year, put everyone on notice.**
  
- Question 2: what are the consequences for not giving?
  - **Beth:** A family's rate for choice vouchers gets locked in in March, so we need to have decisions made for school families by then. For practical purposes, we might want to think about giving more on a calendar year or quarterly than on a fiscal year basis.
  - We need to make sure we're communicating the choice scholarship option.
    - Can propose making parish contributions since the tuition is being covered by vouchers.
  - Clarity; timing; pastoral discretion.
  - Consequences for parish side?
    - More frequent communication?
      - Seems the best option. Not a lot of other mechanisms.
  - Parish is enriched by school families showing up for mass.
  
- Question 3: how do fundraising activities affect giving amount?
  - It doesn't
  
- Question 4: who decides fundraising efforts?
  - Parish Finance Committee reviews them.
  - **Proposal:** decisions should also be considered by stewardship committee.
  
- **For Parish Finance: reconsider the \$25/week amount after we work for the year to communicate it better.**

**Geoff Ziegler (Stewardship Chair) Communication Plan (decision from item #2):**

**October 28/29 (proposed):** Annual Finance address to the parish, all masses.

- Could we also include an ACH tutorial and/or documentation at a table in Narthex?

**November 5:** STA Ministry Fair

- Definitely passive (possibly active) opportunity to further share the Annual Giving message.

**Late November/early December:** updated parishioner status letter (unique to each family)

- This would give parishioners an opportunity to "see where they stand" and provide information if they wish to update their giving approach.

**March:** Annual stewardship appeal (moved from Q4 calendar year to late Q3/early Q4 of fiscal year)

- Have two versions of a similar letter. Version A would go to non-school parishioners. Version B would go to school parishioners. Version B would contain the same information as Version A + specific information about their school status.
- Would also then align with Choice scholarship efforts by the school.

## **October 2023 Report from Spiritual Life Pillar**

### **Fred Chandler, Pillar Head**

Arts & Environment: Michael Davis, together with George Screes and Steve Gudorf.

- A. Working on design plans for Advent and Christmas displays.
- B. Planning an Evening of Stillness in Sacred Silence prayer service during Advent. Will likely be towards the beginning of Advent.
- C. Organizing and cleaning hallway area to basement.
- D. Steve Gudorf & George Screes - Steve and George have been in an integral part of A&E for many years. Over the last few years, they have begun to step down on their involvement and are continuing to do so effective later this year. I am coordinating meetings with them to ensure we have as much detail documented about the regular tasks they complete. They will not completely be leaving but their involvement will lessen even further. I am continuing to network with other parishioners to identify new support resources for our committee. I am meeting with Sheila Brown to discuss further in detail with the hope she can assist in identifying new committee members as well. I am also requesting assistance from the Parish Council in identifying new committee members.
- E. Steve & George recognition - Need to determine an appropriate way to recognize and honor Steve and George's years of service. They are humble and like to work behind the scenes and will not want anything big. I am suggesting a write up that can be included in the bulletin, newsletter and read at each mass as well as some form of gift of thanks to them. Plan to complete this recognition task in December as of now.

Bible Study: Jay Kiesler. The Bible Study group began a five-session biblical study of the Eucharist on September 14. The group meets the second and fourth Thursdays of the month in the Parish Conference Room at 1:00 PM. There also is a Thursday night group at 7:00 PM. The group uses The Eucharist in Scripture from Little Rock Scripture Studies. The parish also will offer a different four-session presentation on the Eucharist sometime this spring or early summer.

Children's Liturgy of the Word: This ministry is continuing with a strong, positive response from the participating children.

Religious Ed: We are back to pre-pandemic numbers with 40 kiddos enrolled in our Sunday morning religious education program. We have a new catechist in the 3-4-5th-grade class - Jay Kiesler. Longtime catechist Dorothy Henehan received the Catechist of the Year award at the 10:30 Mass on Catechist Sunday, Sept. 17.

Eucharistic Ministers/Greeters/Lectors/Musicians: There continues to be a need for additional people for each of these ministries. Commissioning of EMs and Lectors is scheduled on December 1-2. Julie Sherer is the new coordinator for EMs

Ministry to the Homebound: This ministry is suspended for the time being.

Centering Prayer: The group continues to meet at 6:00 p.m. on Thursdays.

Morning prayer: Bill Scott. The Morning Prayer group is still going strong. The group continues to meet weekdays at 7:45 in the Bosler Chapel and typically have a group of 4-6 people. The gatherings last 15-20 minutes.

Prayer Power: Sheila Pluckebaum. To request prayers, email Sheila at [sheilapluck@sbcglobal.net](mailto:sheilapluck@sbcglobal.net)

RCIA: Karla Hudecek. Six adults are preparing to receive the sacraments of initiation on Holy Saturday. That number is at least double what we have had in each of the past 4 years.

Retreats for men and women:

Sacramental Prep: Eighth-graders interested in receiving the Sacrament of Confirmation began their preparation sessions on Sunday, Sept. 24. The program consists of seven formation meetings and draws candidates into a deeper relationship with God through sponsor-candidate relationships, service projects and

an overnight retreat at Camp Rancho Fromasa. Subsequent meetings will be on these Sundays -- Oct. 29, Dec. 3, Jan. 21, Feb. 4, March 3 and April 21. The retreat is scheduled for Nov. 11-12. Twelve teens will be confirmed May 1. Thirty children will receive First Reconciliation/Communion this school year - our largest group since 2019. This includes three who will be baptized this fall. Information about the sacrament of First Reconciliation was also offered, as well as materials that will be used for preparation. Seventeen children have been baptized so far this year, with nine pending. That's as many as we had in 2019.

Youth Ministry: Efforts are underway to have more youth Masses.

Vacation Bible School: SCUBA VBS – Diving into Friendship with God – will be **June 17-21, 2024**.

Liturgy Committee: Sharon Mason's term as chair of the committee ended on September 21. Mary Rice and Julie Niec volunteered to co-chair the group.

Eucharistic Revival: The **10th National Eucharistic Congress** (NEC) will be held on **July 17-21, 2024**, in Indianapolis, primarily at Lucas Oil Stadium and in surrounding venues. As the defining event of a five-year National Eucharistic Revival, the NEC is an opportunity for Catholics across the United States to be “healed, converted, formed, and unified by an encounter with Jesus in the Eucharist”—and then to be sent out on mission, newly inspired and “on fire” with the love of Christ and His Holy Spirit.

### **The Week at a Glance**

Each day of the National Eucharistic Congress is guided by a theme drawn from Scripture:

- From the Four Corners (Wednesday)
- The Greatest Love Story (Thursday)
- Into Gethsemane (Friday)
- This is My Body (Saturday)
- To the Ends of the Earth (Sunday)

A discounted registration fee of \$274 has been offered for those of us in the Archdiocese of Indianapolis.



## **Parish Council Report: September 30, 2023**

- Fiscal year 2023-24 giving was 2.5% lower than prior fiscal year-to-date – this covers July-August 2023.
- Finance committee voted to endorse communication to parish regarding discussion at September special session to improve communication of existing parish expectation that each parish household contribute \$25 per week (\$1,300 annually) to Sunday collections to support operations of parish.

## **STA Finance Committee Meeting – September 19, 2023**

### **Financial Statements Update**

- Collections were 26% below budget for fiscal year (at this time last year we were 23% below budget). Budget corresponds to target of \$25/week per registered household.
- Summary of financial activity on following page.
- Sanctuary HVAC to be repaired shortly; insurance will cover costs beyond \$5,000 deductible.

### **New Business**

- SausageFest unofficial net income: \$180,000.
- Additional funding approved to complete upgrades/installation for A/V system in gym.
- Approved changes to list of 8<sup>th</sup> grade fundraisers.
- Finance committee will send a non-school member to sit in School Commission meetings this year.
- Committee chair will present annual financial update to parish on weekend of October 28 & 29. Please see attachment for parish council version, which includes more specifics than what will be provided to the parish at large.
- Future finance committee meetings will include discussion of Archdiocese CCF matching gift program, and of Laudato Si' Action Platform items with Creation Care.

St. Thomas Aquinas Parish and School, Indianapolis

Summary of Financial Activity for Fiscal Year: July 1, 2023 to August 31, 2023

<b>Revenues – to nearest thousand</b>	<b>Period</b>	<b>Over/(Under) Budget</b>
Sunday Collections	97,000	(32,000)
Tuition & Fees	314,000	40,000
Other Revenue	17,000	(6,000)
<u>Total Revenue</u>	<u>\$428,000</u>	<u>\$2,000</u>

<b>Expenses – to nearest thousand</b>	<b>YTD</b>	<b>(Over)/Under Budget</b>
Salaries and Benefits	(173,000)	135,000
Archdiocese Assessments	(31,000)	-
Spiritual Life & Programming	(25,000)	6,000
Property, Facility, Utilities	(42,000)	4,000
Other Expenses	(12,000)	(2,000)
<u>Total Expenses</u>	<u>\$(283,000)</u>	<u>143,000</u>
<b>Net Income:</b>	<b>\$145,000</b>	<b>\$145,000</b>

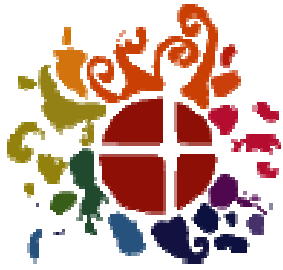
**Bank Balance (to nearest thousand):**

Fifth Third Bank \$878,000

**Restricted Funds Balances:**

Haiti \$25,000  
Auction/Gala \$62,000  
Energy Improvements \$30,000  
Capital Campaign \$100,000  
STA Home & School \$82,000  
Various Auxiliaries (reporting to FC) \$300,000  
Other Restricted Funds \$279,000





# ST THOMAS AQUINAS CHURCH AND SCHOOL

## Financial Overview for July 1, 2022 to June 30, 2023

For the most recent fiscal year (the 12 months from July 2022 to June 2023), Sunday collections dropped about 2 % for the second straight year. To respond, parish leadership is recommitting to St. Thomas Aquinas' traditional expectation of a contribution of \$25 a week, or \$1,300 annually, per parish household. Please take some time to prayerfully consider how your household can meet this expectation. This is a difficult ask to make, and it is a difficult request to hear as a parishioner. However, the financial support of all parish families is crucial to our mission as a parish and as a school.

Last school year an effort to increase enrollment resulted in school revenue increasing by 10 %. Last October, the Gala netted about \$108,000, including funds for renovating bathrooms in this building matched dollar-for-dollar by the archdiocese. This year's SausageFest netted about \$180,000.

We appreciate the financial support you provide to our parish! Thank you for your attention.

### 2023-24 STA Finance Committee Members:

Chair – Noah DeMoss - [noah.demoss@oneamerica.com](mailto:noah.demoss@oneamerica.com) - (317) 767-4154

Andy Bastnagel

Brandon Thomas

Gary deCastro

John Sobotowski

Liz Turner

Mark Momper

Melissa Klitzman

School Commission Representative – Clark Kirkman - [clark.kirkman@gmail.com](mailto:clark.kirkman@gmail.com)

Parish Accountant – Ithream Blackmon - [iblackmon@staindy.org](mailto:iblackmon@staindy.org)

The next Finance Committee meeting is scheduled for **Tuesday, November 21 at 7:00 pm** in the parish conference room.

# Exploring the Pandemic Impact on Congregations

## Research Findings vis-à-vis Parish Goals

In early 2023 St. Thomas Aquinas participated in a five-year, Lilly Endowment-funded research project that collected information on the possible changes and long-term implications the COVID-19 pandemic might have on religious life. It included an online survey of parishioners, as well as two focus groups with parishioners, several visits to liturgies and an interview and separate questionnaire for key leaders.

**Sample Description:** A total of 69 people completed the online survey, the majority of which are White (62), women (48), and over the age of 40 years. 64% of the sample also holds an education of a master's degree or higher, which is significantly more education than the other four congregations in this researcher's sample of five congregations. 75% of respondents have also been attending the congregation for over 10 years. Most were married.

In general, the research affirmed that STA has a clear identity – that “they work to be diverse, welcoming, and oriented towards justice.”

### Spiritual Life

- Unsurprisingly, the desire for community was the No. 1 reason cited for returning to in-person worship. Forty people mentioned it, while 9 said it was the Eucharist.
- “During the pandemic, the sense of prayer and meditation remained. ... They seem to have great concern for religious education, for people coming back to worship, but most also reported their faith and relationship with God was the same or somewhat stronger.”
- A number reported that their faith, sense of belonging, trust in church leaders, optimism about people working together were the same or lower.
- Weekly church attendance dropped from 70% pre-pandemic to 46% as of January 2023.

### Stewardship

- 26 people, or 38%, reported decreased involvement in the parish since the pandemic (beyond worship); while 10 people reported increased involvement leadership tasks or roles.
- Online giving increased 12% post pandemic; overall giving increased modestly or stayed the same for 88% of the respondents

### Community Engagement

- Several people said they wanted more social and service opportunities.

### School

- The overview noted a separation between several groups. “The school family and the church family overlap, but many of the parents and students who attend the school do not attend mass as well as younger families who have increasingly not returned to this church.”

### Dialogue, Truth and Faith

- The lockdown gave some people the time to become more aware of the deep injustice and inequality in our society and the need for a clear commitment to inclusion and fighting white supremacy.

Most of them were seeking what the life of the congregation would be in the future, saying the church is deciding on new directions, but they don't feel they've reached that direction. A few think they should rethink where they are heading but most felt they had a future, even if it's changing. They also reported being adaptive to new directions.