

St. Bartholomew Catholic Church

St. Joseph Catholic Church

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

It is surreal to think that it has now been nearly nine months since I've been at St. Joseph Catholic Church as your priest. I am grateful for these months and the ways you've generously received me. I have also been impressed with the way that you care for and love each other as a parish family.

I am writing this letter with regard to my living situation and the St. Joseph Rectory. When the parish announced the sale of the previous St. Bartholomew Rectory on M-82, the plan mentioned at the time was to build a rectory on the campus of St. Bartholomew in Newaygo. That plan was put on hold for a time on account of rising building costs and the lack of a full-time priest in Newaygo and White Cloud. After being in these parishes for the last several months, it has become clear to me that I need to resume this project of building a rectory on the campus of St. Bartholomew.

This is the case for several reasons. Firstly, given that the majority of St. Bartholomew parishioners live south of the parish, a rectory in Newaygo exists much closer to the middle point of all parishioners between the two parishes. Secondly, the office and most parish Masses and activities take place in Newaygo. Thirdly, a Church the size of St. Bartholomew simply ought to have a rectory. Please know that this decision comes after considerable prayer, deliberation, and consultation, and I do not make this decision lightly.

I imagine that this news could be difficult to hear. I know that St. Joseph parishioners were thrilled to see a priest move into this beautiful house after decades of vacancy. With that said, I am not content with this rectory remaining empty and vacant. Therefore I would like to initiate a process of discernment regarding the use of our rectory. Here are a few ideas that have occurred to me or others:

- Invite a retired priest to live in the rectory
- Utilize the rectory as a retreat house for priests
- Collaborate with Love INC's Rooms of Refuge Program to use the rectory as a shelter or work with Insight Pregnancy Services or another local organization to provide assistance to women in crisis pregnancies.
- Use the rectory as an additional location for Bishop Baraga Academy's childcare

While we are merely in the idea stage of this process, I am excited about the possibility of putting our beautiful rectory to good use. Far more important than my ideas is what you as the parishioners of St. Joseph would like to see. In the meantime, I will obviously continue to live here at St. Joseph until a rectory could be completed in Newaygo, so we have time to discern this together. Let us listen to the voice of the Holy Spirit and how God is calling us to live the mission of Jesus Christ in White Cloud!

If you have any questions or ideas, please feel free to contact me. Please continue to keep me in your prayers, and be assured of my daily prayers for you.

Sincerely yours in Christ,



Fr. Noah Thelen