

Christ Jesus, Our Hope Yesterday & Today: What Have We Achieved?

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As *Christ Jesus, Our Hope* continues, it is important to look back and assess what has been accomplished. We ask ourselves, are the steps that we have taken been successful in addressing areas of critical concern?

Since *Christ Jesus, Our Hope* began, there has been significant improvement in the budgets of parishes that have been involved in the process so far. In the fiscal year of 2008 - 2009, the budgeted deficits of parishes in Phase I and II of the process totaled nearly \$3.4 million. For the current fiscal year, 2011 - 2012, this same group of parishes had a cumulative budget deficit of \$848,000. This can be attributed to parish mergers and strategic action plans.

The direct subsidy from the Diocese to those same parishes declined from \$1.2 million to zero.

When considering the success of parish mergers, the signs of success take somewhat longer to realize, though we can point to some immediate markers of success. The success of parish mergers often comes most quickly through the sharing of resources among the parishes merged.

One such example is St. Matthew's parish in Crown Heights. It was recently merged with St. Gregory the Great and previously with Our Lady of Charity. These three faith communities have significantly reduced their debts and balanced their budget. It happened because of their ability to share resources freely. Additionally, these three communities have come together as one new family of faith during a recent Corpus Christi procession to celebrate their identity as Catholics and find strength in their unity.

Parishes that have merged in the past few years are also showing new signs of growth through the sharing of clergy, staff and resources. Smaller parishes in our diocese, such as Holy Family in Park Slope, have been able to retain their church and continue the celebration of Mass by merging with St. Thomas Aquinas on 9th Street. Now, as one new parish, the pastor celebrates Mass at both locations. The same is true for all merged parishes.

These changes can be difficult to navigate and do require organization, but this sharing of resources helps the Church remain present in all the neighborhoods of Brooklyn and Queens.

The more intangible, but critical, success of parish mergers is building up of the communion of our Church and the sense of unity that we share as Catholics. When one of our members is struggling, Catholics are called to come together and support one another. It is in this way that we become a stronger community and a family of faith.

It was once said of us, "Look at those Christians, how they love one another." There will continue to be challenging days ahead for our Church, but the promise of Christ Jesus is that we will succeed in addressing our most dire challenges if we are willing to care for one another.

As Blessed Pope John Paul II said, "[the goal of communion is] to see my brother or sister in faith as part of me." To the extent that we accomplish this unity, we will be successful.

For more information, visit www.christjesusourhope.org.