

Summary of Responses from Paulist Center Community Members
In Response to the Paulist Discernment Process

February 2024

These are the major themes and factors that we were able to summarize from the ~50 letters received by the pastoral council with thoughts from members of the Paulist Center on the unique reasons supporting why the Paulist Fathers should continue to staff and maintain the ministries at the Paulist Center in Boston.

1. The Paulist Center is a unique source of hope and community for Catholics in metro Boston. The spirit of inclusiveness and welcoming, along with the strong liturgies, preaching, and music make the Paulist Center a unique place to worship and attracts Catholics from throughout metro Boston. The Paulist Center is not a local parish but is an intentional alternative, a refuge, for the NONES, the alienated, and the disenchanted who have not found a home in the diocesan churches in their neighborhoods. If the Paulist Center were to close, most members would not be able to find a Catholic place to worship where they would feel comfortable, included, and “at home”.
2. The Paulist Center mission of inclusiveness, liturgies, social justice, and outreach along with the spirit and vitality of the Masses have renewed hope and either kept people attending church or attracted many, many members who felt alienated and cast out by the church to come back to God and the church. The Paulist Center is often referred to as the “Last Stop on the Train out of the Church”. If this stop is not available to people, they are likely to fall away from the Church and are not coming back.
3. The Paulist Center has been a foundation of inclusivity and has actively lived out the Paulist Mission and Pope Francis’s teachings to reconcile those who have been alienated and leaving the Roman Catholic church:
 - LGBTQIA - The very active LGBTQIA ministry has kept many members in the church and has flourished with many members extremely active in all aspects of the Paulist Center activities from sacristans, lectors, musicians, leaders of fund raisers, to members of the Pastoral Council. During Covid, the LGBTQIA community initiated weekly Zoom prayer services that continue today.
 - Women – Many women at the Paulist Center are attracted to the inclusiveness of the community, the way the community embraces women’s perspectives in general and during the Masses, and have helped so many of them continue to have faith in the Catholic church after many trying times.

- Divorced Catholics – The Paulist Center was a leader in forming a ministry that welcomed and attended to the needs of divorced Catholics. It attracted many people who came during a time of great difficulty and struggle in their lives and have now found a spiritual home which has allowed them to rebuild their lives and flourish.
- Young Adults: The Paulist Center’s young adult community has attracted many students and new residents of the Boston area to the church. Their social events have attracted multiple non-Catholics or NONES looking for a spiritual home to the Paulist Center and many of them have gone on, through the RCIA program, to become members of the church. The Paulist Center holds a very popular Marriage-Preparation program that attracts couples from throughout the Archdiocese of Boston and introduces hundreds of couples a year to the Paulists, with a first-hand look at the modern, inclusive, and collaborative message of Fr. Isaac Hecker.
- Any others who are just striving for an inclusive, progressive, and social justice-focused community.

There are too many stories to include that document how women, divorced Catholics, and LGBTQIA people have had a major spiritual hole in their lives filled by finding the Paulist Center and becoming members of the Paulist Center Community. The Paulist Center has many extremely active women and LGBTQIA members on the Pastoral Council and in numerous positions of leadership throughout the community. Today, 6 of the 8 members of the Pastoral Council are either LGBTQIA or women.

4. The Paulist Center has a long history of social impact in the City of Boston. These efforts are energized by the Paulist Fathers and the members of the community, but they also energize the members of the community to get out of their comfort zones in order to ask their friends and neighbors for donations to good causes, assist new immigrant families in adjusting to life in Boston and the US, or communicate with a local hungry or homeless person. These ministries from the Paulist Center include:
 - Continuously offering the Wednesday Night Supper club serving 120-150 hungry people every Wednesday evening for over 60 years. Maintaining a food pantry that serves the people of downtown Boston. Offering a hot breakfast one Saturday a month to any hungry resident at our door.
 - The founding of the Walk for Hunger, the nation’s first pledge-walk fundraiser, which now raises over \$1,000,000 a year to feed the hungry in Massachusetts.
 - Donation of 5% of the annual collection to a variety of causes that align with the Paulist Center’s mission.
 - The Paulist Center has supported a sister community in El Salvador with numerous fundraisers and awareness building events throughout the years.

- The creation and presentation of the Isaac Hecker Award for Social Justice, attracting many nationally recognized people and highlighting their service, the message of Fr. Hecker, and the service of the Paulists. Past award recipients include: Dorothy Day, Cesar Chavez, Sister Helen Prejean, Sister Norma Pimental, and Martin Sheen.
 - Members of the Paulist Center were instrumental in the foundation of Voice of the Faithful in 2002 and then in the leadership of the organization. They are an active voice of outrage and change in response to the news regarding the history of clergy sex abuse throughout the Catholic church in Boston and across the US. Today the group has grown to over 30,000 members worldwide.
 - The Paulist Center was one of the first Catholic churches in Boston to form a divorced Catholics group and welcome divorced Catholics, who felt excluded and shunned in other churches, into our community.
 - The Center has a very active Immigration Advocacy Group impacting legislation in Massachusetts and providing aid to immigrants and refugees in the Boston area.
 - The Center has also taken up Pope Francis's call to protect our earth with the formation of the Creation Care Committee.
5. The Paulist Center has a unique location sitting at the base of the Massachusetts State House and adjacent to Boston Common.
- We are a place that welcomes visitors and tourists to Boston from around the world. We recognize them at Mass, chat with them after Mass, and even sometimes give them restaurant recommendations. We focus on letting nearby hotels know our Mass times.
 - We interact with the many protests and protesters on the Common and in front of the State House on a regular basis. This provides awareness of the many issues of the day to our members and strengthens their commitment to Pope Francis's and Jesus's calls for social justice.
 - We have the wealthy and the very poor at our doorstep. The Center lives out the Paulist mission to minister the those just outside our door. There is a significant diversity of those sitting in the pews at any given Mass. One member of the Center recounted a time when she saw a homeless person in a pew sitting next to a US Senator. Members of the Paulist Center donate money to the few street people who are often outside the Center, and many of these people feel close enough to the community to come in and pray with us.
 - A Paulist priest from the Paulist Center has occasionally served as Chaplain at the Massachusetts State House.
 - The proximity to the Massachusetts State House and interaction with the legislators allows the members of the Paulist Center to promote social justice legislation and to find ways to combat toxic polarization in our politics.

- It would be unfortunate for the Paulist Fathers to close such a high profile and historic location when they are advocating for sainthood for Fr. Isaac Hecker.
6. The Paulist Center has a long history of participating in the Koinonia program from the Paulist Fathers Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Office, relating Catholic teachings, and fostering interfaith dialogue. The strength of these programs and the Paulist Center involvement help the members of the Center to live out the current Paulist focus on reducing toxic polarization in the church, amongst different religions, and throughout the country.
- The Paulist Center shares its worship space with a local Coptic Catholic community for their services.
 - The Paulist Center provided a temporary worship space for two years for a local downtown Muslim community while their worship space was being renovated.
 - Fr. Tom Ryan ran the Paulist Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Mission from the Paulist Center for many years. During that time, the Paulist Center became involved in Unite Boston and Cooperative Metropolitan Ministries.
 - Members of the Paulist Center have invited Fr. Rich to participate in interfaith services with a rabbi at Jewish Senior Life Independent Living. These gatherings now continue on a regular basis.
 - The Paulist Center hosts the very moving and well-attended ecumenical 7 Last Words service every year on Good Friday.
7. The Paulist Center has a very active Paulist Associates group who are active in many national Paulist Associates ministries:
- Barbara Lapinskas is on the national Paulist Associates board; and a member of the Paulist Center has served on the board since its inception.
 - Denis Hurley is the Editor of the Associate World newsletter. Paula Cuzzo also served in that position.
 - Denis Hurley and Paula Cuzzo were active members of the committee to plan the Isaac Hecker Symposium in 2023.
 - Mary Sullivan was recognized by the Boston Archdiocese for her work on the Paulist Associates and at the Paulist Center.

In addition to these Paulist Center members supporting the national Paulist Associates initiatives, Paulist Center member Mary Lesko has been working closely with Fr. John Geaney in support of the Paulist Fund; and Bob Bordone has been part of the national Paulist group working on combatting polarization.

8. The Paulist Center's inclusive and justice-oriented community has influenced many careers and actions focused on serving others, serving marginalized communities, and

climate justice.

9. The Paulist Center's location in metro Boston is well-aligned with Fr. Isaac Hecker's ties to Emerson and Thoreau and his time in Concord, MA.
10. The Paulist Center is a true community with strong lay involvement and leadership. The Paulist Center is well-positioned to adapt and thrive in a future with a reduced availability of ordained priests. There are many active lay members who currently assist the Paulist priests serving here and would be highly engaged in taking on more responsibility in future years should there be a need to reduce the number of active priests serving the community.
11. The Paulist Center is also financially well positioned to continue to operate into the future. The community has an Operating Reserve of \$600,000 and an endowment of over \$1.4M which generates income for the Center.
12. The Paulist House and residence is very attractive to senior Paulists. It currently houses 5 senior Paulists, and Fr. Rick is a currently active Paulist who plans to live out his retirement years here in Boston.
13. The Paulist Center and its community of members and worshippers are a major part of the lives of the members. The news of the Paulist Discernment process has generated over 50 emails with testimonials on the love of the members for the Paulist Center Community and how the Center and the Paulists have impacted their lives. Many of these statements discuss how the Paulist Center has filled a spiritual void that no local parish church could fill and how it impacted people's choices on where to buy a home and grow their families.
14. The Paulist Center's modern message of inclusiveness, its vibrant Family Religious Education Program (FREP), and its active young adult program have resulted in a major portion of the Center's population being families with children. In addition to a normal religious education program, the FREP program has sponsored recent intergenerational discussion sessions on racism, immigration, and the Israel-Hamas War. These programs help to fuel dialogue and understanding across households and generations and not only reduce some of the toxic polarization in our society today, but also produce a citizenry that understands that there are multiple sides to an issue and the need to put ourselves in the shoes of others (let he/she who is without sin cast the first stone) before casting judgement.
15. The Paulist Center has developed a strong and vibrant liturgical dance ministry. This unique and inclusive ministry involves a racially diverse group of adolescents and

involves children and teens with disabilities and mental health challenges. It also helps promote the Paulist mission by participating in multiple inter-faith festivals with Christians, Jews, and Muslims to promote interfaith dialogue and collaboration.

16. The Paulist Center has been willing to confront issues head on and be a place of “truth-telling”. The Center hosted the play, “Conversations with My Molester: A Journey of Faith”, which was written by a member of the Center. It was presented 6 times and generated a full-page article in the New York Times.