

St John leadership Meeting

July 27, 2026, Waynesboro Library

Minutes from St John parish leadership meeting discussing the history and status of the former St. John's property and the foreclosure process involving Appalachian Christian School. We met at the Waynesboro Library on July 27, 2026, with the following FC and PPC members in attendance:

Finance Council

Kathie Ward
Joe Noto
Chip Hill
Maggie Van Huss
Mary Anne Barlow

Parish Council

Bonnie Weber
Dawn Rogers
Bob Bossi
Ken Raiche
Miguelina Beccera
Thea Jordan

Here's a concise summary:

- The meeting opened with a prayer asking for guidance, wisdom, and unity.
- Kathie Ward explained that the purpose of the meeting was to develop one or more recommendations for the pastor to present to the Diocese of Richmond regarding the future use of the Maple Avenue church property if it returns to parish ownership.
- FC and PPC (Members) introduced themselves, including parish and finance council representatives.
- A historical overview was given:
 - The parish built a new church and needed to sell the old St. John's property to help finance the project.
 - The property remained on the market for about three years without a buyer because most interested parties wanted the church, not the school.
 - Appalachian Christian School (formerly Afton Christian School) approached the parish to purchase the property.
 - Because the school couldn't obtain traditional financing, the parish agreed to hold the mortgage, despite concerns from the Diocese about the financial risk.
 - The school made a \$75,000 down payment and agreed to monthly mortgage payments with a balloon payment due after three years.

- When the balloon payment became due:
 - The school said it expected funds from a benefactor's estate.
 - The inheritance became tied up in litigation and later in difficulties accessing offshore funds.
 - As a result, the balance remained unpaid.
- Approximately 18 months ago (January 2025), the Diocese of Richmond assumed responsibility for handling the matter, instructing parish leaders not to discuss it publicly or negotiate directly with the school.
- The Diocese eventually initiated foreclosure proceedings after receiving no response to notices.
- Parish leaders had requested that the school be allowed to remain open through the end of the 2026 academic year to avoid disrupting students.
- The school continued making its regular mortgage payments, which participants acknowledged as being to its credit.
- After foreclosure proceedings began, the school retained legal counsel and claimed another potential benefactor might satisfy the debt, though parish leaders expressed skepticism because similar assurances had been made previously.
- At the time of the meeting:
 - The foreclosure case was pending in court.
 - No hearing had yet been scheduled.
 - The parish had no control over the court's timeline and was waiting for the legal process to proceed.

Diocese Letter to the Parish

- A Zoom meeting took place a week prior to our July 27th meeting. FC members, Father Francis and Bonnie Weber met with Mike McGee and the Richmond Finance team to discuss the ACS foreclosure. During the meeting, Kevin Muldowney (diocesan lawyer) mentioned that the Diocese would draft a letter from the Diocese to the parishioners explaining the ACS situation. When the draft letter arrived, however, it was signed as though it came from **Father Francis**, rather than from the Diocese.

Kathie Ward called Mike McGee to ask why the letter was signed only by Father Francis and not from both parties. Mike explained that diocesan policy generally requires communications to come through the pastor, but he was willing to discuss the matter further with Father Francis. Kathie then told Father Francis that he could contact Mike, although she did not know whether he did.

Members unanimously agreed that:

- The letter is well written, thorough, and necessary, However, it should be signed by **both the Diocese and Father Francis**, rather than Father alone.
- Co-signing would:
 - Make it clear that the information originated with the Diocese.
 - Prevent parishioners from believing parish leaders had known all the detailed information throughout the process but intentionally withheld it.

Timing of the Letter

- Members discussed when the letter would be distributed.
- They understood it would likely accompany the parish's annual budget mailing or bulletin insert.
- Distribution was expected to occur after Father Francis received the members' recommendations and responded to the Diocese.

Parish Questions and Follow-Up

Members anticipated that parishioners would have many questions after receiving the letter.

- During previous discussions, diocesan representatives had offered to participate in a large Zoom meeting with parishioners if needed.
- Members viewed this as a practical way to answer questions directly rather than expecting Father Francis or parish leaders to respond to issues that had been handled by the Diocese.
- Members noted that the Diocese had requested a response by the following day, July 28, 2026, regarding the members' recommendations.
- Parish leaders had not been included in many of the discussions with Appalachian Christian School (ACS) and did not know the details of ongoing negotiations.

- They felt they were being asked to make recommendations without having all the information.

All members unanimously voted on the recommendations and that they should be sent to Father Francis immediately following the July 27th meeting.

An email was sent to Father Francis at 8:24pm on July 27, 2026 and stated the following:

“We had a good meeting this evening and have reached consensus, and recommend the following:

1. The Maple Ave property letter – it should come from the diocese and yourself and therefore, should be signed by both parties.
2. As it relates to the email from Kevin Muldowney regarding the leasing options, we are open to discussion and will decide once the courts make a decision regarding the foreclosure.
3. To gather parishioner feedback on the letter, we recommend placing a bulletin notice directing comments, with names and contact information, to the PPC suggestion box.”

Discussion of a Potential Lease

A significant portion of the discussion focused on whether the parish should indicate a willingness to lease the property back to ACS if the Diocese regained ownership.

Points raised included:

- The property is still in foreclosure and has **not yet returned to diocesan ownership**, so no lease can currently be offered.
- The foreclosure process could result in:
 - the Diocese regaining the property,
 - another buyer purchasing it,
 - or another outcome determined by the court.
- Because of these uncertainties, several members questioned the value of negotiating lease terms before ownership is resolved.

Others explained that the Diocese was simply seeking to know the parish’s general position so it could be prepared if the property is returned.

Proposed Lease Costs

Members reviewed information received from the Diocese indicating:

- A commercial real estate professional estimated fair market rent for the approximately **30,000-square-foot** property at **\$90,000–\$105,000 annually**, or approximately **\$8,000–\$9,500 per month**.
- ACS is currently paying substantially less.
- Any future lease would also need to cover insurance, taxes, maintenance, and other ownership expenses, resulting in an even higher monthly payment.

Several members questioned whether ACS would be financially capable of paying those amounts, noting that the school has already struggled to pay increased interest charges.

Public Nature of the Case

One member remarked that once the parish letter was distributed, the information would spread throughout the community.

Others noted that:

- The foreclosure case is already part of the public record.
- Court information can be found through Virginia court records and internet searches.
- Although the information is public, most people would only discover it if they specifically searched for it.

No Direct Contact with ACS

Members reiterated that:

- The Diocese instructed parish representatives not to communicate directly with ACS.
- Aside from one early Zoom meeting involving Father Francis and several ACS representatives, parish leadership has followed that instruction.
- Any future negotiations would be handled by the Diocese rather than the parish.

Concerns About Transparency

Several participants expressed concern that:

- Parents, teachers, and donors at ACS may not fully understand the school's legal and financial situation.

- One member mentioned that a recently appointed fundraising leader at ACS appeared unaware of the foreclosure proceedings.
- Participants felt families deserved greater transparency before making decisions about tuition or donations.

Foreclosure Timeline

Members reviewed the anticipated legal timeline:

- A summary judgment process was expected to occur first.
- After that, the case would proceed toward placement on the court calendar.
- Based on information shared by diocesan representatives, members estimated that court proceedings and a resolution could take approximately **two to three months**, although the exact timing would depend on the court.

Meeting adjourned at 6pm.