

THE DIOCESE OF BELLEVILLE

THE PASTORAL PLAN FOR PARISH RENEWAL AND RESTRUCTURING



OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

April 2, 2013

Tuesday within the Octave of Easter

"A Time for Renewal"

Dear Priests, Deacons, Religious, Parish Life Coordinators, Principals and Department Directors:
Dear People of God:

Peace be with You! Jesus Christ is the reason why the Catholic Church exists and He is the reason why we are working to renew our Local Church through our PASTORAL PLAN FOR PARISH RENEWAL AND RESTRUCTURING. Our primary goal is to proclaim the Good News of Jesus and to do so more effectively. In order to achieve that goal we must help our people and each other to continue to learn our faith, love our faith, and live our faith. We will do this if each of our parishes, each of our communities, is nurturing vital, engaged Christians. Our PASTORAL PLAN becomes a program of renewal when we commit ourselves anew: to be people of genuine prayer, to be people eager to be evangelizers by professing our faith in Christ, to be people dedicated to studying the Word of God and spreading the authentic teachings of the Catholic Church, and to be people who are truly generous, giving of our time, talent, and treasure to our parishes and our Diocese for the sake of the Gospel. Eastertide is our time for renewal.

It is with this vision of our mission before me that I share with you this FORMAL RESPONSE to the work that has been going on since my August 6, 2011, Pastoral Letter, "EMBRACING THE FUTURE WITH HOPE," which introduced THE PASTORAL PLAN.

In that letter I wrote that this long overdue effort "*will require parishes to make difficult decisions that may be painful. However, THE PASTORAL PLAN will be more fruitful if most of the decisions are made at the parish and cluster levels and then recommended to me for implementation. The challenges of the future are so great that real and difficult decisions must be made. I urge the parishes and clusters to face forthrightly and address these hard decisions...for the long-term good of the whole Diocese. This requires an unselfish spirit that looks beyond individual parish boundaries. All parishes are required to participate. Over time, every parish in the Diocese will be affected in some way by this undertaking.*"

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In his February 8, 2013, MEMORANDUM, Monsignor John W. McEvilly, Vicar General, Moderator of the Curia and Chairman of THE PASTORAL PLAN COMMITTEE, provided you with an update and overview of the work of THE COMMITTEE. This was done not only to inform you of the work being done, but also to assist you in anticipating the contents of this FORMAL RESPONSE to the process. As you review the materials in this document, you will note that, unlike many other diocesan plans, ours will be implemented in a dynamic, flexible, and gradual manner that seeks to take into account the practical and pastoral realities of our different parish communities. Because of this gradual and organic implementation, not every decision will be included here. Instead, you will receive periodic updates when specific pastoral arrangements are completed.

I am very grateful to the members of THE COMMITTEE and each of you who have demonstrated your dedication and commitment to your Catholic faith throughout this period of meeting, deliberating, collecting and collating data, and discerning the future of the Church in southern Illinois. Your generous, cooperative spirit has been deeply appreciated. I thank you in advance for your continued cooperation during the coming years of implementation. During the past months, I have spent many evenings alone in the Chancery reading over the many comments that you and your parishioners have submitted to the Diocese. These hours of study have made me acutely aware that stress, tension, and differences of opinion are inevitable in a consultation such as this. The strong feelings expressed in some of your observations underscore the fact that, in some cases, these tensions may become more acute because everyone will not be in agreement with every decision. I wish to assure you that every effort has been made to hear and appreciate the many different points of view expressed in each PARISH VIABILITY FORM.

After reviewing all of the materials from each parish, listening to the insights of the Vicar General, THE COMMITTEE, and others, I placed the difficult decisions that we must make as a Diocese before the Lord in prayer. I prayed to the Holy Spirit for guidance in my discernment. The serenity that I now experience gives me confidence that the decisions I have made are for the well-being of us all. I ask you to read the entire RESPONSE carefully. Reflect and pray about its contents. Discuss it with your Parish Leadership, and communicate its contents to your people in a positive manner.

The heart of THE PASTORAL PLAN is the establishment of PARISH PARTNERSHIPS. I instructed the Deans to call each Pastor, Administrator, and Parish Life Coordinator to give you personally a brief explanation of this change, because of the importance of this new structure. PARISH PARTNERSHIPS consist of joining parishes together, usually a larger parish with a smaller one (in a few cases, more than one). The central responsibility of these PARISH PARTNERSHIPS is to begin work immediately on a STRATEGIC PASTORAL MODEL which will provide a practical arrangement for the parishes in question for the day when they will be served by only one priest. In most cases, it

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is not possible to be certain of that date. It may be in two, three, or more years, but that day is coming. This is all but certain. When it does, the well-developed, STRATEGIC PASTORAL MODEL, which each PARISH PARTNERSHIP is required to submit to the Vicar General's office, will take effect.

These PARISH PARTNERSHIPS can be arranged in four groups:

- a.) PARISH PARTNERSHIPS of parishes that already have acknowledged the need to merge into one parish and are directed to petition the Bishop to do so in the immediate future;
- b.) PARISH PARTNERSHIPS of parishes that are directed to develop a new STRATEGIC PASTORAL MODEL that will need to be implemented in the near future;
- c.) PARISH PARTNERSHIPS of parishes that are directed to develop a new STRATEGIC PASTORAL MODEL that takes into account the probability of having only one priest, even though the implementation of these models will not take place for a number of years;
- d.) PARISH PARTNERSHIPS of parishes that already have been joined together to be served by only one priest and are directed to make every effort to bring these parishes together in even greater and more effective collaboration.

The details of the PARISH PARTNERSHIPS, as well as the other aspects of THE PASTORAL PLAN, are elaborated in the FORMAL RESPONSE. These include: the Reorganization of the Diocesan Structure, the Reorganization of the Department Directors, the Reorganization of the Deaneries into VICARIATES, and requirements for the viability of our Catholic Elementary Schools. This RESPONSE contains a number of changes and pastoral initiatives that are being made for the good of the Body of Christ. It does not contain a dramatic, disturbing announcement of the names of specific parishes and schools and the dates on which they will be closed. I have deliberately avoided that approach in favor of a more organic, gradual, and dynamic process which continues to place great responsibilities in the hands of the People of God. However, you should not be misled by this. THE PASTORAL PLAN will have real consequences that will require real sacrifices on the part of all as it is implemented. The result will eventually be a reduction in the number of parishes and schools in the Diocese.

A central component of this PASTORAL PLAN is the need for everyone in the Diocese to make a renewed and sincere commitment to pray and work for vocations to the priesthood. On many occasions I have said that we are all called to be vocations directors. This is not a figure of speech. I am convinced that we can have no reason to hope for an increase in vocations to the priesthood unless each one of us makes a conscious effort to find ways to invite personally young men from our communities of faith to consider serving the Church as ministers of Word and Sacrament. Our personal prayerfulness, our dedication to the Church, our joyful commitment to Christ, and the pride we take in our day-to-day pastoral service are the best

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possible vocation inspirations. I share the view of many in the Diocese that there is a need to have a priest who can devote a considerable amount of his time to working effectively for vocations to the priesthood. However, I do not believe that a priest in this position will be effective unless each of us takes our personal responsibility to be vocation directors seriously and cooperates fully with him. At the same time, I have long sought to find a way of appointing a priest to focus his energy on this essential ministry. As a part of THE PASTORAL PLAN, it is my hope and my intention to appoint a priest as Vocation Director who will begin this work no later than September 2013.

There is no perfect plan for pastoral renewal and restructuring in the Diocese. THE PASTORAL PLAN that I place before you today, however, is the result of the input from parish leadership, individual parishioners, members of THE COMMITTEE, and others. I am very aware that the implementation of THE PASTORAL PLAN may lead to questions or concerns. The details of THE PASTORAL PLAN are not all carved in stone. Once you have studied THE PASTORAL PLAN, discussed it and prayed about it, you should feel free to share any questions you have with a member of THE COMMITTEE, with the Vicar General, or with me. All serious and well-grounded suggestions for modification will be considered. However, it will not be possible to consider simply maintaining the *status quo*.

Once the new VICARIATES are established and the new Vicars Forane have been appointed, Monsignor McEvilly and/or I will attend a meeting of each VICARIATE to reflect with you on the PASTORAL PLAN FOR PARISH RENEWAL AND RESTRUCTURING and respond to questions you may have.

In “EMBRACING THE FUTURE WITH HOPE” I placed a particular emphasis on the importance of placing prayer at the heart of THE PASTORAL PLAN. If it is to bear fruit, personal and communal prayer must remain at the heart of this process as we go forward. Please continue to pray for everyone in our Diocese during this time of decision and transition. I invite you to return to ATTACHMENT G: PRAYER RESOURCES FOR THE PLANNING GATHERINGS, where you will find many prayers from which to choose. Once again, in addition to the Mass, our greatest prayer, and the Rosary, I recommend that you and your fellow parishioners continue to pray the remarkable Prayer for Divine Guidance by the Trappist mystic, Fr. Thomas Merton. We cannot succeed without prayer!

Appreciatively yours in Christ,



The Most Reverend Edward K. Braxton, Ph.D., S.T.D.
Bishop of Belleville

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The Prayer for Divine Guidance

by

Fr. Thomas Merton, O.C.S.O.

“My Lord God:

We have no idea where we are going.

We do not see the road ahead of us.

We cannot know for certain where it will end.

Nor do we really know ourselves,

and the fact that we think we are following

your will does not mean

that we are actually doing so.

But we believe that our desire to please you

does in fact please you.

And we hope that we have that desire
in all that we are doing.

We hope that we will never do anything
apart from that desire.

And we know that if we do this
you will lead us by the right road
though we may know nothing about it.

Therefore will we trust you always
though we may seem to be lost
and in the shadow of death.

We will not fear,
for you are ever with us,
and you will never leave us
to face our perils alone.

Hear our prayer in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. AMEN”