

# THE DIOCESE OF BELLEVILLE

## THE PASTORAL PLAN FOR PARISH RENEWAL AND RESTRUCTURING



DIOCESE OF BELLEVILLE

APRIL 2, 2013

TUESDAY WITHIN THE OCTAVE OF EASTER

### OFFICIAL STATEMENT

#### **THE PASTORAL PLAN FOR PARISH RENEWAL AND RESTRUCTURING: AN OVERVIEW**

Today, the Most Reverend Edward K. Braxton, Bishop of Belleville, released his FORMAL RESPONSE to the information gathered from the parishes in THE PASTORAL PLAN FOR PARISH RENEWAL AND RESTRUCTURING which he initiated in his Pastoral Letter of August 6, 2011. In consultation with the PASTORAL PLAN COMMITTEE\* established for this purpose and with other representatives of the Diocese, the Bishop has formulated a comprehensive reorganization of the Catholic Church in southern Illinois in order to strengthen the Local Church and assist the people of God as we continue to learn our faith, love our faith, and live our faith in the years to come.

The Bishop's FORMAL RESPONSE contains a number of changes and pastoral initiatives that are being made for the good of the Body of Christ. The Bishop has sought to determine a pastorally effective course of action that respects the individual parish communities and seeks to bring about structural changes in the least disruptive manner. The Bishop's document does not contain a dramatic announcement of the names of specific parishes and schools and the dates on which they will be closed. He has 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, no one should be misled by this approach. 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.

The Bishop's FORMAL RESPONSE includes: the reorganization of the Diocesan Structure; the reorganization of the Department Directors; the reorganization of the Deaneries into VICARIATES and the appointment of new Vicars Forane. Within the VICARIATES, the parish communities are linked together in new PARISH PARTNERSHIPS. His RESPONSE also includes the reorganization of the requirements for the viability of our Catholic Elementary Schools.

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The heart of THE PASTORAL PLAN FOR PARISH RENEWAL AND RESTRUCTURING is the establishment of PARISH PARTNERSHIPS. PARISH PARTNERSHIPS will 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 is not possible to be certain of that date. It may be in one, two, three, or more years. However, the projection of the probability of having only fifty active Diocesan Priests in the near future makes it clear that day is coming.

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 new STRATEGIC PASTORAL MODELS that will need to be implemented in the near future;
- c.) PARISH PARTNERSHIPS of parishes that are directed to develop new STRATEGIC PASTORAL MODELS that take 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 leadership of every PARISH PARTNERSHIP is required to develop a STRATEGIC PASTORAL MODEL for the future, when there will be only one priest to serve several currently existing parish communities. The Bishop acknowledges that the work of developing STRATEGIC PASTORAL MODELS will vary in difficulty in different PARISH PARTNERSHIPS. In some cases, the process might be relatively easy. In other cases, it will be more challenging. In still other cases, the process may be quite difficult. And there may be a small number of cases where it seems almost impossible. Parish leaders are encouraged to contact the Vicar General or the Bishop himself, if they encounter seemingly insurmountable challenges.

Each PARISH PARTNERSHIP must submit by September 15, 2013, a 1-2 page report informing the Bishop of the progress being made by the PARISH PARTNERSHIPS to develop an appropriate STRATEGIC PASTORAL MODEL. Each PARISH PARTNERSHIP must also submit by December 31, 2013, a well-developed draft of its STRATEGIC PASTORAL MODEL detailing how the PARISH PARTNERSHIPS will be structured. This timeframe clearly does not mean that the new structure will take effect on that day. It means that it is imperative for all parishes to develop an actual plan of action by December 31, 2013 that is specific and clear so that it can be implemented

# THE DIOCESE OF BELLEVILLE

## THE PASTORAL PLAN FOR PARISH RENEWAL AND RESTRUCTURING

when it is needed, even if the need does not arise in the immediate future. Obviously, if we are blessed with a growth in our Catholic population, an increase in vocations to the priesthood and an influx of *fidei donum* priests, the implementation of some PARISH PARTNERSHIPS' STRATEGIC PASTORAL MODELS may be delayed indefinitely.

Several possible STRATEGIC PASTORAL MODELS are immediately evident:

- a.) Two or more parishes petition to merge and become one parish with only one church building;
- b.) Two or more parishes petition to merge and become one parish with one primary church building while one or two of the former parish church buildings are granted chapel status for occasional use, at least for a time;
- c.) Two or more parishes remain free standing (without a merger), maintain both churches, and develop a structure within which they can realistically be served by one priest. This would include necessary changes in liturgical schedules (Sunday Mass, Holy Days, Holy Week) and joining many parish committees and activities together; or
- d.) Other STRATEGIC PASTORAL MODELS developed by PARISH PARTNERSHIPS and proposed to the Bishop for his consideration.

The PARISH PARTNERSHIPS are groups of two or three parishes, superseding the clusters. They will function in a manner similar to the clusters but they will require more intense and structured collaboration, driven by the realization that sooner or later they will be served by only one priest. With the creation of these PARISH PARTNERSHIPS, the superseded clusters are formally dissolved. Fruitful shared ministry between members of these former clusters may continue on a voluntary basis. However, participation in the PARISH PARTNERSHIPS is mandatory.

Commenting on his FORMAL RESPONSE Bishop Braxton said:

“As we turn to the work of implementing the different aspects of THE PASTORAL PLAN FOR PARISH RENEWAL AND RESTRUCTURING, we do so in the midst of a Year of Faith marking the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Second Vatican Council and the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the publication of the Catechism of the Catholic Church. This year of grace, one of His Holiness, Pope Benedict XVI's last gifts to the Church, opened on October 11, 2012. It will be closed by His Holiness, Pope Francis on the Feast of Christ the King, November 24, 2013, one of his first gifts to the Church. As I said in my Year of Faith Lecture at the Cathedral, March 17, 2013, the work of restructuring the Diocese will only become the work of renewal if we turn to Christ in the Scriptures, in the lives of the saints, in the Council documents, and in the pages of the Catechism. Prayerfully turning to these great resources in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament

# THE DIOCESE OF BELLEVILLE

## THE PASTORAL PLAN FOR PARISH RENEWAL AND RESTRUCTURING

will open our minds and hearts to the Holy Spirit who will renew us all – bishops, priests, deacons, religious, the Christian faithful, and our parish communities. And, if we embrace that renewal, that same Holy Spirit may grace us with an increase in vocations to the priesthood, the diaconate, and the religious life.

Therefore, during the months and years ahead, let us do everything in Christ. When we are having difficulties determining the best course of action, remember the Lord is near! When individuals and groups are expressing strong seemingly irreconcilable differences, remember the Lord is near! When there is sadness and frustration in the face of painful decisions, remember the Lord is near! When we begin to experience the ways in which our communities of faith are strengthened and renewed by our common generous embrace of THE PASTORAL PLAN FOR PARISH RENEWAL AND RESTRUCTURING, let us rejoice! The Lord is near!”

\*The members of THE PASTORAL PLAN FOR PARISH RENEWAL AND RESTRUCTURING COMMITTEE are:

**The Reverend Monsignor John W. McEvelly, Vicar General and Moderator of the Curia, Chairman, *ex officio***

**The Very Reverend C. Raymond Schultz, Vicar Forane, Vice Chairman**

**The Reverend Monsignor John T. Myler, Vicar Forane**

**The Reverend Monsignor Daniel J. Jurek, Vicar Forane**

**The Very Reverend Henry J. Fischer, Vicar Forane (until his resignation for health reasons) The Very Reverend Robert B. Flannery, Vicar Forane**

**The Very Reverend John C. Iffert, Vicar Forane**

**The Reverend Kenneth J. York, J.C.L., Chancellor for Canonical Affairs**

**Deacon Robert J. Lanter, Director of the Permanent Diaconate**

**Sister Catherine Wellinghoff, A.S.C., Parish Life Coordinator of St. Paul Parish,**

**Johnston City Mr. Thomas H. Posnanski, Director of Faith Formation, Director of Office of Catholic Education Mr. James V. Mroczkowski, Director of Temporal Affairs, Chief Financial Officer**

**Mr. David R. Spotanski, Chancellor for Administration and Pastoral Services (until his departure from the Diocese)**

**Ms. Kathy Mulvin, Diocesan Pastoral Council**