

October 8, 2003

Ms. Betty Thomas
Acting Chair, Brighton Planning Group Oversight Committee
236 Park Circle
Rochester, NY 14623

Dear Betty:

The Brighton planning group begins "Pastoral Planning for the New Millennium: Phase Two" this fall. Reviewing your first pastoral plan, I especially commend your collaborative work related to vocations. I am aware that you have no deacons currently assigned to any of your parishes. You may want to highlight this local vocation need as you encourage people, especially our youth, to consider whether they have a call to priestly, diaconal, religious or lay ministry. As you continue to work with our vocations awareness team, you may also want to work with Deacon David Palma, Director of Deacon Personnel, on ways to attract diaconal candidates from and for your parishes.

Our diocesan value--to be a collaborative Church—is of increasing importance as we face a future with fewer priests. I recognize that you have had less success in the other collaborative areas identified in your first plan: communications, youth ministry, and ministry with post high school to early 30s adults. My hope is that you will redouble your efforts to find ways to work together to meet the challenges posed in these critical areas, both for today and in the future.

I also invite you to investigate the potential benefits of a coordinated approach to ministry in one or more of these areas: faith formation, the sick and dying, the institutionalized (for example, the Rochester Psychiatric Center), and seniors living in senior care facilities or their homes. When done well, increased inter-parish collaboration leads to more fruitful ministry.

Currently you have three priest-pastors and a pastoral administrator/sacramental team leading your four parishes. A Basilian priest serves as chaplain at St. John Fisher College. We project that the number of priests available for ministry in the Brighton planning group parishes will decrease from four to three sometime between now and 2009. My understanding is that, when the current priest chaplain at St. John Fisher is no longer available, the Basilians will not be able to replace him. At that time, the three planning group priests will become responsible for supporting Catholic campus ministry at the college in accord with the diocesan campus ministry plan.

The Brighton planning group currently also includes Nazareth College and Monroe Community College. We anticipate that Nazareth College will shift to the Pittsford-Mendon planning group. At the same time, we are considering the mutual benefits of shifting the University of Rochester Newman community to the Brighton planning group. For example, the University of Rochester priest chaplain and staff could support the growing needs at Monroe Community College which now has resident students. While your current planning should consider St. John Fisher and Monroe Community College, be mindful of these other possible changes as you explore creative opportunities for inter-campus collaboration. You might also investigate ways your parishes could share the Good News with these academic communities and the future leaders of our world and the Church.

Church law limits priests to presiding at no more than three Sunday observance Masses. You have been able to continue with an expanded Mass schedule through the gracious help of retired priests and priests temporarily in residence from other

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dioceses. Increasingly, however, their generosity may be needed in other areas of our Diocese where fewer Masses would require church expansion in parishes that simply could not afford to do that. Your Mass schedule should accommodate that reality.

Your challenge is to find a way to be a flourishing and vital church with three parish priests--not all likely to be priest-pastors—and with a reduced likelihood of support from retired and extern priests. I ask that you be open to the possibility that you may not be able to achieve that goal with your current four-parish configuration. Together, you will need to address facility-related alternatives as you consider the impact of fewer priests serving a relatively stable population.

Please find ways to educate your parishioners about the reality of the declining number of priests within our Diocese. Help them to understand what might change in their own communities as three parish priests respond to the pastoral needs of all parishioners. Share with them the success of the pastoral administrator model at Our Lady Queen of Peace, and the likelihood that a pastoral administrator will eventually lead one or more of the other Brighton faith communities with a part time priest providing sacramental ministry. Also, share with them that the current four-parish configuration is likely to change.

You are in a unique position to champion another of our diocesan values--to engage in ecumenical and interfaith dialogue and cooperation. With your neighboring Islamic and Jewish centers, you could model for our Diocese ways in which to carry out the spirit of the agreements we have with each.

Finally, I am grateful for your gracious support of outreach ministry, especially to ministries that focus on the marginalized. Your commitment visibly demonstrates that we are all one in Christ. To strengthen this oneness, I ask that you consider additional ways in which you can help vulnerable urban or rural parishes to maintain a compassionate Church presence where the needs are the greatest.

I offer my prayers as you begin this second phase of pastoral planning. Casey Lopata, your planning group liaison, will work with you to ensure that you receive any necessary support from the various offices of the Pastoral Center as you develop your pastoral plan.

With every good wish, I remain

Your brother in Christ,

†Matthew H. Clark
Bishop of Rochester

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