

August 2, 2000

Sr. Robert Tierney, SSND
and Mr. John Luken
St. Cecilia Church
2732 Culver Road
Rochester, New York 14622

Dear John and Sr. Roberta,

First, I want to thank you and your colleagues on the Planning Group Leadership Team for your work on a five-year pastoral plan for the Irondequoit Planning Group. This is the 33rd plan that I have read and reviewed. There were some who wondered at the beginning of Pastoral Planning for the New Millennium if our ambitious process would really work. As I read your plan, I have additional evidence that in fact the process does work. Our parishes, pastoral leaders, and lay leaders have demonstrated their ability to face the realities of our time and place and then work together to address issues collaboratively in wonderfully creative ways. The Irondequoit group is no exception.

Overview

One of the distinguishing features of your plan is the development of a Mission Statement for the planning group. It is statement of the common mission of the parishes of your region and is an affirmation of our values as a Diocesan church.

We, the Catholic Community of Irondequoit, are committed to living and giving witness to the Good News of the Gospel. On our faith journey, nourished by the Word and Eucharist, we join with other churches and all who seek harmony within the human family, to make the Kingdom of God a reality in our world by extending hospitality of God's loving presence to all who are in need.

Collaborative Initiatives

Together you have identified four collaborative initiatives:

1. Ministry to Senior Adults
2. Ministry to Youth
3. Train Liturgical Ministers
4. Review and reduce the number of weekend masses

These initiatives reflect the common concerns and issues each parish identified in the parish assessment process as well as the reality of the future decrease in the number of priests available to serve these parishes and indeed parishes throughout the Diocese.

While I will comment on each of these in the following sections, I want to stress the importance of identifying responsibility for implementation and for future planning. Your plan calls for the formation of an Oversight Committee charged "to work with the implementation committees to guide the approved initiatives and to establish the next set of initiatives with the individual faith communities and with the diocese." The membership of the Steering Committee adequately reflects the faith communities and the initiatives under implementation. I would point out that an 18 month term as noted on page 3 may be appropriate for the implementation of these specific initiatives but the Steering Committee or something very much like it needs to continue through the five year period. Circumstances will change; new challenges will arise; planning will need to be done again. It is prudent to have an existing group or committee in place to deal with these issues in addition to specific implementation.

Your collaborative initiatives are ambitious and there are certainly financial implications for each parish and faith community. I perfectly understand that it was not possible to do the detailed financial analysis both of the costs of each initiative and of various financing formulas during the planning period. I sense that the communities are committed to a good faith effort to come up with acceptable alternatives as the first order of business. Please know that Casey Lopata, planning group liaison, will be available to work with you and the finance committee as it works on this issue.

Configuration Sub-Team Report

It is important that we move toward a Mass schedule that respects the canon law requirement that no priest say more than three Masses of Sunday obligation each weekend. As I mentioned in my remarks at the Priests Convocation, we fail to prepare ourselves and parishioners to deal with the challenge of fewer priests by not confirming to this reasonable norm. I hope that your planning will move expeditiously toward this norm. I also would ask you to carefully review the attendance at Masses in the parishes and faith communities of the planning group. Just because there will be a full time priest at each parish and at St. Ann's does not necessarily mean that each parish should have three weekend Masses. There may be a parish in which more than three Masses are reasonably required and others in which less than three are required. In the spirit of

collaboration, I ask you to take such situations into account and devise schedules that optimize the service of all priests in the planning group.

Finance and Facility Sub-Team Report

Since there are not any major finance or facility issues that the group desires to address directly, the formation of this sub-team is an appropriate response. I understand the work of this group will focus on the following:

1. Procedures for cost sharing
2. Envelop exchange process
3. Combined purchasing
4. Shared resources
5. Referrals for maintenance
6. Grant writing
7. Regional stewardship process

This is an ambitious agenda but seems focused on appropriate issues.

Senior Ministry

This is the only planning group that has focused so comprehensively on the needs of older Catholics. Since other planning groups have high numbers of seniors, I am sure that it is the presence of St. Ann's Community and its resources that has enabled this group to develop such a comprehensive approach. Much of what you do here can serve as a model for the rest of the Diocese.

As you do the more detailed investigation in this area, I hope that you will keep alert to the many fine organizations that provide services and support to our older citizens. In some cases, effective communication of already available services may be more important than trying to provide direct services. Our focus and objective must always be on the spiritual needs of older members. There is precious little understanding of the spirituality of older persons and the special needs that they face. Of course, one's spiritual life is intimately connected with other realities of one's situation. These other realities must be respected in every way we can. I only urge a pragmatic approach in partnership with others.

Clearly much thought has already been given to this area. I look forward to being kept informed of progress.

Youth Ministry

Your approach to Youth Ministry is clearly focused. You intend to develop a Regional Youth Ministry that will complement local parish programs. This is an excellent example of doing at the local level what can best be done there and collaborating in ways that will add rather than detract value from those local efforts. I appreciate the careful

planning that has already gone into this proposal. I realize that much work remains to be done but I appreciate your willingness to engage in meaningful collaboration in this crucial area. Michael Theisen, Coordinator of Youth Ministry, will be available to work with you on this initiative.

Liturgical Ministry

The quality of a parish's liturgical life is central to its vitality. Thus I am pleased to see that the parishes have identified liturgical training as an area of collaboration. Unlike the other initiatives, this does not require significant financial support but rather the spirit of cooperation that is clearly apparent in your work together. Joan Workmaster, Director of the Office of Liturgy, will be available to work with you on this initiative.

Finally, I am impressed with timelines developed for each collaborative initiative. Such careful planning now will make implementation more orderly and effective.

I am pleased to appoint Mr. Casey Lopata as a liaison to your planning group. Casey will begin work with you shortly on the transition from planning to implementation. He will also work out a date when I can come to celebrate the beginning of this relationship with the parishes and St. Ann's Community.

I will keep you and the members of the Steering Committee in my prayers and look forward to learning of your progress.

Your brother in Christ,

†Matthew H. Clark
Bishop of Rochester

Cc: Pastors, Chaplain
Casey Lopata
Michael Theisen
Joan Workmaster