

Appendix 3A

St. Thomas the Apostle Parish Council

At a meeting of the St. Thomas the Apostle held on September 6, 2006, the following proposal was brought by the two Parish Council Members, representing the Irondequoit Pastoral Planning Group (IPPG).

BE IT RESOLVED IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE RECOMMENDATION OF THE IPPG, THE PARISHES ST. THOMAS THE APOSTLE, ST. SALOME'S AND CHRIST THE KING SHALL BECOME A SINGLE CLUSTER ON OR AFTER JULY 1, 2007.

FOR: 3
AGAINST: 6
ABSTAIN: 3 (ex officio members)

ADDENDUM: Reasons for the Vote of the Parish Council against the proposal of IPPG

- (1) The St. Thomas' Parish Council had previously unanimously approved a two parish cluster with St. Salome's parish in the event that St. Thomas could not remain a stand alone parish. St. Salome's parish was deemed by the Parish Council to be the most compatible parish with St. Thomas inasmuch as it was a contiguous parish with a traditional Catholic character. In addition, many current members of St. Thomas were once members of St. Salome; and vice versa. This proposed two parish cluster was not recommended by the IPPG.
- (2) A two parish cluster (with St. Salome's parish) would be more manageable than a three parish cluster (including Christ the King). Experimentation within the cluster which might lead to common religious education, common fund raising, joint landscaping and snow plow contracts, etc., would be easier to try, review and possibly discontinue with a smaller two parish cluster.
- (3) A three parish cluster is not necessary at this time because under the current plan, there will be three (3) diocesan priests and two (2) Basilian Fathers (not including retired priests) who will be available to celebrate Masses after July 1, 2007. Clustering St. Salome's with St. Thomas would allow for one pastor for the cluster and for each of the remaining parishes. If St. Salome's would prefer to cluster with Christ the King as a two parish cluster, then St. Thomas could remain as a stand alone parish.
- (4) At a prayer and discussion held at St. Thomas on June 8, 2006, the three proposed parish cluster proposal was met with strong and vocal opposition from some of St. Thomas' most active parishioners.
- (5) Few members from St. Thomas are enthusiastic about the three parish cluster. The support from the Parish Council for this cluster was primarily from the Parish Council's IPPG representatives. Their support appears to be based upon their perceived need to go along with IPPG's recommendation and that a five parish cluster constituting all of the Irondequoit parishes will be inevitable by the year 2012.

- (6) In its desire to find a consensus, the IPPG has pitted St. Thomas parishioners against each other. Rather than the free exchange of ideas in order to find a practical solution to the priest shortage, the IPPG has appears to want to silence all dissent for its recommendation..

Appendix 3B

Cluster Addendum: St. Thomas the Apostle Parish

This document is challenging to draft because St. Thomas is a parish of committed Catholics with a great spirit and sense of community. We do not want to spin in on the things that divide or separate us. There is no one who embraces the cluster change—we all wish that we could continue in the tradition that Father Bradler has so admirably upheld as he leads this flock. Unfortunately, the shortage of priests brings a situation that cannot be ignored.

We are writing this specific addendum to represent a perspective from a number of parishioners who are willing to move ahead on a cluster in Irondequoit due to the above situation. This position respectfully differs from another view existing in the parish—our goal is to represent this ‘cluster’ point of view: a willingness to form an Irondequoit cluster due to the potential synergy of additional talents, gifts, and treasures.

Current State

As Parish Council Members, our role is to represent our fellow St. Thomas parishioners. We are a diverse group united around our commitment to God. Some members of the parish and the Parish Council consider themselves ‘traditional’ or ‘conservative’ or ‘orthodox’. They have strong feelings around the liturgical style and traditions that they deeply want to uphold. They are concerned that the IPPG proposals will cause change to the liturgical elements they deeply cherish. They feel that a three parish cluster is too large for one priest to get to know his parishioners. Additionally, there is a perception that the three-cluster proposal creates some ‘winners’ and ‘losers’: three parishes cluster and two stand alone for the time being. The two that stand alone seem unchanged and unaffected while three parishes have significant change.

The initial vote of the St. Thomas Parish Council was to cluster with St Salome’s. That parish council decided to cluster with Christ the King due to ministries and resources that were already shared between those two parishes. Given that decision, St Thomas was invited to join those two parishes and form one cluster. St Thomas had made the big step to cluster with one parish. But, the issue of joining two parishes then became a major issue. There are those who believe that with three Diocesan priests (not including Basilian Fathers) in the next several years, we could continue to stand alone, at least in the short term. They also think that not enough effort has gone into finding a priest for St Thomas and want us to investigate more creative solutions.

These members share the concerns around the fairness of the two parishes remaining stand-alone while three other parishes cluster. There are also concerns about the speed of the clustering and a desire to go more slowly. There are many fears and concerns about the unknown. This decision can never be based on a vote or a survey. We have no desire to divide the parish in a turbulent debate resulting in minority positions or majority rules. There just is no way to come to a parish consensus. And so, we are at very different places and we feel it is important to describe the other point of view at St Thomas.

Path Forward

Although no one is choosing this, we are in the midst of great change. St Thomas parishioners will reluctantly say good-bye to a beloved pastor by June of next year. No matter what, change is on the horizon whether in the form of a new pastor or a new cluster. And so, this document represents those fellow parishioners who are choosing to embrace an expanded community of neighbors who bring a diverse set of gifts and talents. There is no point in delay—we know we must let our faith lead us through this decision. We view change as a given and ultimately depend on our faith to lead us to a different but positive environment in which to worship.

Mass schedules may change and a new pastor may bring some different liturgical approaches. But, we feel the benefits outweigh the risks. If Irondequoit Senior Ministries is a proof point, we have much to gain within our parish life. We can now share infrastructure, ministries, and business arrangements.

The cluster will be larger than the individual parish that we have experienced up to now, but we have faith that our new pastor will be up to the challenge and will actively seek to understand each parish and reach out to individual families. Additionally, our deacon is a great spiritual support with deep roots in the parish. No parishioner need be a stranger to the ministries within our parish or the cluster. It is up to each of us to reach out to the new pastor and our fellow cluster members just as they will reach out to us. With openness and a desire to grow together, we can all be stronger for the change.

We would respectfully make some suggestions to ease concerns and facilitate more rapid unification of the cluster.

1. **Five vs. Three Parish Cluster:** Other members of our Council seem to resonate to the idea of a full Irondequoit five-parish cluster. However, there is a desire of some IPPG members to move in a slower, more measured fashion by going to a three-parish cluster and studying the effects. This also allows time for the clergy to step up to a full five-parish cluster. We feel it would be worth the effort to reconsider the five-parish cluster to eliminate any feelings of ‘winners’ and ‘losers’. There are strengths and gifts from each of the five parishes and there could be a single cluster of specific ministries or other infrastructure areas. The IPPG could identify very specific integration points that begin the process of a larger cluster such as Youth Ministries, Outreach, Evangelization, Parish Life, financial contracts or even different priests from the other two parishes taking one Mass in another parish. This is all designed to foster a sense that we are all impacted but we can all ‘win’ together. We feel we will be stronger if Irondequoit is viewed as one community and not just one cluster and two other parishes.
2. **Financial and Parish Council Structure:** We do understand that our finances will not be co-mingled and that our parish council structures remain intact, although meeting jointly with the other parish councils in the cluster and the cluster pastor. We fully support this and believe that this will allow us to keep an identity while benefiting from specific talents from our cluster neighbors.
3. **Forward Progress:** As we make this clustering decision, it will be months before a new pastor is appointed. This is valuable time to help us come together and begin the cluster formation. In fact, the waiting time could be very stressful. We would ask that the IPPG be allowed to begin to work on specific areas to begin the integration: shared ministries, activities, and events to unite the cluster and get people introduced and comfortable, a common vision of the future, etc.
4. **New Pastor Appointment:** Our new pastor must be a uniquely gifted and talented shepherd, committed to making the cluster work. Ultimately, the choice is made by the Holy Spirit acting through the Bishop. We would ask that the newly-formed cluster committee meet to identify specific attributes and experiences of the new pastor in order to provide input to the Bishop as he makes his decision.
5. **Role of the Deacon:** We know that the parish staff serves at the discretion of the pastor. We would suggest that serious consideration be given to leaving our Deacon in place as a spiritual bridge to assist in the transition of St. Thomas. Deacon Tom Beck is very active in our parish and has become very familiar with our parishioners. He could be a trusted spiritual minister as we get acquainted with the new pastor.
6. **Continued Unification:** There are members of the parish who are very much opposed to this cluster arrangement. Although other parishioners are accepting, we do not want to lose parishioners who have difficulty with this whole change. We would ask that the IPPG and the Bishop be sensitive to the concerns of our fellow parishioners as decisions are made. We must accept this change but we are also stronger with the gifts of all parishioners.

Again, we know that the Bishop has some difficult and challenging decisions to make. Our faith gives us the strength to know that all of this is really in God’s hands. We are not naively ignoring potential barriers. But, we also represent members of our faith community who did not seek this change but are willing to face the future and grow stronger through a combination of the best each of the five Irondequoit

parishes has to offer. We have unique identities and unique gifts. In the end, this is not about our differences but about our collective strength in our faith.