

## **I Introduction**

Pastoral Planning for the New Millennium began with each of the four communities undergoing a parish assessment process in the winter and spring of 1998. Parishioners evaluated individual parish's strengths and challenges, as well as progress made toward the four Synod goals. Through various forms of parish feedback, each faith community determined their highest priority issues. Beginning in the summer of 1998, members of all four of the parishes began working together to determine areas of common need, in order to learn where collaborative efforts would be appropriate. The areas identified were:

- Adult Education
- Volunteerism
- Young Adult Ministry
- Communications
- Long-range Planning
- Building Community

As the following planning document will illustrate, some of the above needs were used as starting points for our collaborative efforts.

You will find the sections of this document organized by the work of the four sub-committees:

- II. Configuration
- III. Facilities and Finance
- IV. Communication
- V. Collaborative programming

We have also included a timeline of planned activities in section

VI. Timeline

## **II Configuration**

### **A. Background**

In the past few years, the parishes of our planning group have experienced several disruptive changes.

In 1996 St. Mary's lost their pastor and obtained a sacramental minister and a pastoral administrator.

In June of 1996 St. Columba's/St. Patrick's pastor was replaced by a resident priest administrator.

In June 1998 St. Vincent's lost their priest administrator and received a sacramental minister and a pastoral administrator (although this arrangement is supposed to be an indefinite, temporary situation).

St. Christopher's pastor retired in June of 1998, and was succeeded by a resident priest administrator.

This leaves the planning group with 2.6 priest equivalents at the present time, a loss of 50% of its full-time pastors *in a period of less than two years*. The two full-time priests currently serving both have short tenures in these parishes. These circumstances have led to a lack of long-term stability in regard to the priest personnel in the parishes of our planning group.

The diocese has allotted 3.3 priest equivalents for the beginning of the planning period (present), to become 2.8 at some point during the next five years.

### **B. Recommendations**

Given the distances between churches, the number of Masses required to serve the attending congregations, and the vitality of all four parishes, the present configuration of four individual parishes is most appropriate.

We believe that the restoration of the number of priest equivalents to the 3.3 the diocese has stated as our starting point would be disruptive, given the large number of changes the group has already experienced, along with the uncertainty which a possible restoration of a full-time priest would entail.

Our plan for the availability of 2.8 priest equivalents includes: a pastor at St. Christopher's, a pastor at one other parish, a sacramental minister for each of the other two parishes, and a weekend assistant at St. Christopher's to relieve the pastor of celebrating four Sunday Masses each weekend (in excess of diocesan guidelines)\*. The exact allocation of these priest equivalents will be finalized by the configuration committee by **June 1999**.

Given the above facts, we have concerns that in assuming the present configuration of 2.8 (our eventual five-year low), our planning group would be even more vulnerable to further losses early in the next planning cycle. We believe that a number less than 2.8 priest equivalents would not adequately serve the needs of our communities without more disruptive changes.

\* Note: As of November 1998, a temporary weekend assistant has been assigned to St. Christopher's for a period of 1-2 years. This assignment raises the number of priest equivalents to 2.8; this number should be maintained throughout the planning period.

### **III. Facilities and Finance**

#### **A. Present circumstances**

We foresee the planning group relationship as one where neighbors can work together. All four of the parishes maintain current budgets and fiscally responsible policies, and have active Parish Pastoral Councils, along with some form of Facilities and Finance Councils/Committees. These bodies, along with parish staffs, will be the main means of implementing any collaborative efforts within the financial realm.

#### **B. Recommendations**

Individual parishes may save money by combining our purchasing power for certain products or services. Building and grounds maintenance, office supplies and equipment, and printing are somewhat natural areas where savings may be available.

Our parishes should explore the possibilities of sharing facilities for programs, meetings, and any other needs that may exist. There is also the possibility of shared staffing for specific situations or common needs.

Establishing and promoting Deferred Giving programs, and exploring alternative income streams are other areas for collaborative efforts. Alternative income sources may be major, joint fundraising efforts, such as automobile or other large prize raffles which are too big for one of our parishes to handle alone.

Through the parish assessment portion of the planning process, it has become apparent that none of the four parishes has undertaken a true parish long-range planning process. It is recommended that each parish begin this process, and because we will all be at the same starting point, the process should be standardized as much as possible.

We foresee no *group* five year capital needs. Within our group, St. Christopher's will investigate the need for a capital program, due to rapid parish population growth. The other three parishes should maintain a close relationship to this process, to investigate effects or options (relative to space concerns) which may affect the entire group.

The facilities and finance sub-committee plans to continue as an oversight committee, to encourage collaboration and assist the parish staffs and parish Facilities and Finance Councils as needed. An informal joint meeting with the appropriate financial staff and/or committee members from all four of the parishes will be planned before the end of **January, 1999**. This will be a forum in which to establish a working relationship and explore cost saving options. The meeting will be followed up with another within one to two months (at the discretion of the committee), to determine progress and to further encourage collaboration of our staffs. Periodic joint meetings will be held as necessary to update our collaborative efforts and to insure the continued working relationship of the group.

## **IV. Communication**

### **A. Inter-parish communication and community-building**

There is a need for parishioners at all four communities to begin to feel that they are part of a larger community, and feel comfortable attending liturgies or other activities at a parish other than their own. In order for this transition to occur, people need to be made aware of happenings at other parishes. With exposure over time, parishioners may not view the idea of traveling to a neighboring church such an unusual or unreasonable idea. There is a need for staffs at each of the parishes to open and maintain regular lines of communication.

### **B. Recommendations**

Although there has been some inter-parish bulletin submissions in the past, the practice has been sporadic. It is recommended that more items of general interest be passed on to the other parishes for inclusion in their bulletins. Also, a copy of each parish's bulletin should be forwarded to each of the other parishes each week, in order for staff to stay informed of activities in the other communities. It is planned that staff begin these practices in **January, 1999**.

As another means of furthering the sense of a larger community, the Pastoral Planning Team will begin a series of *Getting to Know Our Neighbors* bulletin articles (parish histories, introductions, etc.). These are planned to begin in the **spring of 1999**.

## V. Collaborative programming

### A. Background/philosophy

The traditions of parochialism are difficult to break. Historically, each parish (with the possible exception of St. Christopher's) has been a very small-town-centered community. Encouraging people to move beyond this model will be the greatest challenge any collaborative partnerships will face.

Collaboration among our four parishes should not be viewed primarily as a response to the shortage of priests. While the priest shortage is a factor driving us in this direction, collaboration is also a way to better serve the parishioners in all four faith communities. The steps we are recommending now are small ones.

True collaboration will require a change in mindset of parishioners and staff. It will eventually require a change in expectations of who answers a call for help, who teaches a sacramental preparation class, who visits the sick in the hospital, where and when liturgies are held, and many other aspects of parish life.

Collaboration is not an event; it is a stage in our transformation from four parishes existing independently, to four parishes working together.

There exist significant obstacles to collaboration, such as: resistance to change, lack of an immediate crisis, geographic distances, loyalty to traditional practices or staff, fear of the unknown, and identification with a particular parish's unique characteristics or personality. It is this mindset from which we will embark on our first collaborative undertakings.

### B. First Projects

#### 1. *Adult Education*

**Background:** A need for adult education was identified by the parish assessment of all four communities within our planning group. Collective past experience has shown multiple attempts at adult education programs with minimal success. Lack of commitment, time, and responsiveness have generally been barriers to successful, long-lasting programs and focus.

**Recommendation:** We recommend that the Pastoral Councils create an Adult Education Committee similar to the parishes' regular standing committees. This group (unlike current committees) will consist of members from all four of the parishes. They will meet as a joint team, plan for a joint Adult Education approach, and report back to the respective Pastoral Councils. Selection of team member(s) from each parish should take place by the **February 1999**. This team should use not only the collective needs of the parishes, but also the past learning experiences of the group, in order to focus on a process which will:

- Identify all the groups of parishioners that will be included in the adult education outreach
- Decide how the adult education will happen
- Implement in the best manner
- Stay linked to pastors, pastoral administrators, catechetical and social ministry leaders.

This should be a learning/growing process similar to the entire planning process. The first meeting of the group Adult Education Committee should take place in **March, 1999**.

A potential starting point for this team might be *St. Bernard's on the Road*; four programs (one at each parish) could be held throughout the year. A status report and preliminary plan should be presented to the Pastoral Planning Team in **May, 1999**, with a goal of the first program to take place in the **fall of 1999**.

## 2. *Volunteerism*

**Background:** The growth and vitality of parish life is highly dependent upon the stewardship of the parish community: the offering of time, talent, and treasure. Each of the parishes in our planning cluster attempts to capture these resources in different ways, some structured and others less so. There are two realities common to all four parishes: (1) we never have enough volunteers, and (2) there is a small core of volunteers at the heart of each parish.

**Recommendations:** Problems with recruitment and retention of volunteers are commonplace in other nonprofit organizations. We should learn from their experiences and realize the commitment of resources necessary to develop and maintain a strong volunteer base in the church environment. In summary we should focus on four areas of change:

1. *Change attitudes.* Treat our volunteers as customers! Appreciate their time and talent. Match their skills and interests with the tasks at hand. Prepare them and be prepared ourselves.
2. *Change the nature of committees.* The word "committee" embodies the notion of commitment, but it also implies "forever". We should look at the way our committees function and determine how we might break down the work of our parishes into "bite size" pieces.
3. *Volunteer Coordinators.* Focus on what the individuals might bring to the communities above and beyond the activities the parish already offers. A volunteer coordinator could interview new parishioners (as well as existing), matching talents and interests with parish needs, explain the available opportunities to the individual and explore the possibilities.
4. *Provide the necessary tools for the job.* Insure expectations are clearly set as well as providing them with the necessary tools and information to accomplish their tasks.

**Plan:** We feel this is a collaborative effort for 2 major reasons: First, this is an age-old embedded problem which will require more "out of the box" thinking and brainstorming among the parishes is more likely to provide this. Second, the development of strong volunteer programs requires many skill sets and the burden is less when the burden is shared. The plan for recruitment and retention of volunteers:

Inform the Pastoral Council at each parish about this initiative and its importance by **February 1999**. Ask the Councils to decide upon The Pastor or Pastoral Administrator will identify a staff liaison to support this effort at the parish level by **March 1999**.

The parish representatives and staff liaisons will meet in **April 1999** with the support of a professional facilitator with expertise in will share some strategies for overcoming these obstacles, and

will then suggest the focus, to brainstorm ideas

formation of subgroups, each with a specific for addressing these challenges.

The parish representatives will take this information and report back to the Pastoral Councils in **May or June 1999**. The group of parish representatives will reconvene in **October or November 1999** to discuss progress that was made to that point, and to share specific strategies at the parish level that contributed toward or detracted from success in this effort.

### **3. *Coordination of Special Liturgies***

While each parish will maintain individual weekend liturgy schedules, there exists a great potential for coordination of “special” liturgical schedules: Masses for Holy Days, seasonal Reconciliation services, or Stations of the Cross are some examples. Beginning in **January, 1999**, Holy Day Mass schedules for all parishes should be published in each of the bulletins, along with any opportunities for special devotions. By the **1999 season of Lent**, the pastors, pastoral administrators, along with parish liturgy committees, should meet to coordinate the schedules for seasonal Reconciliation services, perhaps by staggering the evenings of the week on which they are held. The goal is to enable as many parishioners as possible to partake of the services. Beginning in **January, 2000**, schedules for Holy Day Masses should be similarly coordinated.

### **C. Continued work**

While we believe in starting slowly, there are many other areas in which we see a potential for collaborative efforts. Although there are no specific timed plans for the following items, that does not diminish their importance. We plan on exploring and encouraging the planning and implementation of collaborative work on:

- hospital visits
- youth ministry
- marriage preparation
- RCIA/RCIC
- counseling (drug, alcohol, unemployment)
- Stephen ministry
- social ministry
- Knights of Columbus
- young adult ministry
- support groups (bereavement, separated/divorced)

## VI. Timeline

The following timeline reflects the specific goals set forth in the aforementioned recommendations.

DATE	ACTION	WHO RESPONSIBLE
January 1999	inter-parish financial meeting	financial staff and/or finance committee members
January 1999	bulletin exchange	staff member
January 1999	increase submission of bulletin notices to other parishes	staff member
January 1999	publishing of other parishes' schedules for Holy Days and special devotions	pastor/pastoral administrator, liturgy committee
February 1999	planning group adult education committee members selected	pastoral councils, pastor/pastoral administrator
February 1999	communicate volunteerism initiative to Pastoral Councils	Pastoral Planning Team
March 1999	first inter-parish adult education committee meeting	group adult education committee members
March 1999	staff liaison for volunteerism initiative named	pastor/pastoral administrator
Lent 1999	coordination of seasonal Reconciliation services	pastor/pastoral administrator, liturgy committee
April 1999	volunteerism initiative meeting with professional facilitator	volunteerism initiative committee
Spring 1999	<i>Getting to Know Our Neighbors</i> series of bulletin articles begin	Pastoral Planning Team
May 1999	adult education preliminary plan submitted to Pastoral Planning Team	group adult education committee
May or June 1999	volunteerism committee to report to pastoral councils	volunteerism initiative committee
June 1999	final recommendation for allocation of priest personnel	Pastoral Planning Team
Fall 1999	first joint adult education program	group adult education committee
October or November 1999	volunteerism initiative committee re-convenes	volunteerism initiative committee
January 2000	coordination of Holy Day Mass schedules	pastor/pastoral administrator, liturgy committee

The members of the Southwest Monroe/Northwest Livingston Planning Team are:

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