

January 5, 2000

**Co-Chairs, Canandaigua/Rt. 96 PGLT**

John Peltier  
5825 Mt. Ash Drive  
Farmington, New York 14425

James Weisbeck  
3196 Carroll Hill  
Bloomfield, New York 14469

Dear John and Jim,

Please extend my thanks to the members of the Planning Group Leadership Team of the Roman Catholic Community of North-Western Ontario County for its dedicated work on a five year pastoral plan for the faith communities of your area. I appreciate their willingness to devote time and energy to this process of responding to the major issues and concerns facing the six parishes in the planning group.

Your group faced some unique issues. No other group combines some of the diocese's largest and smallest parishes. In addition, yours is an area of the diocese in which there will be future growth as people relocate away from the central Rochester area into exurbs. While it was possible to maintain the number of priests currently serving this area at five, the fact that one of these will not be a pastor reflects the continuing decline in the number of priests. This is an indication of future reductions in the number available to this group.

I also want to recognize and thank each of you for your leadership without which the PGLT would not have been able to complete its task in such timely and effective manner.

**Introduction**

You begin your plan with a set of propositions with which you all agree and on which you propose to build your collaborative life. I especially appreciated the first two statements. We are all called to make Christ present in the world by our personal actions; no policy, no plan, no statement can take the place of our personal behavior in our day to day world. At this time of year, we are called to our personal responsibility to "incarnate" God's love in our world. Truly this call requires constant study, prayer, and openness. We need to read and understand the "signs of our times" so that our witness is both true to the gospel message and relevant to our world. This is often an unsettling journey that is possible only by the light of faith.

I believe that you have correctly stated that "our future depends on how well we can abide by the law of Christ and go beyond a view of Church and parish as a parochial, independent structure."

**Configuration**

I understand your desire that all parishes within the planning group continue in their current canonical status as individual parishes. Given the plan you have devised and the number of

priests to be available to your group over the next five years, this is a reasonable objective. Beyond the next five years as the number of priests continues to decline, that objective may continue to be desirable but not necessarily reasonable or possible. Your good work in beginning this pastoral planning is building a foundation on which those future questions can be honestly addressed.

Your plan calls for continued assignment of priest pastors at St. Dominic, St. Felix/St. Francis, St. Mary, and St. Patrick and the appointment of a pastoral administrator and sacramental minister at St. Bridget/St. Joseph. This is a reasonable and workable configuration. Mr. William Olsen, Director of Human Resources, will be working with the St. Bridget/St. Joseph parish on the appointment of a pastoral administrator. Your plan requests that the sacramental minister be assigned full time to work in ministries within the planning group. These ministries would include work in hospitals, jails, hospices and nursing homes. If possible, this priest should work with a group of lay volunteers who would be trained and organized to carry on the pastoral aspects of the ministry. This would prepare for the time after this five-year period when this full time priest might not be available.

### **Interparish Council**

The plan calls for the creation of an Interparish Council to insure accountability for this plan, to work on the collaborative opportunities identified through this process, and to be available for ongoing review of pastoral issues and concerns. This is an important aspect of the plan because it will insure the continuing dialog and sharing essential to fruitful collaboration.

### **Mass Configuration**

I appreciate your willingness to deal with this difficult issue. There is clearly a spirit of collaboration and compromise that will be even more important in the future. While the details of mass times will be worked out by the Interparish Council, the parishes have affirmed a reduction in the number of masses to respond to the canonical guidelines of no more than three weekend masses of Sunday obligation.

### **Sacramental Minister**

The Interparish Council will begin work immediately to specify the ministerial work of the priest in addition to his role as sacramental minister at St. Bridget/St. Joseph. While I affirm this in principle, it will be necessary for me to approve the specifics of the pastoral assignment. Fr. Michael Conboy, Director of Priest Personnel, will work with you to assist in this specification. He will forward to me through the Priest Personnel Board your final recommendations on this position. In the meantime, we will proceed on the presumption that the sacramental minister will work full time within the planning group. Please keep in mind, however, that the good of the Diocese may require me to make use of priest personnel in ways other than that which you have specified.

### **Collaboration**

Your planning team identified seven common concerns that can be addressed, at least in part, through collaboration among the parishes:

1. Lay leadership
2. Volunteers
3. Social ministry
4. Evangelization
5. Life-long learning

6. Young adults
7. Youth

The Interparish Council will have developed timelines for collaborative actions in these areas by December 31, 2000. I advise you to be realistic about the work that can be accomplished in a limited period of time. All seven issues are important but all cannot be addressed at the same time. I urge you to establish priorities and to decide which few issues will be the basis for collaborative programs over the first two years of the planning period. It is not a question of which issues will be addressed as much as which will be addressed first.

#### **Other Actions**

I encourage your efforts to share "home parish" envelopes, to create and use various communications vehicles, and to publish an interparish mass schedule.

#### **Need for Larger Worship Sites**

I believe you have sounded an important note for the future of this group and, indeed, of all planning groups. As the number of priests declines over the next 20 years, we will surely be faced with the necessity of celebrating fewer masses. Given the centrality of the Eucharist, fewer masses means that Eucharistic celebrations will have to take place in larger gatherings. This has implications for existing parishes and facilities. While your plan does not directly address this issue, it is important that you do maintain your openness to this emerging reality.

#### **Affirmation**

With the reservation about the job description for the sacramental minister, I heartily affirm your plan and look forward to hearing of your progress. Once the details of the ministerial assignment of the sacramental minister is finalized and recommended to me, I will communicate my decision to you.

Mr. Casey Lopata has been assigned as Pastoral Center liaison to work with you and the Interparish Council on the implementation of the plan. Casey will be in touch with you to begin to assist you in the formation and work of the Interparish Council. You can reach him at the Pastoral Center--328-3228 ext. 270 or [lopata@dor.org](mailto:lopata@dor.org).

I look forward to meeting with you and the members of the parish communities on January 18 to celebrate the beginning of this collaboration.

With every good wish, I remain,

Your brother in Christ,

† Matthew H. Clark  
Bishop of Rochester

MHC:cls

CC: Reverend Richard Beligotti  
Reverend Michael Conboy  
Reverend William Cosgrove

Rev. Edward Dillon

Mr. Casey Lopata  
Mr. William Olsen  
Rev. Walter Wainwright  
Rev. George Wiant