

September 25, 2003

Rev. Robert Ring
Pastor, Our Lady of the Lakes Catholic Community
210 Keuka Street
Penn Yan, NY 14527

Dear Bob:

As the Our Lady of the Lakes planning group begins "Pastoral Planning for the New Millennium: Phase Two," I want to express my gratitude to you, your staff, and parishioners for the energy, determination, and faith you have brought to pastoral planning and the clustering of your six communities over the past five years. As I re-read your first pastoral plan, I appreciated more fully the changes your communities chose and then lived through: the movement from three clusters to one, the consolidation of administrative staff, the sharing of one rectory as living space for the three priests. While change—even change leading to positive outcomes—is often difficult, your communities have also faced unforeseen changes, particularly shifts in the priests assigned to minister within Our Lady of the Lakes. Thank you for the warm way you have welcomed each new priest into your midst and for your fortitude in continuing the work of the Church in sometimes difficult circumstances.

The Our Lady of the Lakes planning group is projected to continue to have three priests available to it through 2009 and then two from 2009-2014. We as a Diocese have learned many things over the past five years of pastoral planning as we tried new ways of structuring or configuring our faith communities. We now know that some structures we developed placed undue burdens on our pastoral leaders. As we plan for the next five and ten years I am asking that planning groups develop configuration models in which no pastor is responsible for more than three parishes and that clustered parishes move in the direction of becoming one parish under civil and Church law, possibly maintaining multiple churches offering Sunday Eucharist and other ministries. Since these new constraints—designed to foster the health of our pastoral leaders and the quality of our ministry—affect the Our Lady of the Lakes planning group, I ask your pastoral plan to address this direction. I ask you also to develop one pastoral council from your multiple councils and a provisional six-Mass schedule for 2009-2014. However, after examining the attendance at weekend Mass in your six churches, you may decide to adjust or reduce your Mass schedule more quickly.

There are some additional issues which I invite your communities to address during this second phase of pastoral planning. Please undertake a careful consideration of the continued need for all the buildings owned by your cluster, and work toward the ability to hire and pay well-qualified, trained staff to meet the needs of your communities. Become knowledgeable about the academic successes and challenges facing St. Michael School; examine its relationship to

St. Michael and indeed the entire cluster so you can plan for the future. Please address the ministerial needs of the Catholic students at Keuka College in light of the new diocesan campus ministry staffing plan.

I encourage you to use the resources of our diocesan Department of Evangelization and Catechesis as you continue to enhance the quality of your faith formation programs. The Department of Liturgy suggests that, as you move toward becoming a more unified faith community, you continue to build common worship experiences and develop a set of common hymns and sung Mass parts across the six churches. They offer their services to conduct common training for your liturgical ministers and musicians.

Just as other planning groups have learned from your experiences and borrowed ideas such as your regional Lenten mission, I invite you to examine whether some creative ministerial approaches, undertaken in other parts of the Diocese, might be of benefit to you. The Central Steuben planning group has developed a model for youth ministry in rural communities spread out geographically. Perhaps this model would offer some new possibilities for expanding your youth ministry efforts. The Northwestern Ontario planning group trains parishioners to offer pastoral care in a coordinated fashion to those in nursing homes and hospitals. Perhaps you will want to investigate a similar expansion of those trained to provide pastoral care to the sick and dying in your area.

As you enter "Pastoral Planning for the New Millennium: Phase Two," know that your communities will be in my prayers and that I offer you the full support of the offices at the Pastoral Center in your work.

With every good wish I remain

Copy: Ms. Karen Rinefield