

SPECIAL REPORT

Bishop

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parishes are clustered with one or more other parishes and are served by a single pastor. Pastoral administrators currently lead 8 percent of our parishes. The future will accentuate these trends. Thus, since it is not possible to appoint a priest to every parish, I have decided that the Priest Personnel Board must have the ability to review initially both priests and pastoral administrators for each pastoral opening. While the preference, as I said above, will always be for a priest, increasingly pastoral administrators will be asked to assume this pastoral-leadership position.

I realize that several Pastoral plans call for specific pastoral leadership models: a pastor here, a pastoral administrator there. As much as possible, we will try to honor these plans, but it may happen that the realities of available human resources may move us in a different direction. Parishes that are currently led by pastoral administrators and strongly desire to continue with that model may find themselves again assigned priest pastors. Parishes that have assumed they would always have priest pastors may indeed find that a pastoral administrator is assigned. In all this change, I promise you that my decisions will always be guided by what is best for the specific parish and for the Diocese as a whole. I know that I can count on your understanding and support as we move in this direction.

In this context, I am often asked, "Won't we have married priests by 2025?" Once again I remind you, for me it's all speculation. No one knows the future. In 1975, who could have guessed what the Church in 2000 would have looked like? Much may change or very little. We do know that the world itself will change. What we don't know are the exact ways in which the Church will change in response to or in spite of those social and cultural changes. Nevertheless, even married priests will not solve our problem. Protestant churches with married and female clergy face the same clergy shortage as we do. The problem is the result of societal shifts and should not be blamed on Roman Catholic policies alone.

So what are some possible future scenarios?

One way to think about an uncertain future is to tell stories about how it might look.

Bill, Casey, and Karen have developed a set of possible scenarios for our future. You were given a handout that describes them. I found them to be helpful and stimulating ways to think about the future, but, like all such exercises, they are not predictions. The future is known only to God. Nevertheless, theologians tell us that we co-create the future with God.

All of the scenarios involve communities working together cooperatively. From past experience, we have learned that we must work together and plan together, co-creating a future that reflects our highest ideals and values, or we will inherit a future that dishonors the Church called together in Christ's name.

Pastoral Planning for the New Millennium was the beginning of a process of looking beyond an individual parish to include the needs of neighboring faith communities as well. We must continue that journey and extend our relationship beyond our proximate geographic neighbors to all the parishes and faith communities of the Diocese. It is all too easy to read about the closing of St. Francis of Assisi church in Rochester, the consolidation of six parishes of Southern Cayuga, the merger of the four Corning-Painted Post

Each generation of the Church must go through its own Passover from death to life in order to prepare the Church for the next generation.

parishes and to think, "Thank God that's not happening here. That is awful but it is their problem."

That all-too-human response is not the thinking of a follower of Christ who realizes that what happens in any parish or any community of the Diocese cannot be irrelevant to him or her. We are all part of the Body of Christ and thus all part of our diocesan church. Within the parameters of the law of the Church, we must work out ways in which all our parishes — urban, suburban, and rural — reflect a unity of concern and action on behalf of all. This may require those blessed with great material resources to share their richness with those who struggle; it may require that those who struggle receive assistance graciously. This will require of all a humility and empathy of spirit that will shine as an example of how we are to be church in our time and in our place.

How will we do the next round of planning?

We can think theoretically about the future: what it will be like, and how we will respond? But we must also plan concretely. We know that in 2002 the first class of planning groups will start planning for the next five years. How they approach that planning is a question to which we must have an answer in less than a year from now. I would like to discuss this important question by talking about what you can count on from me in this process and what I need to have from you.

What can you count on from me?

First, Companionship

You can count on me to be with you as we walk together through this process. We will be facing difficult issues, but we will face them together. I will be available; I will listen; I will respond. For 22 years, I have been blessed with responsibility for the pastoral care of this Diocese. I have tried always to be guided by my faith and by your faith in the continuing presence of Jesus among us.

Second you can expect from me a clear set of criteria to assess parish vitality and viability

In Pastoral Planning for the New Millennium we used indicators that were both qualitative and quantitative. There was no attempt to "norm" this information. Rather our focus was on gathering the information in consistent and accurate formats and displaying the results for use by parish and planning group leadership teams. With several years of experience, and greater accuracy in the underlying data, we can now contextualize the information for an individual parish or faith community. Vitality criteria can be clearer and more evaluative.

We need to have a standard approach to evaluating the vitality of our parishes and faith communities. Should we continue to assign priest as pastors or pastoral administrators to parishes that have not been able to generate at least median levels of vitality? If all parishes cannot be retained, are the least developed to be discontinued? Or, are the least developed to become our priority? At some point, we will have to ask the question: If we cannot support all parishes, which ones will no longer be supported? Can we reorganize a group of communities into a single canonical



Bishop Clark and Candace Galik, pastoral associate of St. Catherine of Siena in Ithaca, converse during the lunch break.

parish, but continue with multiple worship sites as though they were multiple parishes? We need greater realism and judgment. If some of our parishes become "chapels of ease" — where Eucharist is only celebrated on occasion — let us do that honestly without simulating a parish where there truly is none.

However we measure vitality, I believe that we need to establish a minimum level of activity. There can be a point at which it is not a responsible use of resources to continue a parish. Let's take an extreme example of a parish where nothing takes place other than Sunday Eucharist. There is no faith formation program, no sacramental preparation, no youth or young adult ministry, no ministry to sick and dying, no senior ministry, no social ministry. Even the Sunday liturgy lacks life. The worship space is half-empty. There is no active participation by the congregation. There are no liturgical ministers. But the building is well taken care of and the parish accounts are balanced and in order. Does such a community have a claim on a priest pastor or pastoral administrator when we do not have enough of both to serve all of our parishes?

Or vice-versa. The parish is alive in all the areas mentioned above except it is in debt and its expenses continue to outpace its revenues?

If these are extreme examples, what about a parish that has some of these pastoral activities but lacks any outreach to the spiritual and material needs of its community? What about a parish that does not tithe its resources to those in greater need? What about a parish that refuses to train its volunteers so they can provide the best possible ministry?

Whether we use the pastoral goals identified in the Synod or recast them into a different framework, we need to focus on the true life and vitality of the parish. A promising direction is to use vitality indicators derived from the various aspects of the four-fold mission of the church (word, worship, community, and service) as well as the parish's ability to sustain itself financially and physically.

Third, you can expect from me a clear statement of the issues facing each planning group and its member parishes and faith communities.

We learned a great deal about our parishes during the first round of planning. A careful review of the information now available, along with an assessment of parish vitality and viability, will be part of the information provided to each parish and planning group. In other words, in addition to the analysis and assessment that you will conduct in your parishes and planning groups, we will provide to you a similar analysis by the staff of the Pastoral Center. Sometimes others can see issues and

concerns more clearly and objectively because they have the benefit of broad knowledge of many parishes and because they are not personally involved in the life of a faith community.

Constraints

As we move into this next round, it is important that we keep some constraints in mind. Our process should always stimulate and nurture creativity, and that creativity must deal forthrightly with the realities and constraints we face.

Priest Personnel Policies

There are constraints that place limits on the life and work of our priests. They are based on canon law, local diocesan legislation, and common sense.

Three Mass limit

No priest may say more than three Masses of Sunday obligation each weekend. This is a requirement of canon law and it accords with good sense.

Pastoral administrators

As I mentioned earlier, pastoral administrators will be eligible to apply for any pastoral leadership opening.

Priests from other dioceses

Priests from outside our diocese are valued members of the diocesan clergy. Their presence in our diocese has benefited them and us as well. However, since most dioceses in the world have fewer priests than we, in justice we cannot actively recruit priests from other dioceses to minister here. In truth, we should be considering sharing our priestly abundance with those less fortunate.

Retired Priests

At my request, Priest Personnel is working out policies that will permit me to assign retired priests or teams of retired priests who have expressed interest in continuing to provide sacramental and pastoral ministry. This will be done in a way that does not compromise or diminish their retirement benefits. It is important to understand that this does not provide a solution to the declining number of priests, but rather permits those who wish to extend their service somewhat beyond normal retirement.

Role of Deacons

I have asked the Deacon Personnel Board to develop a set of policies that, while respecting family and job responsibility needs, will result in the assignment of deacons to the parishes and faith communities most in need of the sacramental ministries and preaching of deacons.

Sunday Eucharist

Sunday Eucharist remains at the center of the life of each parish. No parish or faith community that functions as a parish can on a routine basis continue without a Sunday Eucharist. As a diocese, we have guidelines for Sunday Celebration in the Absence of a Priest. These guidelines are for emergency situations only and do not envision a Sunday Celebration in the Absence of