

Charlotte/Greece/Hilton Pastoral Planning Task Force
Tuesday, July 9, 2024 @ St. Lawrence Deacon Hall

ATTENDING: Holy Cross/Our Mother of Sorrows: Fr. William Coffas, Fr. Justin Miller, **Holy Cross:** Joseph DiVincenzo, **Our Mother of Sorrows:** Marc Boeh, David Witkoski, **St. Charles Borromeo:** Fr. John Firpo, Gina Reeder, David Steklenski, **St. John the Evangelist:** Fr. Peter Enyan-Boadu, Paul Parkman, Nick Verdino, **St. Lawrence:** Fr. Lee Chase, Steve Amico, Jeri Rombaut, **St. Leo the Great:** Fr. Joseph Catanise, **St. Mark's:** Deacon Frank Pettrone, Peter Blind, Kimm Wesley, **Facilitator:** Karen Rinefierd, **Minutes Scribe:** Maryanne Sutton

EXCUSED: Holy Cross: Amy Mulcahy, **St. Leo the Great:** David Jones, Barbara Surash

Welcome to Bishop Salvatore Matano, Fr. Daniel White (Priest Secretary to Bishop Matano), **and Mr. Michael Sauter** (Diocesan Director, Department of Pastoral Services)

Opening Prayer led by Father Lee Chase

Brief overview of the Task Force mission and committees (Evangelization, Vocations, and Shared Website) -- Father Lee Chase

Father Chase distributed copies of a summary of the activity of the Task Force (available on the Roc Catholics Northwest website) and the three 7-parish committees, and then orally summarized the handout.

Questions submitted by Task Force members beforehand and shared with Bishop Matano

- As Bishop of the Diocese of Rochester, what information would you want prior to making any decision regarding the future of the parishes in this group? That is, what information is helpful for you to receive within a recommendation or report given to you by a group such as ours? Is there anything specific that you would like to see in our final recommendation/report that would be helpful in making your decisions as we move forward? Is there anything that we are not considering and are we on the right track?
- We have an Evangelization subcommittee that has been very active in working to bring the seven parishes together in a collective effort of evangelization. We want to proceed in the vision/direction that you have for our diocese. What are some practical ways that you would like to see these parishes work together in Evangelization?
- We have a Vocations subcommittee for the seven parishes. What efforts might we undertake to join together with the diocese to encourage men in seeking the priesthood and permanent diaconate?

Presentation/Comments by Bishop Matano

- I appreciate the zeal and the work done already by this Task Force and that you are motivated by faith.
- The vision I have for any pastoral plan is to include a focus on increasing Mass attendance. Otherwise, efforts will be for naught. People now think they are doing well if they attend Mass one or two times per month.
- Increased attendance at Mass will not happen without support for family life. Only 17% of couples today get married in the Church. There needs to be a focus in parishes on families with particular sensitivity to single parents. There needs to be a welcoming embrace from the Church.

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- We also need a revival of the sacrament of Confession. I have asked the clergy to increase the hours when confession is offered—e.g., not just to offer confession on Saturdays before Mass but also on a weekday evening or before weekday Masses. If people do not believe that they sin, why would they think they need the Church? We can see the result of people not able to distinguish between right and wrong in the violence evident in our area.
- Catechetical instruction should include catechesis of parents. The Diocese has now made online courses from the University of Steubenville available to all parishes.
- Liturgy is important. Good liturgy includes the quality of the music, creating a sense of solemnity which lifts people to the Transcendent. Training for all who have roles during the Mass (e.g., lectors, altar servers) is necessary. The priest or deacon in the homily needs to unify and not divide, especially during this political time. He should focus on issues, not candidates.
- Pastoral plans need to build relationships—first with Jesus Christ and then with each other. The Church is one, holy, catholic, and apostolic. That is why we have a preferential option for the poor. Ultimately, we have to worship together as the family of God. All were created in the image and likeness of God. We can learn from those in the pro-life movement who never give up in the face of criticism.
- We need to understand synodality. There have been synods since the early Church. Synods are not license to do whatever people want but an opportunity for the Church to explain more clearly what she teaches and reveal ever better the face of Christ.
- I realize that this task force is focused on strengthening the Church in this area. Its recommendation to me as Bishop will not involve recommending that any church close. I do not want to close churches. The Vatican has said that lack of availability of priests, changing demographics, and finances are not reasons to close a church. However, churches can be closed if the building is no longer suitable for worship or if there is unanimity among people that it should close. Solid communication with parishioners is key to reaching that unity. For example, Father Firpo communicated clearly and regularly with the parishioners of Holy Name of Jesus before recommending that the church be closed. People understood the recommendation and there was no outcry.
- These are things the seven parishes can do now: develop cooperation among the parishes, hold common events, share staff and ministries, remove siloes. This is a gradual, progressive way. If people over time see that they cannot sustain what has been, they will agree on a future. The uniting of parishes is an exercise of human interaction.
- Every plan must be planted within the lived experience of a community.
- We cannot have a defeatist attitude with our Church and faith. Vocations to the priesthood are very important, but what young man would consider the priesthood if he only sees decline? Five young men have gone to the Dominican congregation because they see others who are young and vibrant. Among those from our Diocese who will be in seminary this fall, we have one young man from St. Mark's Parish. Youth attracts youth.
- You are doing a good job. You have the dedication that is a foundation for pastoral planning.

Comments by Task Force Members/Interactions with Bishop Matano

- Task Force member: Thank you for providing us with some wonderful, inspiring answers.
- Task Force member: I have been impressed with your interactions with young people.
- Task Force member: the Task Force has not talked about closures—that is off the table. We have been focused on developing a proposal based on clustering of parishes.

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- Bishop: We do need to be realistic as we look at the present and plan for the future. I realize that some churches in this area were built when Kodak was in its hey day. In pastoral planning we need both faith and reason. We need to keep going forward.
- The Bishop's concluding words: I have deep gratitude for the work you are doing. Do not get discouraged; there are many good things happening. You are volunteering your time and putting so much effort into this work. This is the strength of our parishes.