

UPDATE

Planning for the Future of St. Margaret Mary Deanery

As you are aware, statistics indicate that there will be one half the number of priests serving in the Archdiocese of Cincinnati in 10 years. That decline in the number of priests will also be felt in the 18 parishes that make up the St. Margaret Mary Deanery of which we are one. Several years ago representatives including pastors and staff of some of the parishes began to meet in order to plan for the future. Approximately one year ago it was decided that it was important to have all of the parishes in the deanery involved in the planning process. On October 30, 2003, we had our first gathering of priests, pastors and 5 or 6 representatives from each of the parishes of the Deanery. Approximately 100 people attended.

Since then we have had two additional gatherings of this group. We have shared our fears and concerns as well as hopes and dreams for the future. We listened to Fr. Ed Hussey put forth a vision of church on a snowy January evening and discussed how we can be church at this time and in this place. We have even begun discussing how we might begin to collaborate and work together. We recently proposed dividing into clusters or "pastoral regions" so that we might begin thinking about working more closely with a geographically close parish, or a parish that feeds into a particular high school. Let us be clear, these are NOT mergers or consolidations, but just an attempt to establish groupings of parishes that can work together. Nothing is set in stone at this point. Currently, the pastoral regions that will begin talking, collaborating, sharing ministries are:
Corpus Christi, St. John Neumann and St. John the Baptist;
St. Bartholomew, Our Lady of the Rosary, St. Vivian, St. Matthias and St. James Wyoming;
St. Ann, Assumption, St. Margaret Mary and St. Clare;
St. Ignatius, St. James the Greater and St. Therese the Little Flower.
St. Clement is in the process of discerning with whom they will work. The three non-territorial parishes in the Deanery; Our Lady of Lavang (Vietnamese), Su Casa (Spanish speaking) and St. Andrew Kim (Korean), because of their specialized ministry will stand on their own at this time.

This summer the Deanery Steering Committee, comprised of pastors and pastoral staff, will be working on a statement of values, parameters and guiding principles that will be used by all the pastoral regions in our planning. The committee will also be planning a Fall Kickoff or "unveiling" for our Deanery planning process.

Also the Deanery has recently established a Catholic Schools Task Force made up of pastors, principals and representatives of Education Commissions from each parish to look at and plan for the Future of Catholic Schools in our Deanery. It is such an important and complex issue we felt it necessary to form a special task force.

While planning for the future has been happening on the deanery level, the Archdiocese has been planning on a wider level. It has been a widely consultative process in an attempt to obtain feedback from the grass roots. Details of this process have been or will be reported and published in the *Catholic Telegraph*. For more info look at the Archdiocesan web site catholiccincinnati.org.

It is a challenging time for us and anyone who is part of the church. True, there have been the scandals, disappointments, and the growing shortage of ordained leadership is unsettling. But, thank God, there has been an explosion of lay leadership, ministry and ownership. The face of the church may look different in the future but we trust that the Spirit of God continues to guide us.