

Joint Statement for Publication in Parish Newsletters and Web-Sites

DIOCESE OF BELLEVILLE PASTORAL PLAN FOR PARISH RENEWAL AND RESTRUCTURING PARISH PARTNERSHIP PASTORAL PLANNING COMMITTEE

St. Mary, Trenton IL & St. George, New Baden IL

PROGRESS REPORT

October 9, 2013

Earlier this year our Bishop, The Most Rev. Edward K. Braxton announced on April 2, 2013 his response to THE PASTORAL PLAN FOR PARISH RENEWAL AND RESTRUCTURING. Bishop Braxton initiated a diocesan wide process to plan for the future vitality and realignment of parishes throughout southern Illinois as a response to the declining number of priests that are available to serve Catholics in our diocese. The core of THE PLAN was the designation of “Parish Partnerships” between two (or more) parishes that would begin discussions between ordained and lay parish leadership of how they would share one priest at a point in the future. Here at Saint Mary/Saint George we’ve been partnered with Saint George, New Baden/St. Mary, Trenton.

The pastors and laity of both parishes have met for three meetings in August, September and October. In September a preliminary report required by the Bishop was sent to his office describing the discussions and decisions made up to that point. The ad-hoc Parish partnership Pastoral Planning Committee will continue to meet through the end of the year on a monthly basis. A final report and plan is to be submitted to the Bishop at that time. Parishioners have been informed of earlier decisions in a previous edition of the parish newsletter and information posted on the parish web-site. In early discussions it was decided that St. George and St. Mary would remain two independent parishes served by one priest-pastor. This priest would celebrate three Masses for Sunday obligation between the two parishes and split his time as equally as possible between the two parishes. After the first two meetings and discussion of the duties of a priest, deacon and current lay staff in the parishes it was also agreed in principal without specific details by the joint parish committee members that the parishes would most likely have to hire at least one additional staff member to assist the pastor in administration or pastoral care of the parishes so that the communities can continue to meet the needs of parishioners. It was hoped that this extra person would be able to free up the priest to be available to perform the sacramental, liturgical and pastoral care functions proper to the priesthood without adding to the additional burden of administration of two parishes instead of one.

Parishioners are reminded that the effective date of any changes that will be required by the sharing of a pastor has not been determined. The parishes will implement the plan that is being prepared at that unknown future time when one or both of the current pastors ceases to serve one of the parishes because of transfer, retirement or other unforeseen circumstances. As Bishop Braxton has been reminding the people in the diocese, it is better to be prepared with a carefully considered plan in place than to scramble to put something together when the unexpected occurs. Parishioners will experience less stress and confusion and the transition will happen more smoothly.

The committee most recently met on Tuesday, October 8, 2013 at St. Mary Parish in Trenton. More specificity was given to some of the details of THE PLAN that will need to be put in place when St. Mary and St. George Parishes begin to share one pastor. At the October meeting a suggested Mass schedule was agreed upon which would be implemented when only one priest is available to serve the two parishes with the understanding that it could be altered due to future circumstances or preferences of the priest assigned to serve both communities. There would be three Masses each weekend. The location of the Saturday vigil Mass, earlier and later Sunday morning Masses would be alternated every other month. For example, in the first month the Eucharist on Saturday evening and later Mass on Sunday would be at St. Mary and the early Sunday Eucharist at St. George. The following month the parishes would flip what time Mass is celebrated with St. Mary celebrating the earlier Sunday liturgy and St. George would host the Saturday vigil and later Sunday Mass. Parish School of Religion Classes would be held the same time in both parishes each Sunday, between the two Mass times. Most likely, the time of celebration of the Eucharist would be 4:00 PM on Saturday and 8:00 and 10:30 AM on Sunday.

Each parish would have two weekday celebrations of the Eucharist at times to be determined by the pastor. On Holy Days, there would be one celebration of the Mass in each parish (one vigil, one on the day of the feast). Most likely there would be three Masses for Christmas, with two in one parish and one in the other parish, to be alternated each year. The liturgies of the Sacred Triduum (Holy Thursday, Good Friday and Holy Saturday Easter Vigil) would be one joint liturgy each day with parishioners of both parishes. The church would remain the same all three days with the parishes alternating hosting the Triduum every other year.

The committee and pastors realize that the proposed liturgical schedule may cause some hardship and require travel. As Bishop Braxton wrote in his response to THE PLAN, "The Pastoral Plan will have real consequences that will require real sacrifices on the part of all [parishes] as it is implemented" so that all Catholics will continue to have access to the Eucharist and parishes that are vital. Along with Bishop Braxton the pastors remind their parishioners to keep the mission of the church as the Body of Christ as their guiding vision and let go of any parochialism for the good of the whole. Creative solutions, such as car pools, that spring forth from the generosity of parishioners will have to be explored to make sure everyone can attend Mass each week. It is hoped that parishioners who already travel to bring children to schools and shop in other

communities will accept this as one more necessary trip to live their faith.

Also determined at the October meeting were issues concerning how the priest-pastor would be compensated. Expenses related to his salary and proscribed benefits would be shared by the two parishes, each paying half. The pastor would determine which parish rectory in which to reside with each parish continuing to assume the cost of maintenance and upkeep of their rectory building whether the priest is living there or not.

The committee continues to discuss what additional staff would be needed to make the sharing of a priest most beneficial for both parishes. Current professional staff would remain in place (secretary/administrative assistant, Coordinators of Religious Education and Deacon). The Bishop could be petitioned to assign Deacon John Fridley to serve both parishes instead of just St. George Parish at some future date to assist in the cooperation of the two parishes as they prepare for greater collaboration in the future. Members of the committee are in agreement that some role be defined for a shared "pastoral associate" with specific responsibilities at future meetings. They thought this position can be funded partially by the fact each parish will be paying less for a priest and those funds can be used for the salary of a professional lay ecclesial minister such as a pastoral associate. There will be a need to begin, now, development of greater stewardship in both parishes along with growth and maintain membership to make the hiring of a new staff member feasible.

The next meeting of the ad-hoc joint parish committee for pastoral planning will be Tuesday, November 12 at 7:15 PM in New Baden at St. George Parish. In addition to discussing the role of a possible Pastoral Associate, the group will also discuss what activities and ministries the two parishes could begin sharing in the present before the sharing of a pastor becomes necessary. Such mutual cooperation will build relationships between parishioners and better utilize limited resources and hopefully make the transition to one priest-pastor less traumatic.

If parishioners have questions, concerns and comments they are asked to contact one of the members of the joint parish committee.

From St. George, New Baden:

Rev. Gene Neff, Pastor

Rev. Mr. John Fridley, Deacon and Director of Religious Education

Mr. Glenn Albers, Trustee

Mrs. Judy Fuehne, Trustee

Mr. Tony Parr, Pastoral Council Chairperson

From St. Mary, Trenton

Rev. Joseph C. Rascher, Pastor

Mrs. Kim Moss, Coordinator of Religious Education

Mr. Jim Jansen, Trustee

Ms. Karen Pokasta, Trustee

Mr. Pete Schumacher, Pastoral Council Chairperson

Parishioners are also asked to pray for vocations to the priesthood in the Diocese of Belleville.