

Joint Statement of the Ad-Hoc Parish Partnership Committee For St. George, New Baden and St. Mary, Trenton

November 10, 2014

On August 6, 2011, the Most Rev. Edward K. Braxton, Bishop of Belleville, issued a Pastoral Letter entitled “Embracing the Future With Hope” which introduced to our local church a process for planning for the future of parishes in southern Illinois over which he presides. “The Pastoral Plan” as it is known was designed to have maximum parishioners input into decisions concerning the future of parishes in the diocese while facing the challenge of changing demographics and fewer priests available to serve the Catholics of the diocese.

After initial data was gathered Bishop Braxton issued his “Formal Response” on April 2, 2013. In this document he designated “parish partnerships” and mandated each partnership to develop a plan with specifics indicating how the partner parishes would share a priest-pastor and envision sharing their mission to serve Catholics in their territory in a more collaborative manner. St. Mary Parish in Trenton was partnered with St. George Parish in New Baden.

An ad-hoc committee of parish leadership from both parishes met over the course of several months and developed a plan for this sharing. A final report was sent to the Bishop in December 2013. Details of the joint plan were shared with both parishes in their newsletters published shortly after each report was completed and sent to the bishop. (See St. Mary Church Presenter June 2013 Vol. 2/No. 4, October 2013 Vol. 3/No. 1 and December 2013 Vol. 3 No. 2).

On June 8, 2014, the Bishop issued a follow up document “The Vicariate Letters: The Bishop’s Reflections on the Strategic Pastoral Models of the Parish Partnerships.” In this document he asked each parish partnership to “refine” and develop in more detail the plans they had submitted in December 2013 according to his directives written to each partnership. The Bishop instructed the St. Mary-St. George partnership “...you must propose ways in which you can move beyond sharing individual programs and resources. Please take the opportunity to re-imagine what your parishes would look like if you truly shared a common mission: both parishes with a single mission, the mission of Christ to proclaim the Good News to all. Look for specific ways to reorganize your parish life for this shared mission. This should include aligning ministry efforts, sharing parish leadership structures, and developing a greater degree of sharing of parish life.”

On September 25, 2014 the parishes’ joint ad-hoc committee reconvened to attempt to flesh out the previously submitted plan according to the bishop’s directives. The following details have been added to our plan in hopes that this is what the Bishop is seeking.

Deacon John Fridley, who is now serving both parishes with the consent of both pastors will prepare a comparison of each parish’s current Mission Statements for similarities and prepare a possible draft joint mission statement to be considered by both parish councils. On January 21, 2015 a joint meeting of the two parish’s Pastoral Councils will be held with the task of refining and preparing a “joint vision statement” that will address what we would like our parishes to “look like” in 10 years.

Concerning Pastoral councils: The committee had previously discussed but did not describe adequately in their previous plan the following; Each parish's pastoral council will meet every other month, alternating months, so that the pastor and deacon (appointed by the bishop to serve both parishes) will attend only one pastoral council meeting a month. The connecting links, to bring the concerns, planned action items and information from one partner parish to the other will be the Pastor, Deacon and proposed jointly shared Pastoral Associate who will attend both parishes' pastoral council meetings. Normally, there would not be a pastoral council meeting in December and July.

There will be an annual joint meeting of both councils or designated representatives to a joint meeting at the discretion of the pastoral councils to consider items common to both parishes that will further the joint vision statement.

The committee believes it would not be advisable to have a joint council between the parishes in the foreseeable future.

Finance Councils will remain separate. Currently Saint Mary's Finance Council meets quarterly. Saint George's Finance Council meets 5 times per year (more often if special need arises). This is a total of no more than 9 meetings per year.

The ad-hoc committee will continue to work on a job description for a potential "Pastoral Associate" that would assist in areas of administration, volunteer recruitment and retention, lay-ministry development and life-long faith formation. The Pastoral Associate would work in collaboration with the pastor, deacon and existing parish Coordinators of Religious Education. Such a staff member will be essential to maintaining our vision of sharing a pastor who must be available for sacramental, pastoral and a ministry of leadership and oversight. Both parishes will continue to discuss and develop stewardship plans to finance the additional position.

A joint Stewardship Committee is envisioned.

The committee anticipates inviting a parish pastor or staff member from another parish currently doing what our parishes are being asked to do to give a presentation and discussion about their "Best Practices" as an example of how our parishes might collaborate on joint vision and mission in practical terms.

Other areas and ministries that the committee anticipates the parishes sharing besides those already mentioned in the previous report of December 31, 2013:

- Bereavement ministry (currently in existence at St. George, to be extended to St. Mary)
- Provide links to each other's web-sites adding a page on each parish's web-site of joint activities, possibly share a web-master.
- Make each partner parish's bulletin available in the other's parish. We believe that at present we are not at a point to have a joint bulletin. We will continue to discuss possibility of joint bulletin in the future.
Add a "flap" page to current bulletins with "what's happening in the partner parish" sent by secretaries to one another.
- Consider a joint parishes picture directory in approximately the year 2016 or 2017 (both parishes have just completed a directory in 2013, 2014).
- Plan for more joint social outreach projects, such as holiday meals for needy and shut-ins.
- Provide workers at each other's summer picnics (e.g. take responsibility for a particular stand or activity)

- Joint adult formation, small Christian communities, bible studies.
- While each parish will maintain a separate Parish School of Religion the parishes are planning on inaugurating joint sacramental preparation programs for Infant Baptism preparation (for parents), First Reconciliation & Communion and Confirmation. The programs for children's sacramental preparation would take place outside of Parish School of Religious (PSR) class time on Sunday (e.g. Saturday or a weeknight). All program team members and catechists would be from both parishes.
- Grade school PSR Staff of both parishes will discuss possibility of "joint activity days" for various PSR classes (retreat day, youth rally type activities). It would be desirable to have joint "catechist formation meetings and in-service planning meetings."
- A joint High School Youth Ministry initiative will be put in place.
- Ladies' and Men's Sodalities from both parishes would be encouraged to have an annual joint activity.
- Both parishes will continue to supply team members for Pre-Cana at the Mater Dei site.

The ad-hoc committee further stated that the parishes would continue to revisit the joint pastoral plan in the future on a periodic basis, and adapt the plan according to the current needs of parishioners.

All reports and pertinent documentation concerning the plan can be located on each parish's web-site. The Saint Mary website is www.stmarytrenton.com The St. George web-site is www.stgeorgefamily.org

Any parishioners who have questions about the planning process or suggestions for the ad-hoc committee are encouraged to contact their pastor, parish staff member or ad-hoc committee members. At St. Mary contact Fr. Joe Rascher or Mrs. Kim Moss, Coordinator of Religious Education or any member of the ad-hoc committee (Jim Jansen, Karen Pokasta or Jim Cathcart) or any pastoral council member. At St. George contact Fr. Gene Neff, Deacon John Fridley or any committee member.