



GATHERING GOD'S GIFTS PARISH PLANNING UPDATE

March 2009

"Expansion in the Church calls for special care in diocesan planning and the training of personnel through ongoing activities of formation in order to facilitate the necessary deepening of the faith of your people... From this foundation faith flourishes in Christian virtue, and gives rise to vibrant parishes and generous service to the wider community."

--Pope Benedict XVI, January 2009

In January, when meeting with the Bishops of Nigeria, Pope Benedict XVI stressed the importance of training and diocesan planning in order to create strong, vibrant parishes.

The Holy Father's recent call for vibrant parishes is in keeping with the theme of Pope John Paul II's Apostolic Letter at the close of the Jubilee Year 2000. In *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, Pope John Paul II called on each local Church to assess its fervor and find fresh enthusiasm for its spiritual and pastoral responsibilities. He called on each diocese to draw up a new pastoral plan, to search for and obtain necessary resources in order to invest in concrete initiatives that will generate fresh enthusiasm for the faith.

With this in mind, Bishop Joseph Galante in 2005 and 2006 met with men and women from every parish in every part of the diocese at parish "Speak Up" sessions. At the sessions, Bishop Galante invited parishioners to share with him their concerns and hopes for the Church in South Jersey. At these meetings, the people of the diocese identified six pastoral priorities for the Church: lifelong faith formation, compassionate outreach, priestly vocations, lay ministry, youth and young adults and liturgy.

In order to advance these pastoral priorities and to address the challenges of demographic change, population shifts, Catholics drifting away from their faith, and a declining number of diocesan priests available for ministry, all parishes engaged in a process of planning. They gathered and studied data in order to develop recommendations designed to strengthen and revitalize parish life in all areas of the diocese, including the joining together of parishes through merger.

Bishop Joseph A. Galante considered carefully the recommendations of deanery planners as well as the

advice of the 23-person Diocesan Planning Commission. The following criteria were used in the Commission's review of each proposed configuration:

- 1) distance to and accessibility of Sunday Mass,
- 2) adequacy of worship space;
- 3) the pastor's workload;
- 4) consistency with the number of priests that will be available for ministry;
- 5) adequate provision for upgrading ministry outreach through hiring professional staff in key ministerial positions; and
- 6) demonstration of adequate parish income to support the proposed configuration.

Bishop Galante also conducted two formal consultations last spring and summer with the Presbyteral Council to ensure that the reconfiguration of parishes would serve the common good of the Church. This included strengthening the ability of parish communities to have the necessary human resources available to grow in vitality and providing an improved financial base in order to support dynamic parishes.

Following this three-year period of study and consultation, Bishop Galante announced on April 3, 2008 his intentions for parish configurations in the diocese. Including several modifications announced in August 2008, Bishop intends for there to be 37 merged parishes (one of which will later cluster), three parish clusters involving seven parishes, and 25 "stand-alone" parishes. The intended reconfiguration will result in 68 parishes served by 107 churches. The reduction in the number of parishes is consistent with the reductions recommended by the deanery planners, the Diocesan Planning Commission and the Presbyteral Council.

In announcing his intentions for parish reconfiguration, Bishop Galante designated certain churches as the home ("seat") or location of the new parish. Other churches have been designated as "worship sites." The term "worship site" is used to identify a church that belongs to and will serve the new parish after the merged parish is established. Each church building that remains designated as a worship site retains its name and is located within and belongs to the new parish. All assets and liabilities of the merging parishes follow the Faithful to the new parish, and belong to the new parish, not the diocese.

The pastor, the administration, the parish office, the staff, the coordination of ministries, and the sacramental and business records are located at the seat of the parish.

It is recommended that events that affect the life of the new parish such as the Sacraments of Initiation be celebrated in the home (seat) of the parish, including the entrance of RCIA candidates on Holy Saturday and the celebration of First Eucharist and Confirmation. However, the pastor may determine that there are sufficient pastoral reasons to allow baptisms, reconciliation, weddings, and funerals at a parish worship site(s). For example, a worship site may be:

- a church kept open for daily mass or daily mass on a rotation schedule with the parish church or other worship site(s)
- a church where the sacraments of Baptism, First Eucharist, Reconciliation may be celebrated
- a church kept open on a limited basis for weekend liturgy, some daily masses and Eucharistic adoration
- a church where services are limited to weddings, funerals and special liturgies and devotions
- a church used for some worship services (school liturgies, for example) and some outreach ministry
- a church that is used only seasonally
- a church that combines some of the options above

When Bishop Galante announced his intentions for the reconfiguration of parishes in the diocese last April, he indicated that the process of bringing merging parishes together could take 12-24 months, depending on the needs and circumstances of the parishes that will be merging. Decrees will be promulgated by Bishop Galante when the parishes are ready to merge.

In August 2008, Bishop appointed 41 Priest Conveners who will be the likely pastors of the new parishes. They, in turn, gathered representatives from each merging parish to form a Core Team to assist them in the work of readying the parishes to merge. Core Teams were commissioned by Bishop Galante in October 2008 and participated in six hours of leadership training sessions conducted throughout the diocese earlier this year.

Kevin DiPietropolo	Bonnie Vadino
Bill Harle	Don Williams
Joe Grassi	Tony Ziccardi
Larry Pursell	

The Priest Conveners and more than 300 Core Team Members representing each parish that will be merging have been working in recent weeks and in the months ahead to lay the foundations for sacramental life, worship and pastoral ministries in the new parish. They are addressing issues related to the care of temporal goods, including parish organizational structure, capital projects, operations and maintenance, real estate and facilities. They will review various finance and accounting issues and prepare to establish new registers, accounts and record books for the new parishes. They also will attend to the range of canonical and civil considerations involved in bringing parishes together. They will select a new Finance Council nominate Lay Trustees

Working in collaboration with parish pastors they will develop a variety of community-building experiences among merging parishes, inviting merging parishes to worship and pray together, engaging parishioners in suggesting names for the new parishes and developing parish mission statements. While about 14 monthly meeting agendas have been suggested as a general guide to prepare the parishes for merger, each Core Team will determine the pace, timeline and the number of meetings that will be necessary for them based on the needs of their parishes.

As our parish begins this important work, we pray for God's grace that we may be guided and strengthened by the Holy Spirit for the challenge ahead. We pray for our Priest Convener, Fr. Joe Ferrara, and our Core Team members as they collaborate with our pastor and parish leadership to bring about a stronger, more vibrant parish. We pray also for our parish community that we may grow in unity and in hope, manifesting daily our love for Jesus and one another.

For more information, see
www.GatheringGodsGifts.org

Our Priest Convener is
Consultant:
Mark Buscher

Fr. Joe Ferrara
Ron Katkocin
Sheila Tartamosa