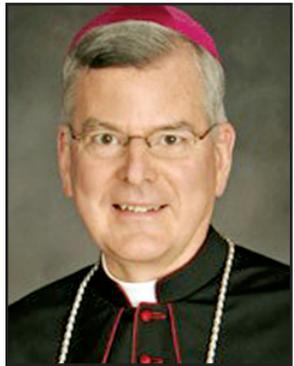


Task force will focus on parish and school planning

We live in an age of constant change. From the cell phones we use, to the style of clothing we wear or the model of television we watch, changes are all around us.

It has been said that “to live is to change, and change often.” As I grow older, I find even my body cannot often do what it once used to do; hence, change is inevitable.

The one area in my life where I do not expect change is in the tenets of faith. “Jesus Christ is the same, yesterday, today and forever” (Hebrews 13:8). His teachings rooted in objective truths do not change, but my depth of appreciating and understanding those teachings can and does change; hopefully, I am constantly growing in faith.



ARCHBISHOP
JOHN C. NIENSTEDT

The structures of parish life can and do change, i.e., demographics shift, pastoral needs are altered, resources, once abundant, diminish. As good stewards of the gifts we have been given from our forebearers, we must constantly be reading “the signs of the times” to determine our proper response to the changes taking place around us.

When I first arrived in the Diocese of New Ulm, the pastoral leaders there were beginning their third Plan for Parishes. Changes were happening rapidly in this rural area: The family farm was dying, co-ops were buying up large tracts of land for harvesting, the youth, in large numbers, were moving to larger cities and priestly vocations had diminished. There were too many churches for our sacramental needs and not enough priests to continue “business as usual.”

We had to act, and so a committee had been formed. The end result was a new model of parish structuring, called the “Area Faith Community.”

Here, three, four, even five small parishes came together in a collaborative relationship with one pastoral council, one worship committee, one social concerns committee, etc. The main principle at work was “to build on our strengths, not duplicate our efforts.”

The task was not easy: It required multiple drafts and as many town hall meetings with all the pastoral leaders involved. But, in the end, it worked because it was founded on general consensus and a sense of ownership on the part of the majority of its stakeholders.

For the past year and a half, I have visited over 90 of our 218 parishes in all areas of our archdiocese, as well as over half of our 103 Catholic schools.

I have sat through eight months of meetings of the Comprehensive Assignment Board, which concerns itself with recommending priests and deacons for parish assignments.

I have listened to presentations on shifting

demographics, on the emergence of new diverse ethnic groups and the impact of these changes on financial viability in the different quadrants of our local church.

Responding to changes

What I see are changes happening before my eyes. I believe it is time to respond. But the response should be framed within the concept of being good stewards of the gifts we have been given from our forebearers. We must use the various gifts and resources that have been entrusted to our care to serve the needs of the people of our archdiocese.

On Feb. 26, 2009, I called the first meeting of a Strategic Task Force for Parish and School Planning in the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis. I shared with the Task Force some basic principles to guide their work:

■ Full sacramental ministry must be available to every Catholic in each geographical area of the archdiocese. In other words, every Catholic will have a home parish and will know where to go for spiritual assistance.

■ Qualified pastoral leaders (i.e., clergy, religious and lay) will be assigned to each of those geographical areas.

■ Special concern must be given to the poor, the marginalized or the immigrant.

■ Every parish will be involved, to one degree or another, in the planning process. We will not permit discussions to fall along the lines of “the haves” and “the have nots.” Every parish will be expected to evaluate its spiritual, sacramental, communal, financial and faith formation resources. Adjustments will be made with other parishes in that particular deanery based on the evaluation.

■ Catholic schools cannot be left out of the plan. The situation with our schools is complex and diverse. But we want to continue our support for them to the best of our ability.

■ The discussions surrounding this planning should be characterized by mutual respect, patience, honesty and an ability to listen to all points of view. The main thrust of the planning is about collaboration and cooperation, not about closing, though the latter may happen in some cases.

A listing of the members of the Strategic Task Force and their backgrounds are mentioned in the accompanying sidebar (at right).

I have asked them to give me a set of recommendations in 12 to 18 months. They will hold monthly meetings and send me executive minutes after each gathering.

I assured them that I believe in the process and will remain engaged in that process. I thanked them for what will be an arduous task, yet one that will be extremely beneficial for this local church and, I hope, personally satisfying for each of them.

Please pray for the success of this undertaking. Your prayer will be an important contribution to the task force’s success.

God bless you!

Members of Strategic Task Force for Parish and School Planning

■ Father John Bauer, co-chair

Rector of the Basilica of St. Mary, Minneapolis; ordained 1979; pastor of St. Gregory, St. Leo and St. Therese, 1979. Merged these parishes into Lumen Christi Catholic Community in St. Paul.

■ Father Peter Laird, co-chair

Ordained in 1997; associate pastor of St. Olaf Parish, Minneapolis; currently vice rector of St. Paul Seminary; member of archdiocesan Presbyteral Council and College of Consultors.

■ Sister Mary Madonna Ashton, CSJ

Involved in health care administration for private and public sectors: acute care, long-term care and public health.

■ Brother Milton Barker, FSC

President, Totino Grace High School, Fridley.

■ Deacon Robert Durham

St. John the Baptist, Savage; business administrator, Our Lady of Grace, Edina.

■ Dr. Marilou Eldred

Assumption Parish, St. Paul; president, St. Mary’s College, Notre Dame, Ind., 1979-1997; current president of Catholic Community Foundation.

■ Father Kevin Finnegan

Ordained 1996; pastor of Divine Mercy in Faribault, St. Michael in Kenyon and St. Patrick in Shieldsville.

■ Deacon Ramon Garcia

Native of Mexico; ordained in 2008; worked at Sagrado de Corazon de Jesus Hispanic Community for 15 years. Now works at St. Stephen Church in Anoka and St. Odilia Church in Shoreview.

■ Dr. Lori Glynn

Principal of Our Lady of Peace School in south Minneapolis; former archdiocesan superintendent of Catholic schools.

■ Father William Kenney

Ordained in 1956; retired; priest personnel director of archdiocese for 10 years. Currently doing weekend services at Lumen Christi in St. Paul.

■ Deacon George Nugent

Ordained in 1992; retired business executive; now facilities administrator and also deacon at All Saints in Lakeville.

■ Mr. Charles Osborne

Member and trustee, St. Charles Borromeo Parish in St. Anthony; vice president and chief financial officer, Fair Isaac Corporation.

■ Deacon Rip Riordan

Ordained in 1998; currently deacon at St. Ambrose Church of Woodbury; archdiocesan staff as director of diaconate, 2001-2004; director of clergy services 2004-2007.

■ Mrs. Carol Shukle

Our Lady of the Lake parish in Mound; president, Archdiocesan Council of Catholic Women; career in education and background in mass communications.

■ Father Peter Wittman

Ordained in 1975. Many parish assignments; currently pastor of St. Mary in Shakopee and St. Mary of Purification of Marystown.

■ Mr. James Lundholm-Eades, staff

— Information provided by the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis.