

## **Holy Ghost, St. Helen & St. Jude Transition News**

### **May 2010**

THANK YOU to all of you who attended the Clustering Parishes Open Forum on April 15th. The speakers—Dick Sullivan (Our Lady of Lourdes, Brighton), Betty Thomas (St. Anne, Rochester), and Dick Kurz (Peace of Christ, Rochester) shared the stories of their parishes. Our Lady of Lourdes and St. Anne clustered in 2008. St. John the Evangelist, St. Ambrose, and St. James clustered in 2004 and merged into a single parish with three worship sites in 2007. They offered hope and encouragement as we begin a similar path. Four pieces of advice: 1) don't give up on your parish and its future, 2) keep people informed through good and regular communication (frequent town meetings were suggested), 3) have compassion for those who can't accept change, 4) educate the people.

#### **QUESTIONS PUT TO THE PANEL**

##### **How did each parish deal with finances?**

When St. Ambrose, St. James, and St. John the Evangelist clustered, the three finance councils began meeting together regularly. Transparency was important. Initially one of the most difficult items was deciding how to allocate the shared expenses for the two priests—whether to split them equally three ways or pro-rate them based on collections or number of registered parishioners. Over time, one finance council was formed and the “extra” former members created several subcommittees including ones devoted to bequests and leases.

##### **Did you lose parishioners when the cluster began?**

Yes. Some members of St. Anne left because they didn't want a pastoral administrator (in this case a Sister of St. Joseph) leading their parish instead of a priest. Some were afraid that the Latin music they had at one Mass would be discontinued (it wasn't). At Peace of Christ some people left because there were changes in the way Mass was celebrated. However, the panelists also noted that new people have come and they keep getting new registrations.

##### **Have you closed any churches?**

No, we haven't, but we need to work constantly at keeping the finances going. At Peace of Christ four years after clustering, the finance council reported that long-term repairs to buildings would cost \$850,000. The pastor told the people that he had not been sent there to close parishes, and the pastoral and finance councils decided to run a capital campaign. They raised over one million dollars.

#### **QUESTIONS ADDRESSED BY KAREN RINEFIERD, DIOCESAN LIAISON**

##### **Where does my envelope go if I attend Mass at another parish? If people always go to Mass at a different church, won't they change their registration?**

If you put your envelope into the basket at any of our three churches (or really any other parish in the diocese) it will be returned to your own parish. Loose cash will stay with the church that collects it. It's possible that people will change their parish registration but past experience has shown that, if they continue to go to one of the churches within the cluster, they do not.

##### **Are we going to choose a new name for our cluster?**

No, there won't be a new name—we'll probably refer to Holy Ghost/St. Helen/St. Jude when referring to the cluster. However, if and when we decide to merge our parishes into a single parish with multiple worship sites, there would be a process to choose a new name and parishioners would have input.

##### **Will all three parishes share the expenses for Fr. Joseph who serves the Vietnamese parishioners of St. Helen's?**

No, St. Helen's will continue to pay his salary, benefits, and living expenses.

##### **How are deacons assigned? Does clustering affect their assignments?**

We currently have deacons serving Holy Ghost and St. Jude. Bishop Clark assigns deacons after consultation with the Deacon Personnel Board. In our case, since the 3 parishes are clustering and cooperating with one another, the new pastor, Fr. Schramel, after conversation with a particular deacon, may change his responsibilities to serve the ministry needs of all three parishes.

When does the diocese plan to close my parish?

There is no plan or desire to close any of the three parishes. There are many clusters and single parishes with multiple worship sites throughout the diocese where churches have not closed. However, many of you have come from nearby churches that did close after clustering. In those instances, the declining number of parishioners and declining ability to pay the church's expenses including maintaining facilities led to the closure. The parishioners did the best they could under difficult circumstances. Here if the finances are well managed and if people stay and remain involved in their churches, there should be no reason to consider closures.

What kind of communication is the transition team doing?

This is the third bulletin insert since the transition team was formed in January. Beginning in April, there has been a weekly "Transition News" column in all three bulletins. Cards have been created including the Transition Prayer and the new Mass schedule. There are big signs in front of each church announcing the new Mass schedule. Information is available on the parish web sites. It is likely that the Clustering Parishes Open Forum will be followed by town meetings over the next year. Our office personnel are also working toward a common bulletin.

IF I HAVE A QUESTION, HOW CAN I GET AN ANSWER TO IT?

Please feel free to contact any of the Transition Team members; contact information is listed below. You can also write your question on paper and drop it in the collection basket.

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