

THE STATUS QUO IS NOT AN OPTION!!!

CALLED TO BE CHURCH

In January members of our local planning group (St. Henry's, Averill Park, St. Mary's, Nassau and Immaculate Conception, New Lebanon) met to discuss how we would examine and address the data discussed for the past year, formulate options and eventually decide on recommendations to make to the Diocese. We established six ad-hoc subcommittees to address this: Faith Formation for Youth, Faith Formation for Adults, Prayer and Worship, Church Administration, Pastoral Care and Christian Service and Outreach. In addition, the priests and associates for administration formed an initial Coordinating Committee to help initiate the process. This group along with the Chairpeople of our six Sub-Committees: Linda Ridzi (School Age Faith Formation for Youth), Lori Killeen (Adult Faith Formation), Deacon Bob Paquarelli (Prayer and Worship), Linda Banker (Pastoral Care), Mary Linton (Christian Service) and Frances Fairweather (Administration) comprise the Executive Committee that reviews all options and recommendations made by our subcommittees.

The initial Coordinating Committee met on January 14th. This Committee consisted of our facilitator – Sheila Peiffer, the three pastors - Fr. John Close, Fr. Antone Kandrac, OFM Conv., and Fr. John Provost, and the administrative assistants - Frances Fairweather, Pam Breen, Sr. Peg Sullivan, and Deacon Peter Quinn. This group was charged with making preliminary suggestions to the entire planning group on whether to close, merge or link the churches in our Planning Group. The Diocese had provided us with criteria for determining whether individual churches should close, merge or link. Although not all of our churches meet the criteria established to stay open, the committee believes that because of the distances involved and the need to provide a Catholic presence in our rural areas we should make an effort to link or merge our churches so that each worship site may stay open – at least in the foreseeable future.

From the reports that were made at our February 25th meeting, it is clear that all subcommittees have been meeting regularly and are addressing the areas assigned to them. The subcommittees are formulating options on the basis of linkage. In other words, we do not foresee any of our three parishes closing in the immediate future although there is the possibility of mergers taking place at later dates. However, the Bishop has already stated that every parish will need to change in some way and all parishes need to cooperate with one another if the faith is to remain strong. He's told us the status quo is not an option. The subcommittees will be determining and suggesting different ways in which our parishes can share programs, services and personnel.

The School Age Faith Formation Committee is looking into sharing resources, coordination and sacramental preparation in order to offer quality programs for this age group. The Prayer and Worship committee is looking into encouraging lay ministries, sharing celebrations and having combined training for Eucharistic Ministers, Lectors and liturgical ministers from our parishes. Pastoral Care is discussing end of life issues and how to involve and train more lay volunteers to assist in outreach to the homebound and those in nursing homes and hospitals. Church Administration is looking into finances, statistics, as well as the utilization of our various buildings, personnel and how to best service the needs of our parishes. Adult Faith Formation has discussed surveying parishioners and providing programs for young adults, older adults and those preparing to celebrate Baptism, Marriage and entry into the Church (RCIA). Christian Service/Outreach has identified 10 areas to provide outreach ministry and is preparing ways to encourage and train parishioners to serve as advocacy volunteers in these areas.

The Administration Committee has been looking at options for revising the weekend and weekday Mass schedules. The new schedules would begin in the New Year of 2009. We have to prepare for the fact that we will have only two priests available in the future. Furthermore, the Diocese has stated that it will no longer be able to supply weekend coverage for priests who go on vacation or in case of emergencies, such as illness. Therefore the resulting mass schedule for our churches eventually must be able to be handled by two priests. As we know - the status quo is not an option!

The committees will continue to meet throughout March until they have finished their tasks. We will continue to keep you informed. Please read the various bulletin announcements and inserts that are available to you. We will soon be communicating *with you in more* specific ways. We will make you aware of the *various options* that are being discussed and you will have a chance to respond. Your input is very important. We need your thoughts and ideas before the final report is made to the Bishop in June. Please pray for the various parishioners who are involved in this process so that the Spirit can continue to guide them as we all prepare for the future mission of the Church in our area.

CALLED TO BE CHURCH TIME LINE – 2008

- JANUARY: Initial organization, Subcommittees established and begin meeting
- FEBRUARY/MARCH: Subcommittees meet to formulate options
- APRIL: Subcommittee chairs will report to the entire group during the Local Planning Group Meeting
- MAY: Plans will be refined and completed and reports will be made to the Local Planning Group
- JUNE: Final Draft will be presented to the Local Planning Group
- JUNE 30, 2008: Final Draft will be presented to the Bishop's Office
The Bishop will appoint a Pastoral Planning Review Committee which will approve the various recommendations or ask for some revisions.
- FALL – 2008: The Bishop will receive the Final Drafts
- JANUARY 1, 2009: Implementation of the plans will begin

RESPONDING OPPORTUNITIES

In order to give the parishioners a chance to respond and give their input:

- Town Meetings will be planned.
- Bulletin inserts, such as this one, will be provided.
- A “Comment Box” will be placed in the Church.
- Pulpit presentations will be made.
- Toward the end of June an extended pulpit presentation will be made, and the Final Draft will be available to all parishioners.

SUBCOMMITTEE MEMBERS FROM ST. MARY'S

- School Age Faith Formation: Linda Ridzi, Frank Ridzi
- Adult Faith Formation: Kate Wantuch, Jim Shannon
- Prayer and Worship: Deacon John Skelly, Jeannette Charland
- Christian Service and Outreach: Mary Ann Roberts, Marion Rysedorph
- Pastoral Care: Barbara Mullins, Bob Matarese, Barbara Matarese
- Church Administration & Finance: Fr. Antone, Frances Fairweather