

“Pastoral Planning” Update

I will generally use the term “pastoral planning” as a sort of catch-all phrase referring mainly to “administrative” or “operational” things for the pastorate – how things will work, staffing, etc.

Update on Staffing

A previous article mentioned that each pastorate is required to fill 3 positions: Discipleship and Evangelization (teaching the faith), “facilities manager” (maintenance), and a so-called “business manager.” These would be for the whole pastorate – not 3 for each parish, 3 total people. I hope to look for (or create) opportunities for all parishioners to get to know staff members. The salaries for these positions will be split across all of the parishes according to the number of registered parishioners at each parish. For example, Salem is currently the largest parish and they pay 27% of “shared costs,” while Bridgewater is the smallest and they pay 5%. “Shared costs,” incidentally, refer to paying for those things that the parishes share; priest salaries would be the most obvious example; some office expenses are also shared. Although there are alternatives of how to split shared costs across parishes, doing it according to the number of registered parishioners is by far the most common and longstanding way in the diocese and the one currently recommended (if not mandated) by the diocese.

Please bear in mind that these staffing positions do not replace the need for volunteers or other paid personnel. As just a couple of simple and obvious examples, there is no way for one person to do all of the teaching for CCD, nor is it possible for one maintenance person to do all of the mowing and snow removal for all parishes. These positions will also not, by any means, replace the pastor who does have the responsibility of “governance” in a parish. The “higher” pastoral work of the priest, however, is preaching/teaching, administering the sacraments, and praying. Staff, volunteers, and other paid people are simply needed in order for a parish (or pastorate) to operate smoothly and to allow the priest to fulfill these greater, God-given roles.

Maintenance Person

I am pleased to announce that Bob Erickson from St Patrick’s parish (Montrose) has been hired for the maintenance position. In addition to being very astute in regard to building and grounds issues, Bob is a very pleasant and mild-mannered gentleman. I think you will find him easy to deal with. Bob will be part time. At first I thought this should be a full-time position but Bob preferred to be part-time. After thinking about that for a time, I realized that would actually be a better way to get started because I’m not sure how much time this position will require. Starting this out as a part-time position allows for the opportunity to assess how much time is needed. It’s better to have a part time person and then realize that we need a full-time person, rather than committing to a full-time person and then realizing we don’t have enough work for a full-time position.

One of the things we have to do is get “operational” things well organized so that things flow smoothly and with minimal error. I do have a ways to go on this yet. In regard to facilities, one of the things I hope to do is get all of those involved with building and grounds things – cleaning, sextons (cemetery caretakers), repairs and other maintenance, mowing, snow removal, etc – all those from each parish together for one meeting with the pastor, Bob Erickson, and perhaps one or two other staff members. This will give Bob (as well as me to some extent) a chance to meet everybody and get to know who does what. It will also provide an opportunity for questions, discussion, and perhaps further organization.

Discipleship and Evangelization (D&E)

Maggan Krempeges from St Mary’s (Salem) is currently serving in this role for the parishes north of I-90. Maggan has really taken hold of this position and is doing a lot of good things with the youth as well as some adult classes. She will be the “D&E person” for the whole pastorate. The priests will continue to be involved in all aspects of teaching – CCD, marriage prep, RCIA, and hopefully offer some adult classes as well.

Secretary and Bookkeeper

Emily Ruden, from St Mary of Mercy parish (Alexandria), was the secretary for Alexandria, Emery, and Bridgewater and she is now serving as secretary for the whole pastorate, with an office in Salem. Emily is currently out on maternity leave (congratulations to her and her husband Chris!). Emily would also like to be

part time so she is here (or will be here again after she comes back) Tuesday through Thursday. The plan is to eventually hire a full-time secretary and move Emily into a part-time bookkeeper position.

An Important Announcement Made at the Town Hall Meetings

As mentioned before, another requirement of the diocese/bishop is that each pastorate have so-called town hall meetings this year, which just means meeting(s) open to all parishioners to discuss matters related to the new pastorate. The focus of these meetings, again as specified by the bishop/chancery, was on the 4 pillars that the bishop has identified for building up the faith and the pastorates: Worship, Discipleship & Evangelization, Community, and Service. This pastorate has already had two of these meetings (Nov 5th and Nov 12th). No others are currently scheduled but if I think there is a need for one, we might have one next spring. If you weren't able to attend the meeting in November, the way they were organized is that people sat at some particular table and those at the same table discussed and wrote down responses to the questions emailed out related to the 4 pillars (Worship, etc). Those were collected at the end (one sheet per table) for the priests to review. After people had a chance to discuss the questions and write down responses (i.e., at the end of the meeting) the floor was opened for anyone who wanted to make some general comments.

Although there is still much to do in regard to "pastoral planning," at the same time a good number of decisions had already been made by the bishop even before July 1st. The most obvious one is the new groupings of parishes (the pastorates). The requirement to fill the 3 positions mentioned before was another. The main reason I wanted to write a little about the town hall meetings, however, is because the facilitators announced another important decision at these meetings which I'm not sure everyone picked up on; and, of course, while the meetings were well attended, not everyone was there so I want to reiterate that announcement here.

For each pastorate one of the decisions made, at the diocesan level, was the maximum number of weekend Masses each pastorate could have. The important announcement that was made at the town hall meetings is that this pastorate will be allowed to have a maximum of only 5 weekend Masses, starting no later than January 1, 2025. It has been further stipulated that parishes must have a weekend Mass every weekend or not at all. Since there are currently 7 parishes in the pastorate, that means that at least 2 parishes will no longer get a weekend Mass as of 1/1/2025, or sooner. Currently, St Stephen's (Bridgewater) gets one Mass per month and St Martin's (Emery) gets the others. This will no longer be allowed. I do realize that this arrangement with Bridgewater and Emery is no extra burden for the priests but, nonetheless, it will no longer be permitted.

Which parishes will no longer have a weekend Mass is not yet decided although, frankly, it will probably be largely determined by Mass counts; where a parish is located relative to other parishes could also be a factor. Those parishes that no longer get a weekend Mass do not necessarily have to be closed. We can have weekday Masses there if people want, we can keep the Blessed Sacrament there, and we can have funerals and weddings at those locations as well. We are not required to just immediately close the parish and get rid of the property. In fact, I think it is at least worth trying to have weekday Masses at those parishes for awhile and see how it goes. It could turn out to be harder to get income for a parish when it no longer has weekend Masses; if parishioners want to keep the parish going without a weekend Mass, that will have to be worked out.

This is a hard thing. No one wants to see their parish "closed" or no longer have a weekend Mass. I grew up in a small rural parish and I would hate to see it no longer get weekend Masses, even though I no longer live there. That church is where I first really encountered the Lord, it is where I first became aware of my vocation. I also remember well the Yugoslavian priest (Fr Kuvacic) who was there when I was growing up; he was forced to watch as the Communists executed his mom & dad, and yet I never saw him downcast. He was like a second father. These are more than just memories. Yes, I would hate to see that parish closed. But if Fr Kuvacic were here now, he would say: remember why you are here – to get to Heaven. If one door "closes," you must remain undeterred in seeking the Lord. I realize that these are not necessarily consoling words, but it is the truth and we can't let go of it. Let us bear one last thing in mind. Compassion means sharing in (com = together or with) the suffering (passion) of another. As we go forth, let's remember to have compassion for one another and especially for those whose parish will no longer have a weekend Mass. God bless you, Fr Kuhn.