

*“For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for wholeness...
to give you a future full of hope.” Jeremiah 29:11*



June 15, 2019

Dear Parishioners of St. Mary, Annunciation of the Lord, St. Jude the Apostle, St. Anthony and St. Andrew the Apostle Parishes:

Last Sunday, we celebrated the Feast of Pentecost. Pentecost was the beginning of the Church's Mission! The Holy Spirit was sent by Christ to sanctify the Church. The Holy Spirit *enlightened* and *strengthened* the Apostles, so they could *preach the Gospel fearlessly*.

For the last few months, representatives of your five parishes have been fearlessly embracing and preparing for change through the hard work of strategic planning. Working together, they are building bridges, strengthening relationships and establishing new partnerships to help ensure a stronger future, together.

When your plan is complete, it will not mean the “end” of anything – just the opposite. It will represent a beginning of a new paradigm. In order for this strategic plan to succeed, it is vital that the planning that has begun, continues.

First Approval: To date, the good work of the strategic planning teams, coupled with conversations and counsel that I have received from our Taunton pastors, has led to a recommendation of creating two *Linked Parish* models. I am in agreement with this recommendation.

A linked model means that the five parishes in Taunton will remain independent at this time. However, with this new relationship, we will establish two groups of linked parishes and each group will operate with one central administration office and an appropriate staffing structure to be put in place to 1) manage the administration – bookkeeping, operations, and facilities maintenance of the campuses, and 2) provide leadership for all faith formation and evangelization programs along with coordination of parish ministries. This will allow our priests to be priests – freeing the clergy from the day-to-day burdens of administration.

The two groups of *linked* parishes will be:

1. St. Andrew the Apostle and Annunciation of the Lord; and
2. St. Jude the Apostle, St. Mary and St. Anthony

The Clergy: On June 23rd, Rev. James J. Doherty, C.S.C., will be celebrating his final Mass as pastor of St. Mary Parish. Please join me in thanking Fr. Jim and the Holy Cross Fathers for their years serving the good people of St. Mary's.

- With the departure of Fr. Doherty, the three parishes of St. Mary, St. Jude and St. Anthony will enter a new relationship. With the goal of maintaining the three as distinct, vibrant parishes, I will entrust their pastoral care to two priests *in solidum* — a Latin term that means “in solidarity.” Rev. Freddie Babiczuk and Rev. Thomas E. Costa, Jr., will serve as pastors *in solidum*, or as equals.
- Rev. Edward E. Murphy and Rev. Gerard A. Hebert will serve as pastors *in solidum* (as equals), responsible for the pastoral care of St. Andrew the Apostle and Annunciation of the Lord Parishes.

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Exercising pastoral care in this way requires the designation of one priest to serve as moderator. Our Church’s Canon Law defines the role of moderator as “the one who directs the joint action and answers for it to the bishop”. Fr. Babiczuk will serve as moderator for St. Mary, St. Jude, and St. Anthony and the centralized administration office that will be established for the three parishes.

Fr. Murphy will serve as moderator for St. Andrew and Annunciation of the Lord and will be responsible for the centralized administration office established for that group.

In addition, I am counting on this planning process to identify ways that all five parishes –which are in such close proximity, can collaborate and work together for a stronger future. This is evident in your strategic planning.

We will optimize these weeks ahead by completing the strategic plan for Taunton so that you may begin to transition from planning to implementation with your new leadership teams in place. Let us continue to work together to build the “future full of hope” that Jeremiah foretold – in Taunton and beyond! May God bless us on this journey of *Rebuilding in Faith and Hope!*

Sincerely yours in the Lord,



Most Reverend Edgar M. da Cunha, S.D.V., D.D.
Bishop of Fall River

Questions and Answers:

- 1. How did the Bishop decide on creating two groups of Linked Parishes?** At the second Taunton strategic planning meeting, a straw poll was taken among the six different planning teams. More than 100 of the planners participated in the poll, and several options of possible collaborative groups among the five parishes were identified. The Finance and Administration planning team then considered all of the suggested alternatives. After considerable discussion, the Finance and Administration team recommended to the Bishop the top two suggested groupings that surfaced from the straw poll. The Bishop took these two suggestions and then met with the pastors. The final decision came about based on the recommendations of the 100+ planners, input from the Finance and Administration planning team, and discussion with the pastors.
- 2. What does “in solidum” pastoral leadership mean?** It is a team approach to parish ministry – each priest serving as a full Pastor, but sharing the work among two, or three parishes. This new way of ministering does not mean any one parish will be closed or receive less attention. This is being done specifically so these parishes can be vibrant, active and worshipping communities. This model of ministry may also benefit other parishes in the future. One of the co-equal “in solidum” Pastors will serve as “moderator” – the coordinator of the team, and the representative to the Bishop.
- 3. Why couldn’t our pastors just stay in their current parishes?** After the Bishop appointed the moderator for each collaborative group, the Bishop and the Pastors together discussed the ideal teams – how their individual talents could best be utilized in the leadership of these two linked parish models.
- 4. What do parishes stand to lose if they partner?** Some parishes worry that they might lose their sense of identity. The point of strategic planning is not to reduce parishes to the lowest common denominator, but rather to ensure that we continue to celebrate our heritage *with others*. Our parishes have unique and uplifting traditions based on culture, ethnic backgrounds, worship styles and leadership. We want to continue to celebrate those traditions, but we have to be inviting to others *sharing not only our traditions, but our faith as well*. As our members get older, there are fewer and fewer people who understand or even recognize some of these traditions. If we don’t consolidate our resources and at the same time, reach out beyond the walls of our church buildings, our traditions will soon be relics of the past. Such is the work of strategic planning.