

A Letter from the Pastor

May 30, 2010

Dear Parishioners,

This past winter and spring has been a challenging time for our parish. One significant milestone is taking place as I write. The cluster planning committee has finished their work. Their recommendations to Bishop Rozanski are in their final format. We now know that, within one to three years, a single pastor and associate pastor will be assigned to the three south county parishes. There will be an impact on our parish. When the cluster plan is implemented, we can expect only a part-time presence of priests in our parish.

This news is neither unexpected nor necessarily all bad. Beginning in January of this year the Pastoral Council and I began to reflect on what this might mean for our parish. We determined that the two areas of parish life that would feel the most effect would be pastoral care and parish administration. The key question we then asked was how we might best prepare for this change.

Very early on it became clear that a new staff position was needed. That was the conclusion of the working group headed by Dick Maio and our Pastoral Council concurred.

The position created would be that of a lay pastoral assistant, who would act as an extension of the new pastor and associate pastor in providing pastoral care and in administrating the parish. Countless individuals and families look to us in the time of crisis, illness, loss and grief. They come to our church to be married or to have their marriages blessed. A lay pastoral assistant would help to provide the preparation and follow-up in these moments. They would also be an on-hand presence when no priest was available. Besides assuring that there is quality pastoral care in the parish, the position will help to keep the parish office going, to maintain volunteers, and to act as a representative from the pastor to the parish ministries and organizations. It is the Pastoral Council's and my opinion that, without this position, the quality of our parish life will suffer.

Although the solution, employing a lay pastoral assistant, might seem clear, hiring someone for the position has several substantial hurdles. It is very unlikely that we will be able to find a fully qualified candidate for the position. Instead, we will have to provide on the job training before the cluster plan is fully implemented. I am confident that we will be able to find and train the right person. A much greater problem is funding the position. At the present moment there is no money for a lay pastoral assistant in next year's budget. The only way for this to happen is to increase our offertory collection. You will hear more about this in the next few weeks.

I have written this letter so that you could see what our parish is facing in the near future. The Pastoral Council and I have been praying and discerning about what the future holds for us. Now we bring the result of those prayers and discernment to you. I invite your feedback. You may contact me in person or by e-mail (pastor@olph.net) or, if you prefer, you may contact Bill Kraus, the president of the pastoral council (Malemute9@aol.com).

God bless, Fr. Joe