

CLUSTER 23 PARISH FORUMS

As you know, the members of the Cluster Planning Committee for Cluster 23 have spent the past year gathering statistics and feedback from the leadership and parishioners of the churches in our cluster. We related to you on the weekend of April 29/30 that from the four options that were presented to us by Bishop Malone, we will recommend adopting Model II.

For Cluster 23, Model Two means maintaining all of the churches within the cluster and that we share the following:

- one Pastor and two additional priests
- one Pastoral Council and one Finance Council (each council having equal representation from each church)
- one business manager and administrative staff in a central location

During this year, several questions were raised, but the planning committee was unable to answer many of them. Now that we have chosen a model and have begun writing our recommendations to the Bishop, we feel we are in a position to respond to the questions that we could not address before. Some of the questions shared over the last year and our answers include the following:

1. How will my parish be affected?

Parishes as we know them now will be different in that they will be working cooperatively with several other parishes or formed into a new combined parish. Worship sites (church buildings) will remain open and most of the current activities in place at those worship sites will remain. In some churches, Mass times may change and there will be a new structure to the Pastoral Council as they eventually merge. See question #2

2. How many priests will be assigned to our parish cluster?

For parish cluster 23, we will have one pastor and two additional priests. The pastor will be assigned by the Bishop. Priests may or may not live in one facility and will travel to the worship sites as necessary. The priests will share the Masses and sacramental duties at each worship site. Mass schedules will need to be adjusted in some parishes to accommodate the availability of priests and allow for travel time.

3. Where will the “Parish Cluster” administrative office be located?

Part of the work of the Parish Cluster Planning Committee includes making decisions based on discussions and feedback from existing parish communities as well as through extensive analysis and review of existing facilities. The committee has recommended two options to the Bishop. Based on your feedback and a complete facilities review, we are recommending that the central office be located at St. Anne’s in Gorham; should that option not be feasible at the time of implementation for our clustering plan, we ask that the central office be located at Our Lady of Perpetual Help in Windham.

4. Will the general public be allowed some input in this process?

The Parish Cluster Planning Committee is made up of members of St. Anne, St. Anthony, St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, St. Joseph, and Our Lady of Perpetual Help and are familiar with all aspects of concern for our individual parishes so as to represent all its members fairly and effectively. It is not possible to have unlimited participants; however, the Planning Committee held “on site” discussion meetings with leaders and members of all of the Pastoral Councils, Finance, Religious Education, and Social Justice and Peace Commissions to learn more about the unique qualities of each parish and to hear their specific issues. In the periodic Committee update reports given from the pulpit, parishioners were urged to contact members of the Planning Committee to share concerns and ask questions; we appreciate the interest and feedback provided by many of you during our past year of planning.

5. We would like to have consistent and frequent communication.

We continue to post the minutes of our meetings on the websites for St. Anne's, Our Lady of Perpetual Help, and St. Anthony's. We have posted hard copy of minutes, pulpit sharings, and other handouts on the bulletin boards at each church. In addition, we have repeatedly encouraged any and all of you to seek out your parish representatives. Our planning committee visited each of the church communities within the cluster and spoke with parish leaders and various commission members.

6. What happens if one or two existing parishes don't agree with the recommendation?

The Planning Committee, with the guidance of its facilitator, Martha Conroy, narrowed its choice of models to two selections and analyzed their Pro's and Con's. At the conclusion of this thoughtful and prayerful process, the selected Model emerged. The selection of the model and collection of data, it should be noted, was not the sole accomplishment of this cluster planning group. Through the process, the group evolved into a community, working collaboratively to the benefit of all of the parishes in the Cluster. The challenge remaining for the Cluster Planning Committee members is much the same as the challenge facing the Apostles following the death of Our Lord. They were charged with teaching others about Jesus' love for us, even though their audience may not have personally experienced Him. As those who have experienced becoming part of a broader faith community, how do we ensure that others in our cluster experience being a part of a broader faith community as well? How do we bring our faith communities to the point where they are comfortable in acknowledging and sharing their gifts with others? Therein lies the challenge of evangelization for our newly formed cluster.

7. Are we turning the parishes into businesses rather than taking into account the pastoral needs of the community?

Members of Parish Cluster 23 are making a collaborative effort in identifying new ways for sustaining effective commissions, both at the local level as well as cluster-wide. We believe this process presents us with an opportunity to create our future as a vibrant community in faith by enhancing services already in place, as well as identifying new programs to be initiated. The sharing of priests and the development of collaborative relationships with centralized personnel and lay leaders and ministers will serve to build a broader faith community within the cluster. These are the reasons that the Cluster planning Committee recommends Cluster Model # 2.

8. "One Staff" as outlined in the models – What does that mean?

The Cluster Core Leadership Team will include the Pastor, two Parochial vicars, a deacon, a parish life coordinator, and business manager and their support staff (i.e.: secretaries, bookkeepers, other needed administrative support, and sextons). In an effort to maintain the individuality and integrity of each church, we recommend that the following site staff positions and commissions remain in place: Parish catechetical leader, music ministry, secretary, sexton, faith formation commission, worship and spirituality commission, social justice and peace commission, and parish and family life commission.

9. How are existing funds/donations to be used after the clustering process?

There will be one business manager and one finance council overseeing the finances for all of the churches in Cluster 23 but separate books will be kept for each, allowing the funds raised in a particular church to be used by that church. Each church within the Cluster will contribute to the financial support of the shared personnel and resources.

10. What will the parish council be responsible for and what will be the decision-making process?

The Parish Council will be comprised of an equal number of members from each church. Though it may be involved with different situations and have different committees within it, the function will not change from that of existing Parish/Pastoral Councils; to work with and to be an advisory board for the Pastor.

We hope that you take time to go over this information before the weekend of May 20th and 21st when your cluster representatives will hold a "parish forum" to go over the details of Model II and answer any further questions you may have.