

October 22, 2008

John M. Owens, Esq.  
9 W. Boulevard Parkway  
Rochester, NY 14612

Dear John:

Thank you for sharing the concerns and feelings of members of the Eastern Greece/Charlotte planning group with me in a way both honest and respectful. My intent was never to ignore or disavow the important role the planning group plays, but I realize that healing and a rebuilding of relationships are now necessary.

My purpose had been to deal with an emergency situation in one of the parishes of the diocese and to put an interim arrangement in place that would help Our Lady of Mercy move onto a more financially healthy path while long-term planning could be accomplished. Because Our Lady of Mercy is part of a planning group including five other parishes, it seemed wisest to ask the entire planning group to work together to brainstorm, evaluate, and propose those actions which would ensure a strong Catholic ministry and presence within the Eastern Greece/Charlotte area. I thought your input toward the long-term future was most appropriate, while you would have preferred having your ideas included in the shaping of the interim arrangements. I regret that my decisions caused pain and mistrust among the very people who are so instrumental in helping the six parishes of Eastern Greece/Charlotte to collaborate more fully.

I also sense in your words an underlying frustration that the pastoral plan you worked on so diligently only a few years ago is now being "put on the shelf" and you are being asked to begin again. Probably anyone would feel the same in a similar situation. However, as we go through pastoral planning throughout the diocese, we all operate on our best assumptions regarding what the near and distant future will hold. The apportionment of priests for planning purposes was based on the projections done by the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) at Georgetown University. Unfortunately, our number of priests has declined more quickly than those projections indicated, and further adjustments have to be made. Yours is not the only planning group where adaptation was necessary because of changed circumstances at the local and/or diocesan-level. I am inviting you who are closest to your own situation to be the ones to study, to pray, and to devise the most creative and realistic approaches to be taken.

You state in your letter that you expect the pastoral planning process will take eighteen months to two years to complete. That expectation seems reasonable in light of our experience with other planning groups doing similarly complex planning. Please do

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remember, though, that the last six months or so of your process will be spent gaining input from parishioners, staff, pastoral councils, and others as well as revising in light of what you learn. Therefore, you will need to work expeditiously in order to have a draft plan ready to share with them by June or possible December 2009.

We all recognize that healing takes time. I hope that this exchange of letters contributes to a building of trust and shared responsibility. Thank you again for writing. My prayers are with you, other members of the planning group, the pastors, staff and parishioners of the Eastern Greece/Charlotte parishes. Please keep me in your prayers as well.

With every good wish I remain,

Your brother in Christ,

†Matthew H. Clark  
Bishop of Rochester