

January 11, 2006

Mr. Michael D. Shea
488 Stonewood Avenue
Rochester, New York 14616-3623

Dear Michael,

Thank you for the PPNM II plan for the Eastern Greece/Charlotte Planning Group. Please express my thanks to all those who have been involved in the development of this plan and especially the members of the Steering Group. I appreciate your careful efforts to address the issues I raised in my letter to you. Also please accept my thanks for your leadership of this planning process. While all those involved made important contributions, those in leadership positions set the tone for this challenging process. Please express my thanks to the pastoral leaders for their dedication to this collaborative planning.

Your plan addresses the reality of the declining number of priests in the Diocese and specifically the reduction in the number likely to be assigned to the parishes of your planning group. Your plan recommends that six of the eight (and later seven) priests be assigned to each of the six parishes, either as pastor or as sacramental minister with a pastoral administrator. The additional two (and later one) priests will be assigned to two (and later one) of the four largest parishes. I understand that the pastoral leaders of these four will meet to make a recommendation to Priest Personnel about such assignments. While these will be assignments to individual parishes, I appreciate your indication that the parishes of the planning group would be given priority in terms of supporting sacramental ministry from these two (and later one) priests.

In my letter initiating the second round of planning, I asked you to look carefully at your Sunday Mass schedule. I have asked all planning groups to do this so that our sacramental ministry responds to the needs of the faithful throughout the Diocese. I know that you have analyzed your attendance trends over the past years and have concluded that it is best to maintain your current Mass configuration. You indicate that you fear further reductions in Mass attendance if the number of Masses is reduced. I can appreciate your apprehension. However, attendance at Masses in the planning group has been declining over the past years independently of the number of Masses. As the number of priests continues to decline, it will become even more important to insure an equitable distribution of presiders. However, as long as your schedule continues to reflect the diocesan three Mass, I accept your judgment in this matter. Please note that the number of Masses will need to be reduced as the number of priests declines.

I am pleased to note your continued work in collaborative ministry in the areas of evangelization, young adults, seniors, the sick and dying, and those released from hospitals as well as support for the vulnerable and marginalized especially in rural and urban parishes. I am glad that youth ministry will be a new, worthy collaborative focus for the planning group as a whole. I share your hope that all parishes would be active participants on the Evangelization Focus Team. You have done a great deal of work in understanding this priority and have developed goals through 2010. You have also focused in a special way on ministry to young adults that continues your engagement in this ministry. I hope that you will be able to identify initiatives that engage all the faith communities and that will have a discernible impact on this concern.

Much of your ministry plan calls for the continuation of your many current efforts with ongoing review to determine opportunities for effective and needed collaboration. I encourage you in this oversight.

Your plan also calls for efforts to “discern...the appropriate degree of cooperation and/or collaboration” among the six parishes. I found your distinctions between coordinated, cooperative, and collaborative to be helpful. Such planning may seem easy to put off but I endorse your insight that “programs, ministries, and initiatives can no longer be conducted in isolation.”

I affirm your pastoral plan and look forward to learning of progress over the next five years. Karen Rinefierd will continue in her role as Planning Group Liaison. Please be assured of my prayers as you journey together.

With every good wish, I remain,

Your brother in Christ,

†Matthew H. Clark
Bishop of Rochester

cc: Ms. Michele Bertot
Rev. Alexander Bradshaw
Rev. Timothy Brown
Rev. John Forni
Ms. Karen Rinefierd
Rev. Gary Tyman
Rev. Thomas Wheeland