

September 27, 2003

Mr. Michael Shea
488 Stonewood Avenue
Rochester, NY 14616

Dear Mike:

Thank you for continuing to chair the E. Greece/Charlotte Steering Committee as the planning group prepares to begin “Pastoral Planning for the New Millennium: Phase Two.” As I reviewed progress on implementing the first E. Greece/Charlotte five-year pastoral plan, I noticed that you have tackled challenging areas of ministry together, particularly outreach to young adults and evangelization, and maintained your focus on these, sometimes even in the face of limited success. I commend your continued work in these areas as well as your efforts to build communication among the parishes and to coordinate the pastoral care provided by your churches to senior care facilities.

As the Diocese of Rochester continues to respond to a declining number of priests, we project that, during the 2004-2009 time period, eight priests will be available to serve within your six parishes, and then seven from 2009-2014. In your pastoral planning, please recommend how two and then one parochial vicar may best be assigned to help meet the sacramental and ministerial needs of your parishes.

There are some issues which I invite your communities to address during this second phase of pastoral planning in addition to any others you determine on your own. First, I ask you to examine your current weekend Mass schedules and reduce the number of Masses as possible and appropriate. The ideal is that the entire church community gather as one each Sunday for Eucharist. That is, of course, not possible in your parishes. However, given the capacity of your worship spaces and the number of people attending particular Masses, it seems that having less Masses could result in fuller participation by the congregation and possibly more vibrant liturgies. In a time when we as a Diocese sometimes struggle to ensure that every parish community has a priest available to preside at every Mass each weekend, a reduced weekend Mass schedule in E. Greece/Charlotte might allow us to better serve the needs of the wider Church. You may also find it useful to coordinate Mass schedules throughout your planning group so that times are staggered.

While much of our Diocese is facing or in the midst of difficult changes—more frequent transitions in leadership, more uncertainty about who will preside at Eucharist each week, consolidating or clustering parishes--your people are less affected by these issues.

Mr. Michael Shea
September 22, 2003
Page Two

Diocese of Rochester

However, I ask you to find ways to help your parishioners become aware of the reality of the declining number of priests and the shifting population within our Diocese. Help them to understand what might change in their own communities as a decreasing number of priests must respond to the needs of large numbers of parishioners. Share with them the likelihood that more of your communities will eventually be led by a pastoral administrator with a priest sacramental minister providing sacramental ministry to the parish.

I encourage you to continue your efforts in evangelization and young adult ministry. You may want to investigate opportunities the diocesan Department of Evangelization and Catechesis is offering to co-sponsor "Theology on Tap" and similar faith formation opportunities for young adults. It might be beneficial to build on your earlier efforts in order to have a more coordinated approach to ministry with the sick and dying, particularly for those being released from hospitals, as well as with seniors living in senior care facilities or at home.

I am mindful that your communities already support those having difficulty meeting basic needs. However, as you develop your pastoral plan, please discuss whether there are additional ways, individually and collectively, in which you could aid vulnerable urban or rural parishes or other ministries directed toward the marginalized.

I offer my prayers as you begin this second phase of pastoral planning. Karen Rinefierd, your planning group liaison, will work with you to ensure that you receive any necessary support from the various offices of the Pastoral Center as you create different aspects of your pastoral plan.

With every good wish, I remain,

Your brother in Christ,

+Matthew H. Clark
Bishop of Rochester

Copies: Rev. Robert Beligotti
 Ms. Michele Bertot
 Rev. Alexander Bradshaw
 Rev. Timothy Brown
 Rev. John Forni
 Rev. Thomas Wheeland

Ms. Karen Rinefierd