

June 18, 2008

Mr. John Owens  
9 West Boulevard Parkway  
Rochester, NY 14612

Dear John:

Thank you for the leadership you have provided to the Eastern Greece/Charlotte planning group over the past year. When your predecessor, Michael Shea, sent to me your most recent pastoral plan in December 2005, we all expected that the plans you laid forth for ministerial collaboration and utilization of priests would guide the work of the parishes for a 5-year period. However, changing circumstances have led me to ask you to develop a new plan addressing emerging needs and issues. While the most visible concern is the financial situation at some of the Eastern Greece/Charlotte parishes amidst the challenging local economic climate, the current landscape in the Eastern Greece and Charlotte areas includes changing demographics (both of the parishes and of the surrounding neighborhoods) and a significant drop in Mass attendance over the past seven years.

The goal of all pastoral planning in our diocese is to create, sustain, and/or increase the vitality of parishes and faith communities. In your situation I ask that you develop specific ways to strengthen key ministries—particularly youth ministry and faith formation throughout the life cycle, to engage parishioners more fully in a stewardship model of disciple living, and to identify meaningful ways to reach out to those now living in your neighborhoods. To do so you will need to utilize your available human and financial resources and buildings in a judicious and creative way.

As the Diocese of Rochester continues to respond to a declining number of priests and given the significant decline in Mass attendance within your planning group over the last several years, six priests will be available to serve within your parishes until 2014. These “projected” priests may not, however, all necessarily be priest pastors. Since all pastoral leadership positions in our diocese are now open to pastoral administrators, one or more could be sacramental ministers serving with a pastoral administrator on either a full-time or part-time basis. As you develop a way to utilize the services and leadership of these priests, you will need to take into account the significantly high number of funerals at four of your parishes. Indeed, even with the parish clustering and consolidation that has gone on around the diocese, four of your parishes rank among the very highest in the number of funerals celebrated each year. You may also note the large number of marriages celebrated at Holy Cross and St. Charles Borromeo.

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You will need to develop a weekend Mass schedule consistent with six priests serving your parishes. While a change in Mass times is difficult for people, you may find that with fewer Masses each weekend, there could potentially be even more vibrant liturgies with fuller participation by the congregation.

As you develop your plan, please brainstorm and evaluate as wide a variety of models as you can. For example, perhaps two or more parishes will want to combine resources so that an even stronger comprehensive youth ministry can be developed with enhanced staffing and the capability to reach a greater number of young people. Perhaps families would benefit from the availability of a number of different models of faith formation for children, open to all within your parishes. You might choose to develop one or more regional Masses as part of the 18-Mass schedule which have particular styles of music, preaching, and prayer. Similarly, you may want to generate and consider as many ways as possible to structure parishes and recommend how priests are assigned within the parishes of Eastern Greece/Charlotte—e.g. a pastor with a parochial vicar serving two or three parishes, a priest with a primary assignment to one parish but a secondary appointment to aid with funerals throughout the planning group. I am aware that some of your parishioners either fear or expect that one or more parishes may need to close. Please include that option among those you evaluate; however, I expect that other more creative solutions may arise through your work.

Your communities are in my prayers as you begin another pastoral planning process. Karen Rinefierd, your planning group liaison, will continue to work with you and will 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

MHC/mgm

Copies: Rev. Alexander Bradshaw  
Rev. John Firpo  
Rev. John Forni  
Rev. John Gagnier  
Rev. Thomas Wheeland  
Ms. Karen Rinefierd