



DIOCESE OF ROCHESTER

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Bishop's Office

June 11, 2007

Mr. Ricardo A. Gonzales
146 Tudor Road
Pittsford, NY 14534

Dear Ric:

Please express my gratitude to all those involved in the development of the pastoral plan for the Rush Henrietta Planning Group. I also want to thank you for your leadership of this process. The work of all is important but nothing is more important than careful, committed, persistent and humble leadership. I understand that you have done much to bring this process to an effective conclusion with the submission of this plan.

Your creative plan sets out ways to ensure a vital, healthy Catholic community for Rush and Henrietta into the future. Your task was, and will be, challenging, made necessary by the changing needs of your area as well as the declining number of priests available to serve within your communities.

Your plan calls for a committee to be created in 2009—or for the Pastoral Planning Committee to assume the responsibility—to consider whether to cluster two or three parishes when the number of priests available to your group declines from three to two sometime between 2010 and 2015. You expect a preliminary decision to be made by June 2010. The Rush-Henrietta Pastoral Planning team will then review this process over a two-year period. It may, however, be best to begin that work much sooner than January 2009. Oftentimes when parishes prepare to cluster, a great deal must be done to foster relationships among parishioners and to address various logistical concerns such as how shared costs will be distributed among the parishes, to develop new Mass schedules, and to consider facility needs for ministry.

Because it is essential that the members of the parishes understand what these changes would entail, the Rush-Henrietta Planning Group will need to ensure excellent communication with parishioners. This would include providing pertinent information to parishioners as well as continuing forums where discussion can take place, questions be asked, ideas clarified, and input received.

One issue I did not see addressed within your plan was whether your current facilities would meet the space requirements for a reduced weekend Mass schedule, set to begin sometime between 2010 and 2015. Your October Mass count numbers seem to indicate that you would have "just enough" room for the parishioners who currently attend Mass at your three churches. Your mission and vision statements, coupled with your intent to enhance ministries such as outreach to alienated Catholics, youth, and young adults, are admirable. Yet it will be difficult to welcome people fully and wholeheartedly into your communities if the churches are overly crowded. The aging of our local population also makes fully accessible facilities increasingly important. I expect that the committee addressing clustering will make consideration of these realities and possibilities part of its analysis and work. They will need to address facility-related alternatives as you consider the impact of fewer priests serving a growing population.

Now that it appears that your configuration decisions are being addressed, I invite you to begin to meet in planning with Rev. Richard Hunt and the campus ministry members from RIT, as they are part of your planning group. I ask that your Vision Statement be expanded to include the RIT Catholic campus ministry. Your Vision Statement, Mission Statement, and Values all appear to be very appealing to college-age Catholics. Your "Shared Ministry" list

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already names many ministries that could potentially be shared with the college campus ministry in some way. Theology on Tap, evening of prayer for peace, RCIA, Pre Cana, Lenten Retreats/Missions and Social Ministry are just a few ministries that our colleges share with parishes. In your plan you state that in the beginning of 2007 the three parishes will work together to explore ministry to Young Adults (18-35). I ask that you include the RIT campus with your three parishes as you have a wonderful young adult community to help you develop this ministry. Please also contact Shannon Loughlin, Diocesan Director of Young Adult and Campus Ministry, to help you explore ways to bring the campus back into the planning group. Since Fr. Jim Hewes, the incoming parochial administrator of St. Joseph's, has significant past experience in campus ministry, he will likely also be a good resource in determining ways for the campus community and the parishes to collaborate most fruitfully.

You are a community that has been richly blessed with the presence of pastoral leaders of every vocation: priesthood (diocesan and order), diaconate, religious life and lay ecclesial ministers. I ask you to take this richness and, with the assistance of Carol Dady from the Vocations Office, develop strategies to enrich people's understanding of the many ways God calls us into vocations.

I approve your pastoral plan and look forward to its implementation. Deb Housel will continue to work with your planning group. She will be an important source of information on the process of clustering and will connect you to diocesan personnel you may need as you consider the impact of crowded churches. Please know that you, the members of the planning group, the parishioners of all three parishes and the RIT Catholic campus ministry, staff members, and your leaders will be in my prayers.

With every good wish, I remain,

Your brother in Christ,



†Matthew H. Clark
Bishop of Rochester

Copies: Sr. Alice Cooney, SSJ
Mrs. Carol Dady
Rev. Douglas Della Pietra
Rev. James Hewes
Mrs. Deborah Housel
Rev. Richard Hunt, SJ
Mrs. Shannon Loughlin
Mrs. Barbara Swiecki