

## INTRODUCTION

During the past year and a half, four parishes comprising our CLUSTER have been meeting on a monthly basis. Together St. Thomas in Delmar, Christ the King in Westmere, St. Matthew in Voorheesville, St. Lucy in Altamont combined with St. Bernadette in Berne form our Albany Suburban #2 Cluster. Outlined below are the **draft recommendations** set forth by our Local Planning Group (and its committees) which consists of 40 parishioners. These draft recommendations reflect the local planning group's (LPG) attempts to address the three components of **Reconfiguration, Mission, and Ministry** as conceptualized by the Called to BE Church pastoral planning process of the Diocese of Albany.

## LIFELONG FORMATION

### Background

Each of the four parishes in our local planning group is currently providing Faith Formation for children and youth in their respective parishes, including programs for Sacramental preparation and Youth Ministry activities. During the April 2007 "Called to be Church" meeting on Adult Faith Formation, the following recommendations were compiled for our cluster:

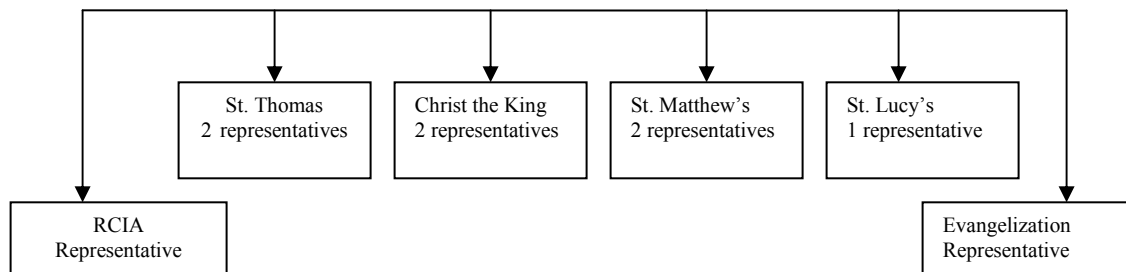
- Bring back the Renew program or other forms of Scripture Sharing
- Improve the formation of parents as the "primary catechist"
- Focus on the basics of Catholic Theology
- Offer cluster retreats and shared speaker programs

The Lifelong Faith Formation Committee reviewed the above recommendations and those for the Early Childhood, School-Age children, Young Adults and Adults and concluded that the greatest need lies in the area of *Adult Faith Formation*.

Therefore, we have several recommendations:

1. Link the 4 LPG parishes:

- to form one Adult Formation Committee comprised of representatives from each of the existing parishes and the RCIA and Evangelization teams.



- to form one RCIA team comprised of the existing individual parish teams
  - to form one Evangelization team comprised of representatives of the existing parishes
- The team would provide opportunities such as: communal prayer and faith sharing, training adults for specific ministries, regular updates and opportunities for on-going formation.

2. Hire a Cluster Pastoral Associate for Adult Formation to address the needs of our post high school through senior citizen parishioners. The responsibilities of this position will be to coordinate young adult (18 years) to senior adult faith formation efforts for the Local Planning Group including RCIA, Evangelization and Adult programs. The salary, fringe benefits and location will be determined during the first year. The Committee proposes that the process be initiated by hiring an intern from Siena/St. Rose/St. Bernard's for the first year with compensation at approximately \$10,000.

3. Link resources for catechetical/youth ministry training and ongoing formation, and explore ways to collaborate on sacramental prep programs for Baptism, Reconciliation, Eucharist, Confirmation.

4. Offer YM opportunities in areas such as service, cluster-wide retreats, prayer experiences and community building events. Given the numbers, space limitations & diversity of programs, pre-school - elementary program staffs will collaborate to share resources and look at the feasibility of offering cluster-wide programs such as Vacation Bible School, playgroups, etc. For Youth Ministry (middle – high school), we will form and develop a cluster-wide YM Core Team charged with developing a comprehensive YM model for the cluster.
5. Collaborate on ways to provide opportunities for cluster-wide intergenerational experiences such as a family retreat.

## **SERVICE and ADVOCACY**

1. On a cluster-wide basis, one to two volunteer positions will be established for the purpose of helping parishioners navigate the routes for accessing available services in the community (i.e., mental health, respite, eldercare, etc). This service is projected to be referral in nature. Current LPG Christian Service will initiate start-up by January 2009.
2. A Core Team for Visitation and Pastoral Care, consisting of one member from each cluster church, will plan for and oversee visits to hospitals, adult care facilities and homebound parishioners. The goal is to promote combined pastoral care services on a cluster-wide basis and insure consistency throughout the cluster. Coordinated cluster services will include, but not be limited to, communion and prayer visits to facilities, training and support, and socialization. Christ the King will initiate the first meeting. Homebound parishioners will be visited by members of the respective parishes. Long Term: It is probable that we will need to hire a PT or FT coordinator of all pastoral care visits within the cluster.
3. In the area of Peace and Social Justice a cluster-wide Social Justice / Public Policy committee will be established in June 2008 to study and carryout activities as a cluster in the area of peace and social justice. Current members of like groups already established in each cluster church will be invited to be the “start-up” group.
4. In regards to the Giving Tree program, Christ the King and St Thomas the Apostle parishes will formally link together in consultation with Catholic Charities to establish a more focused plan and organization for giving. This will be established at a meeting in June 2008, which St. Thomas will coordinate. St. Matthews and St. Lucy’s /St. Bernadette’s will continue their current practices.
5. The cluster will promote and offer membership in the Knights of Columbus at Christ the King Church and The Men’s Association at St. Matthews Church to men from all cluster parishes. In addition, we are exploring options to share “St. Vincent DePaul” resources within the cluster on an “as-needed, emergency basis.”
6. In the area of Prison Ministry, the cluster will promote participation by interested parishioners in either the REC (Resident Encounters with Christ) program or the program facilitated by Catholic Charities. A few parishioners from Christ the King, St. Matthew’s, St. Lucy’s and St. Bernadette’s are currently involved in the REC program.
7. In the area of bereavement the cluster will promote and offer membership in a support group for those suffering the loss of a loved one. [A support group already exists at St. Thomas the Apostle Church, and one is offered at Christ the King.] In addition, any training or speakers dealing with all aspects of helping in the area of bereavement or death and dying, such as funeral home prayer services, helping at funerals and other areas, will be undertaken as a cluster.
8. Opportunities for participation in providing meals or volunteer services to agencies or parish needs will be advertised through each church bulletin’s *Cluster Corner*. Chairpersons of these activities will be responsible for conveying information to each parish for insertion in their respective bulletins.

## **PRAYER, WORSHIP & SACRAMENTAL PREPARATION**

### Prayer & Worship

- Seasonal preparation and programs will be coordinated among the cluster parishes.

- Enhanced training of liturgical ministers will be provided through collaboration of cluster parishes.
- Parishes will be encouraged to celebrate non-Eucharistic Prayer in the Catholic Tradition at times during the week when Mass had been scheduled but will no longer be offered. This should begin with a significant education process in the Fall 2008.
- Weekday Mass will be held twice a week in St. Thomas, St. Matthew's, St. Lucy's, and Christ the King. This reduction in the number of weekday Masses is necessary due to the Sunday Mass schedule required to keep all worship sites open. In addition, it recognizes the other sites for which the priests assigned to the cluster are also assigned as Sacramental Ministers, such as nursing homes and schools, as well as funeral Masses as required.
- Pastors and parish life director will increase their familiarity with all the congregations so as to create a greater sense of community with all the religious leaders of the 4 parishes. This would be accomplished through a rotation of the priests during ordinary time period of the church calendar year beginning 2009.
- Weekend Masses: No worship site will be closed at this time. Sunday Mass schedules have been developed based on having 4 priests and then 3 priests available to the cluster parishes. The schedules were developed based upon attendance at each Mass and parish preferences, whenever possible. The schedules below show each priest as a different letter. The scheduling allows the 2 priests that cover more than 1 worship site to celebrate all assigned Masses at one site and then move to the other while allowing adequate time for travel and preparation for the next Mass without requiring the priest to arrive and rush to the altar. Presently, there are 3 full-time pastors, 1 recently ordained priest (Associate), and 2 retired priests in our cluster. We recommend eventually moving to the following Mass schedules on an incremental basis, that is, as the priest staffing pattern decreases over time.

#### 4 Priest Schedule for Cluster

Proposed	Saturday		Sunday morning							
	4	5	7:30	8	8:30	9:30	10	10:15	11:15	Noon
St. Thomas		C		C			C			C
St. Matthew's		A		A			A			
Christ the King	B				B			B		
St. Lucy's					D					
St. Bernadette's								D		

#### 3 Priest Schedule for Cluster

Proposed	Saturday		Sunday morning								Sunday
	4 p	5 p	7:30	8	8:30	9:15	10	10:15	11:15	Noon	5 pm
St. Thomas		C			C		C			C	
St. Matthew's						A			A		B
Christ the King	B			B				B			
St. Lucy's			A								
St. Bernadette's		A									

#### Sacramental Preparation

- Baptism – Preparation is currently done within each parish. Preparation programs will be more standardized, and preparation sessions will be coordinated by one parish within the cluster, being certain that these classes are rotated between each parish and parents will be encouraged to attend the sessions that best meet their schedules. Baptismal records will be retained at the parish where the Baptism takes place.
- Confirmation -- All the cluster parishes with the exception of St. Thomas gather at the Cathedral on one date for Confirmation. Once the Cathedral is reopened, St. Thomas will join with the other cluster parishes at the Cathedral.

## CATHOLIC SCHOOL EDUCATION

#### Short-term:

1. The School Boards of Christ the King and St. Thomas the Apostle will form a Task Force to explore ways of reducing and containing operational costs. Some possible areas to explore are the sharing of personnel and

common purchasing. In addition, the Task Force would examine ways to recruit potential students from the LPG-Cluster parishes.

2. The LPG-Cluster parishes without schools will continue to support the ministry of Catholic education and continue to encourage the efforts of recruitment of potential students for our schools. Such efforts may include reps of the schools speaking at Masses, meeting families after Mass or at Coffee Hours, distributing promotional materials, etc. Where students come from outside our LPG-Cluster, efforts should continue to develop partnerships with those parish communities.
3. The LPG-Cluster parishes will create an opportunity to collaborate on a Service Project between the schools and the parishes each year.
4. The monies realized through the Diocesan school assessment of the parish communities of St Matthew and St. Lucy/St. Bernadette will be applied directly and equally to the schools of Christ the King and St. Thomas the Apostle. Preliminary estimates suggest the increase to our schools would be minimal but it would clearly convey our linkage in a concrete manner.

Long-term:

1. We are asking that the Diocese give serious consideration to developing a concrete plan for the consolidation of elementary and secondary schools within the Albany region to create a Catholic Education Campus that would accommodate levels pre-K through 12. We should strive for nothing less than the best possible educational environment for our students. Within such a consolidation, those parishes with previously existing parish schools would be expected, for at least the first three years, to contribute annually the same amount of money that they gave to their parish school in its most recent fiscal year..

## **ADMINISTRATION and FINANCE – SHARED HUMAN RESOURCES**

As the parishes are recommending linking rather than merger, the administrative staffs will remain largely intact for the immediate future. However, we feel it is clear that the pastors, parish life director, and staffs of these parishes become familiar with each other's functions, configuration, challenges, and opportunities. In that light we have proposed the following..

1. We recommend that paid and volunteer staff in "like functional areas" within the cluster meet 3 times a year to discuss the issues they face as a parish. We see the areas of daily administration, building/grounds, accounting/finance being areas where collaboration can eventually lead to better utilization of resources. The purpose of these meetings would be to facilitate ideas on how to best utilize the cluster resources and remove potential overlapping or duplicative efforts. Begin: Jan 2009.
2. We recommend that the staffs of the 4 parishes be notified when an administrative position becomes vacant so as to encourage the use of current resources in the cluster. A possible outcome might be full time work split between 2 or 3 parishes.
3. We recommend continued collaboration among the faith formation teams in the parishes for idea sharing and possible expansion of joint activities. New programs, seminars, or other activities might be possible with the "economies of scale" available to a larger group.
4. We recommend that a "Cluster Corner" become a permanent part of each church bulletin's template. Its focus will be informational to promote cluster-wide opportunities of all kinds. **Long Term:** Establishment of a cluster website and procurement of a webmaster to keep it current.
5. Short term goal: To ensure that the recommendations set forth by this planning process become carried out, we recommend that someone be hired to serve as a facilitator for the cluster.
6. Long term goal: To develop a Cluster Administrator as the pastors/parish life directors devote more of their time to sacramental duties and less time to administrative functions.