

Below is a record of the meeting held on July 29, 2019 to discuss implications of the proposed Diocesan Pastoral Plan. We believe it adequately reflects what was said. Approximately 60 parishioners were present. The meeting lasted more or less one hour. Father Weisenberger's comments and responses are in regular type, parishioners' questions and comments are in bold. We have not identified the individuals who asked the questions or made the remarks.

Introductory Remarks from Fr. Weisenberger:

The proposed Pastoral Plan from the diocese is meant to enhance ministry, help us do a better job of "go therefore and make disciples of all the nations", and use our resources, specifically personnel, in a better way.

As a parish we are part of the diocese. A diocese establishes parishes. We may say, "Don't bother us, we are fine", but we need a bigger picture, a larger way of looking at it so we are not just this parish or that parish. Having said this, parishes under the Uniting in Heart 2030 Pastor Plan would remain distinct. With the current proposal of a pastorate between St. Joseph and St. Alphonsus, St. Joseph would not become part of St. Alphonsus. What would happen is that a priest would be the pastor of both parishes, with possible associate pastors, but the parishes would remain distinct. We will still be St. Joseph Parish. We are not becoming one parish, but we are sharing personnel, specifically clergy type personnel but potentially other staff.

People have said "I don't want to be responsible for St. Alphonsus' debt." St. Joseph will not be. Finances remain separate. If people contribute to St. Alphonsus, the money will remain with St. Alphonsus. If people contribute to St. Joseph, the money will remain with St. Joseph. This may be confusing because of the idea of one business office. One business office could manage the finances of two distinct parishes. The parishes are not being merged - that is not what is being proposed.

A lot of the details are still being worked out. Once the process of forming pastorates begins, then the staffs and leaderships of the parishes involved would figure out the details.

The current diocesan proposal shows St. Joseph and St. Alphonsus as a pastorate. I have suggested, instead, St. Mary, Frankfort and St. Joseph as a pastorate for several reasons. My main reason is that St. Mary cannot continue doing what they are doing. The pastor at St. Mary works three to four times harder than the pastor at St. Joseph. It is a poor use of resources. Another reason is that culturally we are more like St. Mary.

This kind of plan is something I have been thinking about for 20 years. You need to spend a certain amount of time and energy on maintenance – just maintaining who you are. But you should also be spending time on mission. The way we have done things, we spend more time on maintenance than we do on mission. I see this proposal as greatly enhancing the ability to do mission.

The official period for contacting the diocese to express any suggestions or comments ended July 19. The diocese has received 710 comments from people all over the diocese. That equates to approximately 12 comments per parish.

Questions from Parishioners:

How will this give us more time to do mission?

In terms of the clergy if we had one pastor and an associate (over two parishes), the pastor would be doing the administrative things and the associate would do things that the priests are supposed to do, like teach. Example: If I didn't have to go to another Finance Council meeting, I would be happy. I would have more time and energy to spend on things I am good at and enjoy. Fr. Miller, pastor of St. Mary, Frankfort, said (prior to knowing about the proposal) "I wish I had the time to do the adult education things you do." He can't because he spends all his time and energy just doing the basic stuff.

This seems like it is a step towards combining parishes to make a mega parish so you can service it with two priests instead of three. What are you doing with staff? Do you get rid of our staff? Do you overload the other staff? Finances are separate and yet the Catholic Moment shows expenses are combined. Another thing said was to better utilize resources and facilities. I see no upside. The biggest question is what are you doing with staff?

Although it shows expenses are combined, that does not mean they will be combined. Finances will remain separate. I think the staff question is a very legitimate question. From my perspective, this is another reason our parish and St. Mary would be better because St. Mary doesn't have a full-time staff.

How does that (St. Mary and St. Joseph staff) make us better?

St. Joseph is in an unusual position in it won't make St. Joseph that much better. But I see it as better for the diocese. We need to remember we are part of something bigger. I don't see it as harming us in any way. Staff resources would not make us better but would help St. Mary. This is more of an issue of what was said earlier, if we are in a pastorate with St. Alphonsus, they have a full-time staff and then you have redundancy. I see that as a larger concern.

We live in a post Christian world. It seems like they are using that as an excuse. It sounds like the Church is giving up on us.

I would not interpret it that way. How many of you have children and grandchildren that no longer go to church? That is a reality. It is a different kind of culture.

One of the glaring omissions in the presentation is the misstatement of priests running through 2030.

It is the most negative assumption you could make. I agree it is too negative.

At the Carmel presentation they made it very clear they did not include intake of priests. Why are we so focused on logistics and not focused on the ability for the diocese to minister to the people through consecrated vocations? Why was that omitted because that is a huge piece and yet we, as lay, are not included in what is going on. Vocations is still a missing piece that the entire laity can work to address in a meaningful and substantial way.

10 years from now, my guess is that we would have the same number of priests active in ministry as we do now. That is not a major issue. There will be a number of priests that retire, become ill, or die. Realistically we have potential priests/seminarians that the number will basically stay the same. Most dioceses would kill to have the number of priests that we have. We are not in bad shape in those terms. When I have told priests of other dioceses that approximately one-third of the priests of our diocese are millennials – people can't believe it. One reason is Fr. Brian Doerr did a wonderful job as Vocations Director. I am confident that Fr. Aaron and Fr. Thompson, the new Vocations Directors, will do a wonderful job as well and will get vocations moving again.

Religious Education and Sacraments - how will that be carried out between two parishes? The youth are the future. I have sent my child to Catholic School and see how involved the youth are at other parishes. I cringe at the thought of losing our religious education department.

I would not anticipate that Religious Education/Youth group would move to St. Alphonsus.

There is a concern about no office onsite. Here, the office is local, and you would lose people coming to the office. Also, what would happen to the food distribution? The food distribution clientele would not be able to get to St. Alphonsus easily.

I don't expect any of that (the food distribution) to change. When they talk about facilities, they are not talking about us (St. Joseph), it is a plan for the diocese. One example is my home county – it has a population of 8,000 people and there are five church buildings. Do you think their facilities are used efficiently? They are talking more about those terms, not us. The priest in Fowler drives 13 miles to Dunnington on Hwy 18 (which is a horrible road) to say Mass for very few people. This is not a good use of personnel and facilities.

There is concern about St. Joseph's autonomy regardless of who it is that St. Joseph is a pastorate with. What things would change that our parish would not chart our own course or have our own autonomy that we currently do?

I do not see that happening. I was the pastor at St. Paul, Marion and Holy Family, Gas City. Those parishes would say the only thing they shared was a pastor. One example is, I love adult education. Once I became the pastor of both parishes, some of the folks would come to St. Paul from Holy Family that didn't come before although they were always welcome. Decisions on ministry and finance actually stayed separate. The people there did not feel like they were one parish but two separate parishes.

Our financial wherewithal stays at St. Joseph. If we can afford and raise money to do things we could and if we can't then no one will come to our aid?

Correct.

Who makes the decisions then? Isn't the pastor in charge of the decisions?

Ultimately, yes. St. Joseph would still have its own Finance Council. They would still give advice to the pastor. Decisions would still be made here. The only thing different is that the pastor is also a pastor of another parish. Everything stays separate.

Our most valuable resource is our priest. So those things will still free up the pastor's time? Or will it be "I have to decide what we are going to do on the budget. I have to decide what we are going to do on the building."?

Because we have a staff, I don't spend much time on those things but when you don't have a staff you have to spend more time on them. If you have a pastor and an associate at least one of them should have time to spend on things more connected to mission. This parish is way less demanding than where I was before.

Will we have an office open every day here? Will we have a priest here every day? Would we have those privileges? If the administration would be in Zionsville would we owe them a fee for administration? Would there be daily Mass? Will we never know what priest is coming?

I would tend to say yes there would be daily Mass, but I cannot say that with absolute certainty. These are all questions that need to be decided once the pastorate is formed - I don't know how that would work. If you go to the Cathedral you don't know who is saying Mass because they have more than one priest. In my opinion, having different perspectives is a good thing. I was in Grant County for 20 years. There are people that would joke that they knew what homily I was giving because it was from three years ago. No one suits everyone. So, having a different priest say Mass I see that as a good thing.

We are blessed that we are self-supporting and not a mission diocese. Are they worried less about the loss of priests and more about the loss in the next few decades in the amount of money we have to support an independent diocese?

The concern about money comes more from parishioners, not the diocese. I don't think that is the driving issue. I really think that this will enable us to do a better job in providing ministry.

Since we are sharing resources, will there still be daily Mass celebrated in a drivable area?

I would expect yes, we would. I do not see that changing.

Combination of parish councils – how does it benefit the parishes?

It is one of the things I am not in favor of. In Grant County each parish had their own parish council. I see the value in, maybe, the two councils getting together on occasion. But it makes sense to me to have two separate councils.

In 1998 I was part of a board in Evansville to put a plan together similar to this plan. Multiple parishes have closed, viable parishes died, and there has been loss of priests. I see emphasis is being placed on the wrong things. If I say, “Who is the church?”, the response would be “We are the church.” We need to take charge of this and grow. If we think about Sears, they had the catalog business tied up for 30-40 years. They made tons of money and grew. But they were not looking forward and got stagnant. They worried more about money and less about growing. They stayed where they were at. If they were farsighted, they could have got into the internet and could have been the Amazon of today. If we do not, as a diocese, start doing things forward thinking we are going to end up shutting down. We need to find a way to move forward. I am more for growth and less for shrinking.

Maybe one reason this gives people concern is my first thought was Eli Lilly. They hired an outside consultant to tell them what to do - cold and analytical. Did they look at St. Joseph and St. Alphonsus, fit them in an Excel spreadsheet, and that is what determined what needed to be done? We need to think about the intangibles. Maybe it would be good to combine with St. Mary. We are culturally more like them. Maybe there could be more ways for us to reach out ministerially that they do not have available to them now. Can you give us some sort of assurance that they are not just looking at the numbers on a spreadsheet but that they are also looking at intangibles as well?

I can be as sure as I can be about anything.

If we combine with St. Alphonsus which parish loses a Mass? What happens to leadership night?

That goes back to what was previously asked and according to the plan the parish councils would be combined, and I would not be in favor of doing that. The loss of a Mass would be something that would be decided by the pastorate.

What is the timing?

It is a 2030 plan. I assume it would start soon but that is up in the air.

My understanding is that the end game of this plan is that we are going to do better at Evangelization, but there is not one word on how that is going to happen.

Please try to remember St. Joseph is not the whole diocese. The idea is that the priests would have more time to do evangelization under the pastorate. We need to have a bigger picture.

Who did the diocese hire? How much did we pay them?

The name of the group is Partners Edge. They are made up of mostly lay people and have done this throughout the country. Their headquarters are in St. Paul, MN. A Lilly Grant paid for this project.

Why did they make us build a 700 seat church?

The Pastoral Plan has no connection to the building of St. Joseph Church.

(A parishioner's response on church seats) The diocese's initial directive was for a 1000 seat church for growth over the next 50 years. To the bishop's credit, the parish told the bishop we do not think we can get enough money to build a 1000 seat church. Can we build a 700-750 seat church without debt? The bishop approved. The southern Boone County demographics have changed. Our parish is well prepared to handle the growth.

How is this working out for other dioceses doing this, Diocese of Sioux City, IA?

I am sure there are challenges and successes.

Final Comment made by a parishioner: I was distressed at the level of business speak. I know from experience at Our Lady of Mount Carmel, when they built the 24/7 adoration chapel, that (prayer) along with other factors caused an explosion of vocations. I was distressed that prayer was not mentioned in this plan.

There were no other questions or comments, so the meeting was adjourned.