



OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

June 8, 2014
PENTECOST SUNDAY
North Central Vicariate Letter

“A New Pentecost in Our Day”

Dear Father Iffert,
Dear Priests, Deacons, Religious, Parish Life Coordinators, and the Christian Faithful of the
North Central Vicariate:

May the Grace and Peace of Jesus Christ and the Power of the Holy Spirit be with you!

I am writing to you about the **PASTORAL PLAN FOR PARISH RENEWAL AND RESTRUCTURING**. In my letter introducing the **PASTORAL PLAN**, I wrote “Jesus Christ is the reason the Catholic Church exists and He is the reason why we are working to renew our Local Church...Our **PASTORAL PLAN** becomes a program of renewal when we commit ourselves anew: to be people of genuine prayer, to be people eager to be evangelizers by professing our faith in Christ, to be people dedicated to studying the Word of God and spreading the authentic teachings of the Catholic Church, and to be people who are truly generous, giving of our time, talent, and treasure to our parishes and our Diocese for the sake of the Gospel.” Pentecost is our time for renewal. I write this Vicariate Letter today to reflect with you on your **STRATEGIC PASTORAL MODELS** for the **PASTORAL PLAN**, reminding you that we must confidently build the life of this Local Church upon Jesus Christ and His mission.

Our Holy Father, Pope Francis, has urged us to see the ministry of the Church in a missionary way. “We must come out of ourselves and grow in boldness.” I ask you to hear these words of the Holy Father and take them to heart. Your work of putting the **PASTORAL PLAN** into effect at the parish level will not be successful unless we seize this opportunity to come out of ourselves and to be bold for Christ and His evangelizing mission. This is a call to place mission

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over maintenance. The mission of the Church does not always allow for the maintenance of the *status quo*.

I would like to thank all of you for the seriousness and diligence with which you have responded to the mandates that I outlined in my **FORMAL RESPONSE TO THE PASTORAL PLAN**. By means of decrees and articles published in The Messenger, regular reports to the Presbyteral Council, and other announcements, I have kept you informed of some of the more significant results of implementing the **PASTORAL PLAN**. The hard work of the **PARISH PARTNERSHIPS** in developing **STRATEGIC PASTORAL MODELS** has been at the heart of these developments. This Vicariate Letter contains reflections and instructions about the **STRATEGIC PASTORAL MODELS** made in consultation with the Vicars Forane and the members of the **PASTORAL PLAN COMMITTEE**.

The members of the PASTORAL PLAN FOR PARISH RENEWAL AND RESTRUCTURING COMMITTEE are:

The Reverend Monsignor John W. McEvelly, Vicar General and Moderator of the Curia, Chairman, *ex officio*

The Reverend Monsignor Thomas D. Flach, Vicar Forane

The Very Reverend John C. Iffert, Vicar Forane

The Reverend Monsignor John T. Myler, Vicar Forane

The Very Reverend Mark D. Stec, Vicar Forane

The Very Reverend Eugene H. Wojcik, Vicar Forane

Deacon Robert Lanter, Director of the Permanent Diaconate

Sister Catherine Wellinghoff, A.S.C., Parish Life Coordinator of St. Paul Parish, Johnston City

Mrs. Sue Huett, Director of Pastoral Services, Director of Office of Worship

Mr. James V. Mroczkowski, Director of Temporal Affairs, Chief Financial Officer

Ms. Kathy Mulvin, Diocesan Pastoral Council

Mr. Thomas Posnanski, Director of Faith Formation, Director of Office of Catholic Education

It has taken some time to prepare this response because of the volume of materials received and because neither I nor any member of the **COMMITTEE** has been free to work on this full-time.

I have decided to send this response in the form of a letter to all of the parishes in each Vicariate because it is important for all of you to be aware of where we are at this stage of what will continue to be an on-going process. Parishes should distribute it as widely as possible. Place it on parish websites, study it at Vicariate meetings, and review it at gatherings of the parish leaders. These introductory comments and the section pertaining to your **PARTNERSHIP** should be copied and inserted in the bulletin. This letter will also be available on the diocesan website at www.diobelle.org.

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The text **BELOW** and continuing to the bottom of page four is from my April 2, 2013
FORMAL RESPONSE TO THE PASTORAL PLAN:

In order to accomplish this, it will be necessary for the leadership of PARISH PARTNERSHIPS to develop a schedule of regular meetings. It is primarily at these meetings that the STRATEGIC PASTORAL MODELS should be decided upon and developed as fully as possible. If a PARISH PARTNERSHIP is having difficulty developing a model, the leadership should send questions and concerns, in writing, to the Vicar General by June 30, 2013. Each PARISH PARTNERSHIP must submit a 1-2 page report on the progress being made in developing an appropriate model no later than September 15, 2013. This will facilitate the process of developing the final draft by December 31, 2013.

The PARISH PARTNERSHIPS can be divided primarily into three groups intended to address specific pastoral situations:

- 1.) In dialogue with parish leadership, I have directed several PARISH PARTNERSHIPS to begin working immediately on a plan for bringing two or three parishes together as one, within a timeframe of one year or less. This is possible because of the maturity of the discussion in the parishes in question and the urgency of the need.
- 2.) When one of the priests departs from one of the parishes in question (due to transfer, retirement, failing health, or the recall of a *fidei donum* missionary priest), he will not be replaced. The pastors and the parish leaderships are being asked to begin work NOW on a proposal for the manner in which one priest will serve more than one parish community. This includes the possibility of merging one or more parishes. (This also applies to the situation of a Parish Life Coordinator who departs from a parish, when he or she is not likely to be replaced.)
- 3.) There are other cases of parishes that were joined together at an earlier date and are being served already by only one priest. These parishes must review the present arrangement. How well is it working? What can the leadership do to bring these parishes together in even greater and more effective collaboration? In some cases, should these parishes merge together as one community of faith?

The leadership of every PARISH PARTNERSHIP is required to develop a STRATEGIC PASTORAL MODEL for the future, when there will be only one priest to serve several currently existing parish communities. I am aware that the work of developing a STRATEGIC PASTORAL MODEL will vary in difficulty in different PARISH PARTNERSHIPS. In some cases, the process might be

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relatively easy. In other cases, it will be more challenging. In still other cases, the process may be quite difficult. And there may be a few cases where it seems almost impossible.

Parishes should not hesitate to contact me or the Vicar General if they encounter seemingly insurmountable problems.

The timeframe, indicating that a **STRATEGIC PASTORAL MODEL** detailing how the **PARISH PARTNERSHIPS** will be structured must be submitted by December 31, 2013, clearly does not mean that the new structure necessarily takes effect on that day. It means that there is a real need to develop an actual model or plan of action that is specific and clear so that it can be implemented when it is needed, even if the need does not arise for five years or more. Obviously, if we are blessed with a growth in our Catholic population, an increase in vocations to the priesthood, and an influx of *fidei donum* priests, the implementation of some **PARISH PARTNERSHIP STRATEGIC PASTORAL MODELS** may be delayed indefinitely.

Several possible **STRATEGIC PASTORAL MODELS** are immediately evident:

- a.) Two or more parishes petition to merge and become one parish with only one church building;
- b.) Two or more parishes petition to merge and become one parish with one primary church building while one or two of the former parish church buildings are granted chapel status for occasional use, at least for a time;
- c.) Two or more parishes remain free standing (without a merger), maintain both churches, and develop a structure within which they can realistically be served by one priest. This would have to include necessary changes in liturgical schedules (Sunday Mass, Holy Days, Holy Week) and joining many parish committees and activities together;
- d.) Other **STRATEGIC PASTORAL MODELS** developed by **PARISH PARTNERSHIPS** and proposed to the Bishop for his consideration.

This important excerpt ABOVE is from my FORMAL RESPONSE TO THE PASTORAL PLAN should be borne in mind as you read the rest of this Vicariate Letter.

I am happy to report that most parishes submitted their **STRATEGIC PASTORAL MODELS**, as I asked, to the **COMMITTEE** by December 31, 2013. I have had extensive discussions with each of the Vicars Forane concerning your responses. They, in turn, shared their comments in writing concerning each **STRATEGIC PASTORAL MODEL**. Their written observations have significantly contributed to the content of this Vicariate Letter. Many of the **STRATEGIC PASTORAL MODELS** are well thought out and moving in the right direction. Some, however, are focused too much on the immediate future and **NOT** upon the **LONG-TERM** future of the parishes in their

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PARTNERSHIPS. In some cases, there is evidence of disagreements among the parish leaders making it difficult to make hard or realistic decisions for the future. A few parishes seem to be assuming that when a current Pastor retires, he will automatically be able to remain in his former parish and continue his ministry. But this decision will not be made until the Pastor actually retires. But, even if a Pastor should remain in his former parish for a time, the question that must be answered **now** is what the parishes will do **WHEN** there is only one priest to serve several parishes. It has also happened that a totally unrealistic proposal has been presented, causing some individuals to submit alternative proposals which they deemed more realistic. Remember that you are not free to change the mandate I have given you in my **FORMAL RESPONSE TO THE PASTORAL PLAN** without my approval. If your mandate is to bring two parishes together to function as one or to reorganize parish life in several parishes so they can be served by one priest, it is my wish and expectation that your **STRATEGIC PASTORAL MODEL** will lay out in as much detail as possible how you think this can be accomplished.

One of the goals of this Vicariate Letter is to invite **ALL PARISH PARTNERSHIPS** to review their recommendations with a greater mindfulness of the long-term needs of the parish communities and the availability of priests to serve them. This especially means developing a realistic and workable Mass schedule, planning joint Holy Week services, developing a common religious education and sacramental preparation program, bringing Parish Pastoral Councils together, developing a joint parish bulletin, alternating venues for parish social events, and collaborating to offer ministries that no single parish could offer alone. The Clinton County ministry to Hispanic Catholics is a good example of a creative, shared, and coordinated ministry that serves the Body of Christ in a way that no single parish or community in the county could manage by itself.

Some of you have proposed developing an expansive vision of **PARISH PARTNERSHIPS**. A few propose a shared mission and a single Parish Pastoral Council that assists the Pastor in developing a shared ministry among Catholics in communities and parishes that remain distinct, with the hope of cultivating greater unity. In other areas of the Diocese, the decision has been made to relinquish the maintenance of a distinctive parish identity and join with a neighboring parish to pursue the mission of Jesus Christ. This willingness to respond to the needs of the whole Church is an example that every parish must be ready to follow.

I note that some **PARISH PARTNERSHIPS** have recommended a different Mass schedule to accommodate the parishes in their group by having one Saturday night Mass at one location and one Sunday morning Mass at the other location. This arrangement, already present in one or two of our parishes, is common in mission territories and it is becoming more common in dioceses in the United States. We know that, from the perspective of liturgical theology, this is a problematic arrangement. The Mass on Saturday night is a Vigil Mass. The assumption is that a Mass will be celebrated on Sunday morning in the same church. There may be no easy solution to this

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dilemma. At present, we seem to have no choice but to permit it out of pastoral necessity. I have also taken note of another challenging situation. How do you bring two relatively small parishes together when neither church has a seating capacity to accommodate the number of people who would need to attend on a reduced Mass schedule? I have encountered this difficulty in other dioceses. In some cases, the only solution has been to locate at least one Mass in a larger venue such as the parish hall or gymnasium. This is certainly not an ideal solution.

I am also aware that some have requested a change in your **PARTNERSHIPS**, suggesting that it is not a good match. Others think certain aspects of the **PASTORAL PLAN** are misguided and should be altered. I have acknowledged from the outset that no program for diocesan renewal and restructuring is perfect. But what we have is good and we should work with it, at least for the present. There were some **PARISH PARTNERSHIPS** that proposed **STRATEGIC PASTORAL MODELS** quite different from my mandate. While a few of these may be workable, others clearly are not.

During the June 2, 2014 meeting of the Presbyteral Council, there was a discussion about the relationship between the **PASTORAL PLAN FOR PARISH RENEWAL AND RESTRUCTURING** and the practice of inviting *fidei donum* missionaries into the Diocese to assist us. It was suggested that perhaps the influx of international priests is delaying the implementation of the **PASTORAL PLAN**, since these priests serve in parishes that our Diocesan priests would be serving as their second or third parish, if the **PLAN** were being fully implemented. I suggested that, from my perspective, the service of *fidei donum* missionaries and the **PASTORAL PLAN** are complementary. This is because, at the present time, our Diocesan priests would not be able to take over all of the vacant parishes if the *fidei donum* priests all departed. I indicated that the situation will become even tighter with large number of retirements in the next few years. This is one of the reasons why the implementation of the **PASTORAL PLAN** must be gradual, dynamic, and organic. This was the first time this concern about our *fidei donum* priests has been raised with me. No priests have written to me expressing their desire to assume an additional pastorate. Therefore, I would like the Vicars Forane to discuss this question in a serious manner at an upcoming Vicariate meeting and report back to me. All priests (incardinated and *fidei donum*) should speak freely at these meeting. These are the questions: Do the majority of priests in your Vicariate believe that additional *fidei donum* priests should not be sought to succeed the priests we now have when their terms expire? Do they believe that, in spite of up-coming retirements and no immediate ordinations, our priests are willing and able to assume responsibility for these parishes without the introduction of additional Parish Life Coordinators? What would be a model for how this could be done? Clear and honest responses to these questions might be quite helpful, especially since it cannot be assumed that *fidei donum* priests will be available indefinitely.

It is my hope that all Priests, Deacons and Parish Life Coordinators will read all five Vicariate Letters in order to have an appreciation of where the entire Diocese is in this process. I would like the parish leadership to study carefully your Vicariate Letter. Share the contents of

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the whole letter with the members of your parish (e.g., distribute it in church, on your website), so they can be kept informed. The section addressing individual parishes is written so that it can be taken out and placed in the parish bulletin. However, in that format, your parishioners will not gain a full perspective. Please gather appropriate parish representatives together to discuss the instructions concerning your individual **PARISH PARTNERSHIP**. I would ask the Vicar Forane to have a follow-up conversation with each Pastor, Administrator, or Parish Life Coordinator in his Vicariate. If necessary, this can be done by telephone. All parish leaders and parishioners should keep in mind that all important information and decisions concerning the **PASTORAL PLAN FOR PARISH RENEWAL AND RESTRUCTURING** will come in writing either from me personally or Monsignor McEvelly, V.G. You should not give serious consideration to rumors, idle talk, and speculation passed by word of mouth.

Every PARISH PARTNERSHIP must respond to this Vicariate Letter. In some cases, the responses may be brief because I have asked for only moderate changes in or additions to your STRATEGIC PASTORAL MODEL. In other cases the response MUST be more extensive because I have asked for significant changes in and additions to your STRATEGIC PASTORAL MODEL. You are asked to give this response a high priority.

Please submit your brief statements or your revised STRATEGIC PASTORAL MODELS to the Vicar General and Moderator of the Curia as soon as possible. However, knowing that summer is at hand, the responses may be submitted as late as (but NO later than) Monday, November 10, 2014, the Feast of Pope St. Leo the Great.

Once I have approved your revised STRATEGIC PASTORAL MODELS, they should not be filed away. They should be regularly reviewed by your Parish Pastoral Councils and broader parish leadership. Make sure you are implementing as much of your STRATEGIC PASTORAL MODEL as you can now, doing so by stages and in dialogue with my Vicar Forane. They should serve as guideposts in the work of planning and mission development for the future. They should help all of us anticipate the shape of the Church to come.

This Vicariate Letter is intended to be the only response in this format. It brings to a conclusion the third phase of this consultative process. If a PARISH PARTNERSHIP does not respond to this Vicariate Letter, or if it fails to further refine its STRATEGIC PASTORAL MODEL as directed in this Letter, additional direct communication will come from me or the Vicar General. If necessary, the PASTORAL PLAN COMMITTEE, guided by the appropriate Vicar Forane, will propose a STRATEGIC PASTORAL MODEL to me for the PARISH PARTNERSHIPS that fail to participate effectively in this consultative process.

I will now turn from these general observations in order to speak to the situation of each parish in the Vicariate and to provide direction concerning the **STRATEGIC PASTORAL MODELS** submitted by **PARISH PARTNERSHIPS** for my consideration.

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St. Dominic, Breese / St. Augustine, Breese

Reverend Patrick N. Peter / Reverend Charles W. Tuttle

I am happy to see that St. Dominic Parish and St. Augustine Parish are engaged in a good deal of shared ministry. You cooperate in maintaining All Saints Academy. You share religious education programs, youth ministry, and many activities. Furthermore, your plan allows for the addition of a lay or religious Pastoral Associate to assist the Pastor in his duties.

As you revise your **STRATEGIC PASTORAL MODEL**, however, I urge you to (1) be even more generous and self-sacrificing in your efforts to establish a shared life and mission, and (2) to be very realistic about the leadership that one priest can offer—even with the help of an effective Pastoral Associate. Maintaining entirely separate committee and leadership structures, while adding another layer of committee work in the coordinating council, seems quite unrealistic to me. I encourage you to explore the manner in which your parishes can build a shared life and mission and move in the direction of my mandate to become a united Catholic community in Breese.

You are partners in the operation of and support for All Saints Academy Catholic school which I hope will continue as a strong Regional Catholic School.

The current schedule of five Sunday and Vigil Masses will obviously be unworkable when only one priest serves your community. You must work to develop a Mass schedule that can be served by one priest, allowing for weddings and other special occasions that occur on Saturdays and Sundays, without relying on the regular assistance of a retired or a so-called “supply” priest.

Finally, it is understandable and laudable that you have encouraged parishioners from St. Anthony Parish in Beckemeyer to participate in many of the religious education programs that you now share. While St. Augustine and St. Anthony share a pastor, this is a very natural development. However, continuing to encourage this situation may hamper the development of the parish partnership that includes St. Anthony Parish, St. Mary Parish in Carlyle, and St. Teresa Parish in Marydale. I encourage the parish leadership of St. Anthony in Beckemeyer to consider how best to help foster the development of shared faith formation efforts in their new **PARISH PARTNERSHIPS**. **Please continue to pray and work with me for Vocations to the Priesthood from your parishes.**

St. George, New Baden / St. Mary, Trenton

Reverend Eugene J. Neff / Reverend Joseph C. Rascher

St. George Parish and St. Mary Purification of the Blessed Virgin Mary Parish are now participating with parishes in Clinton County in a common celebration of the Rite of Christian

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Initiation of Adults. You also jointly provide support for the important ministry to Hispanic Catholics. You also come together for the celebration of the Sacrament of Confirmation for your young people. Additionally, you exchange invitations for parish programs--especially faith formation programs. I note you are currently planning "pulpit exchanges," a shared partnership mission, and a Pastoral Associate who will assist the Pastor when your parishes are served by only one priest. I commend you for these important efforts at cooperation. However, what you have proposed does not go far enough when looking to the long-term.

I must ask you to revise your **STRATEGIC PASTORAL MODEL**. In this revision, you must propose ways in which you can move beyond sharing individual programs and resources. Please take the opportunity to re-imagine what your parishes would look like if you truly shared a common mission. Both parishes with a single mission, the mission of Christ to proclaim the Good News to all. Look for specific ways to reorganize your parish life for this shared mission. This should include aligning ministry efforts, sharing parish leadership structures, and developing a greater degree of sharing of parish life. **Please continue to pray and work with me for Vocations to the Priesthood from your parishes.**

St. Boniface, Germantown / St. Cecilia, Bartelso

Reverend Monsignor James A. Buerster / Reverend Monsignor James A. Buerster

With the untimely death of our beloved Father Henry Fischer, your parishes have experienced the full impact of the **PASTORAL PLAN FOR PARISH RENEWAL AND RESTRUCTURING** in a sudden, painful, and unexpected manner. I commend the leadership and the faithful of both parishes for embracing this reality in a way that honors Father Fischer's characteristic unselfishness. I particularly want to acknowledge Monsignor James Buerster for generously serving as pastor of St. Boniface and St. Cecilia for nearly a year now. While he has indicated that he is willing and able to shoulder this additional pastoral responsibility, everyone must realize that this arrangement has a real impact on him and the Christian Faithful of both parishes. I anticipate that it will be necessary to maintain this arrangement in the years ahead.

At this juncture, everyone at your parishes must understand that Monsignor Buerster will not have his present level of energy and stamina forever. A future Pastor may not be able to serve the two parishes in their present configuration. I now urge you to update your **STRATEGIC PASTORAL MODEL** in a way that will allow for even greater collaboration and a more profound sharing of church life and mission between the people of St. Boniface Parish and St. Cecilia Parish. I realize that this will be a challenge because each parish has a unique history and traditions. Nevertheless, this must be done. Please begin by studying which activities that now take place separately in each parish can be joined together, including all forms of religious education and sacramental formation. Experiment with joint meetings of your Parish Pastoral

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Councils and having shared committee structures. It would be wise to examine your Mass schedule. Can the number of Masses be reduced? Try to allow at least two hours between the starting times of all Vigil and Sunday Masses. Look ahead to next year's Christmas and Holy Week schedule. Do not assume that an additional priest will be available. Can you accommodate one Triduum celebration, alternating Churches during the three days? **Please continue to pray and work with me for Vocations to the Priesthood from your parishes.**

St. Mary, Carlyle / St. Anthony, Beckemeyer / St. Teresa, Marydale

Reverend George A. Mauck / Reverend Charles W. Tuttle / Deacon Robert Lippert, Parish Life Coordinator / Deacon Charles A. Litteken

I am happy to see that your PARISH PARTNERSHIP has incorporated several important and realistic aspects within your STRATEGIC PASTORAL MODEL. Please move ahead in the formation of a single Parish Pastoral Council for all three parishes. I urge you to aggressively explore the possibility of employing an administrative professional to assist the Pastor in managing the temporal goods of the parishes. I encourage you to revisit your STRATEGIC PASTORAL MODEL with an eye toward an even greater collaboration in those aspects essential to parish life, especially faith formation. You must embrace every opportunity to minimize duplicating and triplicating parish structures.

I also encourage your Parish Partnership to explore ways to support All Saints Academy Catholic School as a Regional Catholic school for your partnership.

As I stated in my remarks about St. Dominic Parish and St. Augustine Parish above, the participation of St. Anthony Parish in Beckemeyer in every aspect of the life of this PARISH PARTNERSHIP is imperative for this process to work. If St. Anthony Parish maintains its current association with the two parishes in Breese for catechesis and sacramental formation, I have a serious concern that this may undermine the development of a shared identity, mission, and formation effort in this PARISH PARTNERSHIP. Please keep your focus on your mandate. You must prepare to be served by one priest with an awareness that the three parishes will eventually become two. **Please continue to pray and work with me for Vocations to the Priesthood from your parishes.**

St. Francis, Aviston / St. Rose, St. Rose / St. Felicitas, Beaver Prairie

Reverend Daniel L. Friedman / Reverend Edward F. Schaefer / Sister Diane M. Turner, S.S.N.D., Parish Life Coordinator

I appreciate the serious effort that you have put into developing your STRATEGIC PASTORAL MODEL. I am encouraged by the cooperative spirit that has led you to engage in a number of

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pastoral activities in a unified way. I think you should aggressively look for additional ways that you can reduce duplication and triplication of pastoral activities. Your proposed **MODEL** anticipates that the three parishes will each maintain its own Parish Pastoral Council, religious education program, etc. Then you would superimpose another level of organization and staff sharing for the **PARISH PARTNERSHIP**. I do not think this is a wise course of action. I must ask you to revisit your **MODEL**, keeping in mind your mandate. The three parishes will become two, under the leadership of a single priest, sharing a closely coordinated vision and mission. Please begin by studying which activities that now take place separately in each parish can be joined together, including all forms of religious education and sacramental formation. Experiment with joint meetings of your Parish Pastoral Councils, a shared parish bulletin, and shared committee structures.

Your **PARISH PARTNERSHIP** has a special, seemingly insurmountable challenge which you state clearly. The limited capacity of your church buildings would seem to require that a single priest would need to celebrate five Sunday and Vigil Masses each week in order to accommodate the faithful who currently attend Mass at your three parishes. Other dioceses have faced this challenge, especially in mission territories where one priest sometimes serves 90,000 Catholics with one church and thirty mission stations and the help of lay ecclesial ministers. I think you are being called to think outside of the box. In order to explore solutions to this very real problem, develop a **MODEL** that could be implemented in the medium term (3 to 5 years). For example, you might consider an expansion or reconfiguration of existing space of one of your churches in order to maximize capacity. Alternatively, a dignified setting for the Sunday Eucharist might be created in a gymnasium or other setting that would allow for increased capacity at a principal Mass of the week. I would be the first to agree that it is far better to worship in a “sacred space” so designated. But the day may soon be at hand when you or those who come after you will have no other choice. This would certainly be the case if you are required to reduce the number of church buildings from three to two. You must bring an unselfish and sacrificial attitude to the task of envisioning the best way to reorganize your communities of faith in the way that is best for the Catholic Church to flourish in Aviston, St. Rose, and Beaver Prairie for years to come. **Please continue to pray and work with me for Vocations to the Priesthood from your parishes.**

St. Bernard, Albers / St. Damian, St. Damiansville

Reverend John J. Joyce / Reverend John J. Joyce

St. Bernard Parish and St. Damian Parish have been functioning, to a certain degree, as a **PARISH PARTNERSHIP** for many years, under the leadership of several individual Pastors. As I have said before, however, every parish in the Diocese will eventually feel the impact of the **PASTORAL PLAN FOR PARISH RENEWAL AND RESTRUCTURING**. I have the impression from a

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variety of sources that these parishes have become somewhat less vital in recent years. I did not see strong expressions of efforts at renewal in your **STRATEGIC PASTORAL MODEL**. I am aware that the Deacon has been exercising a special degree of leadership in these communities of faith. I now ask that the Pastor, Deacon and lay leaders renew their enthusiasm and dedication. Call forth additional lay leaders for the work of revitalization. Please begin by studying which activities that now take place separately in each parish can be joined together, including all forms of religious education and sacramental formation. Experiment with joint meetings of your Parish Pastoral Councils, a shared parish bulletin, and shared committee structures.

I ask the parishes of St. Bernard Parish and St. Damian Parish to **expand** your **STRATEGIC PASTORAL MODEL** with more details and specifics concerning the ways in which you are moving toward greater collaboration and the embrace of a shared mission and coordinated ministry. **Please continue to pray and work with me for Vocations to the Priesthood from your parishes.**

St. Mary, Centralia / St. Lawrence, Sandoval

Reverend Justin Olisaemeka / Reverend Monsignor James A. Buerster

St. Mary Parish and St. Lawrence Parish have been served by only one priest for some time. You indicate the various positive steps you have taken to work in closer harmony. You have joint Parish Pastoral Councils and Finance Councils. I now instruct you to follow the proposals in your **STRATEGIC PASTORAL MODEL**: adjust the Mass schedule to reduce to three Vigil and Sunday Masses. Set up specific programs to encourage shared social and outreach activities. Be vigilant about the status of your school at St. Mary Parish. Make every effort to secure its stability for the long term.

Father Justin Olisaemeka, a *fidei donum* missionary priest from the Archdiocese of Onitsha, Nigeria, has generously served you for the past seven years. In July, that service will come to an end. We happily thank him for sharing his many gifts with our Local Church. It is my intention to send Father Dale Maxfield to you to succeed Father Olisaemeka. It will be for all of the Christian Faithful to help him learn the needs of the parish and aggressively continue to implement the **PASTORAL PLAN FOR PARISH RENEWAL AND RESTRUCTURING**. He must keep before his eyes your mandate. Not only are you to be served by one priest, but also you are to actively study the possibility of becoming one parish.

Concerning St. Mary School, I strongly encourage everyone to continue the support of the school and efforts to increase enrollment and fundraising. **Please continue to pray and work with me for Vocations to the Priesthood from your parishes.**

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St. Theresa of Avila, Salem / St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, Kinmundy Reverend Robert J. Zwilling / Reverend Robert J. Zwilling

St. Theresa of Avila Parish and St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Parish have had a **PARISH PARTNERSHIP** structure prior to the **PASTORAL PLAN FOR PARISH RENEWAL AND RESTRUCTURING**. Since the promulgation of the **PLAN**, your Pastor, Father Zwilling, has guided you to a greater level of collaboration in many of the ministries in your communities. Your two small parishes in close proximity must now go even further. Since you will be receiving Father Larry Lemay as your new Pastor, it is imperative that as many agreed upon changes as possible should be put in place while Father Zwilling is still present. This will make the ministry of Father Lemay easier. It will be for him to press forward with even more areas of shared structures, ministries, committees and communications. The reality of the state of the Church in your communities makes it necessary for you to develop a realistic projection of the manner in which you can fulfill your mandate to examine the possibility of becoming one parish with a single mission and vision. Please continue to pursue your 5-year plan regarding the viability of your parish school. I am pleased that you hope to reach the 40% support goal indicated in the **PASTORAL PLAN FOR PARISH RENEWAL AND RESTRUCTURING**. **Please continue to pray and work with me for Vocations to the Priesthood from your parishes.**

St. Ann, Nashville / Our Lady of Perpetual Help, Posen Reverend Andrew J. Knopik / Reverend Bernard C. Goedde, Jr.

St. Ann Parish and Our Lady of Perpetual Help Parish have made rather modest proposals for their **PARISH PARTNERSHIP**. I am concerned the elements in your **PASTORAL PLAN FOR PARISH RENEWAL AND RESTRUCTURING** are not sufficiently forward looking for the long-term. Your **STRATEGIC PASTORAL MODEL** continues to propose maintaining two separate parishes. You suggest this can be accomplished by working out a Mass schedule that could be feasible when you have only one priest. You further suggest that each parish will retain its own Parish Pastoral Council, Finance Council and other key parish committees. You indicate that it will be necessary to create additional structures for coordination between the two parishes.

I do not think this is adequate. The day when you will be served by only one priest may not be far away. Prior to that date, it is necessary for you to develop a response to my mandate that you explore the possibility of becoming one parish, even if that structural change does not happen for some time. I urge you to consider a greater sharing of church life and mission over time, and to reconsider how your Council and committee structures might best promote that unity while being of real assistance to the priest who will serve you. Please begin by studying which activities that now take place separately in each parish can be joined together, including all forms of religious education and sacramental formation. Experiment with joint meetings of

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your Parish Pastoral Councils, a shared parish bulletin, and shared committee structures. This should be accomplished while both current Pastors are still in place. Otherwise, I fear a heavy burden will be placed on the shoulders of the Pastor who inherits the neighboring parish.

Concerning St. Ann School, I strongly encourage everyone to continue the support of the school and efforts to increase enrollment and fundraising. I also encourage your partnership to pursue a long term plan to become a Regional Catholic School for your neighboring Parish Partnerships. **Please continue to pray and work with me for Vocations to the Priesthood from your parishes.**

St. Barbara, Okawville / St. Anthony, Lively Grove

Reverend John J. Joyce

Only time will tell whether or not the **PARISH PARTNERSHIP** of St. Barbara Parish and St. Anthony Parish will be able to remain as distinct parishes. Your new pastor should guide you through a very serious examination of this question. Your **STRATEGIC PASTORAL MODEL** suggesting that you maintain two distinct parish identities served by only one priest is acceptable for the present. However, a shared Mass schedule, separate Parish Pastoral Councils, governance committees, and religious education programs may not be wise for the long run. While it may be difficult, you must begin to think more realistically about the future. Please examine your rather modest **STRATEGIC PASTORAL MODEL** and determine which activities that now take place separately in each parish can be joined together, including all forms of religious education and sacramental formation. Experiment with joint meetings of your Parish Pastoral Councils, a shared parish bulletin, shared committee structures. The **PASTORAL PLAN** challenges all parishes to be bolder in facing the future. The comfortable parochialism of the past is inadequate for the present and the future.

Now that I am appointing Father Steven Poole as Pastor of both parishes, in accord with **PASTORAL PLAN FOR PARISH RENEWAL AND RESTRUCTURING**, I must insist that you move toward a far greater level of cooperation in order to fulfill the mission entrusted to your communities of faith in the new structure of **PARISH PARTNERSHIPS**. **Please continue to pray and work with me for Vocations to the Priesthood from your parishes.**

St. Charles Borromeo, DuBois / St. Michael, Radom

Reverend Oliver Nwachukwu / Reverend Dale A. Maxfield

St. Charles Borromeo Parish and St. Michael Parish is a **PARISH PARTNERSHIP** to which I have given a clear mandate. You are to develop a **STRATEGIC PASTORAL MODEL** by which you will be able to be served by only one priest. Indeed, it is my intention to appoint Father Oliver Nwachukwu as Pastor of St. Michael Parish, in accord with the **PASTORAL PLAN FOR PARISH RENEWAL AND RESTRUCTURING**. For this reason, I now ask you to outline in detail the way in

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which this arrangement would work for your parishes. I urge you to expand your **STRATEGIC PASTORAL MODEL** in a way that will allow for even greater collaboration and a more profound sharing of church life and mission between the people of St. Charles Borromeo Parish and St. Michael Parish. I realize that this will be a challenge because each parish has a unique history and traditions. Nevertheless, this must be done. Please begin by studying which activities that now take place separately in each parish can be joined together, including all forms of religious education and sacramental formation. Perhaps a shared **PARISH PARTNERSHIP** bulletin? Experiment with joint meetings of your Parish Pastoral Councils and shared committee structures. Please review your Mass schedule. Try to allow at least two hours between the starting times of all Vigil and Sunday Masses. Look ahead to next year's Christmas and Holy Week schedule. What if only one priest is available? Can you accommodate one Triduum celebration, alternating Churches during the three days? As you know, some parishes are already doing this. Developing this new arrangement will be a challenge, for a variety of reasons. But it is a challenge I urge you to face. A greater sharing of church life in your **PARISH PARTNERSHIP** will require close cooperation for the sake of the renewed evangelization in southern Illinois. I encourage your Parish Partnership to continue your support for St. Ann Nashville Catholic elementary school so it will be viewed as a Regional Catholic School for your Partnership **Please continue to pray and work with me for Vocations to the Priesthood from your parishes.**

St. Mary, Mt. Vernon / St. Barbara, Scheller

Very Reverend John C. Iffert, V.F. / Reverend Dale A. Maxfield

St. Mary Parish and St. Barbara Parish, like several others in your Vicariate, have a mandate from me to develop a **STRATEGIC PASTORAL MODEL** for your **PARISH PARTNERSHIP** by which you will be able to be served by only one priest. Indeed, it is my intention to appoint Father Iffert, V.F., as Pastor of St. Barbara Parish, in accord with the **PASTORAL PLAN FOR PARISH RENEWAL AND RESTRUCTURING**. For this reason, I now ask you to outline in detail the way in which this arrangement would work for your parishes.

How can you facilitate even greater collaboration and a more profound sharing of church life and mission between the people of St. Mary Parish and St. Barbara Parish? I realize that this will be a challenge because each parish has a unique history and traditions. Nevertheless, this must be done. Please begin by studying which activities that now take place separately in each parish can be joined together, including all forms of religious education and sacramental formation. Perhaps a shared **PARISH PARTNERSHIP** bulletin? Experiment with joint meetings of your Parish Pastoral Councils and shared committee structures. Please review your Mass schedule. Try to allow at least two hours between the starting times of all Vigil and Sunday Masses. Look ahead to next year's Christmas and Holy Week schedule. What if only one priest is available? Can you accommodate one Triduum celebration, alternating Churches during the

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three days? As you know, some parishes are already doing this. Developing this new arrangement will be a challenge, for a variety of reasons. But it is a challenge I urge you to face. As you revisit your **STRATEGIC PASTORAL MODEL** with a focus on greater collaboration and unity, I invite you to consider seriously the possibility that in the future your two parishes might become one, even though that is not in your mandate.

Concerning St. Mary School, I strongly encourage everyone to continue the support of the school and efforts to increase enrollment and fundraising. **Please continue to pray and work with me for Vocations to the Priesthood from your parishes.**

As I conclude this Vicariate Letter, I would like to remind all of you of the importance of maintaining a spirit of prayer throughout this process. Please establish the practice of praying for the parish(es) that make up your **PARTNERSHIP**. Please keep in mind that the ultimate goal of **THE PASTORAL PLAN** is the renewal and rebuilding of Catholic life in our parishes. Allow me to mention again two very helpful books: The Story of a Catholic Parish Rebuilt: Awakening the Faithful, Reaching the Lost, Making Church Better, (Ava Maria Press 2013) by Father Michael White and Thomas Corcoran; and A Struggle for Holy Ground: Reconciliation and the Rites of Parish Closure (Liturgical Press, 2004), by Fr. Michael Weldon, O.F.M. Reading these books with a prayerful spirit and discussing them with one another will provide you with useful insights and practical suggestions.

Please remember that the responses to this Vicariate Letter by the **PARISH PARTNERSHIP** are due in the Vicar General's office by Monday, November 10, 2014.

Once again, I wish to express my appreciation to everyone who has been working with a seriousness of purpose and an open spirit to develop a truly useful and realistic **STRATEGIC PASTORAL MODEL** that will guide our communities of faith into the next twenty-five years of the history of this Local Church. The work before us is a time for renewal; the time for a new Pentecost in our day. Come O Holy Spirit and fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in us the fire of your Divine Love!

Prayerfully and appreciatively yours in Christ,



The Most Reverend Edward K. Braxton, Ph.D., S.T.D.
Bishop of Belleville

The Very Reverend John C. Iffert, V.F.
The North Central Vicariate