

CLUSTER PLAN

Assumption, St. Basil, St. Matthias, St. Michael Parishes

Preamble

Jesus said to them, "Go into the whole world and proclaim the gospel to every creature." Mark 16:15

The Clustering Planning and Coordination Team composed of parishioners from Assumption (Broadview Heights), St. Basil, St. Matthias and St. Michael parishes has been meeting for over a year now. In May of 2007, Bishop Richard G. Lennon offered five (5) challenges to our cluster which he asked us to address in this Cluster Plan. They were 1) to continue to explore collaborative possibilities to strengthen pastoral care in an equitable manner; 2) Strengthen evangelization and the social and community services that serve the surrounding neighborhoods; 3) Engage all of the faithful in regularly attending and participating in the Sunday Eucharistic Liturgy; 4) Continue to support Church in the City partnerships through cluster-cluster cooperation; 5) Continue to monitor enrollment trends and collaborate to insure the long term presence of strong, stable Catholic schools serving this area.

We are fortunate that in our cluster all four parishes are in good financial and spiritual shape. We are blessed with dedicated priests, deacons, religious sisters and lay ecclesial ministers. We have for some time already been exercising collaborative ministries through our ACE (Adult Catholic Education) program, Alpha, Summer Bible Camps; cluster Communal Penance Services in Advent and Lent.

The realities, however, warn us that we must be proactive in addressing the future realities. When we started this process over a year ago, there were nine priests ministering in our four parishes. By the time this Plan is implemented we will be down to seven priests in the four parishes. Only 29% of our registered parishioners are regularly attending Sunday Liturgies. The cost of Catholic education is placing a great burden on our resources. These realities and others need our creative attention now rather than later.

It is in this spirit that the Cluster Planning and Coordination Team has developed the following plan which is to be presented to the Bishop in October for his review. If approved/amended, we will spend the next several years implementing this Plan.

Let us continue to pray for our parishes, our Cluster and the whole Church as we strive to fulfill the command of the Lord found in Mark 16:15.

I. Parish Strengths and Weaknesses

The composite summaries for the South Hills Catholic Cluster listed several areas of vibrancy within the cluster. Areas of strength within the cluster at one or more parishes included Youth Ministry, R.C.I.A., Habitat for Humanity, Alpha, Small Christian Communities, Pre-Cana, Liturgical Ministries, Sacramental Preparation, Catholic Day School, Eucharistic Adoration, Ministry to homebound, and Bereavement. The cluster plan will include collaboration where needed in these areas to strengthen pastoral care across the cluster boundaries.

The cluster identified ministry to the un-churched and alienated as a weakness and has made collaboration in this area a priority. In addition, the cluster would also like to strengthen ministry to the already initiated. Collaboration in programs such as Catholics Coming Home, Alpha, Door to Door Evangelization, Bereavement, Social Concerns, and already existing church groups will be addressed in the cluster master plan for strengthening pastoral care.

Since each parish within the South Hills Catholic Cluster meets the diocesan guidelines for financial solvency, the cluster will focus on continuing to provide quality pastoral care without increasing expenses. The master plan will include areas where the cluster can reduce costs at the parish level through bulk purchases and sharing of "best business practices".

We will continue to build upon existing collaboration in our A.C.E. (adult catholic education), Alpha, Catholics Coming Home, Vacation Bible School, and Cluster Penance services. Finally, the cluster agreed to expand upon existing local and international outreach ministries by inviting all members of the cluster to participate in mission trips to countries such as Haiti and Honduras and assistance to local agencies such as the Brookside Center.

II. Key Realities and trends

The Cluster Planning and Coordination Team reviewed the following areas for planning to provide pastoral care within the cluster.

In general the demographic trends (age, race, income) of the South Hills Catholic Cluster remain unchanged although the cluster continues to grow in the number of registered households. The cluster contains a large number of households with children which will continue to require pastoral care in the areas of education (catholic day school and P.S.R.) and Sacramental Preparation.

A review of Sacramental statistics and staffing lead the team to recommend collaboration in several areas such as R.C.I.A., Marriage Preparation, and Baptismal Preparation for first time parents. In addition, the statistics of our cluster reveal the continued need to minister to the homebound, elderly and financially challenge in our area. The team has recommended the cluster continue to share ministry to organizations such as Habitat for Humanity, and area hunger centers.

The team has also recognized the need to continue to monitor the financial solvency of our cluster's catholic schools. The goal of the cluster is to provide a quality affordable catholic education for children within our cluster. The reality of an excellent public school system and high property taxes has affected enrollment in our cluster schools to some extent. The cluster has a team in place which is meeting on regular basis to ensure that our catholic school presence remains strong. This team is developing a detailed plan of what would trigger the need to merge and how it would be implemented.

Although each parish within our cluster is financially solvent, the C.P.C. team has appointed several members of each parish to begin to identify ways to save money through bulk /blanket purchases as a cluster.

The C.P.C. team has also identified evangelization and outreach as a targeted area for the cluster in the next several years. The reality of registered parishioners that do not attend or participate in weekly Mass or parish activities remains high. The team has identified specific areas of collaboration which will provide ongoing ministry to the alienated and un-churched in our area.

III. Proposed Cluster Plan

In May of 2007, Bishop Lennon offered five (5) challenges to our Cluster. After months of prayerful discussion and discernment, we have responded with this current proposed plan for our Cluster. We have taken the five challenges and broken them down into two focuses: Growth and Sustainability. We further delineated the challenges, based on the two foci into a number of proposed goals. Finally we have proposed certain Aims to attain each goal and answer each challenge.

CHALLENGE-→FOCI→GOALS→AIM→ACTION ITEMS

Challenge: "Continue to explore collaborative possibilities and strengthen pastoral care in an equitable manner."

Focus: Growth

Goal: Service

Aim: 1) Establish a Cluster Communication Team to Promote Catholic identity in the area: help members of the four parishes become acclimated to the cluster concept.

2) Continue to encourage, support and enhance current areas of collaboration (e.g. A.C.E., Catholics Coming Home, Summer Bible Camp, and Alpha)

Focus: Sustainability

Goal: Financial collaboration

Aim: 1) Compare fiscal year financials of each Cluster parish against the diocesan criteria which establishes a parish in "good standing" financially.

2) Analyze the possible collaboration on bulk purchases.

3) Analyze the possible collaboration on blanket service contracts.

Challenge: "Strengthen evangelization and the social and community services that serve the surrounding neighborhoods."

Focus: Growth

Goal: Evangelization

- Aim:
- 1) Provide for the Already Initiated
 - 2) Invite the participating but uninitiated into the Church
 - 3) Reach out to the alienated and unchurched.
 - 4) Coordinate current parish Evangelization programs.

Challenge: "Engage all of the faithful in regularly attending and participating in the Sunday Eucharistic Liturgy."

Focus: Growth

Goal: Evangelization

- Aim:
- 1) Reach out to Alienated and Unchurched.
 - 2) Invite young people/families to full and active participation in the Liturgical life of the Church.
 - 3) Coordinate current programs (such as Alpha, RCIA, and Catholics Coming Home) so as not to be duplicating efforts.

Focus: Growth

Goal: Welcoming

- Aim:
- Establish a Cluster Communication Team to Promote Catholic identity in the area: help members of the four parishes become acclimated to the cluster concept.

Challenge: "Continue to support Church in the City partnerships through cluster-cluster cooperation."

Focus: Growth

Goal: Service

- Aim:
- 1) Collaborate on projects that will further a Catholic presence in service and advocacy, locally, in the greater community and internationally.
 - 2) Provide volunteer opportunities to cluster members for existing international and outreach ministries.
 - 3) Provide for the needs of the greater community by establishing cluster partnerships with already existing parish relationships (e.g. Brookside Center; Thea Bowman Center; etc.)

Challenge: "Continue to monitor enrollment trends and collaborate to insure the long term presence of strong, stable Catholic schools serving this area."

Focus: Sustainability

Goal: Monitor Catholic education (day school and religious education)

- Aim:
- 1) Compile school demographics and comparative costs.
 - 2) Using the previously established school committee among the cluster parishes, continue to monitor enrollment trends in order to provide the opportunity for a good, affordable, Catholic education within our Cluster and community.

IV. Proposed Action Items and Time lines to accomplish the Cluster Plan

Evangelization Team

- Once this plan is approved/refined by the Bishop, the Cluster will form an Evangelization Team composed of members of each of the cluster parishes by the spring of 2009.
- During the summer of 2009 form a Cluster RCIA team to be trained during 2009-2010 by one of the Pastors. The group will then take over the responsibility of recruiting a catechizing Inquirers, Catechumens and Candidates from the four parishes in the future. The RCIA Rites, however, will continue to be celebrated in the respective parishes.
- The Evangelization Team will begin immediately evaluating all parish programs aimed at evangelization. It will encourage and assist current programs already collaborating among the parishes. It will recommend other programs which can be combined and/or begun in order to promote the goals and aims of the Cluster Plan.
- Because we view Evangelization as a major priority, the Team will be asked to study and explore the need and/or feasibility of hiring a Cluster Evangelization Minister to coordinate all evangelization programs in the Cluster. The Team will be asked to make a proposal to the four Pastors and the respective Pastoral/Finance Councils by the summer of 2010.

Catholic Education Team

- The Pastors and Principals from Assumption, St. Basil and St. Michael have been meeting on a regular basis for a few years prior to the Bishop's letter of May 2007.
- St. Matthias is willing to join in the ongoing discussions of this group.
- This group has indicated a willingness to spend the time between now and the summer fall of 2010 working with the diocesan Education Office doing an in-depth study of the current schools and their sustainability in the future.
- This group will formulate any necessary future plans, in consultation with the diocese, after the study is complete.
- The Pastors and the Cluster Leadership Committee will spend the 2008-2009 school year evaluating the current religious education programs we offer for public school children.
- Following the study the DREs of the four parish will make recommendations to the Pastors and appropriate parish commissions in the Fall of 2010, based on their findings and the directives of the Diocese, as to how best provide for the religious education of public school children (e.g. each parish run their own programs, combine programs, etc)

Cluster Finance Team

- This group has already been formed and has been functioning for several months. They are actively working on implementing the aims mentioned in the above Cluster Plan.

Cluster Communication Team

- This group will be formed immediately.
- It will be the liaison for the Cluster to each of the Cluster Parishes.
- It will provide material for parish bulletins ("Cluster Corner") and newsletters
- Plan a Kick-Off Cluster picnic for the summer of 2009. Provide for other social events for the people of the Cluster.
- Bring the awareness of Cluster plans and progress to the parishes and wider community through media releases.
- Once the Plan has been approved by the Bishop, provide a brochure for the members of the Cluster parishes describing what the Cluster is about and what it is doing.

V. Summary of the consultation that was done with parish leaders and parishioners in developing the proposed cluster plan

Four the two years before the formation of the Cluster Teams, the Pastors of the four parishes of our Cluster met several times a year in a collaborative manner. Realizing the realities of fewer priests to minister, they began by strongly endorsing a new adult educational program for the area called ACE; decided that instead of each parish holding Advent Penance Services and other collaborative initiatives.

At the formation of the Cluster Team, each Pastor presented the Bishop's letter of May 2007 to their people at Sunday Liturgies. A column was designed for each parish's bulletin called "Cluster Corner" which is designed to keep the people of the parishes up to date on the work of the Cluster Team.

In February of 2008, the four Pastors "exchanged pulpits" to introduce themselves to the other parishes and assure the people that we were not closing or merging our parishes. Rather we were developing a Pastoral Plan which would strengthen the collaboration of our parishioners.

Finally in August of 2008, the draft of the Cluster Plan was approved by the Team and made available to the four parishes in hard copy and on each respective website. On Thursday, October 2, 2008 the parishioners of the four parishes were invited to a town hall style meeting at St. Matthias to explain in detail the Plan and invite the thoughts and opinion and questions of the people of the Cluster.

Having prayerfully reflected and discussed the issues presented to us by the diocese, we, the Pastors, Parochial Vicar, Staffs and people of Assumption, St. Basil, St. Matthias and St. Michael parishes respectfully submit this Cluster Plan to our Bishop.