

Tompkins Planning Group
“Covenanting Council”
Pastoral Planning, Phase II, October 2002 – June 2005
Questions and Answers Relative to the Pastoral Plan

- 1. What are the origin and significance of the “diocesan constraints”?**
The diocesan constraints served as the Covenanting Council’s primary ground rules for the planning process. They are the same for all 36 planning groups in the diocese. Constraints #1 and #5 are part of the universal law of the Catholic Church. The others reflect Bishop Clark’s concern for balancing the needs of parishioners and priests. The Bishop will not approve any plan that violates any of the constraints unless a strong case for granting an exception is presented.
- 2. Doesn’t Diocesan Constraint #4 conflict with Regional Tenet #1?**
Constraint #4 states that “A cluster of two or three parishes with a single pastor is not the norm in canon law. Typically the cluster should be moving toward becoming a single canonical parish.” Regional Tenet #1 states that “Based on number of parishioners, Mass attendance, size and condition of facilities and financial solvency, each of the Tompkins County faith communities is a viable entity and should be sustained.” Constraint #4 represents a long-term guideline while Tenet #1 is an evaluation of the current condition of the faith communities. The fact that the Covenanting Council believes that each of the seven faith communities is currently a viable entity does not mean that two or more faith communities should not or will not move toward becoming a single canonical parish, with multiple worship sites, in the future.
- 3a. Why is it necessary for clustered parishes to consolidate?**
A priest/pastor is responsible for a broad range of administrative, non-sacramental duties. Attendance at pastoral council and committee meetings, liturgical planning, supervision of staff, financial oversight, etc., all require the attention and involvement of the priest/pastor. When a priest is assigned to pastor more than one parish, these non-sacramental duties – and the time they require – increase proportionately. Coordinating and scheduling these activities for two or more faith communities is an additional time-consuming responsibility. By consolidating parishes served by the same priest, the priest/pastor’s non-sacramental duties become more manageable. There are no plans to close any of our churches; rather, consolidating parishes is one way to reduce the administrative workload of priest/pastors and ensure that they can spend the time needed to minister directly with parishioners.
- 3b. How will the consolidation of clustered parishes be accomplished?**
Our faith communities have begun this discussion and will be guided by both our local traditions and concerns as well as by models already in use in our diocese. The Covenanting Council will be responsible for developing a process and projected timeline for moving toward the necessary mergers and consolidations once Bishop Clark approves our pastoral plan. These may be quite different for All Saints/St. Catherine and Holy Cross/St. Anthony based on the needs and circumstances of each of the communities involved. Clustered parishes need to work together, and become familiar with each other’s programs and customs in order for a spirit of trust to evolve. When the pastor, staff and parishioners of clustered parishes determine that the necessary level of trust and cooperation exists and the time is appropriate, the process of consolidating clustered

parishes can begin. The Covenanting Council will provide regular communications to all Tompkins region faith communities as this process moves forward.

4. What is the rationale for one priest to serve Holy Cross/St. Anthony and Ithaca College?

With one priest assigned to Cornell and one diocesan priest serving Immaculate Conception, the other two diocesan priests have to serve the remaining five faith communities (All Saints, Holy Cross, Ithaca College, St. Anthony and St. Catherine). Saint Catherine is more than twice the size of any of the other 4 communities. In order to balance workloads most equitably, the priest serving St. Catherine should be paired with one of the other communities and the other diocesan priest should serve the remaining three small communities. In view of the relatively short distance between St. Catherine and All Saints and since All Saints and St. Catherine previously shared a priest this pairing seems logical. Holy Cross and St. Anthony have shared a priest for the past 5 years and this arrangement has worked well. Since Ithaca College offers Mass on Sunday afternoon and evening, the priest serving Holy Cross and St. Anthony can celebrate Sunday morning Mass at each parish and either the afternoon or evening Mass at Ithaca College. This priest, though, has a difficult workload serving as priest chaplain at Ithaca College while serving at two parishes. We simply saw no better alternative, given the number of priests that can be assigned to the Tompkins region over the next ten years.

5. Why is it necessary to eliminate Masses? Where Masses are being eliminated why is the Saturday Mass the one to be eliminated?

The number of Masses needs to be reduced because we will have one fewer priest assigned to the Tompkins region over the next ten years. These changes are happening all over our Diocese as well as in neighboring dioceses. No change in Mass schedules is planned for Cornell, Immaculate Conception and Ithaca College. To be in accord with universal church law (priests may celebrate no more than 3 Masses of Sunday obligation per weekend), it will be necessary to celebrate one fewer Mass at All Saints, Holy Cross, St. Anthony and St. Catherine. In most cases it is the Saturday Mass at each location that has the least attendance. In addition, each parish faith community offers religious education on Sunday morning either before or after Sunday Mass. It seems that to eliminate Sunday Mass at any location would disrupt the largest number of parishioners and would jeopardize the viability of the religious education program. (Remember, if extern priests are available it may be possible to maintain more Masses.)

6. How can we recruit externs and how will they be used?

In the past, extern priests attending Cornell have been willing to provide pastoral assistance to faith communities in the region in return for room, board and a small stipend. Although there is a high probability that this will continue, the Covenanting Council is exploring ways to actively recruit externs. The recruitment of non-student externs will require a significant financial commitment, diocesan endorsement and compliance with U.S. Immigration regulations. The first priority in using available externs is the reinstatement of weekend Masses that have been eliminated. Externs can also assist in celebrating additional weekday Masses and provide other sacramental and pastoral assistance.

7. Why does Cornell get a full-time priest while Ithaca College doesn't?

The diocesan "Campus Ministry Guidelines" categorize campuses on the basis of size, complexity and number of Catholic students participating in campus ministry. Due to the

complexity of the Director Chaplain role at “tier one” schools, such as Cornell, and the specialized skills needed for such a position, a full-time priest will be recruited. While the position of Director Chaplain is open to priests from within the diocese, it is also highly likely that a priest would come from outside the diocese. Having been recruited solely for campus ministry, it will not be part of his job description to assist in area parishes. However, once here, he may agree to requests to assist in other parishes. On the other hand, Ithaca College is in the mid-range size and complexity category, to be assigned a lay director of Campus Ministry and a diocesan priest as part-time chaplain. This priest will celebrate at least one Sunday and Holy Day Mass on campus. Smaller campuses such as Tompkins Cortland Community College are to be served as an outreach of the local parish and/or the area planning group.

8. How can we better utilize deacons?

With increased administrative and pastoral pressures being placed on our limited number of priests, deacons are extremely valuable in providing pastoral care, service and administering the sacraments of baptism and marriage. Bishop Clark has suggested that the pastoral plan for the Tompkins region explore ways to recruit additional men for the diaconate formation program. However, since deacons may not celebrate Mass, they are unable to help alleviate the reduction in Masses caused by a decreasing number of priests.

9. Can parishes afford the plan including the staffing implications?

The plan does not call for a significant increase in expense by any of the seven faith communities. Increased costs related to increased staffing should be nearly offset by the savings resulting from the elimination of one priest position in the region.

10. What are the anticipated attendance/financial ramifications of having only one Saturday Mass in the region?

Based on past experience, when Masses are eliminated, attendance declines and contributions will decline proportionately. Individual faith communities will need to encourage their parishioners to use envelopes, especially when attending Mass at a worship site other than their own. (As stated previously, hopefully externs will be available so that additional Saturday Masses can be celebrated.) The Covenanting Council has included a special request in the pastoral plan that the Bishop grant an exception to the constraint that no priest may preside at more than three Masses of Sunday obligation per weekend.

11. What is the “back-up plan” that allows for priests’ vacations and sickness?

Visiting and nearby priests often cover for priests taking vacation. Longer-term coverage is normally arranged through the diocese as the need arises. If a priest is suddenly taken ill over a weekend and a substitute is not available, each parish has one or more persons authorized to lead a “Sunday celebration in the absence of a priest”.

12. What opportunities will there be for parishioner and pastoral council feedback relative to the plan?

The planning process began in October 2002. After each meeting of the Covenanting Council an update was published in each faith community’s Sunday Bulletin and a verbal report was made to each pastoral council. After the preliminary plan and this question and answer document have been distributed to all parishioners, each community will host one or more listening sessions. Parishioner feedback will be sent to each pastoral council and forwarded to the Covenanting Council. Based on feedback received, the plan will be revised and returned to the seven pastoral councils. Revisions will be published in

Sunday bulletins for additional parishioner feedback. A joint meeting of the Covenanting Council and all pastoral councils will be held in December 2004 to either affirm and endorse the final plan or make additional revisions if deemed necessary.

13. When will the non-Mass components of the plan be addressed?

The Covenanting Council recognizes that there are issues relative to each faith community (scheduling of local staff, religious education programs, music ministries etc.) that need to be resolved locally and will not be included in the pastoral plan. Following adoption of the plan, the Covenanting Council will begin the ministry phase of the planning process which will insure that pastoral workloads are balanced and all the ministerial needs of the region are addressed and fulfilled. During this phase the Council will also explore the emerging role of local campuses in relation to parishes and ways to recruit additional men to apply for admission to the diaconate formation program. The Council will also develop a plan to ensure catechist formation and certification in each faith community and ways to create an integrated approach to young adult ministry and campus ministry.

14. When will the plan be implemented?

After the pastoral councils of all seven faith communities have approved the plan it will be sent to Bishop Clark for his approval. This is anticipated to occur in January 2005. We expect that the plan will be implemented in July 2005.

15. How do we create a stronger sense of community across parish boundaries?

We can keep building on the foundation of collaborative activities and ministries we have developed over the past several years. The youth of our parishes have gotten together for retreats and other special events. Our communities share pre-Cana, parts of the RCIA process and the celebration of Confirmation. The Tompkins Planning Program Committee, including staff representatives from each of the seven faith communities, meets regularly to share information for bulletins and develop new opportunities. They have coordinated gatherings for all staff and two regional retreats, led by Franciscan friars in 2000 and 2001. In 2004 – 2005, the program committee introduced the SCHOLA program for adult faith formation, which will continue this coming year. A different faith community hosted this series of speakers/seminars each month. Each of the first six seminars attracted between 60 and 90 attendees from throughout the region. In addition to its tremendous educational and spiritual value, the program has resulted in the development of inter-parish friendships and familiarity with neighboring faith communities and their facilities. The SCHOLA program can serve as a blueprint for future shared programs in helping develop a sense of regional community and broaden the opportunities available to our parishioners.

16. How do we strengthen our faith communities in the long term?

Strength comes from within. The commitment and willingness of individual parishioners to volunteer and get involved; the vitality of the various committees within the faith community, the fostering of a climate of congeniality by the pastor and pastoral council, a welcoming attitude... all contribute to a strong and vibrant faith community. Despite changing demographics, a declining number of priests, and other challenges facing us, we have the ability to build vibrant faith communities.