

RELEASE

CONTACT:

**Catholic Communications Office
Vince LaBarbera, director
260-744-0012**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

April 29, 2009

**Future of Parishes
Diocese of Fort Wayne–South Bend
*Bishop John M. D’Arcy
April 21, 2009***

One of the central responsibilities of a bishop is to see that the Eucharist is provided for his people. In support of this responsibility and of other matters central to the life of the Church, he must seek to provide sufficient priests for the people of that diocese, which the Lord through the Church has placed in his hands. As part of this responsibility the bishop, along with others - especially his priests, must seek to find and implement ways to draw young men to consider the priesthood and not be afraid to offer themselves to this beautiful, but demanding vocation. Working with others, he must try to forge a spirit of courage among young people so they will be willing to take this path of love and service in response to the love of Christ.

Recent circumstances have made it necessary and opportune to seek priests from other countries who may be able to assist on either a temporary or permanent basis, so each parish may have the dynamic presence of priests to care for the flock in the name of Christ.

Such efforts, because of the prayers of many and the grace of the providential God, who promised always to be with His Church, have proven to be effective. Thus, in the

last 23 years, 20 young men have been ordained to the priesthood and continue to serve in parishes, and also six priests who have come from other countries have been incardinated into the Diocese, meaning that they have promised to be part of the priestly work of this Diocese throughout their lives. Approximately 100 others from overseas have spent a period of time serving here.

Also, at this writing, 14 young men are in the seminary preparing for the priesthood for this diocese. Two more have been accepted for the seminary for next year, and several more are in the application process.

The present pastoral situation causes another question to arise.

Are priests presently distributed, or placed, in such a way that people are being properly served, and is the joyful work of pastoral care properly assigned so that no priest's responsibility becomes excessive?

A quick glance at the statistics in the diocese certainly raises pastoral concerns about both of these questions.

There are parishes where the average number of baptisms per year for the past five-year period is five or less, and these parishes have one priest. There are other parishes where the average number of baptisms per year for the past five years is 80. These parishes also have one priest. There are parishes where there are over 200 baptisms a year, and these parishes have just two priests.

BAPTISMS

Baptisms are a significant factor in weighing the situation. Baptisms require substantial work of preparation, instruction of parents, follow-up religious instruction, the eventual preparation for First Holy Communion and Confirmation. When there are a

significant number of baptisms, there must be the training of catechists, teachers who will instruct both parents and children. The priest, who is the chief catechist in the parish, cannot be distant from this work; but must be in the midst of it, tending the flock and training others to teach.

THE SACRAMENT OF MARRIAGE

The bishop and his advisors must also watch closely the number of marriages in a parish. This sacrament requires great discernment and preparation both remote and approximate. While the diocese plays its role through the Family Life Office, preparation for marriage is a significant parish responsibility. The responsibility has grown in complexity, because there are many movements in the contemporary culture; such as same sex marriage, wide-spread contraception, couples living together before marriage and lack of respect for life, which affect young people. The priest must be able to clarify and present clearly to the young couple a sound teaching, so that they will follow the teaching of the Church, and cherish it, and pass it on to their children. He must choose and train married couples to help him. There are parishes that have two or three marriages a year, and other parishes that have 60 or 70 marriages per year. In both cases, there is one priest.

It would be a superficial pastoral analysis if this matter is considered only on the basis of the distribution of work. The full flowering of the spiritual life of families depends on proper distribution of priests. (Indeed, proper preparation of people for marriage will affect family life for several generations.)

There are two additional reasons why it is necessary to face this difficult pastoral situation at this time.

1. The coming of a new bishop. I have been bishop here for 24 years, and treasure every day while I hold this great responsibility. It is incumbent upon me, especially given my knowledge of the diocese, to face what must be done, by at least initiating those changes that need to be made for the better pastoral care of our people, and not leave such difficult decisions to the new bishop. The adjustment faced by a new bishop is difficult enough without having to address the merging or closing of parishes.
2. There is a second reason for facing the necessity of parish mergers at this time. Of our 80 parishes, eleven are currently under the pastoral care of priests from other countries who are not incardinated in this diocese. Incardination is a term in canon law, meaning that a priest is linked permanently to the pastoral service of a diocese. Since these priests are not permanently bound here, they can return to their home diocese or their religious congregation, if they so choose. This presents a second reason why planning and decision making cannot be postponed.

In fairness to the next bishop, in order to make choices rooted in my 24 years of experience, keeping in mind the number of priests serving here but not committed to a life of pastoral service among us, after consultation with priests, and in preparation for further consultation among the laity, I now present to the faithful of the diocese the decisions, that I have made relative to the future of our parishes, and also the changes which must be made in both the near and more distant future.

I have made these decisions after extensive consultation with our priests. Over a year ago, I formed a committee of priests who met several times over many months, and

presented to me a plan for merging and joining parishes, so that our people might be better served.

Wisely, they suggested that not all of these should be made at once, but should be presented, so that there could be further consultation and prayer.

I have made these decisions after much reflection; and as is my responsibility, I have made them after prayer and in the presence of Christ our savior, who is the supreme shepherd of our souls. The following two facts should be clear.

- Some of these changes need not be made at this time.
- There will be a consultation in each parish, presided over by the vicar forane, or dean of the area, where the parish is located.

SOME HISTORY

There were 89 parishes when I was installed as bishop. One new parish, Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton, has been established, bringing the number to 90 at the highest point. Over 24 years, ten have been merged or suspended, leaving 80 parishes in the diocese at this time.

ST. MARY PARISH, GENEVA

Founded in 1883, this parish has 82 families, and it has had 19 baptisms, and no marriages over the five years of our study. I know it well, and have been there many times. As with all the parishes under consideration, it is precious to those who live there. Many are farmers. Currently, there is one candidate from that parish studying for the priesthood. Over the five-year period from 2003 through 2007, there was an average of 4.5 baptisms per year.

Recommendation of Priests' Committee: That it be joined to the nearest parish in the diocese, which is St. Mary, Decatur.

Decision at this time: This recommendation has been accepted for further discussion. However, the parish will remain with a resident priest, as long as Fr. Bosco Perera, OMI, a native of Sri Lanka, is able to remain with us. After that, it will be joined to St. Mary Parish, Decatur. Because of its many years, efforts will be made to see that Mass is celebrated there at least once a month. A special difficulty is that St. Mary's nearest parish in the diocese is 26 miles to the North.

ST. CATHERINE, NIX SETTLEMENT

This parish was founded in 1850, prior to the establishment of the Fort Wayne Diocese. In recent decades it has been cared for by the pastor of St. Joseph Parish, Roanoke.

In the five years under consideration, this parish had 14 baptisms - an average of 2.4 per year, and one marriage.

Recommendation: That this parish be taken care of by the pastor of St. Paul of the Cross Parish, Columbia City, which is closer, and should remain a site for one Mass each Sunday by the pastor of Columbia City.

Response: This recommendation has been accepted and further consultation will follow.

ST. FRANCIS XAVIER PARISH, PIERCETON

Founded in 1864. This parish has for many years been under the pastoral care of a part-time priest. In recent years, there has been the judicial vicar, whose full time ministry is the direction of the Diocesan Tribunal. In the past five years, there have been

17 baptisms, an average of 4.1 per year. There have been four marriages, which is less than one per year.

Recommendation: It is recommended that this parish be merged with Sacred Heart Parish, Warsaw - where there is a school and a church - and where both church and school have recently been enlarged.

Response: This recommendation has been accepted pending further consultation in the parish and by the Presbyteral Council. As long as present personnel allows, the judicial vicar will remain as pastor, but it is likely that the placing of St. Francis under Sacred Heart, Warsaw, will be necessary in the near future.

ST. JOSEPH PARISH, ROANOKE, AND THE PARISHES IN HUNTINGTON, STS. PETER AND PAUL, AND ST. MARY

The two Huntington parishes are historic. St. Mary's, founded in 1896, had as its pastor the legendary Archbishop Noll. Our Sunday Visitor began during his pastorate, and Huntington remains the location of OSV, the largest Catholic publishing company in the country. Sts. Peter and Paul established in 1843 has been under the pastoral care of Capuchin Franciscan priests in recent decades. However, there is no assurance that they will replace Fr. Ronald Rieder, OFM, Cap, when he retires, and they have indicated that they probably will not. These two parish churches are a few steps away, almost literally across the street from each other. So these two parishes, along with St. Joseph, Roanoke, require special pastoral analysis. St. Mary had an average of 31.2 baptisms per year, Sts. Peter and Paul an average of 42.3 baptisms over the five-year period under examination. St. Mary had 56 marriages - or 11.1 per year, and Sts. Peter and Paul averaged 10.2 marriages per year.

St. Joseph, Roanoke, established in 1867, is several miles from the two Huntington churches. Roanoke had 19 baptisms in the five-year period, an average of 3.4 per year. There were four marriages during that time, less than one per year.

Recommendation: One priest should be assigned as pastor for St. Mary Parish and Sts. Peter and Paul Parish, and he should have an associate pastor with him. St. Joseph, Roanoke, should be merged with the Huntington parishes; and as long as there are two priests in Huntington, one Mass can be celebrated each Sunday at Roanoke. This would release one priest for pastoral ministry elsewhere.

Response: While Fr. Rieder, our Capuchin priest, remains at Sts. Peter and Paul, the present situation can be left as it is. When the Capuchins are no longer able to provide a priest for Sts. Peter and Paul, this recommendation is accepted, pending consultation with the parishes concerned, and if necessary, with the Presbyteral Council. (In further consultation, the pastor of St. Mary recommended consideration of a pastor for each of the parishes, rather than a merging of the two parishes.)

ST. JOSEPH, GARRETT

Recommendation: Merge St. Joseph, Garrett, with Immaculate Conception, Auburn, under one priest. At least one weekly Mass would be mandated at St. Joseph, Garrett.

Many children from Immaculate Conception, Auburn, already are enrolled at St. Joseph School, Garrett.

Response: This recommendation is not accepted at this time, but may need to be considered later. Recent efforts to strengthen St. Joseph, Garrett, especially from a fiscal point of view, have been successful.

ST. MARY, FORT WAYNE

The grand history of this parish is well-known. Established in 1848, nine years before the establishment of the Diocese of Fort Wayne, this parish has won the respect of the wider community in recent decades for its ministry to those in need, especially the Soup Kitchen, the granting of scholarships to Catholic Schools for African-American children and others, the foundation of the Matthew 25 Clinic for those without health insurance and Vincent Village for homeless families.

Recommendation: That it be joined to the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception, which is only two blocks away. Also, it is recommended that there continue to be a Mass each Sunday at St. Mary, which indeed, is the present situation at that parish. Presently, St. Mary is under the pastor of St. Peter Church.

Response: Because of the close distance of St. Mary and the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception, this recommendation has been accepted, pending further consultation with the parish and the Presbyteral Council.

ST. HENRY PARISH, FORT WAYNE

For the five years under consideration, St. Henry's Parish has had 11 baptisms, an average of 2.1 per year.

For many years, the pastor of Saint Henry's Parish has also been pastor of the nearby Sacred Heart Parish.

Recommendation: Let the pastor of St. Peter's Parish in Fort Wayne also have responsibility for St. Henry's Parish.

Response: This recommendation is accepted pending further consultation with the pastor in question, and the faithful, and also the Presbyteral Council.

SACRED HEART PARISH, FORT WAYNE

During the five-year period under discussion, there have been 26 baptisms at Sacred Heart, an average of 5.1 per year.

For many years, the Latin Mass, now referred to as the Extraordinary Form of the Roman Liturgy of the Roman Rite, has been celebrated at this parish. Thus, this parish now houses the St. Mother Theodore Guerin Community, directed by Fr. George Gabet, FSSP.

Recommendation: That this parish be granted to the Priestly Fraternity of St. Peter, of which Fr. Gabet, FSSP, is a member, and that they follow the Extraordinary Form of the Roman Liturgy.

I have spoken about this with Fr. Gabet, FSSP, and I am certainly open to this possibility. Mass in the Extraordinary Form is now celebrated daily, as well as Sunday, at Sacred Heart Parish.

Response: I have accepted this recommendation, pending further consultation with the parish and the Fraternity of St. Peter.

ST. GASPER DEL BUFALO PARISH, ROME CITY, AND ST. JOSEPH, LAGRANGE

St. Gasper, Rome City, has just celebrated its Golden Jubilee. Until last year, it was from its founding under the pastoral care of the Precious Blood Missionaries, who withdrew in July, 2008.

St. Joseph, LaGrange, founded in 1933, has been under the pastoral care of the Conventual Franciscan Fathers, who care also for two other parishes.

Recommendation: That one pastor care for both parishes. Since LaGrange is under the pastoral supervision of the Conventual Franciscans, this recommendation cannot be accepted without further consultation with that congregation.

St. Gasper Del Bufalo, Rome City, is presently under the pastoral care of Fr. Bernard Ramanaden, OSB, a native of Sri Lanka.

Response: This recommendation is sound, but will be put on hold for now, as long as Fr. Ramanaden has the approval from his superiors to remain, and the Franciscans continue to be able to care for LaGrange. But as circumstances change, this may have to be considered later.

IMMACULATE CONCEPTION, KENDALLVILLE, AND ST. MARY OF THE ASSUMPTION, AVILLA

St. Mary of the Assumption, Avilla, established in 1853, is one of the oldest parishes in the diocese. It includes an excellent school of 168 students, and at one time was the only parish between Fort Wayne and Elkhart. It is blessed, also, with the Franciscan Sisters of Frankfort, Illinois. St. Mary, Avilla, averages 15 baptisms and 8 marriages per year. Immaculate Conception averages 12 baptisms and 2-3 marriages per year.

Recommendation: That these parishes be merged, with the priests residing at Avilla, and offering one or two Masses a week at Immaculate Conception, Kendallville.

Response: This recommendation is placed on hold for now. When we are no longer able to keep a priest in each parish, this recommendation will have to be seriously considered.

ST. LOUIS, BESANCON

This parish had 67 baptisms in the five-year period, an average of 13.2 per year, and 29 marriages – an average of 5.4 per year. St. Louis, Besancon, was established in 1846, and has had a strong school for a long time.

Recommendation: That the parish be merged with St. John, New Haven, which is three miles distant.

Response: At present, we are able to have a priest at this parish. This recommendation is put on hold for now, but will need serious consideration in the years ahead. If it is merged with St. John, New Haven, Mass should be continued to be celebrated at St. Louis, Besancon, at least once a month.

ST. ROSE, MONROEVILLE

Established in 1868, this parish has 76 baptisms over a five-year period, an average of 15.1 per year. For many years, St. Rose, Monroeville, and St. Louis, Besancon, have been under the care of one pastor.

Recommendation: That this parish be under the care of the pastor of St. Joseph-Hessen Cassel.

Response: While such a recommendation will be considered, this does not release an extra priest for service in a larger parish. Another possibility remains; namely, keeping the parish in Besancon and the parish in Monroeville under one pastor.

Consolidation of the Monroeville school with Saint Joseph–Hessen Cassel, or with the parish school at Besancon, which to some extent has taken place, will continue to be evaluated.

South Bend Area

ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST, SOUTH BEND

St. John the Baptist, South Bend, has had 73 baptisms over the five-year period, an average of 14.5 per year. There have been 14 marriages, an average of 2.4 per year.

Recommendations: Consideration should be given to merging St. John the Baptist, South Bend, with Corpus Christi Parish, South Bend, or Holy Cross Parish, South Bend. It is recommended that this not be an immediate action, because a decision should be made as to whether or not the school should be merged with another school. Efforts to continue and strengthen this school are ongoing.

Response: This will be considered after further consultation with the parish, and the Presbyteral Council, and the diocesan Schools Office.

ST. HEDWIG AND ST. PATRICK PARISHES, AND ST. CASIMIR PARISH, SOUTH BEND

Recommendation: That St. Casimir Parish be closed, and overflow activities from St. Adalbert could be handled by St. Hedwig Parish. The priests at St. Adalbert should be asked to administer St. Adalbert and St. Hedwig with the closing of St. Casimir.

Response: This would have to be discussed with the Congregation of Holy Cross; who have staffed St. Casimir for many years and St. Adalbert more recently.

St. Casimir recently made some painful choices to reduce their budget, and it remains a spirited parish.

The present situation, with St. Patrick and St. Hedwig administered by one pastor, seems better at this time; because of the close proximity of the two churches. Both churches have been recently restored, and are greatly cherished.

OUR LADY OF HUNGARY PARISH, SOUTH BEND

Established in 1921, this parish has been the spiritual home for many, including immigrants from Hungary. It has a school, which has been especially helpful to the children of low-income families.

Our Lady of Hungary has had 36 baptisms over the five-year period, an average of 7.1 per year. There have been 14 marriages over this time, an average of 2.4 per year.

Recommendation: That Our Lady of Hungary Parish be administered by St. Matthew Cathedral Parish. Thus, the pastor and priests at St. Matthew's would care for both St. Matthew and Our Lady of Hungary Parish. This recommendation also was that the parish school of Our Lady of Hungary be merged with the parish school of St. Matthew. Efforts are now being made to strengthen Our Lady of Hungary School, because of its record of reaching those in need. Either with St. Matthew, or as a school in itself, the focus of Our Lady of Hungary School on behalf of families in need will be continued.

A serious concern at Our Lady of Hungary is the financial cost to the diocese of keeping this school. This has cost the diocese \$150,000 over the past year, and \$300,000 over three years.

Response: This recommendation is accepted pending further discussion with the parish and the Presbyteral Council. If this merger is completed, efforts will be made to have one Mass each Sunday at Our Lady of Hungary. Every effort is being made at this time to strengthen the school at Our Lady of Hungary, which serves those of lower incomes.

ST. PATRICK, WALKERTON

Founded in 1856, this parish had 62 baptisms over the five-year period, with an average of 12.2 per year. There were 16 marriages – an average of 3.1 per year.

Recommendation: Because of its geographic location and its isolation from any nearby Catholic churches in our diocese, St. Patrick, Walkerton, would remain a parish, but consideration should be given to building a larger church, which would allow pastors to offer less than the present three Masses each Sunday, along with one on Saturday for the Parish Community.

Response: This recommendation has been accepted, and the pastor and parish will be encouraged to consider the building of a new parish church.

Mishawaka

There are three parishes in downtown Mishawaka: St. Monica, St. Joseph and St. Bavo. All parishes are of similar size.

Recommendation: It may be possible in the future to assign two priests with pastoral care for all three parishes. This could be a pastoral team, or it could be a pastor and associate.

Response: This recommendation is accepted pending further consultation with the parishes and the Presbyteral Council.

Conversations have already begun between four pastors for the merging of the three schools into one school with two locations. This will not be done for the next academic year, but will be seriously considered for the following year.

Such a school merger can assure us of an even stronger Catholic school in Mishawaka. The three parishes, for years, have combined athletic programs and for other student endeavors.

Fort Wayne Area

ST. JOHN BOSCO, CHURUBUSCO, AND IMMACULATE CONCEPTION, EGE

Some years ago, after consultation with the pastor and parishioners of Saint Vincent's Parish, the diocese purchased extensive land in Huntertown, with the possibility of a new parish and school there. There had been two surveys of parishioners at St. Vincent's, one conducted informally by the parish, and another conducted about 10 years ago by an outside firm. St. Vincent's has 768 baptisms over the five-year period -- an average of 153 per year, and an average of 63 marriages per year.

Recommendation: That if a new parish is established in Huntertown, St. John Bosco, Churubusco, and Immaculate Conception, Ege, should be merged into the new parish.

Response: A new parish, if possible with a school, should be considered with a church built on the land in Huntertown, which is adjacent to Cedar Canyon Road.

However, the present economic climate indicates that while this consideration should now begin, the fund raising for a new church should wait until the economy is stabilized.

Also, we must consider the effect on parish schools to the north, such as Garrett and Avilla.

Immaculate Conception, Ege, should continue to have a Mass at least once a month in light of its long history and unique location.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

These changes would release four, and possibly five, diocesan priests for other assignments, either as pastors or associate pastors. It would ease the necessity of appointing as pastors, priests who were ordained only a few years.

It would also release four or five of the non-incardinated priests for other parishes, if their superiors allow them to remain.

I remain grateful for all who have helped consider these important refinements to our pastoral life. It is imperative that these considerations for the proper pastoral care of our diocese move ahead shortly. Some should move towards implementation in the near future, others within a few years.

###