

December 5, 2009

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

In today's second reading to Phillipians, St. Paul, the patron of our diocese, writes, "I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work in you will continue to complete it until the day of Christ Jesus." As Bishop of the Diocese of Worcester, I find these words an inspiration for our pastoral planning that has been taking place in the Diocese of Worcester for more than five years and has involved hundreds of parishioners around our diocese. Essential to this process has been the task of reflecting on the mission of the Catholic Church in Worcester County and on how well our parishes are addressing that mission.

In the town of Clinton specifically and its neighboring communities of Cluster 11, the discussion has been focused on whether Clinton needs three parishes today and in the future, as it did in its long and proud history. Discussions on how to merge Our Lady of the Rosary and Our Lady of Jasna Gora parishes into one were focused on the immediate pastoral needs of these communities, but risked not focusing on long term viability based on the total needs for Clinton in the future. In my pastoral concern for these two parishes, I did not want to merge them today with the distinct probability of having to ask them to merge again in a matter of a few years. The more that discussion ensued, the more many came to realize that the solution for Clinton's long range mission was to have one new, strong, vibrant parish to serve today's diverse community.

On the recommendation of the Diocesan Pastoral Planning Committee, I have decided to announce to you today that there will be one new parish formed in Clinton beginning on July 1, 2010. The individual parishes of St. John the Evangelist, Our Lady of Jasna Gora and Our Lady of the Rosary will be combined into one new parish operating from St. John the Evangelist's parish facilities. All assets and liabilities of the three parishes will be assumed in the new parish, including parish records.

I recognize that this is a difficult announcement to hear, yet I believe that the present and future pastoral needs of the Catholic community needs such a transition in order to be properly staffed and to focus all its resources in addressing the needs of tomorrow while not forgetting the significant contributions made in the past. This single parish will have a new name and will incorporate ministries and devotional traditions that will serve the needs of all its parishioners. Our pastoral mission as the Roman Catholic Church is one of inclusion and hope for the future, not an emphasis on differences from the past. In order to make this pastorally-sensitive transition possible, I have asked Fr. Borkowski and Fr. Walsh to form from all three current parishes a transition-team of parish leaders that will identify how this transition can be effectively accomplished. Members of the Diocesan Pastoral Planning Committee will be available to assist the work of this transition team.

While it is my fervent hope that all can work together in establishing this new, vibrant parish community, I realize that some parishioners will choose to join other parishes, particularly in Cluster 11. As such, I ask that St. Joseph the Good Provider Parish in Berlin and Immaculate Conception Parish in Lancaster begin to meet and evaluate how they can also assist in the transition for individuals and families by strengthening their ability to be welcoming communities to new members.

Allow me to close by turning again to today's second reading from St. Paul, "I pray always with joy in my every prayer for all of you, because of your partnership for the gospel from the first day until now." As a Catholic community, we are in faith committed to bring the good news of Jesus Christ to our society and the world. I believe that with God's grace, this fundamental commitment will guide us in facing any difficult decisions that may present themselves in the months ahead. Please join me in praying that the Holy Spirit will grant us the grace, wisdom and patience to do so in charity toward all.

With every prayerful best wish, I remain

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Most Reverend Robert J. McManus, S.T.D.
Bishop of Worcester