

# Five parishes first to present plan to bishop

After more than five years of planning, the staff and parishioners of five northern Anne Arundel County parishes became the first group to officially present a proposal for clustering – or sharing ministerial duties – to archdiocesan officials.

A committee unveiled the plan to nearly 250 people during a meeting held May 5 at St. Philip Neri, Linthicum Heights.

The proposal aims to meet the pastoral needs of local Catholics despite a reduction in the number of available priests. Under the plan, the five parishes would be linked through a coordinating council while sharing three priests and a pastoral life director.

Bishop Mitchell T. Rozanski, eastern vicar, hailed the proposal as a model not only for the Archdiocese of Baltimore but for other dioceses as well.

“This is a realistic, marvelous plan,” Bishop Rozanski said. “You have really been trailblazers.”

While several other parishes throughout the archdiocese are in various stages of planning for cluster models due to the priest shortage, the Anne Arundel proposal is the first to be presented to the bishop.

The staffing plan calls for pastors to be assigned to both St. Philip and Holy Trinity in Glen Burnie. A third priest would be assigned to Glen Burnie’s Church of the Crucifixion and Church of the Good Shepherd, and a pastoral life director would be named to St. Bernadette, Severn.

A coordinating council made up of three representatives from each parish would oversee the cluster, ensuring individual parish identity while meeting 10 specific goals of the cluster. The goals include sacramental preparation, communication to all five parishes, liturgical enrichment such as adoration or prayer meetings, and occasional social gatherings for the five parishes.

After a liturgy and the presentation, Bishop Rozanski praised the parishes for their commitment to the project and thanked them for their efforts.

“This pastoral plan forged together,” he said, “has really shown the best of your love of the church – your love of God.”

As part of the plan, the priests, deacons and lay ecclesial leaders would continue and, in some cases, strengthen ministries already in place at the parishes. In addition, visiting priests and retired priests would be available for a time to continue providing the sacraments.

The coordinating council would ensure an option of eucharistic celebrations at all five of the parishes on Sunday as well as some morning and evening weekday Masses at each parish.

Bishop Rozanski also praised the five years of dedication to the proposal and noted two areas the archdiocese would need to strengthen: training for lay leaders and the awareness for vocations to the priesthood.

“We need to raise up the call to the priesthood,” he added.

Father J. Bruce Jarboe, pastor of Holy Trinity, told participants that the parish pastors originally began meeting in response to “The Hope the Lies Before Us,” an archdiocesan report published in 2002 on the diminishing number of priests.

In those days, Father Jarboe noted, the parishes felt they would have five full-time priests until 2009. However, “God had an expedited timeline,” he said.

In the past year, the pastor of St. Bernadette resigned and the pastor at Crucifixion was reassigned – leaving the group of parishes in need of the new staffing model.

He emphasized the proposal as a framework for the parishes to begin choosing representatives to serve on the council. “Implementation will be an ongoing and open-ended reality,” Father Jarboe added.

For Father Jarboe, serving in the priesthood has always been collaborative, so the cluster model is one more evolution in shared ministry.

Kevin Brown, a permanent deacon from Holy Trinity, came to the process midway through and recognized the challenge of maintaining the number of Masses celebrated at the five parishes.

Ultimately, the committee recommended maintaining the number of liturgies with the help of visiting priests but noted the schedule would most likely change in the future.

Deacon Brown believes the cluster model means more opportunities for permanent deacons and perhaps a request that each parish be assigned a permanent deacon.

Father Dale Picarella, pastor of St. Philip Neri, said the cluster process led to an “appreciation of the diversity of parish life.” He said parishioners would continue to develop lay ministry with an emphasis on individual gifts. “We’ll just continue building small, Christian relationships sharing faith, life and prayer.”