

Our Lady of the Mountains hits ground running

By George P. Matysek Jr.

gmatysek@CatholicReview.org

CRESAPTOWN – Nearly two months after Archbishop Edwin F. O’Brien gave his approval to establish a unified Cumberland-area parish out of five existing ones, the new “Our Lady of the Mountains” parish is taking shape.

About 50 church leaders from Ss. Peter and Paul, Cumberland; St. Patrick, Cumberland; St. Mary, Cumberland; St. Ambrose, Cresaptown and St. Patrick, Mount Savage came together Aug. 7 at St. Ambrose to select a leadership team for the new parish.

Fifteen members of the new pastoral council, 10 members of the finance committee and five incorporators were named – all evenly divided among the five church sites.

“I’m really excited,” said Rosemary Lehman, a new member of Our Lady of the Mountains’ pastoral council from St. Patrick, Cumberland. “We’re all going to be working together on a common goal.”

Rick Collins, another new pastoral council member from St. Ambrose, said the establishment of the parish leadership team will help provide stability.

“People will become more settled because everyone will be represented,” he said.

At the end of a daylong discussion of hopes and dreams for Our Lady of the Mountains, the Capuchin Franciscan priests who staff the parish unveiled a new Mass schedule that takes effect Sept. 10. The schedule consolidates all daily Masses among the five churches at Ss. Peter and Paul, while providing six weekend Masses at the other four church sites – down from nine weekend Masses currently offered.

The Mountain Maryland Regional Planning Commission (MMRPC) that had developed the proposal for unifying the area parishes had recommended that St.

Patrick in Mount Savage no longer offer regular Masses. As parish leaders explored Mass schedules, however, they decided that a Mass should continue in Mount Savage.

"It would have been difficult for some of the older folks to travel," said Deacon Charles Hiebler, pastoral associate for planning in the Seton vicariate.

Deacon Hiebler said a declining population necessitated a reduction in Mass offerings in the region. Cumberland's population has fallen to 20,859 - down nearly 11,000 from three decades ago, according to the MMRPC.

"The churches right now are a third to half full," Deacon Hiebler explained. "The demographics just aren't there. Most people understand the need for the alterations to the schedule."

Archbishop O'Brien recently established Ss. Peter and Paul as an official canonical shrine. Two daily Masses will be celebrated there. On Wednesdays, confessions and adoration of the Blessed Sacrament will also be available.

"Ss. Peter and Paul will become the heartbeat of spirituality for Western Maryland," said Capuchin Franciscan Father Gregory Chervenak, pastor of Our Lady of the Mountains.

The pastor hopes that the shrine will become a place of pilgrimage - educating people from throughout the state and beyond about Ss. Peter and Paul's rich history and its ties to St. John Neumann and Blessed Francis X. Seelos.

"It honors not only the holiness of the past," Father Chervenak said, "but of the present."

Bishop Mitchell T. Rozanski will install the new pastor and pastoral leadership team during a 10 a.m. Mass Sept. 18 at St. Mary, Cumberland.

Our Lady of the Mountains Mass Schedule

Effective Sept. 10

Weekend Masses:

Saturday - 4 p.m., St. Mary, Cumberland; 5 p.m., St. Ambrose, Cresaptown

Sunday - 8 a.m., St. Patrick, Mount Savage; 9 a.m., St. Ambrose, Cresaptown; 10 a.m., St. Mary, Cumberland; 11 a.m., St. Patrick, Cumberland

Weekday Masses:

Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday - 7:30 a.m. and noon, Shrine of Ss. Peter and Paul, Cumberland.

Wednesday - 7:30 a.m. and 6 p.m., Shrine of Ss. Peter and Paul, Cumberland
(Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament, 8 a.m.-6 p.m., Sacrament of Reconciliation, noon-1 p.m. and 3-4 p.m.)

Saturday - 8:30 a.m., Shrine of Ss. Peter and Paul