



October 2008

Cleveland Northwest Cluster #2

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Summary of Recommendations for the Parishes and Schools

Parishes:

- SS. Philip and James should be closed and combined with St. Ignatius of Antioch Parish.
- St. Vincent de Paul, St. Mel, and St. Mark should continue with their present territories.

Schools:

- St. Mel School should be closed.
- St. Mel Parents and students will be provided advice and guidance on an individual basis with respect to available Catholic school opportunities.

Frequently Asked Questions

1. *Why are SS. Philip and James Church and St. Mel School being recommended to be closed?*

First of all, it should be made absolutely clear, these recommendations are only one part of a complex process. The recommendations now are submitted for review by the thirty-two member *Vibrant Parish Life II Committee* for its recommendation, then to the Bishop's eleven member staff, and then the Bishop will consult with the Presbyteral (Priests) Council

in accordance with Canon (Church) law. Only after this extensive review process is completed will Bishop Lennon announce the final, approved, cluster plans in March of 2009.

More than a year ago, Bishop Lennon sent us cluster directives. The Bishop asked us to establish a framework to enhance the vibrancy and strengthen the presence and pastoral care of the Catholic Church in the Lorain Avenue Cluster.

Those directives cited these challenges: changing demographics, finances and the availability of priests. He also asked us to make evangelization and re-evangelization a priority and to carefully study each parish site, its finances, facilities, long term pastoral needs, and social and community services before determining the directed change in the number of churches and priests to serve here. Finally, the Bishop also directed our cluster to consider the consolidation to no more than three schools. All this is to be in place by July 1, 2010.

After more than ten months of consultation, the Cluster Planning and Coordination team is recommending:

- Closing SS. Philip and James Parish
- Closing of St. Mel School

2. *Isn't it true that some people may be unhappy that their parish is closing and that they will have to travel another location?*

We know that change is never easy, especially when it involves a person's special place of worship, their spiritual home; that's why our process was fair and open and involved everyone in the parishes involved. We attempted to make the major recommendations inclusive of all people. That is why we have conducted parish meetings, carefully evaluated the key issues, shared liturgies and have sought, what we pray, are the best proposals.

3. *What is the difference between Closed, Merged, and Suppressed?*

The terms “suppressed” and “closed” are used interchangeably. A suppressed (closed) parish is joined to an existing parish or parishes. The faithful of a suppressed parish are welcomed into the existing parish both enhancing the existing parish and offering new opportunities for parishioners to serve and to be served.

A “merger:” is a canonical action in which two or more existing parishes come together to form a completely new parish. The emphasis is not on the loss of identity but on coming together as equals to form a completely new parish. The formerly existing parishes no longer exist. In the process of merging, the parishes lose their individual identities and form an entirely new parish.

In both the suppression and joining of parishes and in the merging of parishes, the Christian faithful become members of the resulting territorial or personal parish.

4. *Why were St. Ignatius of Antioch, St. Vincent de Paul, St. Mel, and St. Mark chosen to remain open?*

The Clustering and collaboration team evaluated the short and long term impact of all the facilities and carefully reviewed the Catholic Charities Facilities Corporation assessment of facilities and the finances needed to bring each location up to standard and provide proper ongoing maintenance. Based upon the most effective use of finances and human resources, our careful evaluation lead to the recommendation to keep these parishes open.

5. *Aren't you abandoning some neighborhoods?*

No we are not abandoning SS. Philip and James. They are being welcomed and included into St. Ignatius of Antioch and we are planning for their full spiritual support throughout the transition.

The purpose of this effort is to create a stronger and more vibrant Catholic Church in this area. We believe that after careful evaluation, access to the remaining locations will not be a problem. The facilities at St. Ignatius of Antioch present the best potential for community access and the possibility for expansion of services. We believe where there is some inconvenience, viable solutions are available.

6. *What will become of the buildings to be closed?*

Church Law provides procedures to determine the future of those properties. The Diocese is making available a complete closing manual for proper disposition of all the goods and property, as well as proper direction for parishioners and staff.

Note: the provisions or stipulations of donors and founders must be respected.

7. *What will become of the employees of St. Mel School and SS. Philip and James Parish?*

The Diocese will provide proper direction for the relocation of employees and staff.

8. *Some of SS. Philip and James parishioners may be angry and won't join a new parish?*

We know from prior experiences that emotionally; the initial prospect of leaving one's longtime parish is difficult and requires a period of grieving. However, we will welcome the new members to the parish by sharing their loss and then embracing them in building a better, more vibrant community of Faith.

When St. Jude parish in Warrensville Hts. closed, the parishioners were genuinely welcomed by the parishioners at Resurrection parish in Solon. A similar effort was successful at St. Pius X parish when St. Wenceslaus closed in Maple Heights. The efforts of the Resurrection and St. Pius parishioners aided in easing fears; and that collaborative attitude made the transition much better for all.

9. *Some of St. Mel parents and teachers may be angry and fearful of the future.*

Parents and students will be provided advice and guidance on an individual basis with respect to available Catholic school opportunities. There will also be a Catholic School Information Night at St. Mel in January.

10. *I have heard that parishioners at other parishes have written letters of protest (or signed petitions) directed to the Bishop objecting to a Cluster Team proposal, what happens next?*

Such efforts which could be deemed "Minority reports" are being included in the proposal submitted by the Cluster team. Remember, this proposal, including the minority report, now must be reviewed by the thirty-two member *Vibrant Parish Life II Committee*, then by Bishop Lennon's staff, and then the Bishop will bring these matters before the Presbyteral (Priests) council for consultation; so these objections will be heard during the process.

11. What is the timing for these changes to take place?

March, 2009 Bishop Responds to recommendations with his decision.
July 1, 2010 Plan is implemented

12. Some parishioners say this entire matter was predictable, aren't we just going through the motions of merging or closing parishes?

That was never the case. The process included each parish choosing its cluster partners. Then, the clustering and collaboration teams were formed with each parish represented by five persons for total of twenty-five. The Cluster teams spent ten or more months in discernment, fully assessing the distinct advantages and disadvantages of each parish before submitting their proposals.

13. What will happen to our priests?

The cluster directives indicate that by July 1, 2010 the number of priests to serve the parishes in this cluster will be reduced from six priests to four priests. The Diocese will be involved in the assignment of those priests.

14. What is to happen with the Church in the City partnerships?

These partnerships will remain active.

15. Is there any good news?

Yes! In less densely populated areas of our Diocese, parishioners must drive many miles just to find a SINGLE Catholic church, and the only means of reaching them is private vehicle. We presently enjoy the presence of five Churches within our Cluster.

Please remember we are truly blessed to live in the city and have as many parishes as we do. Even after consolidation efforts the Bishop asks for, we will *still be blessed* with a high number of churches AND various means of transportation to reach them.

Catholic education within the City of Cleveland is unique within the Diocese. Families within our community face a lesser challenge with respect to financing the education of their children and may choose between public, charter, and parochial schools. In fact, many non-Catholics continue to choose Catholic school education for their children. This offers our Cluster a unique opportunity for evangelization.

Our Cluster offers quality weekend liturgies that are warm and inviting and we offer diverse mass schedules.

There has been a long history of collaboration between our Parishes such as PRS, outreach to the poor, and RCIA just to name a few. We are confident that our collaboration will only be further enhanced and expanded as a result of this process resulting in better opportunities to serve one another.

“From the beginning this initiative was aimed at renewal and rebirth in our faith community” This is in fact, an opportunity to maximize our resources within our Cluster to be able to better serve Catholics and non-Catholics alike in our community.

16. When will the Cluster’s proposal be made available?

We have full intentions to be transparent and will make the “final” proposal available after November 15th. The proposal at time of the Town Hall meeting is not complete as it is necessary to incorporate comments and questions submitted to the Cluster during this phase within the final draft. Soon after November 15th, Parishioners will be notified on the availability of the proposal and how to obtain a copy.

Additional Comments

Additional information on cluster planning activity throughout the Diocese can be found on the www.vibrantparishlife.org. Information about the Lorain Avenue Cluster is available at www.svdpcleveland.org.

If you have questions please contact one of the Committee members from your parish for a “Parishioner Comment Form” so that you may submit your questions in writing. Please note all comments forms must be turned into your parish by no later than November 3, 2008.

Robert Tayak at the Diocese Communications Office may be contacted at 1-216-696-6525 Ext. 4460.