



MOST REVEREND
MICHAEL R. COTE, D.D.

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May 26, 2011

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

As you are all aware, the pastoral planning process has been underway in our diocese for the past few years. The Putnam Deanery was the first to complete the process and have some restructuring of the parishes implemented. Then the Norwich and Willimantic deaneries completed the process in May 2010. In October 2010, the parish clusters in those deaneries were directed to continue with various efforts at collaboration and sharing of resources in preparation for eventual yoking; that is, the leadership of two or more parishes being given to one pastor. Just in the last few weeks, the Middletown and Vernon deaneries have completed their process and their final recommendations are being prepared. The parishes of the New London and Old Saybrook deaneries will begin the pastoral planning process in September.

Now, we have arrived at a new level of our process, and some changes anticipated for so long are being implemented. The staffing and restructuring changes listed below are rooted in the Pastoral Planning work done by your parish committees over the last few years. The changes are being announced in all the parishes of the diocese, with an effective date of June 16, 2011. This step into the future will, with God's grace, help us all appreciate the needs of our diocese, and the realities we face for the future.

A recent national study of the Catholic priesthood in America concluded that the number of priests in our country will continue to decline through the next decade. In our own diocese, in just five years, we will hopefully have seven men ordained, but will definitely have 16 pastors over the age of retirement. In light of these facts, and out of concern for the vibrant future of all our parishes, we make the following changes.

In the Norwich deanery, the three parishes of the Divine Mercy Community; Our Lady of Perpetual Help in Quaker Hill, St. John in Montville, and Our Lady of the Lakes in Oakdale, will continue their collaboration, but now with Fr. Joseph Whittel as pastor of the three parishes. For the present, there will be two assistant priests, Father Richard Breton and Father Tad Zadorozny, also assigned to the cluster. Under this plan the excellent work already accomplished by these parishes will continue and increase, to the benefit of the entire diocese.

This continued collaboration is very important because I ask that within the next year, the three parishes present to me a plan for how the Divine Mercy Community will continue to function if, in the future, only one priest is available to you.

The three parishes in the eastern part of the Norwich deanery; St. Catherine of Siena in Preston, St. Mary in Jewett City and St. Thomas the Apostle in Voluntown were all in the same cluster at the beginning of the pastoral planning process; but in October 2010, only the parishes in Preston

and Voluntown were directed to prepare for eventual yoking. Current circumstances now make it necessary to bring the three parishes back together, and put them under the leadership of one pastor, Father Ted Tumicki. For the present, Father Tumicki will have an assistant priest as well, Father Stephen Gulino. This arrangement will allow for continued and increased collaboration among the three parishes, and will ensure that a strong Catholic presence will be maintained in each community.

As part of the implementation plan for the Norwich and Willimantic deaneries in October 2010, the parishes of St. Andrew in Colchester and St. Francis of Assisi in Lebanon were directed to prepare for eventual yoking. Now this plan will be put into place, and the two parishes will be under the leadership of the same pastor, Father Marek Masnicki. For the present time, especially to assist in the process of transition, an assistant priest, Father Benjamin Soosaimanickam, will also be assigned to these two parishes. Under this structure, the efforts at collaboration already underway will continue and increase, to the benefit of both parishes.

In the Putnam Deanery, several pastoral planning recommendations were implemented in 2009. It now becomes necessary to make one addition to what has already been put in place. As of June 16, 2011, the parishes of Most Holy Trinity in Pomfret and St. Mary in Putnam will be yoked under the leadership of one pastor, Father David Choquette, with Father Anthony De Marco as assistant priest. These parishes are geographically close, and both have moderately sized populations. Under one pastor, both parishes will continue to operate, and will have the advantage of several opportunities for collaboration and sharing of resources.

Lastly, although the Middletown deanery has just recently completed its pastoral planning committee work, circumstances already require some action. As of June 16, 2011 the parishes of St. Colman in Middlefield and Notre Dame in Durham will be yoked under the leadership of one pastor, Father Michael Giannitelli. For the present, an assistant priest will also be assigned to the two parishes, Father James Sucholet. In the pastoral planning process, these two parishes were in the same cluster, and so have already begun looking at ways in which they might collaborate. Under the leadership of one pastor, these discussions will continue and bring the two communities closer together.

Around the effective date of these new assignments, the Pastoral Planning Office will be scheduling several parish-wide meetings for those who would like more information on the process of pastoral planning in general, and the process of yoking two or more parishes under the leadership of one pastor.

Let us pray together as a diocese, that these changes in staffing and structure will be an opportunity for increased growth and vitality, not only for the parishes immediately involved, but for all our parishes and people. The strength of our Catholic faith, especially our love of the Eucharist, will carry us through any initial hesitations and bring us all to new levels of unity and cooperation. May God pour out his blessings upon all in the Diocese of Norwich.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Michael R. Cote". The signature is written in a cursive style with a cross at the beginning.

Most Reverend Michael R. Cote
Bishop of Norwich