

**VERNON DEANERY RESTRUCTURING OF PARISHES  
CLUSTER THREE**

**Parishes represented: Saint Joseph, Sacred Heart and Saint Maurice**

**PART ONE:**

**1. In what specific activities are your parishes already cooperating with one another? What other areas of collaboration are in the planning stages?**

**Already Cooperating:** All three parishes have enhanced communication within the cluster by adding links to each other's websites. All three parishes are in the initiation process of sharing their Faith Formation calendar for 2011-2012. Sacred Heart has included an "In the Cluster" section in their weekly bulletin. The priests and lay ministers from St. Joseph and Sacred Heart, along with other parishes in the deanery, share on call days with respect to visitation to the sick at Rockville General Hospital. Sacred Heart and St. Maurice have been working collaboratively with respect to their high school youth groups and Confirmation Prep programs.

**Planning to cooperate (indicate starting date):** The three parishes are planning to address the initiation of a Cluster Council with their Parish Councils and pastors by or before October 2011. This Council will propose the following activities: enhance areas of communication among the 3 parishes by adding news about the cluster into the bulletins of each parish; create a quarterly cluster progress report and distribute to each parish by December 2011; promote that parishioners from all three churches can participate in Masses and functions in each parish, with offertory envelopes returned to their home parishes; encourage special services, such as Divine Mercy Sunday, Forty Hours, Communal Penance and Lenten Services, at one church with clergy participation from all 3 cluster churches; address how Mass times would be staggered if one parish is without a priest/pastor; and plan joint activities for the high school youth groups, with the addition of participation from St. Joseph's youth group, along with Sacred Heart and St. Maurice's.

**PART TWO**

**2a. What is the committee's recommendations for restructuring this cluster of parishes if ONE parish is without a priest/pastor?**

The three parishes, St. Joseph, Sacred Heart and St. Maurice are independent parishes, collaborating, with permission from the Bishop, under the Blessed John Paul II Cluster Council. St. Joseph has had a good working history with the Pauline Fathers, supplying the necessary two priests to live in community, and St. Maurice has undergone a new relationship with a priest from the Salvatorian Order. There is only one diocesan priest in this cluster, stationed at Sacred Heart.

Should the availability of priests be reduced in the future, and if one parish is without a priest/pastor, then it is recommended that there is an initial phase of yoking between St. Joseph and Sacred Heart Parishes. Reasons to support this are that these parishes are less than 3 miles from each other, several children from Sacred Heart attend St. Joseph School, and both parishes collaborate already with visitation to the sick at Rockville Hospital by both clergy and extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion.

A minority opinion is that St. Maurice is in the process of new growth. Both weekly attendance at Mass and offertory income have increased recently in a measured pace. When previously yoked, the parish depleted its substantial financial reserve in property enhancements and remodeling. The enormity

of this expense, the transfer of its pastor of twenty years, the yoking itself, and frequent changes of clergy and programs angered many of its parishioners. This resulted in a 46% loss of parishioners and a resistance to further changes. This parish requests a moratorium for the next few years to rebuild trust and future sustainability.

**2b. Where would remaining priests be located in the restructured region?**

Priests will remain in their present locations. Should the parishes of St. Joseph and Sacred Heart undergo restructuring, then the remaining priests would be located at St. Joseph as they currently have a fully functional rectory on church property. The priest located at St. Maurice would retain residence at its parish rectory.

**2c. Are there any staffing requirements in the plan?**

All three parishes in the cluster would consider sharing the cost of a business administrator. Both Sacred Heart and St. Joseph have a deacon. It is possible that these deacons could be made available to collaborate together to provide adult education forums that all three parishes in this cluster could benefit from, as well as identify the poor and disadvantaged. Sacred Heart has a pastoral assistant who is also their coordinator of faith formation. Should Sacred Heart be restructured, then the pastoral assistant could prove invaluable in the restructured plan. Of note, the pastor of Sacred Heart Parish traditionally heads the Board of Directors for the Sacred Heart Retirement Community, Inc. DBA Rose Commons.

**2d. Would any buildings no longer be used in this plan?**

This would depend on Sacred Heart's ability to secure the funding to demolish its condemned church building.

**2e. If two or more parishes are given to the leadership of one priest, where will essential parish activities be located (Sunday liturgies, all sacramental preparation programs, Confirmation programs, youth ministry, adult faith formation, evangelization efforts, etc)?**

All of these defined activities will occur within their parishes. If two parishes are given to the leadership of one priest, then these activities will occur within their own parishes under the guidance of one priest. Mass times would need to be refigured for the yoked parishes. The Easter Triduum would need to be celebrated in one parish on a rotating basis each year.

**2f. How does this restructuring plan accomplish the goal of the process: more vibrant parish life and the wise use of diocesan resources?**

The restructured plan would allow for collaboration and occasions for parishioners to become acquainted with each other and participate in joint activities defined by the cluster. This will provide familiarity and an aura of hospitality that are critical should any parishes become yoked in the future. It is hoped that the diocese will allow for the resources of priests from religious orders to continue their working relationship with St. Joseph and St. Maurice. This will allow relief should the availability of diocesan priests be reduced in the future.

## **PART THREE**

### **3a. What are the committee's recommendations for restructuring this cluster of parishes if TWO parishes are without a priest/pastor?**

Should the availability of priests be reduced in the future, and if **two** parishes are without a priest/pastor, it is recommended that the parishes of St. Joseph, Sacred Heart and Saint Maurice be yoked.

A minority opinion is that St. Joseph, Sacred Heart, and St. Bernard be reevaluated in relation to clustering. All three parishes are in the township of Vernon. All three churches are within 10 minutes of each other. St. Maurice is an anomaly. The parish is less than 4 miles from St. Bartholomew, in the Archdiocese of Hartford, and also, just less than 10 miles from St. Mary's Parish, Coventry. The majority of the parishioners that left St. Maurice over a 2.6 year period, transferred membership to St. Bartholomew.

### **3b. Where would the remaining priest be located in the restructured region?**

If the restructure region is assigned only one priest, then it is recommended that the priest be located at St. Joseph's Rectory. The reasons to support this include that St. Joseph has a school, it has the highest weekend Mass attendance, it has the highest number of children infants to age 16, and the rectory accommodates 3 priests, with 3 full suites upstairs, and a kitchen, living room, and offices downstairs. Should there be a second priest assigned to support the pastor, this priest could be accommodated at either St. Joseph or St. Maurice, as the latter also can accommodate 3 priests with 3 bedrooms, 2 full bathrooms upstairs, and a living room, kitchen, office and a bedroom suite downstairs (currently used as an office). The former rectory on site at Sacred Heart is used solely for offices presently.

### **Are there other staff requirements in the plan? (Full or part-time deacon, lay minister, or business manager, etc.)**

**3c.** As previously stated in **2c**, all three parishes in the cluster would consider sharing the cost of a business administrator. This would allow the pastor to focus on the sacramental and spiritual needs of the parishes. Both Sacred Heart and St. Joseph have a deacon. Sacred Heart has a pastoral assistant. All three supportive staff could prove invaluable in the restructured plan with assisting the pastor. Each parish would retain their own secretaries. It is recommended that there be formed a Cluster Council that would review areas of collaboration that would share on cost, which might include property maintenance (lawn mowing and snow removal), office, educational, and property maintenance supplies. The Cluster Council might assess a need to streamline staff, with eventually one educational director, one youth group leader, one coordinator to the Sick/Homebound, etc., to help simplify and reduce the amount of work/meetings for the pastor.

### **3d. Would any buildings no longer be used in this plan?**

Sacred Heart could sell the private residence off site used currently to house its pastor. This revenue might allow this parish the means to fund the demolishing of its condemned church building.

**3e. If two or more parishes are given to the leadership of one priest, where will essential parish activities be located (Sunday liturgies, all sacramental preparation programs, Confirmation programs, youth ministry, adult faith formation, evangelization efforts, etc.)?**

The Cluster Council would make recommendations to the pastor in the event that only one priest becomes available to the yoked parishes. Mass times would need to be adjusted immediately. The Easter Triduum would need to be located at one parish. Sacraments, such as First Penance, First Eucharist and Confirmation, could be held at one church. One parish could be identified in hosting adult faith formation, another concentrate on activities for youth, another, social outreach. It is paramount that the overall well being of the pastor be taken into account to reduce his personal physical and emotional stress, and prevent burnout.

**3f. How does this restructuring plan accomplish the goals of the process: more vibrant parish life and the wise use of diocesan resources?**

Identifying the resources and strengths that are unique to each parish: St. Joseph, its highest number of youth, the parochial school, serving the Polish community, fundraising efforts; Sacred Heart, its social outreach programs serving Vernon and Haiti, energetic Youth Group, pastoral assistant; and St. Maurice, its social outreach programs serving Bolton, Manchester and Haiti, fundraising efforts, strong lay leadership, provide for a consolidation of activities specific to each parish, and avoids duplication of services.

**4. Any other comments the committee wishes to add:**

The process of restructuring 3 parishes due to the reduced number of available priests is a new concept for this area. Both Sacred Heart and St. Maurice, when yoked, fostered a sense of collaboration by selecting Mass times, combined the Faith Formation Program, introduced to St. Maurice a youth group program, offered parishioners weekday Mass opportunities Tuesday-Friday, and set up links to each other's websites. It is a process that requires time, patience, and a spirit of cooperation. The course of action these parishes undertook could prove valuable in assisting the Cluster and other parishes to move forward.

It is believed that the proper promotion and fostering of a Catholic education is vital to the mission of St. Joseph Parish, and benefits the Catholic community as a whole. This cluster expresses concern of the ability of a single priest to be able to pastor 3 parishes and a parochial school.

**Respectfully submitted, June 7, 2011:**

Joseph Augustyn, Sacred Heart  
Donna Gessay, Sacred Heart  
Joel Cohan, St. Maurice  
Patricia Cinea, St. Maurice

Angela Atwater, St. Joseph  
Matt Stein, St. Joseph  
John Machung, St. Joseph