

EUCLID CLUSTER
SUMMARY OF TOWN HALL MEETINGS
MAY 27, 2008

What this article is about. This is the first in a series of articles about the Town Hall Meeting and the issues/questions raised in the parish consultation process.

The Town Hall Meeting. Every parish in the Euclid Cluster held a Town Hall Meeting on May 27, 2008, in order to present parishioners with the basic features of the proposal being developed to meet Bishop Lennon's Vibrant Parish Life II mandate to consolidation of the parishes of Euclid. In May 2007 the Bishop sent each Euclid parish a series of challenges:

- Develop a plan for this area to be served by no more than four parishes and no more than four priests.
- Continue to explore collaborative possibilities to strength pastoral care in an equitable manner.
- Engage all of our faithful in regularly attending and participating in Sunday Eucharistic Liturgy.
- Strengthen evangelization and social and community services that serve the poor and surrounding neighborhoods.
- Provide a welcoming and evangelizing presence for the racially and culturally diverse population of the area.
- Continue to monitor enrollment trends and collaborate to insure the long-term presence of strong stable Catholic schools serving the Euclid area. Consider going from four to three schools.
- Include a plan to address the solvency of the parishes.
- Recognize the concern regarding the ability of some parishes to meet operating expenses.
- Carefully study each parish and its facilities in assessing which options would best serve the long term pastoral needs of the cluster and address the demographic issues of the area.

The Realities. These challenges are based on these current realities in the cluster:

- Total number of Catholic households have decreased by 28% in ten years and by 18% since 2000.
- Total Mass attendance has decreased by 31% over 10 years and by 22% since 2000.
- Current estimates indicate there will be 238 priests in 2015, slightly more than the current number of parishes in the diocese.
- If nothing changes, the largest parish in Euclid will be at 1,000 families and declining.

The Work of the Cluster Planning Team. The Cluster Planning Team (CPT) consists of five members from each Euclid parish, including each Pastor/Administrator and a representative from Parish Council, Finance Council, Staff, and parish at large. The CPT and related work teams reporting to the CPT have worked since July 2007 to prepare a proposal meeting these challenges. The proposal is due in September 2008.

The CPT and work teams have worked with relative confidentiality up to this point, but the Town Meetings were convened at this time so that parishioners would be able to give their feedback to the plan. The CPT will consider the feedback as it refines the proposal into its final stages for submission to the Bishop in the Fall.

Options examined. Several models were examined. Whether there should be four parishes, or two, or one in Euclid was studied and rejected. Also considered was the "Suppression" (Closing) of two or three parishes. A suppressed parish is closed, its property, debts, liabilities, and obligations are disposed by the Diocese and remaining assets are distributed to where parishioners are ascribed. The CPT declined to recommend suppression.

Recommendation. A "Merger" occurs when two or more parishes come together to form a new parish. In such a situation, both parishes close and emerge as a new parish with a new administration. The parishioners and the assets, as well as the liabilities, of both former parishes now become the parishioners, the assets and the liabilities of the new parish.

The Cluster Planning Team is recommending the following mergers:

- Merge St. William and St. Robert at the present site of St. William.
- Merge Holy Cross and St. Christine at the present site of Holy Cross.
- Merge St. Felicitas and St. Paul at the present site of St. Felicitas.

Benefits. These mergers, if approved by the Bishop, will provide the following:

- Churches spread evenly throughout Euclid.
- Church populations of between 2,000 and 2,500 households.
- A school at each site.

- There is likely to be a more welcoming approach to change.
- There will be a greater pool of lay ministers.
- There will be a greater opportunity to retain parishioners.
- There can be a consolidation of functions.
- There can be an increased revenue stream.

It will be further proposed that four priests be assigned to Euclid: a pastor/administrator to each new parish and a “Cluster Associate” to cover hospitals, hospice, and nursing homes. Each parish would have a pastoral minister on staff, and a youth minister would be hired for the cluster.

A Ministry Center will be proposed for the benefit of the entire cluster. The center can be used for, among other uses, RCIA programs, Adult Faith Formation, Bereavement Ministry, and Sacramental preparation (e.g., pre-Cana programs, Baptism orientation classes for parents).

Disadvantages. The disadvantages of the mergers will have to be addressed. These disadvantages include

- A potential loss of parishioners.
- More financial decisions.
- A possible loss of jobs.
- All parishes will undergo significant change.

Finances. Financial studies were based on trended data from the last five years and then projected through 2014. These trends and projections show that

- Holy Cross and St. Christine are very strong financially.
- St. Robert and St. William are stable financially, with adequate reserves. The closing of St. Robert’s school substantially reduces the drain on the new parish.
- St. Felicitas and St. Paul both have debt but have strong enough annual net to manage it.

All three new parishes will have assets that can be either sold or rented to retire debt or strengthen reserves.

Schools. The three schools are currently stable but will continue together to work on a deliberate, straightforward and ongoing evaluation of those schools, including demographics, costs, parish data, and educational achievement. The ongoing study will also address regionalization, researching the possibility of consolidation to strengthen Catholic education in the entire area.

Evangelization. All parishes and parishioners will have to devote themselves to evangelization efforts to promote collaboration among parishes, to encourage maximum participation of parishioners, to welcome members into the new parishes, and to structure a collaborative effort for outreach to the broader community.

Parish Consultation. Everyone attending the Town Hall Meeting was given a “Parish Consultation Form” on which they were asked to indicate support or lack of support for the proposal based on current realities. The Cluster Planning Team will study the feedback received from parishioners so as to improve the proposal as it enters its final stage of development, and to identify and address the issues brought out by the feedback.

Future articles. Forthcoming articles will discuss a selection of the questions that were raised in the parish consultation process.

Time Line. It is important that all remember the time line regarding the proposal:

- September 2008: Submitted to the Bishop for approval.
- February 2009: Response from the Bishop. The proposal may be accepted or rejected or modified.
- June 2010: Implementation of the approved plan.

Euclid Cluster
 Communication Liaison
 Deacon Louis Pecek
 216-486-3836