

RCDA Pastoral Planning Office
40 N. Main Ave., Albany, NY
CTBC Leaders' Committee Implementation Report
Year 1 Report Covering June 2009 – December 2010

Schenectady Deanery, Local Planning Group 3

- Our Lady of Fatima, Schenectady
- St. Helen's, Schenectady

Reconfiguration activities to be implemented over the next 18 months:

Rationale For Linkage

Our reasons for choosing linkage are based on the spiritual, financial, and ministerial vibrancy of both parishes. Both Our Lady of Fatima and St. Helen's have been "clustered" for a number of years and have a history of collaboration. Both faith communities have a strong sense of identity, yet demonstrate a willingness to collaborate through linkage.

Having received the direction to deepen linkage with a view toward merger, we offer these considerations that may lead to such a decision:

- Outgrowing current worship spaces.
- Consolidation of staffing, programs and other activities resulting in a *de facto* "functional merger."
- An emerging will of the people to merge into one new parish.

For the next 18 months, we will discuss what merger would look like with our Pastoral Councils and then, through them, to the general parish population. We need to gather data concerning a potential merger, discuss the feasibility of one or two worship sites (or a new worship site), and discern the will of the people through open forums toward the end of the 18 month period.

Mass Schedules

It is important to note that substantial linkage has already occurred in a number of areas, the most prominent of which is our weekend Mass schedule. Since we already have the number of priests projected for 2015 (i.e. 1), in **July 2007**, we reduced the number of weekend Masses between the 2 parishes from 6 to 4.

Mission & Ministry activities to be implemented over the next 18 months:

Prayer/Worship

❖ Overview

- The leadership change that occurred in early 2007 at both parishes enabled us to begin our efforts toward greater linkages well in advance of 2009. The simultaneous departures of both pastors resulted in the assignment of Fr. Bob Longobucco as the administrator at St. Helen's and the sacramental minister at Our Lady of Fatima. This has led to the coordination of Mass schedules and the discussion of other linkage opportunities. We have since been engaged in a process of discerning the complementary giftedness, talents, styles and attitudes of the community of the two parishes. In so doing, we have thoughtfully and prayerfully explored many ways to respect and honor the unique personality of each parish while deepening our collaboration in serving the needs of God's people. Considering what has already been implemented along with our plans and recommendations for further linkages, we believe this process will serve to energize and revitalize our endeavor to be Church.

Recently Implemented:

- Fr. Longobucco, Deacon Sharrow and Deacon Thiesen preach at both worship sites on a consistent, scheduled basis.
- Joint Prayer Shawl Ministry
- Blessing and dismissal of Extraordinary Ministers of the Eucharist.
- Lectors and Eucharistic Ministers currently minister on an inter-parish basis.
- Mass schedules for weekend as well as weekday liturgies have been coordinated.
- Liturgy schedules for Holy Days have been coordinated.
- Confirmation is planned and celebrated jointly.
- Anointing of the Sick is celebrated jointly.
- Advent and Lenten penance services are celebrated jointly.
- RCIA programs have been combined.
- Annual Blessing of the Animals is offered at both parishes.
- One Easter *Triduum* continues to be held at alternating worship sites with combined choirs. Stations of the Cross are alternated between the parishes during Lent.
- Liturgy Teams from both parishes meet periodically to coordinate shared liturgies.
- Guest speakers are invited to address joint meeting of both parishes to discuss liturgical and sacramental topics.
- The joint adoption of our sister parish in Mexico has provided opportunities for prayer and cultural discovery: for example, a devotion to Our Lady of Guadalupe.

Proposed Linkages for 2009 -2010:

- Choirs from both parishes combine for events outside the parish.
- Offer Taize prayer experiences at both parishes.
- Offer teaching Masses at both parishes.

- Create a Children's Liturgy of the Word Committee to expand our monthly offerings to both parishes on alternating months.
- Hold joint commissioning during Mass of all who sign up to serve in the many ministries of the parishes.
- Encourage and facilitate the people of the two parishes getting to know each other by holding a few social events at which all who serve on the various committees will join together to meet outside of Mass. This would be an expansion of the current St. Helen's events to include Our Lady of Fatima.
- Ministers of the Word and Extraordinary Ministers of the Eucharist from both parishes attend joint training sessions and evenings of reflections as well as serve at both parishes.
- Establish a Bell Choir comprising members of both parishes to perform at combined liturgies including Christmas and Easter.

Proposed linkages for 2011 – 2013:

- Continue all of the items listed above.
- Form Ministry of Para liturgical Services to serve the needs of those people of God unable to attend services in our facilities. We would like to offer prayer services, music ministry, rosary, reconciliation, anointing, and Eucharist to the residents of the many nursing, assisted-living, and rehabilitation facilities in our community.
- Participate in deanery programs to serve the Schenectady County Jail and Ellis Hospital.
- Offer the Word of God and the Eucharist to the youth of our community through deanery youth Masses.

Life-long Formation

Recently Implemented:

- ❖ **Increase staff interactions and communication opportunities –**
 - The staff from both parishes with program responsibility engage more frequently (joint staff meetings) to develop a coordinated and integrated planning calendar for both parishes. Through these interactions staff seeks opportunities to achieve parity between the programs where possible.
- ❖ **Develop an integrated approach to improve communications between the two parish communities by:**
 - Designating one staff person to coordinate the communications process among both staff and parish.
 - Incorporating Faith Formation information into each bulletin available at both churches.
 - Creating hotlinks on both parish websites to improve an overall understanding of Faith Formation Programs at both churches.

Proposed Linkages:

- Implement opportunities to utilize Website Technology to centralize the registration processes.

- Provide mechanisms to solicit comments from parishioners.

Early Childhood

Recently Implemented:

- Pre-baptism classes are open to parishioners of both parishes.
- Vacation Bible School during the summer continues to be operated jointly.
- Parent/Child Group open to both parishes.

Proposed Linkages:

- OLF Baptismal records of school age children will be available to St Helen's School so these families are invited to the School's Open Houses.

Elementary Children

❖ **St. Helen's School**

Recently Implemented:

- A \$200 discount on tuition will be given to members of Saint Helen's and Our Lady of Fatima parishes.
- Fundraising opportunities extended to Our Lady of Fatima.
- Living Faith for Kids bulletins distributed at both parishes.

Proposed Linkages

- The School Assessment for Our Lady of Fatima Parish be paid directly to St. Helen's School instead of the current practice of routing funds to the Diocese, then to St. Helen's. Timing for Implementation: 3Q 2009.
- In the linked or combined scenario, all new OLF parish registrants will receive informational literature about St. Helen's School with the other welcome materials.
- St. Helen after school clubs and family fun nights will be open to members of both parishes.

Sacramental Preparation

Proposed Linkages

- First Communion and First Reconciliation will be held together with St. Helen's School children included. There would be parent meetings, preparatory retreats and joint celebrations, as appropriate. Planned Implementation - School Year 2009-2010.
- Registration times and classes will be offered to both parishes to choose when the children will attend.
- Share and coordinate curriculum.
- By 2012-13, combined elementary aged faith formation programs.

Youth Ministry

Recently Implemented

- Combined Youth Ministry Programs
- Hired 1.5 staff members to lead the new Youth Ministry program.
- Created a Face book page.

- Youth Masses: Plan 3-4 youth masses throughout the school year together. Alternate worship site, combined participation: music, lectors, ushers, etc.
- YM Teams: Work on a few big activities together throughout the year: social, service, retreats. Plan on meeting at the beginning of the school year to look at combined activities.

Proposed Linkages

- Establish vibrant Youth Ministry Team of young people and adults.
- Invite college-aged young people to participate in our program.
- Establish a mission statement created in cooperation with our young people.

Adult Faith Formation

Recently Implemented

- One staff member assigned to coordinate Adult Faith Formation program
- Develop a Joint Adult Faith Core Group: This joint committee provides insight and ideas concerning adult programs and groups, enabling more of the parishioner talents and needs of the two parishes to be incorporated into the Adult Faith Formation and Enrichment program.
- Ongoing Scripture/Book Groups and mens'/womens' prayer groups
- Expanding Sister Parish relationship to other Catholic communities.
- Began Intergenerational Faith Events for both parishes

Proposed Linkages

- Develop a network of adult group activities with area Deaneries: incorporate the schedule and information of adult group activities at all the deanery churches in the local area. This could be accomplished a shared communication process (enhanced website, etc).
- Additional home-based Scripture study groups.

Christian Service (Human & Pastoral Services)

Recently Implemented

- Completed the identification of the various activities and ministries falling under the umbrella of Christian Service, Pastoral Care and Social Justice in both parishes.
- Compile comprehensive description of ministries in four areas:
 - Pastoral Care e.g. ministering to hospital, nursing home, homebound; compassion team and bereavement
 - Christian Service e.g. direct service in basic needs, soup kitchen, food programs
 - Social Justice e.g. encouraging systemic change in light of Catholic Social teaching
 - Parish Social Justice Committees (already working together on specific projects) will link more deeply with the goal of combining them.
 - Sister Parish Relationship e.g. medical mission

- A number of years ago, both parishes formed a “sister parish” relationship with the Church of St. Agustin in Mexico and continue to work imaginatively and collaboratively for the good of the people of all three communities.
- Communication to the parishes about reconfigured ministries
- Increase communication in both parishes to proactively keep/ increase our support in current and growing areas.
- Bulletin inserts bulletin boards, informational meetings, donation envelopes, *In God's House* newsletter
- " Evaluation of progress in combining / configuring ministries
- Continue prospering programs and revisit programs that need adjustment
- Work with Deanery Task Force to:
- Identify unmet needs such as jail ministry, service to special populations living within our parishes (widows, service men/women, immigrants, mentally disabled, etc)
- Advocate for those needing assistance, living alone
- Match resources from throughout the Deanery with unmet needs
- Ministry Specific training and education
 - Identify existing Ministry training programs in each parish
 - Identify community and deanery area training programs relevant to each ministry

Proposed Linkages

- Come and See" activities e.g. shadow someone in a specific ministry
- Conduct joint training programs as needed for each ministry
- Create a joint Christian Service Committee
- Create a joint Time & Talent sign-up to be conducted as part of a Ministry Fair.
- Implement training for each area of ministry
- Create a common area in each bulletin so the same information is communicated to each parish.
- Open Bereavement committee to both parishes
- Establish social groups for widows and widowers.

Church Administration

Recently Implemented

- *Web Site:* Both parishes currently have a web site. Linkages between the two sites have been established.
- Continue to combine/share staff as vacancies and opportunities occur.

Proposed Linkages

- *Pastoral Councils:* The administrations of the two parishes should be further linked by having a Pastoral Council representative (preferably the Pastoral Council Presidents) from each parish sit on each other's Council. This would

help in improving communications and linking the two parishes. If a merger between the two parishes were to take place, both existing Pastoral Councils would be merged into one body. Hold a joint Pastoral Council meeting by December.

- *Establish Implementation Committee of Parish Leadership and Lay* to develop a comprehensive plan incorporating all aspects of the action items developed through the Called to be Church process. Continuing efforts toward continued linkage of the two parishes in the LPG as well as the potential of a future merger should be addressed.
- *Church Bulletin:* The LPG should develop one bulletin for distribution at all weekend masses held in the LPG. Each parish could have their own page as well as shared pages listing all events, activities, Pastoral columns, and Mass schedules. Timeframe: The feasibility of issuing one bulletin will be reviewed in 2009-10.
- *Joint Endowment:* The parishes in the LPG should consider establishment of a joint endowment fund. The endowment could also possibly be used to facilitate a future merger of the parishes and meet capital needs which may arise through that possible merger. Timeframe: Initial steps toward establishing a joint endowment will be investigated in 2009-10.
- Establish an Information Technology Committee to advise on service provider needs, obtain bids/proposals, create a database of email addresses from both parishes, and make recommendations about websites.
- Create a Face book page for both parishes.
- Develop one policy handbook and investigate employee evaluation processes.

Evangelization:

Recently Implemented:

- Hired Pastoral Associate for Evangelization for both parishes.
- Created an Evangelization Team
- Held new parishioner welcoming gatherings at both parishes.

Proposed Linkage:

- Anxiously await the upcoming Diocesan Plan for Evangelization

Rev. Robert Longobucco

Deacon Richard Thiesen