



Dear Parishioners of St. Francis of Assisi:

We are now six months into our participation in Cardinal Dolan's Archdiocesan-wide pastoral planning initiative, "Making All Things New" (MATN). Our Parish Core Team has been participating in the "Cluster" phase of this process, meeting with the Core Teams of four other local area parishes from December 2013 through the present. The Cluster, designated by the Archdiocese, includes our parish, along with St. John & St. Mary (Chappaqua), St. Mary of the Assumption (Katonah), St. Patrick (Armonk) and St. Patrick (Bedford).

The MATN initiative has provided a unique opportunity on the parish level to re-energize, grow and improve in all areas of parish life. The Cluster phase of this exercise has been equally invigorating, offering the rare occasion for parishes to share meaningful and thought-provoking dialogue that could be translated into collaborative concepts and ideas that would make each parish stronger in areas like evangelization, pastoral life and administration.

The Cluster has been tasked with the very important exercise of reviewing and assessing parish evaluation criteria and other data compiled by each individual parish. (Our parish evaluation criteria was developed early in this process by our Parish Core Team, based on parishioner input and feedback obtained from The Gallop Poll done in our parish in 2011).

The Cluster has been further required to provide assessments and suggestions on cluster planning in MATN areas identified by the Archdiocese, including Sacramental Life; Evangelization / Catechesis / Catholic Schools / Lifelong Religious Education; Stewardship and Outreach, and Effective Administration. In addition, the Cluster has been asked to submit a preliminary suggestion of a model of parish planning that best fits the parishes in our Cluster.

There are two models for consideration – "Consolidation," whereby parishes could be closed or merged with other parishes, or "Collaboration," whereby individual parishes continue to function autonomously, but work together in areas that will enhance and expand the vibrancy of pastoral life so that parishes will grow, better serve parishioners, and become more effective signs and centers of faith, hope and love to God's people.

After spending many hours of thoughtful, insightful and prayerful discussion and deliberation during meetings over the past three months, our Cluster's preliminary recommendation to the Archdiocese is the "Collaborative" parishes model. The group has suggested the formation of a Cluster Council with equal representation of all five parishes to foster a genuine culture of collaboration. While the Cluster has identified many potential areas of collaboration, some initial collaborative ministries and programs could potentially include adult religious education, evangelization, RCIA, bereavement, healing Masses, and cost-saving shared maintenance services. One area where the Cluster is already collaborating is the regional Catholic school – St. Patrick's School in Bedford.

Where do we go from here? First, let's be very clear that no decisions have been made by the Archdiocese. There is still a long way to go in this MATN process, as we are only in Phase II of this eight-phase

initiative. Preliminary suggestions and recommendations submitted by our Cluster (and 74 other Clusters throughout the Archdiocese) will be reviewed by a special MATN Advisory Group consisting of clergy and laity. All Cluster suggestions and recommendations are subject to further discussion, collaboration and revision before any decisions will be made.

The work of our parish and that of our Cluster is just beginning! Your prayers are needed not only for the efforts of our Cluster, but for the success of this entire initiative throughout the Archdiocese of New York. May the Lord bless the efforts of the many volunteers involved in this process, and may He guide the decisions that will be made.

Yours in Christ,

Parish Core Team

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3/9/2014