

Greetings in Christ, Holy Family!

A lot of things have happened in our diocese over the last two years and some big announcements were made while I was away working on the Good News Cruise. I'm going to give a summary of events, then walk you through what the diocese has done and how this affects us as a parish family.

All this began with Bishop Earl recognizing that our structures within the diocese needed to change. We are currently working out of a system that was created when there were fewer Catholics, more priests and more financial resources.

The changing realities of our culture have put us in a position where we have fewer priests, fewer resources and more Catholics.

This has pushed priests, parish structures and parishioners to the breaking point. For many churches within our diocese, most time and effort is spent keeping the parish afloat, rather than on worshipping God, growing in discipleship and caring for the poor.

So, meetings happened. Lots of meetings. The diocese gathered a ton of input from you, from priests and professionals and, in the end, a system emerged that has been reworked a bit since our last big announcement about eight months ago. The Bishop appears to have finalized the plan and it's now our mission to institute it. This impacts us directly and me personally, so let's walk through it.

What will this new structure look like?

The Diocese of Lansing has been divided into 10 geographical zones called "deaneries". Within those deaneries will be two or three groupings of parishes.

Where does Holy Family and St. Mark fit in?

Holy Family and St. Mark are in the "**Northeastern Deanery**". Here are the parishes within that deanery with us:

1. Good Shepherd in Montrose
2. St. Mary in Durand
3. St. Joseph in Gaines
4. St. Mary, Queen of Angels in Swartz Creek
5. St. Paul in Owosso
6. St. Joseph in Owosso
7. St. Robert Bellarmine in Flushing
8. St. John the Evangelist in Fenton
9. St. Mark in Goodrich
10. Holy Family in Grand Blanc

Included in our deanery are four schools:

1. St. Paul and St. Joseph in Owosso
2. St. Robert Bellarmine in Flushing
3. St. John in Fenton
4. Holy Family in Grand Blanc

Each deanery will have a dean at the head.

What will the dean's job be?

According to the latest mailing, the dean will be charged with the following mission:

- Coordinate common pastoral activities (get parishes to work together)
- Help the parishes pursue the bishop's initiatives
- Emphasize the care and well-being of the priests (prayer, accountability and physical health)
- Regularly visit the parishes in the deanery
- Regularly report back to the bishop on the state of the local church in each area

Basically, the dean will visit the parishes in the deanery and work to get the priests and parishes to function together wherever possible and helpful. The dean will work with the priests in the deanery, attempting to help them grow in holiness/wholeness. The dean will work as a bridge between the bishop's expectations and the priest's needs.

So, how does this affect us at Holy Family and St. Mark?

The Bishop has asked me to serve as dean. How this will play out, I'm not entirely sure. I need to meet with the priests, find out who will cooperate and how much, then work with them to start making plans. I have some sense of what I'd like to do, but almost all of it is dependent on what the needs of people and parishes are, and whether priests will cooperate with this new reality.

I'll still be here in the same way: the same sacramental schedule (Masses, funerals, confessions, weddings, baptisms, hospital and hospice calls, etc). I'm not sure most of you will notice any difference. I will remain Pastor at Holy Family & St. Mark.

Am I worried? Should we be worried?

Worried? No. Intimidated? A bit. This is going to be a lot of work for the next couple of years in particular, but I think it is essential work.

If I may be so bold, look at our parishes. Both St. Mark and Holy Family are thriving. We are both debt free, our numbers go up every year and in both parishes, I am astounded at the generosity of God's People.

This assignment (St. Mark and Holy Family) constitutes my fourth assignment where I was the first priest that parishes had to share with other parishes. The pattern has become predictable to me: Pray my tail off, be honest and clear in communication and be candid in expressing my limitations.

The first year tends to be filled with, "The last pastor did this, why don't you?" which is an honest question to offer and a painful one to receive. It breaks my heart to be so limited, but I know it's simply reality. Once we get past that first year, we all settle into what we have instead of what we had and it moves forward at light speed.

In this case, I'm going to do what I've learned: pray my tail off, be honest and clear in communication and candid in expressing limitations. I'll need to add "be gentle, but clear in expressing my expectations to the other priests."

In the end, my initial plan is that every five or six weeks, I will be away from my parishes for the week, outside of Mass and confessions. During that week, I will tour the deanery, fulfilling the mission entrusted to me as Dean. I'm a big believer in being slow and deliberate in making changes and it's my intent to continue that concept in my time as Dean.

I think God has entrusted a tremendous amount to us at Holy Family and St. Mark. We've climbed some serious mountains in these last few years and I'm so proud to be your priest. This is the next challenge He's given us: to help prayerfully create and live a new structure that will better serve the people and priests of our deanery for the next generations.

I'm going to take this week (January 30 - February 4) to travel to the parishes in the deanery. I'm going to work on some vision statements and try to create a starting point for the parishes and schools in our deanery to work on together.

I will keep you updated as I gain intel.

I love you all. May God bless our efforts.



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