

January 11, 2006

Albert V. Nicolella  
Linda M. Fentner, OCDS  
Karen Walter  
Auburn Catholic Community  
320 South Seward Avenue  
Auburn, New York 13021

Dear Albert, Linda, and Karen,

Please express my thanks to all those involved in the development of the pastoral plan for the Auburn parishes. I know this has been a difficult, often arduous task, made even more difficult by changing circumstances since the beginning of the process. I appreciate the good spirit with which the members of the Auburn Catholic Community Planning Group have dealt with the uncertainty and ambiguity of unanticipated changes in pastoral leadership. The decision of the Franciscans to leave St. Hyacinth's is understandable if regrettable. The timing of this decision and its implementation meant that the planning group was confronted with changes more quickly than would have been the case otherwise.

I also want to thank you for your leadership of this process. The work of all is important but nothing is more important than careful, committed, persistent and humble leadership. You have done much, perhaps more than most know, to bring this process to an effective conclusion with the submission of this plan.

I note that you organized the parishes into two work groups in order to facilitate collaborative planning and ministry. This approach appears to have borne good fruit. At the same time, I consider essential that there be a single planning group for Auburn so that the needs of the entire community are before a group that represents all the Catholic parishes, institutions, and ministries. It is also important that community-wide initiatives continue to move ahead.

Your configuration plan calls for the appointment of a single pastoral leader for St. Hyacinth and St. Francis parishes. I affirm this change in configuration and will make an appointment of a single leader as soon as it is possible to do so. Given the current situation, I have determined that it is wise to make an interim appointment for the leadership of St. Hyacinth until it is possible to post the combined leadership position in our priest personnel process. I will then receive a recommendation from the Priest Personnel Board and will proceed with an appropriate appointment. I wish it were possible to be explicit about the timing of this appointment but it is not. Rest assured that I am cognizant of this situation and will begin the appointment process as soon as possible and practical. Please also note that our diocesan policy on appointment of pastoral leaders may result in either the appointment of a lay pastoral administrator along with a sacramental minister or the appointment of a pastor.

The remainder of your configuration plan calls for the other Auburn parishes to stay as they are for the next five years. As the number of assigned priests declines, it will be necessary to reduce the number of weekend Masses in the Auburn parishes. I appreciate your past efforts in reducing the number of Masses so that our diocesan guidelines are respected. Once all pastoral leader changes have taken place, the number of priests assigned to Auburn parishes will be five with an additional priest assigned as prison chaplain and another as health care chaplain. As these numbers decline, it will be necessary to reduce the overall number of Masses. I was pleased to see that you plan on accommodating some of these changes by seeing assigned priests as a resource for all of Auburn rather than constraining planning within work groups. In preparation for future reductions, I encourage you to examine your current Mass schedule to make sure that Masses are in locations and at times where the need is greatest.

I also value your commitment to work toward collaborative activities and events. These will be increasingly important to the vitality of the Church in Auburn. Your group has also led the way in communication with the support of a professional communications process on behalf of all parishes in the community. I am glad that you will be able to continue that support.

You and your communities will be in my prayers as you move into implementation. Deb Housel will continue to provide support to you in this effort.

With every good wish, I remain,

Your brother in Christ,

†Matthew H. Clark  
Bishop of Rochester

cc: Rev. Dennis Shaw, Holy Family  
S. Chris Treichel, OSF, Sacred Heart/St. Ann  
Rev. Louis Vasile, St. Alphonsus  
Rev. Peter DeBellis, St. Francis of Assisi  
Rev. Frank Lioi, St. Mary  
Rev. Michael Brown, St. Hyacinth  
Deb Housel, Planning Group Liaison