

CLUSTER 28 TRANSITION COMMITTEE

St. Joseph Parish, St. Patrick Parish, St. Pius X Parish, St. Brigid School

The Cluster 28 Transition Committee met again this past week to continue its consideration of the issues ahead of us as we move towards our more formal union next summer. In this and our other regular reports, we seek to moderate fears that the members of our community must inevitably have about the changes ahead of us and to underline our desire to move forward with clear-sightedness and transparency.

The first part of our agenda this week was to review the end-of-fiscal-year financial reports of the three parishes and the school. Overall, we were pleased with what we saw: all four institutions were in better shape than might have been expected given the financial challenges of the past year. This condition is a testament to the continued generous support of all of you in our community, as well as a confirmation that those in charge of financial management in our institutions are doing a good job. Still it is clear that we all live fairly close to the edge financially, there are few reserves and not much margin for error. An unexpected capital expense like a new boiler or roof, for example, would necessitate the borrowing of more money from the diocese.

This situation underlines the importance of our looking towards the consolidation of our resources as an important part of our planning for the year. The most obvious consolidation in this regard will be to bring our business offices together as a single operation at the start of the next fiscal year. This does not mean that our financial resources will be merged; for the present, the finances of all three parishes and the school will remain separate so that we can continue to fairly evaluate them and plan effectively into the future. Rather, a single business office under a cluster business manager will allow us to streamline and standardize our business practices, leverage our contract services and purchasing, oversee volunteers and contributed services, and manage our office and maintenance personnel to the advantage of all four institutions. By early Spring we should have a specific plan to present you along these lines.

Because the long-range viability of our cluster must be carefully watched in the coming five to ten years, especially in light of an aging and shifting Catholic population in our community, we are developing uniform comparative financial and demographic reporting for the four institutions that looks back three years and that we can easily monitor going forward. We have also begun a survey of property and buildings to understand current utilization and to assess looming capital needs. This study process will help us stay abreast of any trends and be prepared for the inevitability of further changes to our cluster necessary in the coming years. Planning cannot end next summer when the cluster is formalized, but must continue into the future.

We also began a discussion of the demands that will be made on our priests in the cluster. When the Capuchins formally end their presence at St. Joseph next August, the whole cluster will be served by the Jesuit Community. We expect that the Jesuits of New England will commit four priests (one retired) to the cluster. Currently, seven priests serve the cluster churches providing a daily Mass and three-four weekend Masses at each church. Additionally, the Capuchins have a long, historic relationship with the Sisters of Mercy at Frances Warde House, the Jesuits have a similar commitment to the Sisters of the Precious Blood. We would like to be able to continue honoring these commitments in some form. The reality, though, is that adjustments will have to be made to the daily and weekend mass schedules to allow for fewer priests. We would ask you to begin thinking and praying about your needs and concerns in this regard. After the first of the year, we hope to hold an open cluster meeting with interested members of our community to discuss with you what we might do to address this situation.

As always, the members of the transition committee pledge to communicate with you in a regular and transparent manner about our planning. We will utilize the bulletin, school news notes/letter, and websites as the first means of this communication. If at any time you have input you wish to share, please feel free to speak with one of the committee members – you can call your parish or school office for contact information. Please continue to keep us and this process in your prayers.