The Diocese of Belleville
Office of the Vicar General and Moderator of the Curia

MEMORANDUM

From: Reverend Monsignor John W. McEvilly, Vicar General and Moderator of the Curia, Chairman of the Committee for THE PASTORAL PLAN FOR PARISH RENEWAL AND Restructuring, ex officio

To: Vicars Forane, Priests, Deacons and Parish Life Coordinators

Re: The Next Step in The Pastoral Plan for Parish Renewal and Restructuring:
   Meetings of the Leaders of the Parish Partnerships with the Bishop, the Vicar General, and the Vicars Forane

Date: January 27, 2016

On the feast of the Transfiguration, August 6, 2011, Bishop Braxton introduced The Pastoral Plan for Parish Renewal and Restructuring with these words,

"The Pastoral Plan, which will be gradual, organic, and dynamic, will eventually have an impact on every parish in the Diocese. It will require parishes to make difficult decisions that may be painful. However, the Plan will be more fruitful if most of the decisions are made at the parish level and then recommended to me for implementation. The challenges of the future are so great that real and difficult decisions must be made. I urge parish leaders to face and address forthrightly these hard decisions. This requires an unselfish spirit that looks beyond individual parish boundaries. It is preferable that our communities of faith make the difficult decisions at the local level. However, if they are not made, these decisions will need to be made at the level of the Vicar General and the Bishop. All parishes are required to participate in The Pastoral Plan for Parish Renewal and Restructuring, without exception." (Pastoral Letter, "Embracing the Future with Hope")

The Bishop and I are very appreciative of the serious efforts the Parish Partnerships have been making to develop, expand, and implement their Strategic Pastoral Models, which outline, in as much detail as possible, the ways in which the parishes involved can coordinate their activities and work closer together in various forms of ministry and communication. These Strategic Pastoral Models must also indicate as clearly as possible the most effective and fruitful way the faith communities can be served when they have only one priest in the Partnerships. In some cases, this may well mean that two or more parishes will become one community of faith.
THE DIOCESE OF BELLEVILLE
THE PASTORAL PLAN FOR PARISH RENEWAL AND RESTRUCTURING

In reviewing the documents that have been submitted, we see that a good number of PARTNERSHIPS have developed detailed and very realistic plans. A smaller number of PARTNERSHIPS have developed more general and perhaps somewhat less realistic plans (in some cases because of seemingly insurmountable challenges). A few PARTNERSHIPS seem to have taken only modest steps or none at all.

This MEMORANDUM is to inform you of THE NEXT STEP of THE PASTORAL PLAN FOR PARISH RENEWAL AND RESTRUCTURING. This will consist of a series of meetings with the Bishop, the Vicar General, the appropriate Vicar Forane and the pastoral leadership of individual PARISH PARTNERSHIPS. (When schools are involved, Mr. Thomas Posnanski, Director of Education, and the school principal should be present.) These meetings, which will be held at the Chancery, will begin in February 2016.

We will start with The Reverend Monsignor John T. Myler, V. F. and the Metro East Vicariate. This will be followed by The Very Reverend John C. Iffert, V.F. and the North Central Vicariate; The Very Reverend Eugene H. Wojcik, V.F. and the West Vicariate; The Reverend Monsignor Thomas D. Flach, V.F. and the South Vicariate; and The Very Reverend Mark D. Stec, V.F. and the East Vicariate.

The Vicar General and the Vicars Forane will determine the order in which the PARISH PARTNERSHIPS in each Vicariate will be called. It is the responsibility of the Vicar Forane to develop the schedule in his Vicariate by contacting the parish leadership and coordinating the date and time with the schedules of the Bishop and the Vicar General. The expectation would be that one Vicariate will be completed before the next Vicariate begins. The meetings will necessarily have to be scheduled according to the calendars of the Bishop, the Vicar General, the Vicar Forane and the parish leadership. This means that it is not possible to announce a schedule for all of the meetings at this time. The process will almost certainly take several months or more. An effort will also be made to limit the number of trips to the Chancery on the part of a Vicar Forane whose rectory is at a considerable distance from Belleville. This might mean attempting to schedule two or three PARISH PARTNERSHIP meetings on the same day, or on an afternoon and the following morning with an overnight stay. An attitude of flexibility and a spirit of cooperation will be required of everyone.

The pastoral leadership of the parishes in the PARISH PARTNERSHIPS must be represented by the parish Pastor, Administrator, or Parish Life Coordinator. Whenever it is possible, the Chairperson of the Parish Pastoral Council, and the Trustees should also participate. In PARISH PARTNERSHIPS where schools are involved, Mr. Thomas Posnanski, Director of Education, and the principal should be present. Everyone is urged to make these meetings a high priority because this is a very important follow-up step to THE PASTORAL PLAN FOR PARISH RENEWAL AND RESTRUCTURING.

In most cases, we anticipate that these meetings will take about an hour and a half.
The agenda will include:

1.) If THE PASTORAL PLAN is to be effective, the parishes must focus even more on renewal than on restructuring. Members of parish communities must be invited to a deeper personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Personal conversion and spirituality are fundamental requirements for the renewal of the liturgical life of the parish, which should renew programs of religious education and Christian formation, which lead to pastoral outreach to those in need in the parish and beyond. Simply maintaining the status quo is not renewal. How is your PARISH PARTNERSHIP making use of the renewal and evangelization resource book recommended by Bishop Braxton? (Rebuilt: Awakening the Faithful, Reaching the Lost, and Making the Church Matter by Father Michael White and Tom Corcoran)

2.) A review of the STRATEGIC PASTORAL MODEL that has been submitted to the Diocese.

3.) A discussion of how faithfully that STRATEGIC PASTORAL MODEL is actually being implemented.

4.) If there is no real STRATEGIC PASTORAL MODEL, a discussion of why it has not been submitted.

5.) If a STRATEGIC PASTORAL MODEL has been submitted but is not being implemented, a discussion of why this is the case.

6.) A discussion of the degree of actual cooperation between/among the parishes in the PARISH PARTNERSHIP.

7.) A discussion of the response of the Christian Faithful to the STRATEGIC PASTORAL MODEL. Has this process had a positive or negative impact on the attendance, spirit, financial resources of the parishes and the involvement of the Faithful?

8.) A discussion of questions, difficulties, challenges that do not seem to have a solution.

9.) If there are schools involved, what is the status of the long-term viability of the school(s)? (Mr. Thomas Posnanski, Director of Education, and the principal should be present for school discussion.)

10.) A discussion of the long-term plans of the Pastor, Administrator, or Parish Life Coordinator (age, health, retirement plans). What impact will these have on the PARISH PARTNERSHIP? What special skills are needed to serve as pastor of more than one parish? What stresses, tensions and frustrations are experienced?

11.) If there is a Deacon in the PARISH PARTNERSHIP, what role is he playing in this process?

12.) Are there serious reasons to suggest that these parishes should be merged into one in the coming years? If that is the case, how difficult would this process be? What timetable would you propose?

13.) Do the parishes in your PARISH PARTNERSHIP pray the Diocesan Prayer for Vocations to the Priesthood at least once a month on Sundays?

14.) Are there fidei domum missionary priests in your PARISH PARTNERSHIP? How has he been received by the Faithful? Have you given serious consideration to the impact on your STRATEGIC PASTORAL MODEL if their Bishops or Religious Superiors called them home?

15.) Have the parishioners all been kept well informed about THE PASTORAL PLAN FOR PARISH RENEWAL AND RESTRUCTURING and the STRATEGIC PASTORAL MODELS being developed by the PARISH PARTNERSHIP?

16.) What are THE NEXT STEPS that your PARISH PARTNERSHIP should be taking to effectively implement THE PASTORAL PLAN?
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In anticipation of these meetings, the PARISH PARTNERSHIP leaders are free to submit any additional materials, including an updated STRATEGIC PASTORAL MODEL, to the Vicar General prior to the meetings. Any additional material MUST be submitted at least two weeks prior to the meeting date.

The Vicars Forane should discuss this MEMORANDUM with the participants at their next Vicariate meeting.

ALL Pastors, Administrators, and Parish Life Coordinators should share this MEMORANDUM with their Parish Pastoral Council and their Trustees and discuss it with them. They should also promptly inform their parishioners of the beginning of THE NEXT STEP in THE PASTORAL PLAN.

N.B. Attached on page five of this Memorandum is a one page summary of THE NEXT STEP that can easily be inserted in the bulletin or distributed to parishioners.

From the very beginning, Bishop Braxton has stressed the importance of doing the work of THE PASTORAL PLAN with prayer at the heart of our efforts. He has reminded us that this work has been undertaken in order for us to develop stronger communities of faith so that our witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ in southern Illinois will be effective in the years ahead. Obviously, this same spirit of prayerfulness must be a part of these meetings. We will be meeting as members of the Christian Community, the Body of Christ.

This means that we must all share our views, concerns and questions with attitudes of openness, trust, and mutual respect. We should keep in mind that we take this next step during the Jubilee Year of Mercy declared by our Holy Father, Pope Francis. He has reminded us that for Christians, the face of God is mercy. He teaches us that all of the work of the Church must be done calling on the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with the desire for forgiveness, compassion, reconciliation, mercy and cooperation.

Thank you in advance for your full cooperation in this important next phase of THE PASTORAL PLAN FOR PARISH RENEWAL AND RESTRUCTURING, which has been undertaken for the good of all.
The Bishop and I are very appreciative of the serious efforts the Parish Partnerships have been making to develop, expand, and implement their Strategic Pastoral Models, which outline in as much detail as possible the ways in which the parishes involved can coordinate their activities and work closer together in various forms of ministry and communication. These Strategic Pastoral Models must also indicate as clearly as possible the most fruitful way the faith communities can be served when they have only one priest in the Partnerships. In some cases, this may mean that, at some point, two or more parishes will become one community of faith.

In reviewing the documents that have been submitted, we see that a good number of Partnerships have developed detailed and very realistic plans. A smaller number of Partnerships have developed more general and perhaps somewhat less realistic plans (in some cases because of seemingly insurmountable challenges). A few Partnerships seem to have taken only modest steps or none at all. The Next Step of The Pastoral Plan for Parish Renewal and Restructuring will consist of a series of meetings with the Bishop, the Vicar General, the appropriate Vicar Forane and the pastoral leadership of individual Parish Partnerships. These meetings, which will be held at the Chancery, will begin in February 2016. It is not possible to announce a schedule for the entire process at this time. These meetings will almost certainly take several months or more. An attitude of flexibility and a spirit of cooperation will be required of everyone.

The pastoral leadership of the parishes in the Parish Partnerships must be represented by the parish Pastor, Administrator, or Parish Life Coordinator. Whenever it is possible, the Chairperson of the Parish Pastoral Council and the Trustees should also participate. The School Principal should participate when the parish school is involved. Please join me and Bishop Braxton in praying for the fruitfulness of this Next Step in The Pastoral Plan for Parish Renewal and Restructuring, which has been undertaken for the good of all.