



Dear Parishioners,

Thank you for your presence at the Beacons of Light town hall meeting last Wednesday. The primary focus of this meeting was to make parishioners of St. Mary, St. Helen, Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception, and the Dayton Hispanic Catholic Community aware of the initiative by the Archdiocese of Cincinnati to *reorganize parishes in a way that addresses the current reality of the number of Catholics and priests within the archdiocese.*

Why are we engaging in this reorganization process now? There are many reasons for this planning process:

- Our parishes need to be vibrant communities of faith in order that we might fully grow as disciples of Jesus Christ.
- Declining religious practice in the U.S. points to the need for strong parishes that lead people to living and growing their faith in Jesus.
- We need to better understand the impact of demographic changes in many areas within our archdiocese.
- We will have fewer priests who can serve as pastors in the future.

The reorganization of parishes is being termed, “Families of Parishes,” or four to five parishes coming together as a ‘family’. The purpose of the reorganization is simple – that, *these new Families of Parishes will be stronger together and focused more on mission than on maintenance.* Many of our parishes struggle to maintain half-full weekend Masses, when our efforts could be put into having fewer Masses that are vibrant, invigorating, and empowering. We should be focusing on radiating Christ in our communities and fully engage our parishioners in the sacramental, evangelization, and charitable mission of the gospel. Moreover, the physical and mental health and well-being of our ever-decreasing number of priests is at risk as they try to manage increasingly unmanageable Mass schedules.

This Families of Parishes model is radically different than the regional concept that has been in practice thus far. In fact, the *goal of the new Families of Parishes to truly become faith communities that live and work together in mission and ministry — not simply associate parishes with a common pastor.* As the Families of Parishes grow stronger together, every Family of Parishes will initially discern Sunday Mass schedules and locations, bring parish staff and pastoral councils together and develop a plan for parish programs and activities with the long-term goal of becoming one parish led by a single pastor. The pace at which parishes join together within the families will be variable and determined by the readiness of the parishes to move forward.

What does this mean for us in our respective parishes? The three parishes of St. Mary, St. Helen, Immaculate Conception and the Hispanic Catholic Community of Dayton have been named in the initial formation of the Family of Parishes. Either one or two more parishes will be added to this initial configuration.

Please know that whereas our three parishes may be the first ones to undertake this process, every parish in the Archdiocese of Cincinnati will be undertaking this process within a year. Also, please know that *Beacons of Light* does not envision closing parishes. It is my vision that once the complete configuration of our family of parishes is determined, I will form a “Family of Parishes Pastoral Council” with representatives from all the parishes to help determine the future our parishes as a “family of parishes.”

Until the full configuration of our family of parishes is determined, there is yet another urgent need. Currently there are 11 Masses in two languages between the three parishes. Ensuring celebrants for each of these Masses is an almost impossible task for one pastor and a few generous visiting/retired priests. *This means that while the complete configuration of our family of parishes is yet to be determined, our parishes*

*will be compelled to consolidate our Mass schedules earlier than originally envisioned.* The question is not whether we should consolidate Masses, but which Masses will serve as “Family of Parishes Mass.” The location of the Masses will be determined in consultation with parish staff and parish pastoral councils. The most central location along with the capacity of the facilities to accommodate four or five parishes along with the Hispanic community will play a determining role in such decision-making.

Please watch next week’s bulletin for upcoming changes in the Mass schedules.

The Family of Parishes reorganization also includes schools within the new configuration. Currently, two of our three parishes have strong medium-sized schools. It can be reasonably said that for the foreseeable future the existing schools will continue to operate as they presently operate.

Let us keep the Families of Parishes process in our prayers. In particular, let us pray for our parishes that we will embrace the upcoming developments with faith in God and in confidence in our ability to come together as the people of God.

You may watch a recording of the livestream at this link: <https://youtu.be/24-z36IKAyI>

In Christ, Fr. Satish Joseph

August 21, 2021