

May 11, 2004

City West Planning Group
19th Ward/Corn Hill/Bullshead Planning Group
Center City East Planning Group

Dear Priests, Pastoral Administrators, and Planning Group Chairs,

Thank you all for your steadfast commitment to the work of the urban Church in your three planning groups. Last year I asked the priests in these groups to consider the possibility of approaching the second round of pastoral planning in a way that might be more relevant to the realities of the urban Church. Eventually this consideration involved parish staff and lay leadership representatives. This work culminated in a meeting for all three groups on March 27 at the Pastoral Center. (A detailed timeline of that process is attached.)

Based on reports of that meeting, two things are clear. The three groups think it is better to proceed with the basics of pastoral planning as three distinct groups. At the same time, the larger group representing priests, parish staff, and lay leaders from all 15 parish thinks it is best to continue with discussions of principles and practices of urban ministry that might guide future pastoral activity in the areas covered by the three groups. In fact, your work has resulted in five important ministry issues that would be the focus of this work.

- Serving the poor with dignity
- Collaboration of resources / buildings
- Valuing diversity
- Fairness, justice
- Urban ministry / crescent area

To be prepared for the projected decrease in the number of priests available to serve your groups, it is essential that the configuration planning within each group begin as soon as possible and be concluded by the end of this calendar year so that the resulting plans can be used to provide guidance to Priest Personnel for pastoral leadership appointments beginning in 2005. I have asked Bill Pickett in his role as Director of Pastoral Planning and Casey Lopata as Planning Group Liaison to meet as soon as possible with the pastoral leaders and council chairs in each group to work out a timeline for this configuration process. We can make appropriate assignments only if we have an understanding of the impact of the number of pastoral leaders and priests on the number and configuration of parishes.

At the same time, I have asked Bernard Grizard as Director of Parish Support Ministries and John Brasley as Coordinator of Urban Ministry Services to begin work with the larger group expanded to include all pastoral ministers to understand more fully these five areas of concern and to provide opportunities for reflection and collaboration on specific pastoral issues, such as, violence, poverty, housing, racism, and multiculturalism. Bernard has also assumed responsibility for multi-cultural ministries and thus will bring that perspective and his extensive background to this project. While many of the issues apply to ministries outside these three planning groups, I want the initial work to focus on these three. It is important that we begin to have concrete results that can form the basis for broader consultation and action by the end of June 2005. I have no doubt that this will not be the conclusion of such a process but it should be the beginning of some concrete implementation. As you move ahead with this ministry planning process, it will be important to be aware of the configuration process.

My prayers are with you as you bring the face of Christ to all who are the urban Church and to all those the urban Church serves. I look forward to supporting your efforts as you proceed.

With every best wish I remain,

Your brother in Christ,

Matthew H. Clark
†Bishop of Rochester

c: Urban Ministry Planning Team representing the 19th Ward, Center City East, and City West planning groups