

**Saints Peter & Paul Parish Listening Session for Pastoral Planning**  
**January 2, 2005**

Convened by: Bob Papaj, Parish Council co-chairperson

The purpose of the meeting was to express and gather opinions relative to the pastoral planning process.

By way of starting and framing the discussion, the basic limits were outlined:

- Five faith communities are involved in the pastoral planning process.
1. Emmanuel Church of the Deaf
  2. Our Lady of Good Counsel
  3. St. Augustine
  4. St. Monica
  5. Saints Peter & Paul.
- Four church buildings are in the cluster (Emmanuel Church of the Deaf worships at Our Lady of Good Counsel).
  - Three weekend Masses (including the Saturday observance) is the maximum number an ordained priest may say.
  - Too many parish-related buildings and their upkeep pose a major problem.
  - One priest will be available to to the five faith communities sometime in 2005-2010.

Question: Are there any specific proposals put forth by the pastoral planning process at this time?

A.: There have been relatively few meetings of the revised pastoral planning process at present. The recent passing of Deacon Fitz Glasgow of RCC 19 canceled an important meeting. The SSPP parish council members are your representatives and they have attended the meetings thus far. SSPP members are currently involved (Steering Committee: Carl Merritt is an advisor and Diane Zielinski is the chairperson of the Communications subcommittee).

There have been some scenarios put forth but they are vague. Regarding specific courses of action, the parish council does not have information upon which to comment at this time.

Parishioner's prepared statement (summarized)

- It is important to celebrate a Mass every Sunday at Saints Peter & Paul --- not just for parishioners but for the persons who share in the Hospitality Table as well. For the parish's small size there is significant involvement in the lector and Eucharistic minister roles (25 persons). The parish has a valuable reachout to the Bull's Head neighborhood. It is important to have a Catholic presence in this neighborhood. The beauty of Saints Peter and Paul involves the people and the church building. The Hospitality area of the church should be put to use during the week for other projects by screening off parts of the church if necessary. Special consideration should be put into security issues to make visitors and parish house residents feel safer. Advertising in publications to invite people to worship at Ss. Peter & Paul may be helpful.

Comment: The parish has done a lot of good on behalf of the neighborhood. That is one of the reasons for keeping it going.

Comment: In spite of the aesthetics of our church we must accept hard realities. Our situation is not unique to Rochester. It is a national concern for Catholics.

Comment: The Diocese of Rochester needs to appreciate the grieving process involved. Workshops to help people cope with the hurt are needed. The inevitability of the process is understood ... but the experience is one of hurt.

Comment: There doesn't seem to be much of a visible effort to share among the clustered churches at present. It is important for RCC 19 members to come here as well as for us to share in their activities.

Question and clarification: What is Deacon Ken Arnold's role regarding SSPP?

A.: Deacon Ken is shared with the Newman Community at the U of R. Deacons do not celebrate Mass. Eucharistic services (not the celebration of the Mass) are used only in emergency situations. They are not planned services.

Comment: Many parishioners walk to Saints Peter & Paul. Walking a greater distance could become a hardship.

Closing Saints Peter & Paul would create negative feelings similar to when Wegmans food store moved out.

Comment: Looking at the campuses of the four worship sites is important. Shutting any one down affects a neighborhood (example: murders occurring near St. Francis of Assisi after it closed). Consider keeping all of the churches open and rely on a circuit of Sunday masses (e.g. a "skipped: no worship here" week). Financial and maintenance concerns can be overcome. This is the wrong time for the Catholic Church to be perceived as being in retreat.

Suggestion: Follow the example of churches that rely on van transportation to and from church for their members. This would help if a parish worship site were closed and members need to travel to another.

Question: What about the priest shortage? Can't there be something done about it by the Vatican?

A.: The priest shortage is a worldwide problem. In spite of the shortage in the U.S. there are many other widespread regions in the world in much worse condition. The permanent diaconate program in the US does offer some encouragement but it is different from the priesthood. The present model for priesthood has not changed.



Question: Where does the collection plate money for a particular church go under a clustered arrangement?

The speaker answered the question by indicating that clustered parishes designate their own church on the envelope.

Follow-up: Regarding keeping all of the churches open and relying on a circuit of Sunday Mass celebration (sometimes "on" with Sunday Mass and sometimes "off" with no Mass until the cycle repeats), it was the speaker's experience that this quickly became confusing and fell apart. It was not regarded as a long-term solution.

Comment: We are lucky to have Bishop Clark and his approach to pastoral planning which relies on parishioner input. In many Dioceses there may be very little input prior to the bishop closing a church. Aging churches that are costly to maintain is a national problem. The Church is not in the market of preserving museums. It's job is to save souls and it is unsure whether having a church building is necessary to carry out that role. We need the passion to preserve our buildings but what would Christ Himself do? Is it the buildings or the people that really makes a church?

Of greater concern is whether the people from that faith community would scatter if their church were closed. It must also be appreciated that the current problems are not to be seen as an attack on the urban church. The problems are too widespread for that to be the case.

What about building conditions among the pastoral planning group sites?

The condition of all of the buildings within the pastoral planning group is assessed by the Diocese. Saints Peter and Paul has already been reviewed and recommendations made. A Diocesan *Building Conditions Assessment* report of all the buildings under consideration will be made available soon to the the pastoral planning task force.

Saints Peter and Paul parish is compiling its own materials relating to building condition assessment, financial vitality and ministry vitality to ensure that parish data and Diocesan data are of the best quality.

Comment: The strengths of our parish ministries may be a saving grace for the parish. It is important to build upon these strengths. There will be an effort for the parish to draw closer to Saint Peter's Kitchen ministry. Making a west side focus for our ministries may prove helpful for the overall parish. Having a greater ministerial presence by building upon our parish ministries may help our overall vitality.

Follow-up: The parish has about twelve individual ministries. The parish council worked hard last year to identify, explain and encourage participation in these ministries. The ministries are "our light to the world" and need sharing.

Comment: We need to be open to the multi-use of our buildings and consider expanding or developing new ministries.

Comment: We need to rent out our building to smaller faith communities as a means of adding income.

Comment: Pray to the Holy Spirit and be open to do God's will.

Comment: Today marks the 135th anniversary of a parish tragedy involving a floor collapse in our former school building. We've been through tough times but have always evolved to meet the needs of the times. We began as a church of immigrants needing help to survive. Then we became a church of support to meet spiritual, educational and social needs. Over the past generation we evolved to being a church in service to the neighborhood. We are called to evolve once again.

Concerning working with RCC 19, it's not about *us / them*. It's about *we*.

Comment: RCC has vital ministries, too. They have similar reasons to stay open. The question is, how can we merge our ministries together? It's not about *us/them* but rather how we can participate together. RCC 19 members have already come to participate in Saints Peter & Paul worship activities. We need to bridge the gaps.

Question: Are there any plans for all the churches involved to come together and have a similar discussion like the one we're having now? Apparently RCC 19 churches have held a listening session together as a cluster.

A.: There is no plan at the present for a joint listening session but the Saints Peter & Paul parish council will raise the suggestion with Sr. Sue Hoffman.

Comment: Check into handicapped accessibility relating to all parish buildings within the pastoral planning group.

Closing comments by convener: Thank you to all participants for your ideas and concerns. The Parish Council will make available to Saints Peter & Paul parishioners a summary of the Listening Session notes. Please continue sharing your ideas and concerns with council members.

Suggestion: Visit the RCC 19 website at: [www.rcc19thward.org](http://www.rcc19thward.org)

note-taker: John E. Curran