

LPA 12 Meeting Notes

April 5, 2008

The meeting covered the following items:

- **Review of Agenda**

- **Review of meeting guidelines which included:**
 - One person speak at a time; Listen; be respectful of others; Keep discussion on-topic ; There are no dumb questions; Quiet your cell phones

- **First round of reports from parishes – general results of council & town hall meetings:**
 - St. Ann – held parish council and finance council meetings – discussed general topics as well as specifics of Options; meetings were emotional with anxiety; gave notice of meetings from pulpit, brochure and letter with handouts. Will continue to keep parish informed.
 - St. Mary's (Richmond) – held parish council and finance council meetings; will hold town hall meetings later – discussions included wisdom of joining parishes with schools (previous discussions in LPA showed pros and cons to both joining and separating parishes with schools), questions on how lines were drawn for LPAs and difficult of implementing current timeline (which is too fast; impossible).
 - Our Lady of Lourdes – held parish council and finance council meetings; will hold town hall meetings later – discussions included “why” we are clustering; ways to ‘get around’ clustering’; ‘How’ clustering would work (from financial and ministries perspectives); concept of sharing priests is fine; priest must support school (critical); will continue to keep parishioners informed; felt that ‘the seeds’ had been planted and it will take time for ideas to ‘sprout’.
 - Immaculate Conception – town hall meeting – discussions showed parishioners were disappointed and venting; wanted to know when the actual implementation would occur; needed to be sure that decisions were based on population trends; questions about both diocesan and LPA boundaries (the ability to draw from surrounding diocese/LPAs for clustering); discussions on the cost of implementing (from where is the money coming to implement/maintain clustering).
 - CVM – council meeting; no town hall meeting – discussions included why clustering was occurring; wanted to know if there were other choices available; is it possible to have other LPA boundaries.
 - St. Mary/Annunciation – parish council, finance council and town hall meeting –discussions included a consensus to move from resistance to solutions; once a solution was found, it was felt that the liturgy schedule would be held impacted and need to have guidelines in place for prayer services; current priest assistance from other diocese will continue even with clustering
 - St. Jude – had joint meeting with Immaculate Conception – discussion included that overall concept of clustering is okay; most resistance to clustering comes from idea that mass schedule will change (all 8 parishes of LPA 12 stated the same); the idea of having a mid-week liturgy to fulfill the Sunday mass obligation is not acceptable; parishes need to keep their deacons; wanted to know from where the next pastor will come when the current pastor leaves.
 - St. Michael – council meetings and town hall meetings – discussions included current steps being taken to improve priest shortage; impact clustering will have on weekend liturgy schedule; how will additional costs be handled; what decision making will Lay have in deciding/implementing the Option and Model chosen for the parish; need for additional information for required decision making i.e. core requirements for governance; additional work needs to be done in identifying how to optimize how the Church of the Vietnamese Martyrs can more fully be a part of clustering so that all involved parishes benefit

- **Update from Planning Commission –**
 - Original directive was for each LPA to send one Plan to diocese (by May 31). Now, a LPA can send one plan plus an alternative, if desired.
 - Priest Personnel Committee has decided to freeze rotation for this year.
 - Plan needs to include prioritization and implementation schedule.

- Since mass times will probably change as a result of clustering, parishes are encouraged to change the schedules before actual clustering as a way of facilitating transition.
- If clustering results in the hiring of a cluster Coordinator, it is the responsibility of the parishes to fund the new position; the diocese will not be funding any new positions.
- Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest (SCAP) should not be regularly scheduled as a part of weekend celebrations. SCAP should be used in situations of emergency or inability to schedule. The bishop has clearly told us that he does not favor SCAP except in emergencies. This should be considered by each parish as it schedules its weekend liturgies and is deciding between SCAP versus weekday liturgies replacing weekend liturgies. Parishes are encouraged to use a pool of available priests whenever possible.

- **Additional Discussion by LPA 12 –**

- Most important factor in clustering is the impact on the weekend liturgy schedule. We are a Eucharist people.
- Next most important factor is the financial consideration. How much extra cost for implementation and maintenance? How are costs divided among parishes?
- Other critical factors are parish-based schools, current debt of parishes, structures.
- How to most effectively use the pastor/other resources of Church of Vietnamese Martyrs given that the pastor is not assignable by bishop, language barriers, cultural barriers, etc. It was felt that the CVM needs to ‘stand alone’ in Option AND that formal agreements be reached in terms of how the pastor would be used at the parishes for liturgy, ministering, etc.

- **Review of Options by Parishes –**

First round vote was taken with following results:

Option A – St. Ann, Our Lady of Lourdes

Abstain – St. Mary’s (Richmond), Immaculate Conception, CVM, ST. Mary Annunciation, St. Jude

Option E – St. Michael

Those abstaining felt it was not possible to decide/not enough information.

St. Michael explained how it created the new Option E (geographically joining St. Ann and St. Michael, high growth in both parishes predicted, ability/willingness to form potential new parish in Goochland, separating two mega parishes ((St. Mary and St. Michael)) to minimize Sunday liturgy schedule impact and more equally distribute number of parishioners)

Revote showed the following results:

Option A – 2 Option E – 3 Abstain – 3

Further discussion followed: It was decided that the clustering of St. Jude, St. Mary Annunciation and Immaculate Conception and the stand-alone of CVM was set. These two entities would require two priests. That left two priests for St. Mary – Richmond, Our Lady of Lourdes, St. Ann, St. Michael and a potential new parish in Goochland.

The suggested arrangement for the 4 parishes and initial vote by the 4 involved parishes were:

- E1: St. Mary & St. Michael plus St. Ann & Our Lady of Lourdes – voted on by St. Ann and OLL
- E2: St. Mary & OLL plus St. Michael & St. Ann – voted on by St. Mary and St. Michael. This arrangement also includes a formal arrangement with CVM for support by pastor.

Repeated discussions on the pros and cons of joining and separating the two schools was held. It is critical that the two parishes with schools (St. Mary and Our Lady of Lourdes) have pastors that support schools and this is not easy to find. St. Ann does not want to cluster with St. Mary with reasons to be shared with Frank and Andy if needed. St. Ann does not want to cluster with St. Michael because it felt that the two parishes were different and that since St. Michael is larger than St. Ann that the pastor would basically be St. Michael’s pastor with little time left for St. Ann. As such, St. Ann wants to be clustered with the smaller Our Lady of Lourdes and have St. Mary and St. Michael cluster and no consideration given for a future Goochland parish.

St. Michael understood St. Ann sense of being 'swallowed up' by a larger a parish and at the same time shared its concern that as of now, one pastor can not handle the needs of its 7,000 parishioners and having to add to an already burdened schedule meant even less ministering to the parish. No one is immune to the sacrifices.

It was suggested that both E1 and E2 be submitted to the diocese in the May report. St. Michael could not support this idea. St. Mary and St. Michael both felt that it is impossible to cluster two mega parishes with one priest. These two parishes have approximately 14,000 parishioners. The impact on these two parishes would be significant.

It was suggested that a two tier approach be taken that would include St. Michael and St. Mary both having its own pastor when the priest count goes from 6 to 5. There was disagreement to this idea because we have been asked by the diocese to cluster according to a four priest count. Additionally, it would force the issue of joining St. Michael and St. Mary.

- **Summary –**

The four parishes were directed to have another round of council and/or town hall meetings, sharing the latest news from the LPA 12 meeting with the goal of consensus on either E1 or E2. Additionally, all parishes are to email Andy by Saturday, April 12 as to their availability on all the Saturdays in May. We may also consider having a mid-week meeting.