

# *Sacred Heart Catholic Church*

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*17 North Walnut Street, Du Quoin, IL 62832*

Dear Parishioners,

At the direction of Bishop Braxton on April 2, 2013 to draft a “Strategic Pastoral Model” that creates a plan for Sacred Heart Parish and Immaculate Conception Parish to be “served by one priest, with the possibility of becoming one parish”, a Restructuring Committee has been meeting since August 2015 to develop that plan. The plan is to be submitted to the Bishop, Vicar General, and Vicar Forane no later than January 2016 for his review and consideration.

Five members of each of the two parishes were asked by Fr. Joseph to serve on the committee. Two committee members who attended the first meeting resigned from the committee, which now consists of John Childs, Rex Duncan, Mary Nippe, Janet Harris, Suzanne Majewski, Krista Piotrowski, Kathy Scaglione, and Karen Wolfe. Karen chairs the meetings and Krista records the meetings and maintains the minutes of those meetings.

The committee members undertake this process with heavy hearts, as it is stated per attachment C – C.1: The Parish Partnerships from the Pastoral Plan for Parish Renewal and Restructuring document per the Diocese of Belleville (see below), and in some cases full closure, of parishes throughout the diocese, the state, and the nation. The meetings have been fruitful and constructive, and have been done with great sensitivity to the historic communal lives of both of these great parishes.

## **Attachment C – C.1: The Parish Partnerships**

The primary reasons for the decision to develop this new structure were outlined by the Vicar General, Monsignor McEvelly, in his February 6, 2013, MEMORANDUM. The decision to move toward these new structures has been dictated by the very real challenges the Diocese must face forthrightly if we are to continue our mission effectively. These challenges will probably become more acute in the next ten years. The main challenges are well known:

- the impact of declining numbers of parishioners and declining financial support in many parishes during the past 20 years;
- the advanced age of many parishioners;
- declining number of elementary schools;
- the age and condition of parish facilities;
- the proximity of one declining parish to another;
- the need for a critical mass of parishioners to sustain viability;
- the long-term uncertainty of the availability of *fidei donum* priests;
- the number of priests eligible for retirement;
- the failing health of several priests;

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- the small number of seminarians; and
- the unreasonableness of asking priests to serve three or more parishes for an extended period of time.

In discussions with other parish leaders who have experienced this same process, the committee learned much about how to effectively and efficiently go about the merger process. One powerful suggestion, which committee members have taken to heart, is the need to communicate as the planning process goes forward. With this letter, the committee hopes to do a better job of communicating the planning process to date.

The intent of the Restructuring Committee is to have a draft plan completed in early December 2015. That plan will be shared with both parishes with opportunities provided for constructive input. At this point, the committee members are considering the following:

Keep Immaculate Conception Church open as long as it is pastorally and financially viable. Should an order of suppression emanate from the Diocese, Immaculate Conception Church should remain open as a chapel that will host one mass monthly. The chapel would remain available for weddings, funerals, and any other religious celebration.

Develop a system of shared governance that includes merged Parish and Finance Councils.

Keep the Immaculate Conception Cemetery operating as it is currently.

The members of the Restructuring Committee will continue to develop and refine the Strategic Pastoral Model, with other recommendations to follow. The assignment the committee members have accepted is a difficult one made necessary by the above attachment C. Failure on our part to develop a thoughtful and sensitive approach to a merger will most likely result in mandatory decisions being reached by the Diocese. With the belief that local parish input into the process works best, the committee will move forward to finalize the Strategic Pastoral Model by the end of the year.

Sincerely,

Joint Restructuring Committee of Sacred Heart Church & Immaculate Conception Church