

## **Future Pastoral Considerations**

### **St. Clare Parish, Askeaton, Greenleaf, Wrightstown**

At times it is easier to deal with questions of “bricks & mortar” or “dollars and cents.” Our four previous inserts have summarized those areas of parish life. The heart and soul of parish life however is our “call to holiness.” Our commitment to the future needs to focus us on how to become a more ministerial complete parish.

In the long range planning process (complete report is on the parish website) little time was devoted to the bricks and mortar or dollars and cents, yet the other plans often returned to the need for improved resources.

It is often said that the longest journey in life is the one that goes from our head to our heart. This moves us from thoughts to emotions. Sometimes we need to move that journey from heart to head. That is the process that takes us from feelings, emotions and sentimentality to moving forward in life. This movement happens as people move from grief to new relationships and a new vitality. We respect and honor our feelings and memories, but also acknowledge that sometimes we need to move forward to infuse new life into ourselves and the next generation of Christians.

In the area of worship certain themes have emerged over the past three years as a parish. One of the most powerful themes is the need for a consistent “presider” at Mass. Other merged or linked parishes also struggle with this. We want to be comfortable at our Eucharistic Celebrations. We want to know the people around us and the leader of our prayer. Unfortunately a parish with five weekend Masses and three worship sites means a pastor is only with each gathering of prayer about sixty percent of the time. The other forty percent is covered gratefully by other available “senior” priests. Even our current practice which is not ideal is not sustainable; our pool of available “help-out” priests is aging and by the natural process of life, shrinking. We hope and pray for an increase of vocations to the priesthood, but must face the real numbers of the current church.

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Continuing in the area of worship, when people describe their experiences of visiting other communities and what they appreciated, we often hear about music. We have a corps of very dedicated musicians. Our current buildings however, with “choir lofts” no longer serve the liturgy well. No one is able to lead from behind. Again and again we hear people speak of energized liturgies in buildings with a cantor and choir leading and modern technology assisting the praying community.

When gathering for worship a key element is hospitality. Space for casual visiting and informal conversation creates an environment where new members can be welcomed. As regular attendees we know those around us, but new-comers can easily be missed. Hospitality requires accessibility features at all entrances and the sanctuary. We currently limit our liturgical ministers to the able-bodied. Some of our sound systems make participation difficult if not

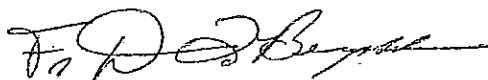
impossible for many of our members. While we manage to celebrate weddings, funerals and baptisms in our current buildings, these celebrations can be enhanced as fuller expressions of our faith with updated facilities. Community-building flourishes in facility areas designed for social interaction, mingling and fun.

In the area of worship, we make do. We do however need to ask ourselves if this is the best we can do in showing our commitment to the Glory of God. Although in planning we look at environment for worship, hospitality, quality of worship and liturgical ministry as well as community formation, we must look to the future to decide if we can move forward with our current facilities.

We have made progress in establishing our "Care Minister" program and our youth ministries. Yet when we look at the areas of pastoral care, and family life ministry we have a way to go. In each area there seems to be a call for greater "age specific" ministries. This is for senior citizens, those in the middle (still being parents for their children, or being care givers for their parents) young adults and youth.

In "social concerns" we know there are many who fall between the cracks in the current social services systems. We do some work in care for the poor and hurting, but recognize there is more we can do. Some of this is in direct service, but is often in advocacy programs to help work with other existing structures and other faith communities if we are to help transform our world into being closer to a reflection of the Kingdom of God.

In our long range plan there were eleven areas of study and concern. In this brief summary only a couple areas have been touched. We encourage that all read and reflect on the plan and its underlying concerns and needs. Part of our challenge is to move forward in all these areas. We recognize a long range plan takes a long time and keeps being updated to look forward. We cannot rest on our laurels for if we do our churches become museums rather than vibrant living expressions for faith. We pray for God's grace to move this parish forward.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "F. D. Bennett". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.