

CLUSTER 28 TRANSITION COMMITTEE

St. Joseph Parish, St. Patrick Parish, St. Pius X Parish, St. Brigid School

The Cluster 28 Transition Committee met again this past week on November 3rd to continue its consideration of the issues ahead of us as we move towards our more formal union next summer. In this and our other regular reports, we seek to moderate fears that the members of our community must inevitably have about the changes ahead of us and to underline our desire to move forward with clear-sightedness and transparency.

Our meeting this week began with a creative discussion of the challenges and opportunities before us as we begin to mold ourselves into a larger community. The most important challenge we considered was how to preserve a sense of belonging for all our members. Becoming one cluster will increase our numbers significantly: There will be many new faces around us. Mass times and locations may shift because of fewer clergy so that our established patterns of worship and our regular contact with smaller groups who know us and are familiar to us will change. Adjustments to our ways of attending to the spiritual and practical needs of the school and parishes will also change as we work to consolidate and more carefully manage our resources. Such change can be confusing and disruptive of our habits of going about the practice of our faith. I am reminded of Mary Magdalene's confusion in the garden the morning after the resurrection where she exclaims to the man (Jesus) whom she takes to be the gardener, "They have taken my Lord, and I do not know where they have put him!"

Thus in this challenge we are called to careful consideration of how to do things in a different way such that we can maintain the strength and familiarity of small, close communities in the context of the much larger community we call our cluster. Just as Mary's ultimate recognition of Jesus that Easter morning led the followers of Jesus to a whole new way of understanding their relationship with the Lord, so we see the challenge of maintaining a close sense of community as an invitation from the Lord to imagine new ways of being a church.

Of prime importance will be getting to know one another in this larger community we now belong to. We cannot get to know everybody, but every opportunity we have to interact with each other in the larger context of our cluster presents the possibility to us of knowing someone new who, as we usually discover, has many of the same hopes and fears that we have about the future. Pragmatically, we will work to provide opportunities for cluster members to interact in focus groups or town meetings – such as the one we plan to have in February regarding the Mass schedule. Information about parish and school social activities will be published in all our communications so that we can feel invited into the lives of the other communities in our cluster. For example, our bulletins are already posted and linked on our web pages. Our established groups such as the Knights of Columbus and Women's Fellowship are already looking for ways to share their social and ministerial activities. We are considering sponsoring new spiritual opportunities as well, such as having a cluster-wide retreat like the one we shared a year ago at St. Pius.

All these things can foster a better sense of our larger community. Still the challenge remains to foster that more intimate sense of family and home that we enjoy in being part of our respective parishes and school. One thing we hope for is that the disciples in Mission groups this winter/spring will continue as faith sharing groups during the rest of the year. We will work to maintain a regular office presence at all our locations so that community members can have their expected access to pastoral assistance with masses or other problems. We will work hard to respect the established "culture" of each of the institutions, avoiding a one size fits all approach to things like liturgy preparation and the distinctive worship practices of each community.

Jesus' disciples took a long time to adjust to the reality of the resurrection and the invitation of that extraordinary moment to imagine new ways of being a community of faith. We are not faced with so radical an invitation, yet all of us can see the challenge before us to preserve our hope and keep our community of faith not only intact but growing and flourishing. Recognizing the Lord in the midst of change is always a challenge, but it is also an opportunity that can, if we are patient, bear much fruit.

As always, the members of the transition committee pledge to communicate with you in a regular and transparent manner about our planning. We will utilize the bulletin, school news notes/letter, and websites as the first means of this communication. If at any time you have input you wish to share, please feel free to speak with one of the committee members – you can call your parish or school office for contact information. Please continue to keep us and this process in your prayers.

- Fr. Jim Lafontaine