

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

In the January 2014 issue of "Christ is Our Hope" magazine, Bishop R. Daniel Conlon wrote an article entitled "Working Together". In his article, the bishop asked us to begin the process of greater collaboration among our parishes. Since that time, we who are part of the Eastern DuPage Deanery have been working together in many different ways.

The Diocese of Joliet is divided into eight geographical areas called deaneries. The parishes in each of these areas have the opportunity to more closely collaborate with each other because of the proximity that they share with one another. In Eastern DuPage, there are sixteen Catholic parish communities and one Easter Rite parish in Lombard that is actually part of another diocese. There was a time when approximately 40 priests staffed these 16 parishes. At the present time, there is a total of 17 priests serving all of them. The many needs of the people in these faith communities cannot all be met by each parish alone. As we work together to share our resources, we can become stronger. By inviting those within our deanery to participate in formation, education, and spiritual programs we become of better service to one another and God. In doing so, there is not the objective either to close parishes or to take away parish identities. We are instead attempting to make better use of our blessings and to become stronger by working together.

In our deanery, we have a Steering Committee composed of two or more representatives from each of the 16 parishes which meets monthly. We are always grateful when guests also attend. The Steering Committee in a sense is the parish council for our deanery. Two of our members are on the Diocesan Pastoral Council. They share our work with the other deaneries as well as the bishop. As a dean, it is my responsibility to share information with the priests who meet together on a monthly basis. The Steering Committee members are asked to make sure that their pastors and parish councils are aware of the efforts of the committee.

What does a steering committee do? Its main objective is to bring together members from all of the parishes to strengthen the local church. It attempts to identify needs that exist that can be addressed through greater collaboration. It also plans a series of ongoing opportunities for the members of our deanery. In this new school year, an entire series of adult educational/formational presentations has been planned. An annual day for liturgical ministers also takes place. Extended periods of time for the Sacrament of Reconciliation during Advent and Lent are also sponsored by this group. The Marriage Enrichment Subcommittee sponsors opportunities for married couples in our deanery to build stronger relationships with one another. At a recent meeting, discussion took place regarding what topics will be addressed in this new year and how, as a group, we can work together to bring together needed assistance for our parishes in dealing with them.

The steering committee parishes are also broken down into three small groups because of their locale to one another. Group 1 parishes are: Ascension, Christ the King, St. Pius, and Sacred Heart. Group 2 parishes are: Holy Ghost, St. Phillip, St. Peter, St. Alexander, St. John the Apostle, St. Joseph, and St. Andrew Kim. Group 3 parishes are: St. Charles Borromeo, Mary Queen of Heaven, Immaculate Conception, Visitation, and St. Alexis. Apart from the steering committee meetings, the local parish groups meet to discuss how they can share resources, programs, and personnel. For example, four parishes in our deanery shared a youth minister for four years. Other local parish groups share missions, sacramental preparation, and other liturgical celebrations. Since June of this year, one of the priests is now the pastor of two of the parishes. Fortunately, these two communities have had a history of already working very closely with one another.

The process of greater collaboration is God's project. As Bishop Conlon wrote, "The church is an instrument in God's hands, designed by God, to do God's work." Please support the efforts of our deanery through your willingness to pray for our work and to show support through your participation in our shared efforts. If you would like to participate, especially in the meetings of your local parish group, please contact your pastor and let him know your willingness to be part of their collaborative efforts. In a future bulletin article, you will see a schedule of the educational/formational opportunities that are being provided for our parishes in this year.

Sincerely in Christ,



Very Reverend Thomas Paul, V.F., Dean of Eastern DuPage County