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NEWS

Page One

Briefs

Archive

Archbishop's Column

Sunday Scriptures

Dear Father

Youth Column

CALENDAR

EDITORIALS

CLASSIFIEDS

SPECIAL SECTIONS

Marriage

Senior Living

Christian Hope

Vacations

INFORMATION

About Us

Advertise

Subscribe

Subscription Changes

Staff Directory

Contact Us

ARCHDIOCESE

Home Page

Life Teen Masses

REVIEW ON TAPE



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October 15, 2004

Archdiocese takes long look at future planning

by Joseph Kenny, Review Staff Writer

Recent news of planning efforts in South St. Louis and Northeast St. Louis County that will result in parish consolidations are part of a much broader picture for the archdiocese.

Though the recommendations in those two regions — where the Catholic population has decreased dramatically over the past two decades — include reducing the number of parishes and schools, planning in some other regions focuses on growth.

A goal for pastoral planning in the archdiocese is for it to be ongoing, according to a report given late last month to the Priests' Council by Msgr. Dennis Delaney, vicar for planning.

The general outline is to have a study of one deanery each year "so that the strength and vitality of all deaneries is assessed and necessary adaptations made on a 10-year cycle," Msgr. Delaney reported.

In May 2003 a study was completed of the St. Charles Deanery, which includes 25 parishes in St. Charles and Lincoln counties. Recommendations were made to establish a new parish as soon as possible between St. Joseph Parish in Cottleville and Immaculate Conception Parish in Dardenne.

Property owned by the archdiocese at Highways N and Z was determined to no longer be a suitable location,



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so the Finance and Property Committee of the archdiocese's Finance Council is searching for another site.

"As soon as it's available and we're able to purchase it, the archbishop's intention would be to found a new parish," Msgr. Delaney said.

Another parish is recommended on the other side of Cottleville to serve growth expected to occur as a result of the Page Avenue extension into St. Charles.

The planning process also recommended increasing the size of facilities at St. Patrick Parish in Wentzville or perhaps the formation of a new parish in that western St. Charles community. The plan also recommends acquiring property in Foristel, where it is expected another parish will be needed in 10 years when that part of far western St. Charles and eastern Warren counties becomes the hub of population growth.

In the last month a pastoral planning process has begun in the North City Deanery, which includes 16 parishes in or bordering North St. Louis. The study, projected to take about six months, also will consider the range of outreach services available in the deanery.

Msgr. Delaney reported that the study will be modeled on the South City and Northeast County deaneries. A task force of pastors and lay leadership has formed, and site visits and interviews with pastors and lay leadership will take place. Draft recommendations will be made for further consultation.

The strategic pastoral planning dates to the beginning of Cardinal Justin Rigali's service in the archdiocese. The original 1997 strategic plan led to the establishment of the pastoral planning office and a pastoral planning process "so that we don't have to address crises one by one, putting out brush fires as it were, when something develops that we haven't anticipated," Msgr. Delaney said.

With pastoral planning, he noted, "we have an opportunity to assess the strengths and be aware of any vulnerability we have."

Once those are addressed, he said, "we can plan for a strong and vital future for the Church."

The goal is to advance the Church's mission while being responsible stewards of the personnel, finances and facilities in the archdiocese.

After the North City planning, studies are anticipated in the west portion of the Southwest County Deanery and nearby parishes in Villa Ridge (Gildehaus), Pacific and Eureka where there is strong growth. The Ste. Genevieve Deanery also will be studied soon as will a portion of the Southwest County Deanery bordering

St. James Parish in South St. Louis that includes Immaculate Conception Parish in Maplewood and St. Luke and Little Flower parishes in Richmond Heights.

Msgr. Delaney noted that priests and parish leaders often are not only welcoming the planning but also encouraging it.

In the South City and Northeast County deaneries, he said, it was the deans who "asked for some assistance in assessing where they're going in the future. It's been from the ground up."

In the Northeast County Deanery, where there are 25 parishes, the draft recommendations call for 10 territorial parishes and one personal parish along with eight elementary schools.

Projections are that through 2010 there will be 17 priests serving the deanery. There currently are 27 priests.

In the 35 parishes of South St. Louis, it is projected that through 2010 there will be 24 priests serving in the area now served by 36 priests. The Review will publish the complete list of recommendations for the South City Deanery in its Oct. 22 issue, after all parishioners have had the chance to hear plans directly from their pastor.

Feedback is being gathered in those deaneries on the draft recommendations. The task forces in the deaneries will consider that information and are expected to present final recommendations to Archbishop Raymond Burke by Dec. 1.



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[PAGE ONE](#) | [BRIEFS](#) | [ARCHIVE](#) | [YOUTH](#) | [CALENDAR](#) | [EDITORIALS](#)
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