

Colossal collaboration: 13 parishes work together to address needs

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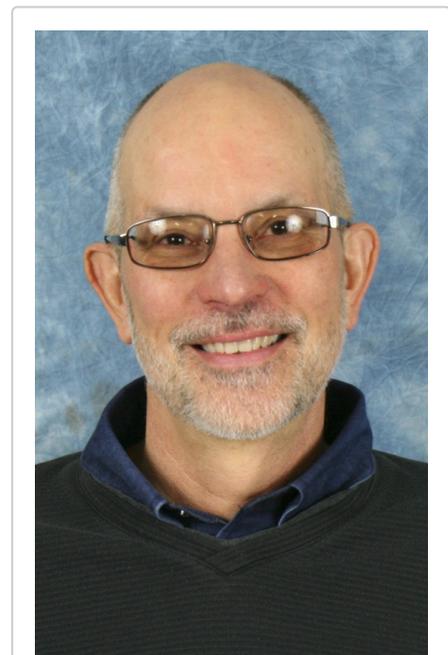
By Barb Arland-Fye and
Deacon Derick Cranston
The Catholic Messenger

Changing demographics and fewer priests propelled a grassroots collaborative effort that will impact 13 parishes in the middle of the Diocese of Davenport. The plan, to take effect July 1, creates some new parish clusters, reduces the number of Masses offered in some parish clusters by one, and reduces the number of priests serving the region by one.

With the new arrangement, St. Patrick Parish in Iowa City will cluster with St. Joseph Parish in West Liberty. Ss. Mary & Mathias Parish in Muscatine will cluster with St. Joseph Parish in Columbus Junction. St. Mary Parish in Wilton will cluster with St. Bernadette Parish in West Branch.

Clusters that won't change configuration: St. Mary Parish in Riverside remains clustered with Holy Trinity Parish in Richmond and St. Joseph Parish in Wellman. St. Joseph Parish in Hills remains clustered with St. Mary parishes in Lone Tree and Nichols. St. James Parish in Washington is not clustered, but collaborates with the other parishes.

"The opportunity for collaboration is what drove this initiative," said diocesan Director of Planning Dan Ebener who facilitated the planning process that began four years



Ebener

ago. “What was really special about this effort is that it came from the grassroots. The pastors themselves have been leading this effort. They know the situation in their parishes better than we do in Davenport.”

Pastors and their parishes south and east of Iowa City began this initiative in July 2014. They called themselves “The Ten Who Can.” Parishes in Hills, Lone Tree, Nichols, Richmond, Riverside, Wellman, Washington, Columbus Junction, West Branch, and West Liberty were the initial collaborators. They were tasked with developing innovative solutions to address the sharp decrease in the number of active priests over the next decade as well as the shifting demographics, especially in rural areas. Of the 70 active priests in the diocese today, as many as 16 will be eligible to retire over the next four years, Ebener noted. Ordinations of new priests are estimated at one or two per year.

“The plan has, and will, foster change in some way for everyone within the planning area. It reflects the discussion and input from pastors in our area regarding clerical distribution, while encouraging our bishop’s vision of maintaining parishes,” said Carol Kaalberg, parish cluster coordinator for Hills, Lone Tree and Nichols. She also serves as vice-president of the Diocesan Pastoral Council and has represented the local planning area over the past five years. All together, the plan impacts 13,502 parishioners, or 14.24 percent of the diocesan population.

Initially, the planning group consisted of parishioners from all 10 parishes and six pastors. Two main concerns surfaced during their meetings: a desire to strategically position their 10 parishes in a way that would keep them viable and open for the foreseeable future, and to share the burden of sacrifice as equally as possible.

Another factor had to be addressed: the high number of Spanish-speaking Catholics in the region. “That was of major concern throughout the discussions,” Ebener said. “That’s why West Liberty was matched with St. Patrick’s in Iowa City, so that Spanish-speaking Masses in those places can continue.”

St. Patrick’s will add a parochial vicar, Father Guillermo Trevino, to join Father Rudolph Juarez, the pastor, in ministering to the Iowa City and West Liberty parishes.

“I worked with Fr. Guillermo here in St. Patrick Parish before he was a deacon. I am convinced that formation of our priests is a communal project,” Fr. Juarez said. “The great staff I have in the parish provided then-seminarian Guillermo an opportunity to hear from the ‘grassroots’ as far as what life from the pew looks like.

“Fr. Guillermo will be a great help in the celebration of the sacraments. And given the Hispanic component of the Iowa City and West Liberty communities, he will be even more invaluable in being present to the people. I foresee him helping with weddings, baptisms, funerals, quinceañeras and all the other liturgical celebrations which constitute parish life.”

“I very much appreciate the collaboration and efforts of this local planning group,” Bishop Zinkula said. “I was extremely impressed by how well they worked together on the plan for their area. They are a witness to all of us of what it means to be part of a local church, in our case the Diocese of Davenport, and not simply single, isolated parishes.”

Mass changes:

- St. Joseph Parish in West Liberty will reduce its weekend Mass schedule to one Spanish Mass and one English Mass. The West Liberty parish is clustered with St. Patrick Parish in Iowa City.
- The cluster of St. Mary Parish-Riverside, Holy Trinity Parish-Richmond and St. Joseph Parish-Wellman will reduce their weekend Mass schedule from four Masses to three.
- The cluster of St. Joseph Parish-Hills and St. Mary parishes-Lone Tree and Nichols will reduce their Mass schedule from four Masses to three.
- St. James Parish in Washington has reduced its Mass schedule from four Masses to three Masses.

Parish Total parishioners

Columbus Junction, St. Joseph 773
Hills, St. Joseph 247
Iowa City, St. Patrick 3,059
Lone Tree, St. Mary 210
Muscatine, Ss. Mary & Mathias 3,929
Nichols, St. Mary 125
Richmond, Holy Trinity 551
Riverside, St. Mary 899
Washington, St. James 1,579
Wellman, St. Joseph 146
West Branch, St. Bernadette 428
West Liberty, St. Joseph 1,212
Wilton, St. Mary 344
Total number affected 13,502
Total percent of diocese affected 14.24 percent
Total diocesan population 94,817