

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

My letter this week has two main parts, each beginning with “As you know...” Why would I write about what you already know? For two reasons: first, because not everyone reads the bulletin every week and second because in addition to what you already know, there’s content below which will be new to all of you.

- **As you know...** We have been working to sell our parish office building in West Concord and to use the proceeds along with some parish savings to re-purpose the rectory building in Concord center as the parish office. This is the second phase of long range planning for our parish properties. Phase one was the re-purposing of the lower church into meeting space and the café. Phase 3 will be improving and refurbishing Monument Hall.

At the spring Town Meeting, approval was given for the Town of Concord to acquire 55 Church Street. In negotiating the transaction it has become evident that the town will take the property by eminent domain as the most practical way to complete the transfer. I can assure you that this is in the best interest of both the parish and the Town of Concord in which we live. The purchase price of the property will remain at \$1,060,000.

While it’s not at all easy to let go a building that has served us so well for 14 years, doing so enables us to move forward with an eye to the future of parish life in Concord and in a way that benefits the town community at large as well.

It’s my hope that the transaction will be completed this summer. Once that happens the parish staff will leave 55 Church Street and move to the main space on the lower level of the church which will become the parish office for about a year. We will use a little more than half the space in the lower church leaving the other half free for meetings and other gatherings. The café will not be affected so coffee and donuts after Mass will continue! Work on the rectory building will not begin until the fall, at which time I will move to another rectory in the immediate vicinity.

- **As you know...** Five years ago the archdiocese began grouping parishes into “collaboratives.” A collaborative consists of 2 or 3 parishes which retain their individual identity, activity and worship schedule but are served by **one** pastor and **one** parish staff. Collaboratives are being phased in and the entire process will not be completed until 2023. Up until now the archdiocese has announced the parishes in the next phase on an annual basis but last week published a schedule of how all remaining parishes will be phased in. Holy Family Parish in Concord will become a collaborative with St. Irene Parish in Carlisle in Phase 7 in June 2019.

As I have written before, Fr. Donohoe in Carlisle and I will be asked to submit voluntary letters of resignation as pastors (effective June 2019) so that a new pastor can be appointed for the collaborative. While he and I would be free to apply to become the pastor of the collaborative we will then be 92 and 72 years old. Unlike Fr. Donohoe I plan to retire at 75 and it would not be good for the collaborative or for me to begin something I’d be leaving so soon. With three years left I’ll ask to be assigned to another parish as an assistant - not as pastor! (And no, it would not be a good idea for me to stay on to help the new pastor in the Concord-Carlisle collaborative!) By June of 2019 I will have served as a pastor in Concord for 25 years: what a gift and blessing it has been to live with you and serve you all this time!

So some changes will come two years down the road. A driving force for this plan is the dwindling number of priests available to serve the parishes of the archdiocese - pray for more vocations to the priesthood! But the number of parishioners across the archdiocese is also in decline (as it is in many religious bodies). The collaborative process, then, is carried out under a plan titled “Disciples in Mission”

(disciplesinmission.com). This is a plan for a new evangelization and revitalization of our parishes. If successful, this plan will bring new life to parish communities and to the church at large. Change is seldom easy but an all too easy way to deal with change is complaint before even understanding what the change will be, will entail and will provide. Please be patient and open and pray for the Holy Spirit to guide us all through this time.

Although not a whole lot can or will change before the effective date of the collaborative two years from now, I will keep you informed in this space of further developments.

Sincerely,
Fr. Fleming