

Progress Report

On the Merging of Five Local Parishes

By Rev. Kevin I. Clinton, Pastor
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On October 15, 2010 the Archdiocese announced the merging of five parishes west of New Prague with the “receiving parish” being St. Wenceslaus Parish, New Prague. [Please note following the appeal from St. Thomas’ parishioners, the plan was modified so that St. Thomas will now merge with St. Anne’s, LeSueur, MN. With this modification, four small rural communities will merge with St. Wenceslaus Parish receiving them.] Note that this merger dramatically changes the St. Wenceslaus corporate identity by a greatly expanded geographical responsibility and three sites to maintain as places of worship: St. John’s (Union Hill), St. Scholastica (Heidelberg, MN) and St. Wenceslaus (New Prague, MN).

Questions and Answers:

1. Who is responsible for detailing and implementing a plan for this new parish entity that begins January 1, 2011?

A “Transitional Leadership Coordinating Committee” (TLCC) has been meeting since mid-November with the ordained leadership of this new parish entity. Membership of this 13 member committee has been created by selecting two representatives from each of the current five parishes, in addition to the one deacon and two priests.

The TLCC membership includes:

Millie Odenthal
Dave Mager
Paul Sirek
Carol Weiers
Laurie Meger

Ben King
Kevin Giesen
Jack Stasney
Diane Weckman
Brian Rynda

Deacon Bob Wagner
Fr. David Barrett
Fr. Kevin Clinton

2. What will the Mass schedule be for this new unified parish entity?

Beginning on the weekend of January 22 & 23, 2011, there will be six Masses celebrated at three different sites at six different times. The schedule is:

- 4pm (or 5pm during summer) Saturday—at St. Wenceslaus site, New Prague
- 8:15pm Saturday—at St. John site (Nov-Apr) or St. Scholastica site (May-October)
- 8:00am Sunday—at St. Scholastica site
- 8:30am Sunday—at St. Wenceslaus site
- 10:00am Sunday—at St. John site
- 10:30am Sunday—at St. Wenceslaus site

3. Will the people of the current five parish communities need to “re-register” as members of a new parish entity?

No. Those who are currently registered members of St. Wenceslaus Parish will have their registration and parish support associated with the St. Wenceslaus site. Those parishioners who are currently registered members of St. John, St. Scholastica, St. Benedict or St. Joseph (Lexington) will have their registration and parish support associated with the St. John/St. Scholastica sites. Of course, if people wish to have their registration changed from east to west or west to east or to another parish in the area, they are certainly free to do so. Such changes will require the parishioner to notify that parish office.

4. What new organizational changes are required within this new parish entity?

- On January 1, 2011 all five sets of parish trustees conclude their trusteeship and two people will serve as trustees of the new parish. Those new trustees are: Robb Schoenbauer and Carol Weiers.
- A “Sub-Parish Coordinating Council” will be created to serve the St. John/St. Scholastica sites and another “Sub-Parish Coordinating Council” is created for the St. Wenceslaus site. [Note that essentially for the St. Wenceslaus site, the current parish Coordinating Council will continue to work as it has been.]
- Overseeing the life of this unified parish entity will be one Parish Pastoral Council with selected representatives from the east and the west. This new “Parish Pastoral Council” will meet less frequently than the “Sub-Parish Coordinating Councils” because most decisions will be made by parish leadership associated with the western sites (St. John/St. Scholastica) and the eastern site (St. Wenceslaus). However, the responsibility of the overall Parish Pastoral Council will be engaged to oversee the viability and health of the new parish entity with its three sites and six Masses. The new Parish Pastoral Council will promote cooperation and complimentary activities among the ministries of the three sites.
- Given the two preceding points about the creation of one Parish Pastoral Council and two Sub Parish Coordinating Councils, similar organizational structures will be created for the financial area. There will be two Sub-Parish Finance Councils and one overall Parish Finance Council. Again, most of the work will be done in the Sub Parish Finance Councils.

5. How are the liabilities and assets of these five parishes merging into one being handled?

The TLCC recognizes this as a serious issue that needs to be appropriately handled within the details of the merger. To address these concerns, the TLCC has structured the finances of this new parish so that there is an “economic fire-wall” between the economics of the St. Wenceslaus site on one hand (the east) and the economics of the St. John/St. Scholastica sites on the other hand (i.e. the west). In practical terms, this means that all the assets, liabilities and resources generated to operate the St. Wenceslaus site on the east, stays within the ministries of that site. Conversely, all the assets, liabilities and resources generated to operate St. John/St. Scholastica sites stay on the west.

“Living within our means” financially and “supporting ministries” that are vital and affirming to the life of a faith community will need to happen on both sides, east and west, of the “economic firewall”. Parishioners to the west will be asked to create and support a vital and sustainable small rural worship community at the St. John/St. Scholastica sites.

6. If the people of the current five parishes are members of one parish after January 1st, how will their financial support be kept separate and focused on supporting either the St. Wenceslaus site (east) or the St. John/St. Scholastica (west)?

The people of this new parish entity will direct the financial support they give, to either St. Wenceslaus or the St. John/St. Scholastica site. One of the ways this will be facilitated is by making the Sunday envelopes different in the west and the east. For the coming year parishioners will be asked to continue using the current Sunday envelopes they have been using in their parish. Note as well, that all envelopes will be forwarded to the site they are associated with. For example, a parishioner, associated with the St. John/St. Scholastica sites, who happens to attend a Mass at St. Wenceslaus may place his/her envelope in the St. Wenceslaus collection and it will be forwarded to St. John/St. Scholastic site—and *vice versa*. [Current St. Benedict Parishioners please note: When St. Benedict envelopes are used to support the work of the church, the amount contributed will be counted as supporting the needs of the St. John/St. Scholastica sites.]

7. What are some important challenges and goals that can be anticipated by all the people involved?

- ✓ The coming next two years will require openness to differences among people and flexibility in realizing that there are many good and different ways for a faith community to come together. In fact, people will be “grieving” the loss of a comfortable and familiar faith community that has been around for 100 to over 150 years. Some individuals have deep roots going back three generations. Grieving is NOT easy, but it is VERY IMPORTANT—to feel it and work through it! People will need to be patient with themselves and those around them. Some may have strong feelings of anger, victimization, sadness and disillusionment.
- ✓ To the west of New Prague the faith communities of potentially four small faith communities will be challenged to work to create a faith community that will typically gather for three Eucharists at two sites (St. John’s or St. Scholastica’s). The new Mass time schedule will cause all four of the faith communities to blend. It will take time for people to become acquainted, feel “at home”, and identify with the faith community gathered for a particular Mass time.

8. Will St. Wenceslaus remain the name of this new larger parish entity?

The question of a name change for this new parish entity is being deferred for the time being. The new leadership of this unified parish will decide how to move forward with this question.

While St. Wenceslaus site is a very large and diverse faith community with many, many ministries, no one should underestimate the value of small rural faith communities. They have a unique and rich character that needs to be valued and preserved. The new larger parish entity that is created on January 1, 2011 with its three sites and six different Mass times, has much potential! With openness on the part of the people and their parish leadership to the guidance of the Holy Spirit, many good things can come to us and to our children in the future.

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