

By means of this letter, I want to share with the people of our parishes how the: *Together in Faith* (the Archdiocesan reorganization plan), will affect each of our sites.

Cardinal Maida, sent a letter to our Vicar, Fr. David Burgard, which states the following, and unfortunately was not included in the Archdiocesan materials: “Recognizing the great distance between most parishes, rather than Vicariate-wide programs, your vicariate has identified the need for collaboration among and coordination of parish plans. Specifically your vicariate will focus on and support: adult formation, religious education, outreach to teens, young adults and seniors, accessibility for the handicapped, stewardship awareness and vocations. I am also aware that the pastors and principals are developing a comprehensive school plan, which will include financial support from all parishes. In addition, you have taken very seriously the charge to examine the number and size of parishes necessary to serve the people of God in the Blue Water Vicariate. In particular the current clusters are evaluating their current arrangement while the five parishes in the Port Huron area continue to evaluate their needs.

Current clusters are evaluating themselves—refers to us. Also, as many of you have read in some newspapers—“the cluster of Holy Cross, St. Catherine, St. Mark will realign. What does this mean?

First----- All of our sites will remain open----again, All of our sites will remain open.

By realigning, the Archdiocese means that we progress from a cluster to a merger. By merging, we will maintain our three sites but continue to consolidate many of our operations, staff, services, and ministries. In many ways,

we are already doing this: our weekday and weekend mass schedule, we have one RCIA program, one parish bulletin, shared staff among our Pastoral Minister, maintenance dept., and pastor.

Presently we have a combined Worship Commission and Parish Council. By merging, those Commissions and Councils would become one (with representation from each site).

By merging, we would be one big parish with three Worship Sites. Holy Cross & St. Catherine would continue to be parishes, and St. Mark would change its status to a Chapel. As long as there is a Senior priest who lives on the Island, we can continue business as usual. If that was to change the amount of services at St. Mark would also have to change.

By merging we will start to think of ourselves as one big parish with three sites, instead of three separate sites connected together by a common pastor. Certain sites will offer certain services. As decisions are made in the future about staffing issues, building issues, etc... how we best serve all three sites will be considered. Again, in many ways we are already doing this. By merging, we are continuing to evolve in this shared relationship and understanding of parish. This may also lead to a 'new-naming' of our merged parishes, but our individual parish names will also be preserved. For instance, our bulletin may refer to our 3 sites/merged parish as "The faith communities of All Saints"—while each of our individual sites would maintain their original names. Again, this is just a possibility. All final details of this will be worked out with the parish council over the next few months, and

certainly all of the parishioners will be given ample time for input and suggestion.

I know for some this will be unwelcome news. Even though this is nothing any of us are looking forward to, for us to continue to stay viable and provide quality ministry to our people, this is the best arrangement for our present situation. There will, no doubt, continue to be small changes in the future, but one thing will always stay the same- our ability to receive the sacraments, worship the Lord in the presence of a community, serve the people of God through Christian Service, and grow in our relationship with the God who created us in love. This is what is most important when it comes to our lives of faith.

I pray that you will continue to support the good efforts of our communities of faith. I thank you for your cooperation and patience with all that has already changed, and with that which will be changing. Together, with confidence in the Holy Spirit, and the cooperation of one another, I am certain we will persevere through this time of transition.

More information on these issues will be included in the bulletin in the coming weeks.

All God's blessings to you,

Fr. Tim Birney