



28 May 2007

The Reverend John E Manning
St. Vincent de Paul
13400 Lorain Ave.
Cleveland, OH 44111-3470

Dear Father Manning,

This past Sunday we celebrated the Feast of Pentecost, one of our most significant feasts and the birth of the Church. Amidst a time of great challenge and uncertainty, the power of the Holy Spirit was poured out upon the first disciples, a unifying Spirit that crossed all boundaries of language, race and culture. Today we also are called by that same Spirit to be Church as fully as possible, to embrace our unity, and transcend whatever might divide us for the greater good of Christ's Mission in our time and place. Knowing the Holy Spirit is always with us, we are called to cooperate with God in the pursuit of holiness for all people and the spread of the Gospel. We are called to be open to the guidance of the Holy Spirit with confidence in God's love and providence.

In my 5 February 2007 letter to you and all the pastors, administrators and parish life coordinators regarding the work of *Vibrant Parish Life – Phase II*, I indicated I would be sending a letter in May to finalize all clusters and to identify significant issues and challenges that need to be addressed in each cluster.

I want to first emphasize that the foundation for the work of all clusters is the Church's essential mission of evangelization and re-evangelization. All that we do must lead to bringing the Gospel message into every human situation and helping all people to come to an encounter with the living Christ. We are called to connect the Gospel message with the culture of our time and engage the lives of people who are practicing Catholics, no longer active Catholics, those who are unchurched, and to all people of good will. At the source and summit of this mission is our celebration of the Eucharist. As I have carefully studied trends in clusters across our diocese, the reality that has been driven home to me is the steady and substantial decline in Mass attendance. I want to raise this matter up as a significant point of discussion for all clusters to address: engaging all of our faithful in regularly attending and participating in the Sunday Eucharistic Liturgy.

A final list of all clusters is now available on the diocesan website. A few changes have been made in response to my meetings with pastors who requested reconsideration. Your parish will continue to be clustered with the parishes of St. Ignatius, St. Mark, St. Mel, and SS. Philip and James.

This cluster, as with each cluster in the diocese, is intended to provide a framework to enhance the vibrancy of parishes and strengthen the presence and pastoral care of the Church in an equitable manner throughout the diocese. As we face growing challenges with regard to changing demographics, finances and fewer priests, we need to take the necessary steps now that will enable us to provide strong and lasting Catholic presence in every area of our diocese. We need to be good and faithful stewards of the resources which God has given to us. Within your cluster area, we cannot risk spending down limited funds and struggle to maintain more facilities than are needed for the population served. For over time, this will weaken our Catholic presence and ministries to the people we are called to serve for many years to come.

(Over)

I wish to present the following issues and challenges for your cluster to address:

- Continue to explore collaborative possibilities to strengthen pastoral care in an equitable manner.
- Based upon demographic, financial and priest trends and the need to provide strong, vibrant and stable parishes that will serve people in the coming years, develop a plan to submit to Bishop Lennon for this area to be served by no more than 4 parishes and no more than 4 priests (4 vs. 6) within the next 3 years and no later than July 1, 2010. Include a plan to address the financial solvency of these parishes.
- Carefully study each parish site and its facilities in assessing which options would best serve the long term pastoral needs of the cluster area.
- Available information indicates:
 - Total number of parish households in the cluster decreased by 33 % over 10 years to 4595 in 2006, and by 23 % since 2000.
 - Total Mass attendance in the cluster decreased by 42 % over 10 years to 3175 in 2006, and by 24% since 2000.
- Recognize the concern regarding the ability of some parishes to meet operating expenses and related debt payments.
- Strengthen evangelization and the social and community services that serve the poor and surrounding neighborhoods.
- Engage all of our faithful in regularly attending and participating in the Sunday Eucharistic Liturgy.
- Continue to monitor enrollment trends and collaborate to insure the long term presence of strong, stable Catholic schools serving this area and adjacent clusters, including consideration of consolidation to no more than 3 schools within the next 3 years and no later than July 1, 2010.
- Continue to support *Church in the City* partnerships through cluster-cluster cooperation.

The diocesan training sessions for Cluster Planning and Coordination Teams being held in May and June will be provide more information and resources to assist in doing this planning work.

I ask that your Cluster Plan be submitted by 15 November 2008 to me through the District Delegate.

I am appointing priests to serve as District Delegates. They will be responsible to monitor and encourage the work of the Cluster Planning and Coordination Teams in their districts, to receive and review minutes and the attendance list for each assigned cluster, and to report to me about progress being made on a regular basis. The Delegate will appoint a pastor to serve as a convener of the initial meeting in each cluster. The announcement of the District Delegates will be forthcoming.

I ask that you and your parish leaders approach this work in a spirit of prayer and discernment. I hope that we can all be open to the best possible insights for strengthening pastoral care within this cluster area and for building a strong and lasting Catholic presence throughout our diocese. As your Cluster Planning and Coordination Team conducts this planning work, if you believe there are important considerations that need to be addressed with me, please direct them to your District Delegate for forwarding to my office.

I realize that this is can be a very difficult undertaking knowing the great care people have for each of our parishes. It will be very important for all of us to look to the greater good of our diocesan Church.

Please know I remain very grateful for your cooperation as we work together to fulfill the Mission of Christ.

Fraternally yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Richard Lennon". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Bishop of Cleveland