

**Presentation Deanery Pastoral Council  
Diocese of Steubenville, Ohio**

**Report to Bishop Daniel Conlon**

**Parish Reconfiguration Recommendation  
April 30, 2007**

Submitted by:  
Msgr. John C. Kolesar, Dean  
Morton R. Herald, Chairperson

## The Challenge

The five Deanery Pastoral Councils of the Diocese of Steubenville were asked by Bishop Conlon to study, discuss, pray and ultimately recommend to him by April 2007 a plan for configuring the parishes in each deanery. The Bishop made this request due to a 30-year decline in the economy and population of the Diocese. The Catholic population of the diocese is only about half of what it was in 1944, yet there are, in net, three more parishes and missions than then. The number of available priests has also declined by more than half, and the number will be even smaller in the next few years.

The shortage of priests is most acute in the Presentation Deanery. Currently it has 15 priests. That number is expected to decline to 7 priests within 5 years. This proposal anticipates a phased-in reconfiguration that ultimately, at some time in the future, can be serviced by 7 priests.

The Deanery Pastoral Council By-laws direct the councils to *“work prayerfully and collaboratively to provide for the most effective way to build up the church in the Diocese of Steubenville...”* Our challenge is how to “build up” when we must “tear down” i.e. close parishes. The answer lies in a reconfiguration plan that allocates available resources (human and financial) in a way that “builds up” (improves, expands, makes better) the surviving parishes as other parishes are closed. The philosophy supporting our recommendations states that for each parish closing (tear down) there be a countervailing action that improves (builds up) the surviving parishes. If this does not occur, then any plan that contemplates parish closings will tear down the church and this is contrary to the directive given the deanery pastoral councils.

## The Discussion

The Presentation Deanery Council has discussed parish reconfiguration in six council meetings since September 2005. Additionally in the time period between September 2005 and April 2007, a sub-committee has met in five sessions to discuss parish reconfiguration. Topics covered in these meetings include:

- i) Guidelines, definitions and standards issued by Bishop Conlon for Parish Configuration in the Diocese of Steubenville
- ii) Liturgy sites
  - (1) Times & schedules for Masses
  - (2) Age distribution in 3 categories for each parish
- iii) October Counts
  - (1) Official parish attendance records
  - (2) Comparison to seating capacities
- iv) Geography
  - (1) Locations of parishes
  - (2) Distances between parishes
- v) Physical structures
  - (1) Condition of buildings
  - (2) Parking capacity
  - (3) Seating capacity
- vi) Transportation
  - (1) Quality of roads between parishes
- vii) Demographics
  - (1) Current population and its profile
  - (2) Projections for future growth / shrinkage
- viii) Number of Priests
  - (1) Now, 3 years, 5 years
- ix) Economic Development in Belmont County

**Central worship sites:** One goal of our discussions has been to identify six parishes with characteristics that would best qualify them for consideration as **central worship sites**. Central worship sites would remain open with resident pastors as the number of priests declines to seven (7) and neighboring parishes are clustered or closed. A parochial vicar will reside in one of the parishes along with its pastor. Three important characteristics used to create this list are 1) seating capacity 2) geography and 3) physical structures. Chart #1 below lists six parishes presented to the council at its meeting on March 21, 2007 as candidates for central worship sites. Included in this list are three parishes that are geographically dispersed (North, South and West) and have seating capacities of 400 or greater.

Chart #1

	City	Parish	Recommendation	Resident pastor / school
1.	Barnesville	Assumption	Remain open as central worship site	Resident pastor
2.	St. Clairsville *	St. Mary	Remain open as central worship site	Resident pastor; Parochial Vicar <a href="#">Elementary School</a>
3.	Bellaire **	St. John	Remain open as central worship site	Resident pastor <a href="#">Elementary School</a> <a href="#">High School</a>
4.	Martins Ferry	St. Mary	Remain open as central worship site	Resident pastor <a href="#">Elementary School</a>
5.	Tiltonsville ***	St. Joseph	Remain open as central worship site	Resident pastor
6.	Colerain	St. Frances	Remain open as central worship site	Resident pastor

\* Western physical structure with > 400 seating capacity.

\*\* Southern physical structure with > 400 seating capacity.

\*\*\* Northern physical structure with 400 seating capacity.

**Disagreement:** There is disagreement among council members regarding which parishes should be on this list. For example, Chart #2 below highlights discussion points regarding St. Joseph / Tiltonsville, St. Francis / Colerain and St. Joseph / Lansing. Bishop Conlon should consider these competing view points as he studies the data and makes decisions regarding parish reconfiguration in the Presentation Deanery:

Chart #2

Central worship site with resident pastor	Reasons for being included in the list of six central worship sites	Objections / disagreements for being included in the list of six central worship sites
St. Joseph / Tiltonsville	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 3<sup>rd</sup> largest seating capacity in deanery;</li> <li>• on major highway (Ohio 7);</li> <li>• geographically located to serve the northern part of the deanery;</li> <li>• recently renovated physical structure</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Moderate lack of parking</li> <li>• Bias of Deanery Council Chairperson, Mort Herald who is a member at St. Joseph / Tiltonsville</li> <li>• Should not be one of the six central worship sites but <u>should be clustered with Martins Ferry</u> to allow room for St. Joseph / Lansing to be a central worship site because it has an elementary school</li> </ul>
St. Francis / Colerain	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 4<sup>th</sup> largest seating capacity in deanery</li> <li>• modern physical structure in good condition</li> <li>• abundance of parking</li> <li>• geographically well positioned to serve the north central part of the deanery</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• difficult access via secondary roads;</li> <li>• has experienced the 2<sup>nd</sup> most dramatic decline in October count (40%) between 2003 and 2005;</li> <li>• Should not be one of the six central worship sites but <u>should be clustered with Martins Ferry</u> to allow room for St. Joseph / Lansing to be a central worship site because it has an elementary school</li> </ul>

**Schools:** St. Joseph Church in Lansing, Ohio which has an elementary school was not on the list of central worship sites (Chart #1) presented to the council at its March 21, 2007 meeting. This proved problematic for the council. As noted in Chart #2 above and later in this report, you will see options for clustering Martins Ferry with either Colerain or Tiltonsville to make room on the list for Lansing as a central worship site.

Another option is to cluster Martins Ferry and Lansing --- two parishes with elementary schools. They are close geographically but is this a reasonable solution? Can one priest manage two parishes with elementary schools? Should one of these two elementary schools be closed? Our deanery council was not directed to study the catholic schools, however, this example highlights the need to coordinate the two policies for parishes and schools.

**Proposed configurations:** At the Presentation Deanery Council meeting held on March 21, 2007, the goal was to achieve a consensus for a final report to Bishop Conlon on the list of central worship sites in Chart #1 and for each of the six configurations in Chart #3 below. We did not achieve that goal. There was agreement on the configurations of lines 1, 2 and 3. There was less agreement for the configurations of lines 4, 5 and 6.

Chart #3

	Central worship site with resident pastor	Seating capacity of central worship site	Number of parishioners projected to attend weekly Masses. (The numbers added to create each total are the 2005 October counts for parishes anticipated to feed into the central worship sites.)	Number of weekly Masses <sup>1</sup>
1.	Barnesville / Assumption	260	<b>Barnesville</b> – 490 Temperanceville – 90 Total = <b>580</b>	3
2.	St. Clairsville / St. Mary	420	<b>St. Clairsville</b> – 899 Flushing – 87 Lafferty – 146 Fairpoint – 158 Maynard – 220 Total = <b>1,510</b>	4
3.	Bellaire / St. John	450	<b>Bellaire / St. John</b> – 528 Bellaire / St. Michael – 89 Shadyside – 335 Neffs – 186 Powhatan Point – 34 Total = <b>1,172</b>	3
4.	Martins Ferry / St. Mary	275	<b>Martins Ferry</b> – 438 Bridgeport – 180 Total = <b>618</b>	3
5.	Tiltonsville / St. Joseph	400	<b>Tiltonsville</b> – 158 Yorkville – 111 Dillonvale – 257 Total = <b>526</b>	2
6.	Colerain / St. Frances	360	<b>Colerain</b> – 205 Lansing – 378 Adena – 209 Total = <b>792</b>	3
	Totals	<b>2,165</b>	<b>5,198</b> <sup>2</sup>	<b>18</b>

<sup>1</sup> This figure is calculated by dividing the total October count by the seating capacity of the central worship site.

<sup>2</sup> Total October count 2005 = 5,198

After much discussion, the council abandoned its attempt to arrive at consensus for each line item. A new approach was adopted that examined all 8 parishes in lines 4, 5 and 6. The goal was to identify 6 parishes that could be clustered with one priest for two churches. The remaining two parishes (8 minus 6) would be closed and their parishioners absorbed into one of the clusters. The following three scenarios emerged:

A.

- Martins Ferry and Lansing clustered. St. Anthony absorbed into either parish.
- Tiltonsville and Dillonvale clustered. Yorkville absorbed into either parish.
- Colerain and Adena clustered.

B.

- Martins Ferry and Tiltonsville clustered with Yorkville and Dillonvale absorbed.
- Lansing and Bridgeport clustered.
- Colerain and Adena clustered.

C.

- Martins Ferry and Colerain clustered. Adena absorbed into either parish.
- Lansing and Bridgeport clustered.
- Tiltonsville and Dillonvale clustered. Yorkville absorbed into either parish.

Chart #4 below lists three configuration options (A, B and C) that reflect the different views of the council regarding lines 4, 5 and 6. Only lines 4, 5, and 6 are shown. Configurations in lines 1, 2, and 3 were agreed upon and are not duplicated in the charts.

**Chart #4 – Configuration option A**

	<b>Central worship site with resident pastor</b>	<b>Seating capacity of central worship site</b>	<b>Number of parishioners projected to attend weekly Masses.</b> (The numbers added to create the total (in bold) below are the 2005 October counts for parishes anticipated to feed into the central parishes.)	<b>Number of weekly Masses</b> <sup>1</sup>
<b>4.</b>	Martins Ferry / St. Mary	275	<b>Martins Ferry</b> – 438 Lansing – 378 Bridgeport – 180 <b>Total = 996</b>	4
<b>5.</b>	Tiltonsville / St. Joseph	400	<b>Tiltonsville</b> – 158 Yorkville – 111 Dillonvale – 257 <b>Total = 526</b>	2
<b>6.</b>	Colerain / St. Frances	360	<b>Colerain</b> – 205 Adena – 209 <b>Total = 414</b>	2

<sup>1</sup> This figure is calculated by dividing the total October count by the seating capacity of the central worship site.

**Chart #4 – Configuration option B**

	<b>Central worship site with resident pastor</b>	<b>Seating capacity of central worship site</b>	<b>Number of parishioners projected to attend weekly Masses.</b> (The numbers added to create the total (in bold) below are the 2005 October counts for parishes anticipated to feed into the central parishes.)	<b>Number of weekly Masses <sup>1</sup></b>
<b>4.</b>	Martins Ferry / St. Mary	275	<b>Martins Ferry</b> – 438 Tiltonsville – 158 Yorkville – 111 Dillonvale – 257 <b>Total = 964</b>	4
<b>5.</b>	Lansing / St. Joseph	240	<b>Lansing</b> – 378 Bridgeport – 180 <b>Total = 558</b>	3
<b>6.</b>	Colerain / St. Frances	360	<b>Colerain</b> – 205 Adena – 209 <b>Total = 414</b>	2

<sup>1</sup> This figure is calculated by dividing the total October count by the seating capacity of the central worship site.

**Chart #4 – Configuration option C**

	<b>Central worship site with resident pastor</b>	<b>Seating capacity of central worship site</b>	<b>Number of parishioners projected to attend weekly Masses.</b> (The numbers added to create the total (in bold) below are the 2005 October counts for parishes anticipated to feed into the central parishes.)	<b>Number of weekly Masses <sup>1</sup></b>
<b>4.</b>	Martins Ferry / St. Mary	275	<b>Martins Ferry</b> – 438 Colerain – 205 Adena – 209 <b>Total = 852</b>	4
<b>5.</b>	Lansing / St. Joseph	240	<b>Lansing</b> - 378 Bridgeport – 180 <b>Total = 558</b>	3
<b>6.</b>	Tiltonsville / St. Joseph	400	<b>Tiltonsville</b> – 158 Yorkville – 111 Dillonvale – 257 <b>Total = 526</b>	2

<sup>1</sup> This figure is calculated by dividing the total October count by the seating capacity of the central worship site.



## Recommendations

Chart #5 below summarizes the multiple parish reconfiguration plans discussed in this report. We propose that Bishop Conlon initiate phased clusterings and closings based on the information contained in this report and summarized in Chart #5.

**Chart #5**

#	Central worship sites with resident pastor	Phased recommendations as conditions and circumstances require	Additional notes / recommendations
<b>1.</b>	Barnesville / Assumption	St. Mary parish in Temperanceville is currently clustered with Assumption and the two parishes share a pastor. This cluster can remain until the Bishop deems is prudent to close Temperanceville.	
<b>2.</b>	St. Clairsville / St. Mary <sup>1</sup>	St. Clairsville will, at some time in the future, absorb parishioners from four parishes in Flushing, Lafferty, Fairpoint and Maynard. Currently Flushing and Lafferty are clustered; and Fairpoint and Maynard are clustered. These clusters can remain until the Bishop deems is prudent to close any or all of these parishes.	Elementary School at St. Mary / St. Clairsville.  Parochial Vicar resides at St. Clairsville in addition to the Pastor.
<b>3.</b>	Bellaire / St. John	St. John / Bellaire and St. Mary / Shadyside as a cluster will, at some time in the future, absorb parishioners from Bellaire (St. Michael), Neffs and Powhatan Point.	Elementary School and High School at St. John / Bellaire.  Parking at St. John / Bellaire is currently a severe problem. Parking represents an even greater problem going forward when the church serves a greater number of parishioners.
<b>4.</b>	Martins Ferry / St. Mary	Martins Ferry could be clustered with Lansing or with Colerain. Either of these proposed clusters could, at some time in the future, absorb parishioners from Bridgeport (St. Anthony) and Adena.	Elementary Schools in Martins Ferry and Lansing may be too much for one pastor if parishes in the two cities are clustered.
<b>5.</b>	Tiltonsville / St. Joseph	Tiltonsville will, at some time in the future, will absorb parishioners from Yorkville and Dillonvale.	An alternative configuration is to cluster Tiltonsville with Martins Ferry and absorb parishioners from Yorkville and Dillonvale. Refer to Chart #4 Configuration option B.
<b>6.</b>	Colerain / St. Frances	If Colerain is clustered with Martins Ferry (Chart #4, Configuration option C), then this slot opens up for Lansing. St. Joseph / Lansing would be clustered with St. Anthony / Bridgeport. When the Bishop deems is prudent to close St. Anthony, those parishioners will be absorbed into St. Joseph / Lansing.	

<sup>1</sup> resident parochial vicar also

We propose that the Bishop consider the following actions as he reconfigures the parishes and assigns priests in the Presentation Deanery:

1. **Build up the Church:** When parishes are closed (tearing down) allocate Diocesan resources --- financial and human --- to improve (build up) the surviving parish(es). For example, St. John / Bellaire has extremely limited parking for its 2005 October count of 528. If St. John / Bellaire will be required to serve an October count 100% higher at some time in the future, the question becomes, "How can such a reconfiguration serve the catholic population in a way that improves (builds up) the level of service that existed prior to the reconfiguration?" The answer is that it can't unless we hold to the proposition that we must "build up" to a greater degree than we "tear down". The council's proposal to Bishop Conlon in this example would be to help St. John, in some way, to purchase property adjacent to or close to the church for the purpose of constructing parking space.
2. **Plan ahead / be proactive:** Don't wait for the inevitable to occur. Use this report to identify your options, make your plan and execute it. For example, if St. John / Bellaire does remain as a central worship site and the configuration recommended in this report is accepted, then we propose that the Diocese begin the process of purchasing land for parking now. This process could take 5 years.
3. **Transition plans:** We propose that the Diocese provide the pastoral care necessary to assist and guide parishes through a closing. *There are no officially approved Roman Catholic rituals for closure or consolidation of a parish....*<sup>1</sup> Parish closure is a traumatic loss of local church, of identity, of autonomy. This trauma will unleash feelings of anger and hostility toward Diocesan leaders entrusted with decision-making authority. The Diocese must help affected parishes to implement procedures and rituals that ease the pain; that provide a forum in which to grieve; and that guide parishioners past the *obstacles that would impede or prevent them from entering into a reconstituted (reconfigured) community of a newly formed parish.*<sup>2</sup> Some ideas:
  - a. announce reconfiguration plans ---- new clusterings or closings ---- at least one year in advance;
  - b. establish transition teams consisting of affected parishioners and diocesan representatives;
  - c. communicate with affected parishioners frequently through socials, dinners, town hall-style meetings, homilies and parish council meetings;
  - d. preserve artifacts from closed parishes and incorporate them into the surviving parish(es).

---

<sup>1</sup> Michael Weldon, O.F.M., *A Struggle for Holy Ground*, xx Introduction.

<sup>2</sup> Michael Weldon, O.F.M., *A Struggle for Holy Ground*, xxii Introduction.