

April 15, 2011

Dear Parishioners of Assumption and St. Margaret Mary Parishes,

May the grace of this Lent and the approaching days of Holy Week be in your hearts. I am writing as a follow-up to the letter you received a few weeks ago from Archbishop Schnurr concerning the future of our parishes and our pastoral region.

This Archdiocesan decision brings our two parishes into the growing community of churches throughout our own Archdiocese and the United States who are experiencing the realities of restructuring. It heralds for us a profound experience of change and with it come the natural feelings of loss, disappointment and even anger. Assumption loses *its own* pastor. St. Margaret Mary *must share* its pastor with another parish.

I pray that during this Lenten time of sacrifice and fasting you will join me in prayer. We can seize this moment of change as an opportunity to increase our faith. We can confidently hope that the Lord is creating something new in our midst. I ask you to imagine with me how we might work together with the Holy Spirit to become *a vibrant regional church*.

So what happens next? In the short term and at Fr. Kennedy's invitation, I intend to celebrate mass with the Assumption community sometime in the near future. Secondly, I plan to meet with both pastoral councils over the next month to talk about how we might move forward to develop a plan for how we can be – in the Archbishop's words – *"a collaborative group of parishes with one pastor . . ."* Thirdly, I will work with the two councils in setting up an ad hoc group of representatives from both parishes who will develop a pastoral region plan.


As pastor of St. Margaret Mary and Parochial Administrator of Assumption I promise to shepherd an inclusive process of building on the strategic planning already accomplished by both of our parishes over the last few years. This plan will honor the unique characteristics and customs of our two parishes.

In terms of some vital elements, I am in conversation with the Archdiocese about getting assistance for the sacramental life of our parishes. I envision a situation whereby there will be no Mass schedule changes over the next year. I am also working with Fr. Kennedy and the pastoral staff at Assumption on devising a plan for how we will assume all the tasks and responsibilities which have been managed by a full time pastor. This is certainly an opportunity for new lay leadership to emerge. Our two parishes already enjoy the fruits of collaborating in some key ministerial areas: Our Lady of Grace Regional School, the R.C.I. A., a number of religious education programs and recently the formation of a high school regional program. With God's help we can work together to further the mission of Jesus Christ in our region.

In light of this momentous decision communication will be critically important. I encourage you to share with us your questions, concerns and suggestions as we undertake this challenging work. Please communicate with any of our pastoral councils members or send in your ideas via our website. A link will be set up on both parish sites specifically for this purpose. I intend to keep you apprised of decisions and developments related to the formation of this pastoral region through the bulletin, the website and occasional bulletin inserts.

Please join me in praying for all our parishioners, our staffs and parish leaders as we strive to discern what God's will is for our future. May we experience the joy and peace of Easter through our collaborative efforts.

Sincerely yours in Christ,



Reverend Jerry Gardner