

## **Assumption / St. Margaret Mary Pastoral Region Questions & Answers – Round #1**

**Q: *Is this a merger of our two parishes?***

**A: NO IT IS NOT.** The archdiocese is implementing a “pastoral region”. In this structure, each parish will remain open as separate entities, but we will share one pastor - Father Jerry Gardner.

**Q: *In Fr. Jerry's letter, he refers to this move as a “vibrant regional church” and mentions setting up an ad hoc committee to develop pastoral regional plan ... are you sure this isn't a merger?***

**A:** In Archbishop Schnurr's letter, he refers to the pastoral region as “a collaborative group of parishes with one pastor”. The committee will be working to identify ways Assumption & St. Margaret Mary Parishes can collaborate – while remaining independent, **canonical** parishes. Assumption Parish & St. Margaret Mary Parish already work together in a few areas: the joint summer Vacation Bible School, catechetical and formation programs for First Communion and Confirmation preparation as well as this year's RCIA. And for three years both are covenant parishes with Our Lady of Grace Regional School at which our children can attend Catholic parochial school.

**Q: *In the archbishop's letter, he states that each parish will remain “canonical” parishes. What is a canonical parish?***

**A:** As found in the Code of Canon Law, – *A parish is a certain community of Christ's faithful stably established within a particular Church, whose pastoral care, under the authority of the diocesan Bishop, is entrusted to a parish priest as its proper pastor* (Can. 515) and, “As a general rule, a parish is to be territorial, that is, it is to embrace all Christ's faithful of a given territory” (Canon 518). Both St. Margaret Mary Parish and Assumption Parish will continue as separate parish identities, each with their own set of financial records and banking accounts, sacramental registers and lay advisory and leadership groups.

**Q: *Will the Saturday & Sunday Mass times change at either parish?***

**A:** As Fr. Jerry stated in his letter, he “envisions a situation where there will be no Mass schedule changes over the next year”.

**Q: *I heard there might be a sacramental priest at Assumption who would say Mass on the weekends. If Assumption does have a sacramental priest, will he also be available for Holy Week and Christmas services, along with other Holy Days of obligation?***

**A:** Fr. Jerry is working with Fr. Wenke (Director of the Priest Personnel Office of the Archdiocese of Cincinnati) to identify a priest who will assist with the celebration of the sacraments in light of present schedules, including Holy Days, Christmas and Holy Week. The priest may also be available for other pastoral responsibilities in the parish life of both Assumption and St. Margaret Mary Parishes while still holding responsibilities or duties away from the two parishes.

**Q: *Will we continue to have daily Mass at Assumption & St. Margaret Mary ?***

***Who will minister at funerals and weddings at Assumption & St. Margaret Mary?***

***Who will minister the sacrament of baptism at Assumption & St. Margaret Mary?***

***Who will minister the sacrament of reconciliation at Assumption & St. Margaret Mary?***

***Who does an Assumption & St. Margaret Mary parishioner contact in the event of death, sickness?***

***Who does an Assumption & St. Margaret Mary parishioner contact when in need of counseling, marriage, etc.?***

**A:** These questions will be addressed over the coming months.

**Q: *When will Assumption parishioners be able to meet and welcome Fr. Gardner?***

**A:** With the date of Fr. Kennedy's retirement in early July, Fr. Jerry hopes to schedule with Fr. Kennedy an opportunity to be with the Assumption Community on a weekend before the July date. With a number of obligations to fulfill in the month of May, it is hoped to do this sometime in June.

**Q: *Will Assumption and St. Margaret Mary social/fundraising events/groups remain separate?***

**A:** There are no plans to change any of our events or traditions. As Fr. Jerry mentioned in his letter, plans “will honor the unique characteristics and customs of our two parishes”.

**Q: *Are there other Pastoral Regions in the archdiocese?***

**A:** A pastoral region is group of parishes (two or more) that share a priest as their pastor. Of the 232 parishes in the archdiocese, there are 92 parishes (39%) that share a pastor. These 92 parishes are staffed by 31 diocesan priests and 8 religious priests.

**Q: *Where were these pastoral region plans developed and how were these regions determined?***

**A:** In 2005 and 2006, a committee called F.I.T. (Futures Implementation Team) was formed to investigate possible solutions to the anticipated shortage of priests in the archdiocese. Fr. Bill served as representative in the initial FUTURE planning. The FIT process proposed “Pastoral Regions” as a solution for the archdiocese. These “pastoral regions” identified which parishes would ultimately share a pastor when the need arose. During this time, in the St. Margaret Mary Deanery, meetings took place to

examine this concept and share ideas on how this may be done initially within four areas of the deanery: representatives from Assumption parish were Paul Mohr, Deacon Rick Reder, Lynn Schultz, and Fr. Bill Kennedy and representatives from St. Margaret Mary parish: Sue Ehrhardt, Mark Wietmarschen, Al Cuchetti, and Fr. Jerry Gardner, joined with five other parishes. Eventually the recommendation from the Archdiocese envisioned about 100 pastoral regions throughout the Archdiocese. This further identification led to the present identified pastoral regions listed in the FUTURES project. You can find more about the FIT process online at <http://www.catholiccincinnati.org/ministries-offices/priestly-formation-2/the-futures-project>.

Q: ***What's a deanery? Who's in our deanery? How many parishes are in our Deanery?***

A: A deanery is an ecclesial structure of the Archdiocese, composed of a number of parishes usually joined by their geographical location, established to assist the Archbishop for the good order of the local Church. Each deanery has one priest appointed as Dean by the Archbishop who has certain responsibilities and acts on behalf of the Archbishop in some matters. Fr. George Jacquemin (Pastor of St. Clare Church) is the present dean of St. Margaret Mary Deanery. There are 17 parishes in the St. Margaret Mary Deanery: St. Ann, Assumption, Mt Healthy, St. Bartholomew, St. Bernard, Winton Place, St. Clare, St. Clement, Corpus Christi, St. Ignatius Loyola, St. James, White Oak, St. James of the Valley, Wyoming, St. John, Dry Ridge, St. John Neumann, St. Margaret Mary, St. Matthias, Our Lady of the Rosary, St. Theresa, the Little Flower, St. Vivian ( as listed in the Archdiocesan Catholic Directory 2011).

Q: ***Is the Assumption / St. Margaret Mary Pastoral Region the first Pastoral Region implemented in our deanery?***

A: There are a couple of instances in our Deanery in which one of the deanery parishes presently share a pastor with another parish: St. Matthias and St. Gabriel, St. Bernard and St. Leo. While our parishes are not the first to experience this structure, the time for implementing our pastoral region occurred when Fr. Kennedy's retirement was accepted by the Archbishop and the number of priests available to fill a vacant pastor's position was limited.

Q: ***Why didn't Assumption get their own Pastor?***

A: Simply stated, the time was right, with Fr. Kennedy's retirement and the fewer number of qualified priest available to fill vacant pastorates. This was a decision recommended by the Priests Personnel Board and accepted by Archbishop Schnurr. As he acknowledges in his letter, this is not something anybody wants, but is a sign of the future in the Archdiocese of Cincinnati as there are not enough priests to fill existing pastorates. Currently in the Archdiocese, there are only 180-185 priests, and 120 of these are over the age of 57.

Q: ***The archbishop's letter and Fr. Jerry's letter both refer to his assignment at Assumption as a "parochial administrator". What is a Parochial Administrator?***

A: A parochial administrator is a priest who takes the place of a pastor in a parish which is vacant. He is bound by the same duties and possesses the same rights as a pastor. However, a parochial administrator is not a permanent assignment. In pastoral region assignments, it is common to begin as a pastoral administrator and then, after a period of time, be assigned as pastor.

Q: ***Who will make the day-to-day decisions at Assumption?***

A: In the coming months, Fr. Jerry will be actively working with Fr. Bill and Assumption's parish staff to determine the specifics of how each will work together and operate on a day-to-day basis. No decisions have been made at this point.

Q: ***Will Assumption still have the services of their own DRE?***

A: Yes.

Q: ***Fr. Jerry, it is understood that the task ahead of you is a momentous one. Certainly there will be a period of adjustment as changes are implemented at both parishes. It will take time for you to become familiar and comfortable with Assumption's parishioners and customs as it will also take time for St. Margaret Mary parishioners to adjust to sharing after having you as pastor for the past eight years. You may feel pulled in both directions at times. In what ways do you plan to balance your time and attention between both parishes so that both feel their pastoral needs are equally and adequately being met?***

A: As with many instances in this planning, it is hard to answer this in specific ways. Fr. Jerry will look to find the ways to do this in the best way that any one person can. This is new to the experience of most priests in the Archdiocese. While we learn from those already in the structure of a pastoral region, each parish and their respective region has its own uniqueness. Fr. Jerry's hope is that the Catholic Church and both communities can draw upon the energy and successes of past/present programs of both communities and continue to discover the gifts or charisms that will enrich both parishes and find ways to raise up new lay leadership that will support parish life and assist a pastor in the work to which he is entrusted.