

*“For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for wholeness...  
to give you a future full of hope.” Jeremiah 29:11*



June 21, 2019

Dear Parishioners of Our Lady of Fatima, St. Mary, and St. Joseph-St. Therese Parishes:

The Solemnity of Corpus Christi celebrates the body of Christ, which Jesus offers to the Father for the salvation of the world. As the Church worships the Lord as both Priest and King, the laity are called “to generously dedicate themselves wholly to the advancement of the kingdom of God and to the reform and improvement of the temporal order in a Christian spirit” (*Apostolicam Actuositatem, the Second Vatican Council's Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity*).

For the last few months, representatives of your three parishes have been dedicating themselves to the advancement of the kingdom of God through the hard work of strategic planning. Working together, you are building bridges, strengthening relationships and establishing new partnerships to help ensure a stronger future, together.

When your plan is complete, it will not mean the “end” of anything – just the opposite. It will represent a beginning of a new paradigm. In order for this strategic plan to succeed, it is vital that the planning that has begun, continues.

First Approval: To date, the good work of the strategic planning teams, the planning facilitators, coupled with conversations and counsel that I have received from your pastors, has led to a recommendation of creating a *Linked Parish* model. I am in agreement with this recommendation.

A linked model means that the three parishes in New Bedford will remain independent at this time. However, with this new relationship, will operate with one central administration office and an appropriate staffing structure to be put in place to 1) manage the administration – bookkeeping, operations, and facilities maintenance of the campuses, and 2) provide leadership for all faith formation and evangelization programs along with coordination of parish ministries. This will allow our priests to be priests – freeing the clergy from the day-to-day burdens of administration. I look forward to learning more about the specific recommendations that will be coming forth from the Administration Planning Team, on this issue.

The Clergy: On June 23rd, Rev. Philip N. Hamel, will be celebrating his final Mass as pastor of St. Joseph-St. Therese parish. Please join me in thanking Fr. Hamel for his years serving the good people of this parish community and please hold Father in your prayers as he takes on a new assignment, leading a new parish collaborative in Somerset and Swansea.

With the departure of Fr. Hamel, the three parishes of St. Joseph-St. Therese, St. Mary and Our Lady of Fatima will enter a new relationship. With the goal of maintaining the three as distinct, vibrant parishes, I will entrust their pastoral care to two priests *in solidum* — a Latin term that means “in solidarity.” Very Rev. Daniel W. Lacroix, V.F. and Rev. John A. Raposo, will serve as pastors *in solidum*, or as equals.

Exercising pastoral care in this way requires the designation of one priest to serve as moderator. Our Church’s Canon Law defines the role of moderator as “the one who directs the joint action and answers for it to the bishop”. Fr. Lacroix will serve as moderator for St. Joseph-St. Therese, Our Lady of Fatima and St. Mary as well as a centralized administration office that will be established for the three parishes.

We will optimize these weeks ahead by completing the strategic plan for the three parishes so that you may begin to transition from planning to implementation with your new leadership team in place. Let us continue to work together to build the “future full of hope” that Jeremiah foretold – in New Bedford and beyond! May God bless us on this journey of *Rebuilding in Faith and Hope!*

Sincerely yours in the Lord,

Most Reverend Edgar M. da Cunha, S.D.V., D.D., Bishop of Fall River