

# ***Faith in Our Future***

Dear Parishioners:

As you know, at the behest of Bishop O'Connell, a diocesan-wide planning initiative, *Faith in Our Future (FIOF)*, began in November, 2015. The process grouped the 107 parishes of our diocese into twenty-five *cohorts* (each with three to six parishes). Cohort 6 is composed of five parishes, of which ours is a part: Our Lady of Sorrows – St. Anthony, St. Gregory the Great, St. Raphael – Holy Angels, and St. Vincent de Paul, all of Hamilton, and St. John the Baptist, Allentown. Each parish has a core team of five members including the pastor.

Each Parish Core Team conducted a parish self-study and then together submitted—to a Diocesan Planning Commission (DPC)—suggestions for new and more effective ways for parish ministry in the face of daunting challenges: e.g., shortage of priests, changing demographics, financial stresses. These were to be based on the six parish models provided in Canon Law:

- Collaborative (a group of parishes working together to reduce costs, joint events, etc.)
- Linking (two or more parishes remaining autonomous but sharing a pastor)
- Merger (two or more parishes forming one parish)
- “In Solidum” (a team of priests serving a group of parishes)
- Parish Life Director (a deacon, religious, or layperson appointed by the bishop to be responsible for a parish’s daily operations, with a priest providing sacramental services)
- Personal Parishes (without any territory, e.g., language-based)

After considerable discussion, the Suggestion our cohort submitted was “**Collaborative Parishes.**” The DPC has responded to our submission with a number of comments and Preliminary Recommendations for further discussion. These may be found on the diocesan website, at [www.dioceseoftrenton.org/faithinourfuture/contact/](http://www.dioceseoftrenton.org/faithinourfuture/contact/).

Over the next three months, each cohort will discuss the Preliminary Recommendations of the DPC and, in turn, submit a Response by September 30. By October 31, the DPC will submit its Final Recommendations to Bishop O'Connell. Before formulating his final decisions, the Bishop will consult—in accord with canon law—the Presbyteral Council, Episcopal Council, and other advisors. Final decisions will be announced in late 2016 or early 2017. Preparation and training to implement the decisions will take place in January and February. Decisions will take effect July 1, 2017. In cases of parish mergers, changes will take place a year later (July 1, 2018).

The DPC’s **Preliminary Recommendations** for Cohort 6 are the following:

- **Linked Parishes** between St. Gregory the Great & Our Lady of Sorrows – St. Anthony
- **Linked Parishes** among St. Raphael – Holy Angels, St. Vincent de Paul, and St. John the Baptist
- **Collaborative Parishes** among all parishes in the cohort, developing areas of collaboration.

“Linked Parishes” share a pastor, but remain distinct canonical and corporate entities. “Collaborative Parishes” enter into cooperative relationships with each other (whether or not they share a pastor). If you have questions about the Preliminary Recommendations, please contact me or one of the other members of our Parish Core Team.

Sincerely,

*Msgr. Thomas Gervasio*

11 July 2016