

Clustering: What's It All About

First, let's look at the terms "clustering" and "cluster partners".

The Archdiocese of Detroit (AOD) website describes clustering as "two or more parishes that share a single pastor and oftentimes a single set of administrative resources and personnel (bookkeeper, maintenance, religious education teachers, etc.). Also used as a verb, e.g. "St. Mary and St. Joseph will make plans to cluster in 2014." Parishes that are "clustered" have independent finances."

AOD defines Cluster Partners as "two or more parishes which would cluster when the need becomes evident – for example, upon the reassignment, retirement, or death of a pastor; or, when a parish runs an operating deficit."

Now, let's look at what the AOD has instructed St. Hilary, St. John Bosco and St. Robert Bellarmine to do:

In early 2012, St. Hilary, St. John Bosco, and St. Robert Bellarmine are to move forward as cluster partners and develop a cluster plan to be submitted to the Regional Moderator (Bp. Frank Reiss) no later than December 31, 2012. The plan is to include collaboration toward a cluster, then a merger of all three parishes. The cluster plan should be implemented when a current pastor is no longer available, if a replacement is not available to be assigned, or when any of these parishes begin to experience a net operating deficit. The plan should commence with models for initial collaboration and include contingency plans for programming, outreach and administration, for clustering/merging the parishes, and/or closing buildings and planning for the sale of property.

Now we know the terms and what the AOD has instructed. But what does that mean for us? Well first of all, it does not mean that St. Hilary and St. John Bosco are going to be absorbed by St. Robert Bellarmine.

Initial plans were submitted to the AOD by December 31st, 2012, and the cluster coordinating committee had their first planning meeting in April 2013. The cluster coordinating committee will be meeting at least quarterly to discuss future collaborative efforts and issues such as Mass schedules when there is a shortage of priests at any of the three parishes, and emergency planning.

In 2013, representatives from all three parishes started meeting to share individual activities, and to develop plans for clustering, if it becomes necessary.

Let's look at where we are currently:

In early 2014 St. Hilary Parish Council had determined it would not be financially feasible to maintain the parish as a continuing entity. Therefore, plans were made to celebrate the 60 years of St Hilary in Redford MI and the Mass of Suppression was held on June 29, 2014. Prior to the closing, representatives from both St. John Bosco and St. Robert Bellarmine spoke at weekend Masses, inviting parishioners to consider during their decision process joining one of the two remaining cluster partners.

If clustering does occur, there will still be a St. John Bosco Church and St. Robert Bellarmine Church and together we will have one Pastor. That Pastor may be one of the two that are currently assigned to our parishes or it could be someone new to us. Either way we will still retain our own separate identities.

With input from the AOD, it was decided that as of September 2014, the remaining Parishes of St. John Bosco and St. Robert Bellarmine would form a Joint Parish Pastoral Council, and that council would assume the planning duties of the former cluster coordinating committee.

You may see some of our separate functions combined into one. There may be only one Business Manager, one Bookkeeper, one Director of Religious Education, or one Maintenance Staff. However, none of this is certain at this time. As part of the planning process, the parish representatives will define what our parishes will look like if we do cluster, which areas will be combined, and which areas will remain separate. At the moment we are discussing the possibility of combined bulletins, changes in the daily Mass schedule, publishing activities being held at each parish, and the establishment of an Emergency Mass schedule if one of the current pastors is no longer available.

You will be kept updated on what is going on through bulletin articles. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to call your parish office(s) or contact any of your parish reps listed below.

Please pray that God guides us in our cluster decision process.

2014/2015 Joint Parish Pastoral Council:

Fr. Richard Osebold (St. John Bosco), Fr. Richard Leliaert (St. Robert Bellarmine),
Laura Scanlan (St. Robert Bellarmine), Bob Bacigal (St. John Bosco), Mary Jo Hodge (St. John Bosco), Margie
McSween (St. John Bosco), Judie Schuett (St. John Bosco), Chuck Sudekum (St. John Bosco), Stella Wolak (St.
John Bosco), Ron Bush (St. Robert Bellarmine), Joe Carrier (St. Robert Bellarmine), Teri Carrier (St. Robert
Bellarmine), Pam Condron (St. Robert Bellarmine), Kandi Johnson (St. Robert Bellarmine), Peter Pierzecki (St.
Robert Bellarmine), Jim Vote (St. Robert Bellarmine)