

Saint Brendan Parish, Bellingham

Your Eminence,

The Saint Brendan's Parish Council, in union with our Pastor and after a consultation period with parishioners, have reached our conclusion regarding the proposal for the creation of Pastoral Service Teams (PST). Although this plan may be an attempt to manage the future of the Archdiocese due to the present shortage of priests serving the Catholic faithful in the Archdiocese, we are convinced that this initiative will create more harm than good in the Archdiocese. Permit us to elaborate on the reasons why we are opposed to this program.

First and foremost, as Catholics, we must trust in the presence and guidance of the Holy Spirit which has given us a rich tradition where the present configuration of parishes has rendered abundant fruits. For this very reason, the virtue of Prudence should advise us to take pause before attempting to re-engineer the present structures.

The primary issue we have with the PST proposal is the recommendation to take every pastor and priest out of his current parish and reassign him somewhere else. We consider this to be the most egregious issue because:

- *We all have experienced the sense of loss when those who care for us are removed from our parish. To make everyone experience this just to make everything equal seems extreme and unnecessary.*
- *If the real problem attempting to be addressed is the shortage of priests and other religious serving the Boston Archdiocese, we would like to point out that the PST proposal has dire consequences when it comes to the heart of the problem: vocations. It takes years for a Pastor to foster the necessary relationship with young men and women called to the ministry. The Pastor is truly an alternate Father figure to these young people and the trust and formation required for the young person to hear the call is best developed under the present structure rather than the one being proposed. By uprooting Pastors from their parishes, the consequent trauma could result in utter frustration and disorientation by those who hear a call to follow Jesus.*
- *The plan seems to correspond more to a business approach by seeking to make 125 Pastoral Service Teams that all look the same, with the idea that they will do the same thing in each of the collaboratives. The plan does not attempt to see the faces of each priest and the parishioners he serves and totally discounts the loyalty a parishioner may have to his or her pastor, running the risk of alienating yet more Catholics in the Boston Archdiocese.*
- *The role the PST is called to serve runs the risk of the laypeople seeing an alternate source to fulfill their pastoral or even ministerial needs, and this may create a situation where the authority of the Pastor is compromised when unorthodox advice or direction may be given by a body that has the backing of the Archdiocese with the consequent*

confusion and perhaps scandal of an “alternate mini-Magisterium” operating in the “collaborative”.

Additionally, the plan speaks of training, CCD restructuring, and excellence in faith formation. We are left to wonder what sort of training - business training? Who decides what faith formation program? Not to mention the cost of all of this. In this economy, many jobs have already been lost and many are on tight budgets. This approach, with its recommended salaries for the PST, would not be giving a good example in stewardship to the Catholics in the Archdiocese. (That statement is based on the visual observation of those who have attended Archdiocesan meetings which detailed the positions and related salaries.)

We see our parishes as evangelizing communities and truly mission-based, and not as ones with a "consumer culture mentality". We believe that The Church is not only dedicated to serving the people who attend to Her services but also as an extension of the salvific arm of the Lord reaching out to all those who have abandoned their faith or are in search of one.

Therefore we in turn propose that the Archdiocese could achieve their goal by:

- *Focusing on supporting the priests as individuals and helping each one to grow in the areas that will help him as he prepares to take on the care of more souls.*
- *Concentrating in the proper evangelization of those in regular attendance so that they in turn would help other Catholics understand that each one of us has a role to play in the building up of our beloved mother, the Church.*
- *Fostering a deeper level of communication between neighboring parishes who will in turn communicate with the Archdiocese to ensure all the evangelization goals are achieved. Deepening the relationship between parishes will strengthen the Church and, thus, provide more paths to evangelize! For example, in Bellingham our Pastors and the Parish Councils are committed to strengthen our bonds, an example of which is the meeting we had together so that we could coordinate our parish responses to the PST proposal.*

This approach will avoid Pastors from being asked to resign their positions, and new pastors being appointed who have no loyalty to their new parish and no knowledge of the parish history or people for whom that parish is their long-term spiritual home. Through the PST, significant power and control will be given up by the individual parishes as they are forced to collaborate and share resources with the likelihood that some parish employees consequently losing their jobs. All this for the sake of a new structure?

In this new evangelization year sought by our Holy Father, we would be going in the wrong direction by adopting the PST plan. It has been said that in Catholic matters, how Boston goes, so goes the nation; so let's not lead the nation in the wrong direction by adopting "business" approaches to the matters of Faith and let's drop this concept of the PST. This proposal reads like a business plan to consolidate and reorganize parishes, despite protestations to the contrary. Instead we humbly suggest a truly Catholic approach to solve the problem: prayer, devotion, adoration, fasting, penance and the Sacraments.

Lastly, we are concerned that our feedback will not be duly considered and heeded. We truly hope that it has not already been decided that this plan will be enforced. For all of the above reasons, we strongly recommend the rejection of the Pastoral Service Teams approach. Instead we recommend the reinforcement of the existing structures with support from the Archdiocese to each of the existing parishes in terms of the evangelizing mission we are endowed by the founder of our Church, Jesus Christ, in whose name we bless you.

Respectfully submitted,

Saint Brendan's Council and Parishioners