

DIOCESE OF GAYLORD

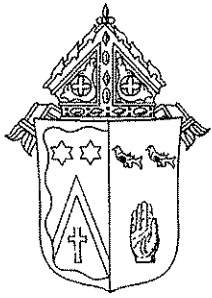
PARISH AND PERSONNEL TASK FORCE

September 5, 2007 – April 2, 2009

FINAL REPORT **LONG TERM RECOMMENDATIONS**

Submitted to:

Bishop Patrick R. Cooney
April 27, 2009



DIOCESE OF GAYLORD

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April 27, 2009

Dear Bishop Cooney,

On behalf of the entire membership of the Parish and Personnel Task Force, I am pleased to present you with our Final Report of recommendations for the long term future of the Diocese of Gaylord.

The long term recommendations presented here are made following an extensive and unprecedented consultative process which took place throughout the Diocese of Gaylord. The Task Force made substantial and concerted efforts to provide opportunities for every parishioner to offer input into this process. I assure you, as well as the faithful of the Diocese, that every comment and piece of correspondence received by the Task Force was thoughtfully and prayerfully considered. This report ultimately reflects our best efforts to propose recommendations to best serve the faithful in view of the challenges faced not only by our diocese, but other dioceses across the country.

The Task Force recognizes that change can be very difficult and the fact that some parishioners are going to experience sadness and disappointment cannot be avoided. We strongly urge that appropriate resources be allocated to assist parishes in the transition process.

The Task Force believes that the Catholic Church in the Diocese of Gaylord stands at a point in history filled with great opportunity and open possibilities. We hope the faithful -- laity and clergy alike -- will embrace this opportunity to minister even more collaboratively as we serve the Lord and our communities, and thereby more fully express God's love and our shared Catholic faith.

Finally, I would like to personally thank each member of the Parish and Personnel Task Force. These individuals have been extraordinarily dedicated and faithful to the work and timelines set before them. The tremendous personal sacrifices made by these men and women over the past three years stand clearly as an example of their great faith and commitment to the well being of our diocese. I am extremely proud to have served with them.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Francis J. Murphy". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping "F" and "M".

Rev. Francis J. Murphy, Vicar General
Chair, Parish and Personnel Task Force

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MISSION STATEMENT OF THE DIOCESE OF GAYLORD

The Father through His Son, Jesus the Christ, has poured forth the Holy Spirit and made us into a “holy nation, a royal priesthood, a people set apart.” Inflamed by the vision of what that reality means for us and for our world, we — the laity, religious and clergy of the Diocese of Gaylord — feel compelled, with God’s help, to become that to which we have been called.

Therefore, in an authentic spirit of thanksgiving, we will work to bring about in all Catholics such an enthusiasm for their faith that they freely share it with others and thereby truly become an evangelizing people. We will also endeavor to build our families, our parishes, our diocese and our world into that faith community whose compassionate ministry to the world embodies and witnesses to God’s power that works to heal and save all humankind.

We recognize that alone we cannot fulfill these desires; but we know we are not alone, God is with us always. Therefore, we are committed to receive his nourishment and power in evermore conscious and active celebrations of His sacraments. We will be open to His saving truths which lead to personal and communal conversion which we find in our love for and study of both the Scriptures and the teachings of the Church. We will respond to His love by giving our time, talent and treasures in pursuit of gospel justice and peace which will be our personal and communal part in the continuing mission of the Risen Lord.

We, through all of our thoughts and actions, want to be an authentic, effective and visible sign of His goodness to us and thereby be a wonderful sign of hope to all.

October 1996

MISSION STATEMENT OF THE PARISH AND PERSONNEL TASK FORCE

The mission of the Parish and Personnel Task Force is to provide recommendations to the Bishop, in consultation with the faithful, to care for the sacramental, pastoral, spiritual and administrative needs of the Diocese of Gaylord.

December 2007

INTRODUCTION

The Parish and Personnel Task Force was appointed by Bishop Patrick R. Cooney in the fall of 2006 following consultation with Rev. Francis Murphy, Vicar General. Rev. Murphy served as Chair of the Parish and Personnel Task Force.

Members of the Task Force were selected following consultation with parish leadership from throughout the diocese and after a personal interview. All Task Force members were required to have knowledge, experience and history with the Catholic Church in the Diocese of Gaylord as well as demonstrate a commitment and vision toward the common good of the entire diocese. Though efforts were made to have representation from throughout the diocese, the primary goal was to select individuals who would work for the benefit of the whole diocese and not simply their own individual faith communities or particular organizational interests.

Task Force members were volunteers and met bi-weekly for most of the two and a half years of their service. In addition, a well-qualified and experienced facilitator was hired to facilitate the meetings of the Task Force. A recording secretary was recruited and the diocesan Director of Communications was appointed to serve as spokesperson. Hundreds of other volunteers assisted in the endeavor by serving in roles such as town hall and regional meeting facilitators, local meeting coordinators, scribes, hosts, etc. The Task Force hereby specifically acknowledges their ministry and assistance with great appreciation and gratitude. It is because of the collaboration and cooperation of leadership and parishioners throughout the diocese that the comprehensive process utilized by the Task Force was made possible.

The Task Force was charged with looking to both the short term and long term in providing recommendations to Bishop Cooney as to how best to minister to the needs of the people in northern Lower Michigan with the resources that are currently available.

The Task Force submitted short term recommendations in April, 2007. This report focuses on the long term recommendations which are being submitted to Bishop Cooney for his consideration with a vision for the future developed over the last two years.

The role of the Task Force remains solely advisory to the Bishop of the Diocese of Gaylord. It is understood that it is ultimately the responsibility of the Bishop alone to decide which, if any, of the recommendations of the Task Force should be acted upon or implemented as well as any timelines for implementation. He may, of course, consult with others and accept, modify, or reject any of the recommendations offered by the Task Force. However, it is important to note that these recommendations are made following unprecedented consultation with the faithful throughout the Diocese of Gaylord. This report represents the best efforts of the Parish and Personnel Task Force to provide for the common good of the people of northern Lower Michigan and to preserve the Catholic faith and presence in our area. We pray that our recommendations will be received in the spirit in which they are offered which is one of hope and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ and the People of God in the Diocese of Gaylord.

The Task Force now entrusts this work to the wisdom of our leadership as guided by the Holy Spirit.

MEMBERS OF THE PARISH AND PERSONNEL TASK FORCE

Rev. Francis Murphy, Chair
St. Ann, Cadillac

Kathleen Lame, Facilitator
St. Mary, Charlevoix

Janet Darr
St. Mary-St. Charles, Cheboygan

Sr. Rita Epple, Pastoral Administrator
St. Dominic, Metz

Rev. Charles Donajkowski, Pastor
St. Ignatius, Rogers City

Rev. Donald Geyman, Pastor
Immaculate Conception, Traverse City

JoAnn Gibes
St. Augustine, Boyne Falls

Robert Hallead
Guardian Angels, Manistee

Betty Hartmann
St. Mary Cathedral, Gaylord

Edward Howe
Sacred Heart, Oscoda

Judy Krussell
St. Francis Xavier, Petoskey

John Mischel
Sacred Heart, Elk Rapids

James Moffit
St. James, Houghton Lake

Rev. Robert Nalley
St. Mary, Grayling

James Rich
St. Mary, Lake Leelanau

Rev. Dennis Stilwell, Pastor
St. Francis Xavier, Petoskey

Wally Wrzesinski
St. James, Houghton Lake

Rev. Robert Zuchowski, Pastor
Sacred Heart, Elk Rapids

Candace Neff, Dir. of Communications
Diocese of Gaylord

Mary Herst, Recording Secretary

GUIDELINES OF THE PARISH AND PERSONNEL TASK FORCE

The Task Force worked within the following guidelines:

- All members would work for the benefit of the “whole diocese.”
- Members understood that all options for meeting the sacramental needs of the faithful in the Gaylord Diocese were open for discussion.
- Members understood the role of the Task Force is advisory only, with final decisions to be made by the Bishop.
- The Diocesan Communications Director would be the official spokesperson for the Parish and Personnel Task Force.
- Closing (suppressing) parishes was to be considered as a last resort.

THE PROCESS UNDERTAKEN BY THE TASK FORCE

In the course of its work, the Parish and Personnel Task Force reviewed a 1986 report which laid out a possible long term plan for the Diocese of Gaylord which was not formally implemented. The Task Force also studied a 2003 National Study of Parish Reorganization in an effort to learn from, and build upon, the work of others already grappling with the same issues. Members also reviewed numerous other books, documents and articles regarding parish viability, national church trends, change and possible solutions. In addition, the members received current information regarding regional population, finances, local trends as well as other reports.

The Task Force also received projections regarding the number of diocesan priests expected to be available to serve in the Diocese of Gaylord over the next several years. This area has been extremely blessed with many retired, extern and religious order priests who have faithfully ministered in our diocese as full time Pastors, Sacramental Ministers and providers of additional weekend assistance. This ministry becomes even more critical in the summer months when the natural beauty and quality of life in Northern Lower Michigan swells our year-round population with visitors. While it is hoped that such gifted priests will continue to be available to serve in our diocese, the Task Force determined that any long term plan must be able to be carried out utilizing only priests ordained or incardinated into the Diocese of Gaylord.

It has been projected that in 2010, 30 diocesan priests will be available to serve this diocese. In 2012, 27 diocesan priests will be available; and in 2015, 24 diocesan priests will be available. These numbers are based on ages and years of service of the diocesan priests as well as projections for future ordinations. The Task Force recognizes and appreciates that many priests often work well past their approved retirement age. For purposes of planning, utilizing the same thought process as with religious and extern priests, the Task Force feels planning for the future should include the presumption that these men may be unavailable for service.

The Task Force studied the processes used by other dioceses in the United States facing similar challenges and developed a model that would include as many people in the decision-making process as possible. The process implemented by the Task Force allowed for every parishioner in the Diocese of Gaylord to have an opportunity to offer input.

The Task Force spent many months and used a variety of means to gather information at every level before the work of making long term recommendations commenced.

- In April and May, 2008, two meetings were held for Priests, Deacons, Parish Life Coordinators, and Lay Administrators to inform them, enlist their support and receive their feedback as to the proposed process and written materials. Suggestions made by participants were incorporated into the process as adopted.

