

**ST. JOHN THE EVANGELIST PARISH (Wellesley)  
May 2012**

**Report to the Archdiocese on the  
Pastoral Planning Commission's Proposal**

The Archdiocesan Pastoral Planning Commission (the "Commission") has proposed a plan (the "Proposal") designed to both grow and strengthen our parishes. The Commission is seeking input from each parish regarding the Proposal. This is the initial report of the St. John the Evangelist (Wellesley) parish (the "Parish").

In response to the request for comment, the Parish solicited input from parishioners in a number of ways, including the following:

- The Parish website included links to the Proposal and to additional material regarding pastoral planning
- The Parish bulletin included numerous discussions of the Proposal and invitations to provide input on the proposal
- Parishioners were invited to complete an online survey on the Parish website
- Parishioners were encouraged to provide specific comments directly to the Parish's Pastoral Planning Group
- The Parish councils held a series of meetings at which parishioners could give feedback and discuss among themselves the implications of the Proposal
- A suggestion box was left in the church gathering space to enable parishioners to comment anonymously
- The feedback received at the parish meetings was summarized in a report and published in the Parish bulletin, so that parishioners could review the comments received and further comment if needed (these meeting reports are attached to this Report as an appendix)
- A draft of this report was reviewed by the Parish's pastoral council, finance council, staff council and planning group at a meeting held for that purpose, and the report was modified based on feedback received at that meeting.

Much of the input reflected in this report was received at consultation meetings held following each of the liturgies on the weekend of March 24-25 (Saturday 5:00 p.m.; Sunday 7:30 a.m., 8:45 p.m., 11:00 p.m., 5:00 p.m.) with an additional meeting held Monday, March 26 at 7:30 p.m. to accommodate those who were unable to be present at one of the weekend sessions. Approximately 180-200 members of the parish community participated in the consultations (meetings and online responses), which were facilitated by members of the Pastoral Planning Group. The discussion was rich and lively with each session lasting approximately one hour. The meetings provided a much needed opportunity for parishioners to share their thoughts, concerns, and hopes and in some instances their frustrations. The following responses are based, in part, on comments made at those meetings.

**1. Do you think the proposed Pastoral Collaborative (St. John the Evangelist – St. Paul) will meet the goal of enhancing and improving our parishes as vibrant, welcoming Eucharistic faith communities?**

St. John the Evangelist prides itself on being a vibrant, welcoming faith community. For many, this is what sets St. John's apart from other parishes they have attended.

There is general acceptance of the proposed collaborative of St. John's and St. Paul's. Despite many similarities, the parishes have distinct cultures, which need to be fostered to maintain the unique vitality of each parish. Some concerns have been expressed that the proposed collaboration will weaken or dilute that sense of community which is integral to the rich sacramental and spiritual life of our parish.

Staffing will be particularly important given the richness of the programs at St. John the Evangelist and the current high level of services we enjoy. Maintaining the high quality of our parish experience will be a key factor in measuring the success of the collaboration.

There are still many questions regarding the specifics of the collaboration, which make it difficult to assess the likelihood of its success. Most of these have to do with the staffing of the Pastoral Service Team and financial and operational implications for the parish.

**2. What are the advantages and disadvantages of this combination, not only for our Parish (St. John the Evangelist) but for both Parishes included in the collaboration?**

The obvious advantage is the close proximity of the 2 parishes and the relationships we share as the majority are members of the Wellesley community. These relationships may help to foster a sense of trust that will be essential in establishing a true collaboration. However, this connection to the broader community may also be a disadvantage. We will need to ensure that those members of our parish who are not residents of Wellesley, in particular the residents of Newton who are valued members of the St. John the Evangelist community, are not made to feel marginalized.

Both parishes appear to be financially sound and have engaged lay members capable of assuming leadership positions within the parish. It is acknowledged that the development of lay leadership and the resources for their training will become increasingly important as the number of priests and religious decline. Other benefits of the proposed collaboration include the centralization of management / administrative functions, the sharing of resources, and a trained staff that is fairly compensated.

The most frequently cited disadvantage is the potential weakening of our sense of community. Both parishes have a strong and well-established sense of identity and culture. This is a fundamental part of the faith experience for many, and the basis of their decision to affiliate with a particular parish community. We need to be sensitive to this as we begin the transition to a collaborative structure.

**3. Do you know of any significant, real problems with the proposed collaborating/sharing of pastoral staffs? If yes, please explain.**

The most difficult issue will be the naming of a pastor, having enjoyed several decades of strong, thoughtful pastoral leadership at St. John the Evangelist. It will be important to have a pastor who can continue to intellectually stimulate our parish and foster collaborative ministry with the laity. This is a key element in the vibrancy of our faith community.

Concerns have also been expressed regarding the demands to be placed on priests serving as pastors in the new model, and their ability to meet the many

pastoral needs of the individual faith communities. Careful attention will need to be paid to the manner in which current staff are handled, as well as the process to be used to staff the Pastoral Service Team.

Since the proposed collaborative will have two elementary schools, many questions were raised. There were many questions regarding the impact of the collaboration on parish schools. What are the expectations of the Archdiocese with regard to schools as we go forward? Will the PST play a role in the administration of the school? Will this be left to individual parishes to sort through?

- 4. The criteria for organizing parishes into proposed collaborative was guided by four general principles: Fairness, Partnership, Financial Viability, and Pastoral Effectiveness. Do you feel the proposed St. John the Evangelist – St. Paul Collaborative reflects these general principles? Please let us know any comments you might have on the criteria used, or on ways to improve them.**

There seemed to be a general consensus that our parishes meet the stated criteria. Given the differences in the culture our parishes, however, there may be differences in how we measure pastoral effectiveness and/or our understanding of what constitutes pastoral effectiveness.

- 5. Are there other criteria that should be taken into account specific to our parish and geography? Do you have any other ideas about parish combinations that seem more workable to you, and why? Please provide any other general suggestions about multi-parish pastoring that you feel would help the APPC in making its ultimate recommendations to Cardinal Sean and the Diocese.**

St. Paul was generally seen as a logical partner going forward. As noted above, we will need to continue to be welcoming to members of our community who live outside of Wellesley, and to ensure an environment that welcomes diversity.

## **OBSERVATIONS**

While there is a general understanding that a change in approach is inevitable, there are concerns with the proposed approach. A number of people asked whether this approach has been tried successfully elsewhere, and whether there were alternative approaches that might be considered. There were also questions as to whether longer-term planning is occurring at the Archdiocesan level. What will happen when the number of priests further declines? Interestingly, our discussion of the new model led some people to question whether parish closings should be off the table.

The critical issue we are facing is the precipitous decline in the number of priests. While lay people can be trained to participate more fully in parish ministry, consideration needs to be given to expanding the pool of priests. Suggestions of ways to increase the number of priests included the recruitment of priests from other continents, the use of former Anglican priests, the consideration of married priests and the ordination of women.

People were generally confused and or distracted by the inclusion of the term “evangelization” in the discussion of collaboration. For many the meaning was unclear, while for others it was associated with more negative connotations of the word. Evangelization is and must be an important part of the Church. It would be helpful if the use of the term was defined more carefully and its place in the proposed model emphasized with specifics.

Lay leadership will be important in ensuring a smooth transition to the Pastoral Service Team model. In addition, there will be new or increased opportunities for the laity to participate in the work of the parish and the Church. We need to prepare lay people for these new roles, as we begin to help other members of the community understand the appropriateness of this shift to greater lay participation.

There are many questions regarding the structure of the proposed collaboration. How will staff decisions for the Pastoral Service Team be handled? Will there be an opportunity to participate in the hiring of staff as well as in the selection of the pastor? How will the PST be funded, i.e. what are the financial implications for the collaborating parishes? What will be the governance structure for the PST and how will it relate to local governance at the parish level? Will the proposed organizational model be flexible enough to accommodate the distinct culture and values of the collaborating parishes?

People want to better understand what is being proposed, and this will be important in building trust that the proposal is viable.

People were generally protective of the priests selected to serve as pastors, wanting to ensure that demands of the new structure were reasonable. These will be among the most important decisions made as we go forward. There was general consensus that the pastor will need to serve both communities in an equitable way, and that the perception of favoritism should be avoided.

## **CONCLUSION**

Collaboration will bring many opportunities to revitalize and strengthen the parishes of the Archdiocese. It will be important to continue to stress the positive aspects of the new model as parishes become bogged down in the difficult decisions that are inevitable. In some instances, the Archdiocese might consider providing professional facilitators to assist parishes in sorting through difficult issues.

Careful planning for the transition will be critical to the successful implementation of the new structure. At this point it is difficult to see how we will get from our current structure to the proposed collaborative model. Development of any plan needs to be done in stages, starting from the grass roots level in the parish. Parishioners see the need for, and want to be engaged in, strategic planning, particularly with regard to the Pastoral Service Team and mechanisms in place to ensure that parishes share equally in decision-making. This information will help people to understand and plan for the transition ahead.

Mutual respect and trust will be critical to the success of any collaboration. While these will develop organically, some recommendations might be offered on how to promote these qualities.

We will learn a great deal as we work through the process, and there are opportunities to learn from each other. Communication as we begin this transition will be important, as will documentation of the process at the Archdiocesan and local parish level.

The Parish reserves the right to supplement this Report from time to time as additional comments are received.

**ATTACHMENTS:**

- Attachment 1: Summaries of the feedback from individual parish-wide meetings held at St. John the Evangelist between March 24<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup>
- Attachment 2: Summary of responses from an e-mail survey sent to the St. John the Evangelist parishioners in March and April.
- Attachment 3: Summary of other feedback from the St. John the Evangelist parishioners (i.e. emails, suggestion box, etc.)

## St. John Parish Meetings on Archdiocesan Pastoral Proposal

Between March 24<sup>th</sup> and March 26<sup>th</sup>, the St. John Pastoral Planning Group held a series of parish wide meetings to gather feedback on the Archdiocesan Pastoral Planning Commission proposal, which includes the formation of a pastoral collaborative consisting of St. John the Evangelist Parish and St. Paul Parish, and the implementation of a Pastoral Service Team (PST) to serve that collaborative. The below is a summary of the polling questions and answers as well as highlights of the discussions during these meetings. Total participation in the five meetings was 135 parishioners.

Polling Question	Answer	Sat 5:00	Sun 7:30	Sun 8:45	Sun 11:00	Sun 5:00	Mon 7:30
What is your level of agreement with Cardinal Sean's exhortation that evangelization be the present and long term task of the Archdiocese?	Agree	86%	82%	46%	9%	73%	80%
	Disagree	0%	0	15%	3%	0%	0%
	Neutral	14%	18%	38%	12%*	27%	20%
What is your level of agreement with the goal that we must grow the Church of Boston by bringing Catholics back to the practice of the faith?	Agree	92%	100%	94%	94%	87%	80%
	Disagree	0%	0%	6%	0%	0%	0
	Neutral	8%	0%	0%	6%	13%	20%
What is your level of agreement with: "The strengthening of parishes should NOT be achieved by another round of closing 100 or more parishes/churches."	Agree	76%	45%	71%	60%	50%	87%
	Disagree	5%	9%	24%	9%	21%	0%
	Neutral	19%	45%	6%	31%	29%	13%
How open are you to having a pastor from outside your proposed collaborative become your pastor?	Open	57%	80%	41%	38%	29%	40%
	Not Open	16%	0%	41%	18%	43%	20%
	Not Sure	27%	20%	18%	44%	29%	40%
Does this proposal of a Pastoral Service Team model take us in the direction you believe we need for the Archdiocese?	Yes	46%	50%	29%	41%	36%	13%
	No	8%	0%	21%	52%	14%	13%
	Neutral	46%	50%	50%	7%	50%	73%
If the Cardinal were to implement the Pastoral Service Team model, how do you think the implementation should take place?	At Once	30%	0%	8%	0%	36%	0%
	In Phases	62%	82%	85%	21%	64%	93%
	Not Sure	8%	18%	8%	79%	0%	7%

\* Many participants needed to understand what is meant by evangelization in the context of the PST to be able to answer.

### Highlights of Comments/Questions during the Parish Wide Meetings

**Evangelization.** What is meant by it in terms of the proposed PST? How does this and "Bringing Catholics back to the Church" bridge the gap to a successful implementation of the proposed structural changes to our Parish?

**Vocation.** The declining number of priests is the real issue. The Church should be working towards a longer term solution to broaden the pool by including married priests and women.

**Finances.** Is the proposed PST truly less expensive to run? It is hard to determine the real impact without any detail. Where will the funding come, especially if highly trained lay people are assumed to take on roles in the PST?

**Proposed PST.** There are cultural differences between the two parishes that will present challenges. We need to somehow preserve the aspects of our parish which are currently working well. Should we begin a dialog with St. Paul's now?

**PST Pastor.** What is the selection process and can we interview the new pastor? Is there a training effort underway and a support structure for the new Pastor of the PST?

**Schools.** What will happen given both parishes have a school?

**Transparency.** Communication and an open dialog during the process are key. People need to feel they have a real say and an influence in the process.



## St. John Parish E-Mail Survey on Archdiocesan Pastoral Proposal

During March and April, the St. John Pastoral Planning Group conducted an e-mail survey to gather feedback on the Archdiocesan Pastoral Planning Commission proposal, which includes the formation of a pastoral collaborative consisting of St. John the Evangelist Parish and St. Paul Parish, and the implementation of a Pastoral Service Team (PST) to serve that collaborative. The below is a summary of the survey questions and answers as well as highlights of the associated comments offered along with the survey answers. A total of 35 parishioners responded to the survey.

**1. Do you think the proposed Pastoral Collaborative (St. John the Evangelist - St. Paul) will meet the goal of enhancing and improving our parishes as vibrant, welcoming Eucharistic faith communities?**

Top number is the count of respondents selecting the option. Bottom % is percent of the total respondents selecting the option.	Will not improve	Unlikely to improve	May or may not improve	Likely to improve somewhat	Will definitely improve significantly
	3	7	14	6	1
10%	23%	45%	19%	3%	

Highlights of Comments Associated with Question 1:

- John's is a special faith community and a vibrant, welcoming Eucharistic faith community. The merger would detract from that. It all depends on having an excellent pastor to lead the teams. .
- This is a key opportunity for the parishes to envision a new beginning where everyone is truly welcome. The success of this will greatly depend on church leadership.
- This idea could strain resources and human capital to the point where both parishes are diminished. It will most likely encourage separate loyalty to the original parish.
- The parishes have very different cultures and I don't feel they are a good fit for collaborating.
- I understand the need to create these parish collaboratives - given financial concerns and the growing shortage of clergy. However, I don't necessarily see how these collaboratives will result in more vibrant and welcoming communities. How will having shared pastoral staff result in a more vibrant and welcoming community?
- In my opinion, the priests and staff are spread too thin as it is, and increasing their responsibilities only minimizes their responsibilities to the faithful community to which they currently minister. I highly suggest deacons could be increased if there are insufficient pastors and priests.

**2. What are the advantages and disadvantages of this combination, not only for our Parish but for both Parishes included in the collaborative?**

Highlights of Comments Associated with Question 2:

- Advantages: revitalize the Church by getting more lay people involved; expand the community to two parishes sharing resources and staff/people. Disadvantages: lose our pastor/leader and Sr. Evelyn who are the heart and soul of St. John's, won't have the same intimacy and feeling of family, cultures of two parishes may clash.
- I feel that one of the biggest draw backs for our particular proposed parish collaborative is the fact that each parish has its own school. How will a shared pastoral staff will be able to run and oversee two (competing) schools?
- I completely understand the need to make these changes. But it is concerning that both parish priests will be replaced by a new priest. I think it is too much all at once.
- The advantage is strengthening the Wellesley Catholic community by a greater concentration of parishioners sharing the same goals. There will be a rich resource of talent to tap into, that will potentially create a great community. The challenge is keeping each parish's individual identity in tact; finding leadership that will see the two parishes as separate personalities and allow the differences to remain; and finally having enough staff at each parish to sustain the needs of each place. Many people that are located in one parish intentionally choose to leave and attend the other parish for many different reasons. I think it is important for the new leadership to recognize the differences.

## Attachment 2

**3. Do you know of any significant, real problems with the proposed collaborating/sharing of pastoral staffs? If Yes, please explain.**

	Number of Response(s)	Response Ratio
Yes	17	53.1%
No	13	40.6%
No Responses	2	6.2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>100%</b>

Highlights of Comments Associated with Question 3:

- As I said before, it has almost everything to do with the leadership.
- Most people from both parishes are in denial of the need for change.
- Most significant problem is getting the support of parishioners who are almost certain to resist change of any kind.
- The environment is very different between the parishes. People have chosen their parish because it is the right fit for them. Combining the two I believe will be difficult.

**4. The criteria for organizing parishes into proposed collaboratives was guided by four general principles: Fairness, Partnership, Financial Viability, and Pastoral Effectiveness. Do you feel that the proposed St. John the Evangelist - St. Paul Collaborative reflects these general principles? Please let us know any comments you might have on the criteria used, or on ways to improve them.**

Top number is the count of respondents selecting the option. Bottom % is percent of the total respondents selecting the option.	Does not reflect any of these principles	Reflects only 1 principle	Reflects only 2 principles	Reflects only 3 principles	Reflects ALL of these principles
	4	5	2	2	13
	15%	19%	8%	8%	50%

Highlights of Comments Associated with Question 4:

- Wondering if these aren't two vibrant churches being paired together and maybe there is a smaller less vibrant church which could be paired with one of the more vibrant churches.
- Since I am unsure of what these principles mean, it seems as though the only consideration taken into account was geographic location and proximity.
- It is an ideal collaborative!
- These principles sound good, but the plan does not really reflect them. The atmosphere of each parish should be taken into consideration as they are very different.

**5. Are there other criteria that should be taken into account specific to our parish and geography? Do you have any other ideas about parish combinations that seem more workable to you, and why? Please provide any other general suggestions about multi-parish pastoring that you feel would help the APPC in making its ultimate recommendation to Cardinal Sean and the Diocese.**

Highlights of Comments Associated with Question 5:

- It seems to me that the primary reason for this change is the lack of priests. Cardinal O'Malley stated that his ultimate goal is to have one priest per parish. The solution is getting more priests: expanding the pool to married priests, former Anglican priests, etc. , and yes, even considering women priests.
- I would like a melding of the staff and not have a new priest as pastor.
- I feel that perhaps St. Julia in Weston might be a better fit for us. I believe that these two parishes have already spent some time in dialogue and there are a number of families that attend at St. John School already since St. Julia does not have its own parish school.
- Provide a way for the priests you have to minister to the people. Don't get all hierarchical about running the parishes -- priests and bishops don't have to do that. The lay community can run the parish, let the priest connect them to God.

## St. John Parish Additional Feedback on Archdiocesan Pastoral Proposal

During March and April, additional feedback was received via e-mails and written comments on the Archdiocesan Pastoral Planning Commission, which includes the formation of a pastoral collaborative consisting of St. John the Evangelist Parish and St. Paul Parish, and the implementation of a Pastoral Service Team (PST) to serve that collaborative. The below is a summary of this additional feedback.

### Highlights of Comments Associated with Additional Feedback:

- We need to articulate what evangelization means on many different levels.
- Are priest being sustained and assisted for this upcoming change?
- Clusters in Philadelphia, models in Rochester and Maine are working and being fine-tuned to meet changes.
- Some parishes are more ready to implement than others – begin regionally.
- One of the big challenges faced by the collaborative will be financial: that the pooled collection revenues will amount to less than the present-day sum of the parts...every major Christian denomination has seen a fall-off in contributions as the purpose of the collection has moved further away from the pews themselves....need a great deal of planning and executing a lengthy transition.
- While Evangelization is proposed as the purpose and theme, it is not defined. What is it? Who is to be evangelized? Who will do the evangelizing and how will it be different from what is being done today as separate parishes?
- We hope the proposed plan for combination is only the first step in developing a process to a certain vision for an ideal parish based on best practices.