



As most of you are aware by now, Archbishop Sean O'Malley met with all of the priests on December 16. His message to us was to strengthen the bonds between bishop and priests to face the serious tasks ahead.

First, he wants us pastors to help him assure our people that no parish money is being used to pay for the settlement with the abuse victims. That will be paid for by the sale of the seminary and residence properties in Brighton and other real estate that the archdiocese owns along with insurance payments.

Second, he has taken on the task of reconfiguring the parishes of our archdiocese. This is an awesome task. Archbishop Sean has framed it in the context of family: the make-up and needs of our family, the Church of Boston, have changed. Our needs locally have changed for the five parishes of Belmont and Watertown. Looking toward the future, we need to reassess our collective needs to decide how best to serve fewer numbers of Catholics, fewer numbers attending mass and fewer priests to staff the parishes. Together, we need to decide how to use what resources we have most effectively.

Today is the Feast of the Holy Family. We can, at times, romanticize how wonderful life must have been for Joseph, Mary and Jesus. But, in reality, life was very difficult for them. From the outset, it was filled with dangers, challenges and uncertainties. Yet, together with faith, they persevered and it changed life forever and for the better for all of us.

The future is uncertain for a number of our parishes in the local area. But with faith in God's help, we move forward and face the task ahead. I believe that our group of local pastors has postured our parishes to begin this task. We had already planned a meeting of all the five Parish Pastoral and Finance Councils along with our staffs to begin looking at how we might do more things together and in a better and more efficient way. This meeting will take place on Wednesday, January 28, 2004 here at St. Luke's. We will now be adding to our work and discussion the task of the reconfiguring of our five area parishes.

This will no doubt be a painful process as some will see their parish close or, at least, see services reduced. It is our hope that we will come out of this process a stronger and more vibrant faith community. We need to work together, to let go of the old and familiar ways, to look at new models which will help us survive and hopefully grow as we better serve God's people.

I don't know what the future holds for our own parish. But I trust, that with faith, prayer and the support of one another, we will be able to engage fully in the process and accept the outcome whatever it may be. In the days and weeks ahead, let us join in prayer with and for our brothers and sisters, our friends and neighbors in the other four parishes. May a spirit of charity and love prevail to guide us in our work.

On this Feast of the Holy Family, I pray for your families and our family, the Church. May the new year be filled with hope and new life that abounds with new possibilities for us and future generations.