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Message to the Catholic Faithful Explaining the Rationale of New Priest Assignments: Intentional support of priestly life and ministry to foster healthy, happy and holy priesthood and ministry

From: Bishop Donald DeGrood

March 20, 2021

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

There is a great saying “As the shepherd goes so too the parishioners.” It has been on my heart and in my prayer to find ways to help our clergy be as healthy, happy and holy as possible so they can help each of you be healthy, happy and holy. After listening to insights from clergy, laity and members of the Clergy Personnel Committee, as well as discerning the gifts of priests and insights in prayer, I am changing our approach to priestly assignments for a variety of reasons:

- To promote healthy, happy and holy priestly life and ministry, I asked for input at our Clergy Days last October on what they would find helpful. I then surveyed our priests to see which ones would be open to living with other priests and share in a communal life of some sort, i.e. regular prayer, meals, fraternity. I took into consideration rectory living situations, distances between churches, individual priests that expressed openness to living in communal life, and other factors before asking the priests to consider this model. With the hope that it would be helpful to them personally, I asked priests to consider this model knowing it has proven fruitful in other dioceses.
- It is not uncommon that isolation and solitary assignments can be a tremendous challenge for some priests. I am supportive of facilitating living arrangements that help foster a shared priestly life, ministry, prayer, regular meals, fraternity, and occasional parish coverage for days on retreat, illness, etc. whenever feasible. I love the idea of priests helping priests be healthy, happy and holy, sharing ideas, as well as the challenges and joys of priesthood.
- I am also aware that some priests are called to a more contemplative way of life so living alone is ideal for a more contemplative lifestyle. I know from experience living alone can also be very spiritually fruitful for those called to this lifestyle.
- To provide more time for parochial vicars to learn how to be effective pastors before actually appointing them pastors. By allowing more time, they will be more equipped and not overwhelmed by their lack of knowledge and experience. This will better prepare recently ordained priests for becoming an effective pastor while at the same time maintaining a healthy, happy and holy lifestyle.



- We, as a diocese, do not currently have enough priests available to serve in all the parishes that have traditionally had pastors living in the community. In fact, in the priest assignment changes announced, you will see that some parishes will no longer have a pastor that lives in the community (which formerly did). The number of eligible priest retirements in the upcoming years averages 2.7 per year. Compared to the 2.0 average for the number of ordinations our diocese has received each year over the past 10 years, we must be realistic about our ability to appoint priests in the ways we have been accustomed to.
- Aligning a priest's gifts, natural and supernatural, produces amazing spiritual fruitfulness for the faithful and the priests.
- I want to try to do what we reasonably can to ensure priestly ministry in rural areas as well as in larger cities as best we can.

July 1, 2020, we implemented the model of one pastor for the two parishes in Mitchell with a parochial vicar. Beginning May 1, 2021, one priest will be appointed pastor of the three parishes in Dell Rapids, Garretson and Huntimer. A second priest will be appointed to serve as a parochial vicar.

Examples where similar changes will be implemented on July 1, 2021, include:

A single pastor will serve:

- the two parishes in Aberdeen (with three priests serving as parochial vicars)
- the two parishes in Mitchell (with one priest serving as a parochial vicar)
- the parishes in Mobridge, Eureka, Herreid and Selby (with one priest serving as a parochial vicar)
- the two parishes in Yankton (with two priests serving as parochial vicars)

A second goal in making priest assignment changes this year was to fully implement any changes in pastoral linkages that were announced in the 2014 Pastoral Plan. Therefore, the following linkages will begin July 1, 2021:

- St. Mary, Salem, and St. Patrick, Montrose.
- St. George, Hartford, and St. Ann, Humboldt

The 2014 Pastoral Plan for our diocese also projected the merging of parishes in Clear Lake and Gary along with Castlewood and Estelline upon the retirement of the priests who were serving in those locations at that time. In an effort to fully-implement the Pastoral Plan, current Mass times and locations within the pastoral linkages that include these parishes will be reviewed by the local pastor with assistance from diocesan staff. As bishop, I will rely on this review process to inform me of the unique circumstances and needs within the pastoral linkages.

In the interim, due to our priestly limitations and the proximity of the parishes to retired priests who can assist in those parishes if needed, the following parishes will be linked by having the same pastor effective on July 1, 2021:



- Castlewood, Clear Lake, Estelline, Gary and Kranzburg.
- Idylwilde/Mayfield, Lesterville/Sigel, Scotland and Tabor.

To begin with, both linkages will be served by retired priests who have generously offered to provide sacramental coverage for Sunday Masses. However, these linkages are decreed with the likelihood that Mass times and locations will be undergoing further study and may need to be changed.

While I imagine it will be difficult for the parishes that will no longer have a priest living onsite as I implement this new model of shared life for priests when possible, I ask for your patience and understanding. We are limited in sufficient priestly vocations so I hope to provide what we reasonably can to serve as we are able. I also hope to intensify our efforts of praying and promoting the amazing vocations of consecrated lives of religious men and women, priests and deacons.

I have come to realize that without healthy, happy and holy priestly lifestyles and ministry it is very detrimental to fostering a healthy, happy and holy way of life for parishioners, consecrated women, men and deacons.

I humbly ask for your fervent prayers for: all affected by the changes of this year's priest assignments; for increased promotions of healthy, happy and holy lives for everyone in our diocese; for a great outpouring of grace of more holy vocations to serve all of you; for grace and insight for those who advise me on clergy assignments; and for me to serve you all as faithfully as I am able to do.

In the Love of God for all of you,

Most Reverend Donald E. DeGrood
Bishop of Sioux Falls