

***Saint Brigid Parish, Blessed Sacrament Parish, and
Assumption BVM Parish***

February 2, 2003

Dear Parishioners of Saint Brigid Parish, Blessed Sacrament Parish, and Assumption BVM Parish:

We have all heard of the "shortage of priests." It is not a myth but a reality. This shortage is now being felt in a very real way here in our own diocese of Saginaw. For instance, only recently:

- * Msgr. Gene Forbes, at the age of 88, entered full retirement as of January 1st. There is no priest to take his place. As a result, St. Anthony Parish, Fisherville and St Joseph Parish, Auburn will share one priest pastor and the two parishes will work together in other ways;
- * Fr. Ray Fron, pastor of St. Joseph's, Bay City, died suddenly this past December at the age of 65. There is no priest to take his place. The priests at St. Boniface Parish, Bay City and St John the Evangelist Parish, Essexville will celebrate mass and provide for the sacramental needs at St Joseph's and the three parishes will work together in other ways;
- * In light of the present number and age of the priests in the diocese, it is predicted that the number of available priests for the entire diocese will be further reduced, due to retirement alone, by as many as 8 in the next 3 to 5 years. That will mean that approximately 50 priests will be available to celebrate mass and provide for the sacramental needs of the 110 parishes and 140,000 Catholics of our diocese.

Bishop Untener and the diocesan Task Force on Pastoral Ministry have stated that we need to realistically plan for the future. As mentioned above, one approach is to look at several parishes having their spiritual needs met by one or two priests. The bishop and task force strongly encourage our three parishes to seriously consider this very real possibility. That would mean looking at two priests celebrating masses and providing for the sacramental needs at Saint Brigid, Blessed Sacrament, and Assumption BVM parishes. The three parishes could also look at other ways of working together.

As your pastors, we know this will necessitate some challenging changes for all of us. However, we believe that it is both practical and feasible for our three parishes to work together and to be able to meet the parish communities' needs with two priests.

We are just beginning to seriously look at this reality. We want you to know this firsthand from us. We want you to know that we plan on involving the various parish leaders (staffs, council and commission members, lay ministers, etc.) and all of the parish members in this.

Many though we are, we are one in this one Lord. We will continue to keep everyone informed as together we work toward meeting the spiritual and sacramental needs of everyone with fewer priests. In this, we ask you to pray for our parish communities and our diocese.

Prayerfully, your pastors,

Fr. James W. Bessert
Saint Brigid Parish

Fr. Peter J. Gaspeny
Blessed Sacrament Parish

Fr. Richard M. Filary
Assumption BVM Parish