

March 8, 2004

Most Reverend Richard G. Lennon
Vicar General and Moderator of the Curia
Archdiocese of Boston
2121 Commonwealth Avenue
Brighton, MA 02135

Subject: Reconfiguration of the Sudbury Cluster

Dear Bishop Lennon:

We are writing in response to your letter of January 10, 2004 and the requests made by Archbishop Sean regarding reconfiguration in the Archdiocese of Boston. Our group has exchanged information (including the suggested "inventory"), met several times, toured each other's facilities and discussed the situation at length. The representatives of the two parishes in the cluster could not agree on a response to the questions asked and are therefore submitting separate reports.

We have structured our response in three parts. First, how we see the process applying to the Sudbury cluster, next our response to the question posed, and finally our assessment of the local situation in North Framingham and Sudbury.

Reconfiguration in the Sudbury Cluster

In Archbishop Sean's letter of January 9th, he outlines three reasons for looking at reconfiguration:

1. Changing demographics
2. Shortage of clergy
3. Financial pressures and condition of buildings

The logic of redeploying parish resources in response to changing demographics makes perfect sense. The Sudbury cluster, however, is stable in total population, while the number of children per capita is increasing, as is reflected in our growing religious education and youth ministry programs.

Financially, both Our Lady of Fatima (OLF) and St. Anselm are in good shape with bills paid and substantial deposits in Chancery accounts. Our Lady of Fatima needs to repaint its worship space as noted in the inventory; maintenance is up to date at St. Anselm. No major building issues exist at either parish. While neither parish is under financial pressure, both have excess capacity and there is no denying that it would cost less to maintain one parish rather than two.

The challenge of the shortage of clergy is an archdiocesan wide issue that must be a consideration for any parish. The two parishes currently have between them, one full

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time pastor, Fr. Bova Conti and one part time pastor, Fr. Fitzpatrick, who splits his time between St. Anselm and the Deaf Community Center (DCC). We also have two deacons, John Nicholson at OLF and Joe Ramrath at St. Anselm. St. Anselm has built an organizational structure that also includes a full-time pastoral associate and strong and well-formed lay commissions who handle many of the day-to-day functions in the parish. On a per capita basis, the clergy resources being utilized are certainly higher than they would be in a combined faith community.

In summary, in the context of the Archbishop Sean's three criteria, the Sudbury cluster does not have urgent issues to address, in that the demographics are strong, the parishes are financially sound and the utilization of clergy seems reasonable relative to the rest of the archdiocese. It is also clear that the St. Anselm parish is very passionate about remaining an independent, small faith community. That being said, if we are truly objective there is no denying that combining the faith communities would reduce operating expenses and reduce the clergy resources required.

Response to Bishop Lennon's Question

While this process is extremely painful, we want to be responsive to the bishop's request for a recommendation. In considering the question we have discussed the disruption and alienation that may occur, the impact on existing or expanded ministries, the impact of proximity on parishioners, and the facility's ability to support the combined faith communities.

Our Lady of Fatima is centrally located within Sudbury and within the combined parish boundaries. It is about four times larger than St. Anselm in terms of registered families. As indicated in the inventory, Our Lady of Fatima needs to spend about \$100,000 to paint its worship space. The present OLF Sunday Mass schedule has the capacity to accommodate the combined faith communities. St. Anselm is a smaller parish, but has a larger worship space than Our Lady of Fatima and all maintenance is up to date. Ultimately though, if we were forced to respond to the question, we would have to recommend the closing of St. Anselm parish based on size and church location. Our Lady of Fatima is four times larger, has available capacity and is more centrally located to the greatest number of parishioners.

While all parishioners are significantly affected by the closing of either parish, the impact is most dramatic on those whose worship space changes. Closing St. Anselm would have the greatest impact on the smallest number of parishioners. Unfortunately the St. Anselm parishioners are dramatically affected by all of the potential scenarios. Their small parish becomes a large parish in every case. St. Anselm has even numbers of

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families from Sudbury and Framingham, and would become very Sudbury centric in any event. For this reason, we recognize that any combination of the two faith communities means a significant change in character for St. Anselm parishioners and the loss of the small community size they cherish so much. We believe there would be a risk of attrition of parishioners regardless of which parish closed, with either the N. Sudbury or N. Framingham families feeling that the new location is too far away from them relative to other alternatives.

Assessment of the Local Situation

In addition to an answer to the questions posed in your letter, we understand that Archbishop Sean is looking for us to provide “good advice, well thought out and with an understanding of the challenges.” In order to give that advice, we believe it is essential that we provide you with our assessment of the local situation in our section of North Framingham and in Sudbury.

Through our meetings together, we have come to know each other’s parish and would make the following observations:

1. Both parishes are strong and thriving faith communities fulfilling well the mission of the church in our geographic territory. Both communities:
 - celebrate faith filled liturgies;
 - have well run religious education programs;
 - reach out to address the needs of the young and the elderly;
 - assist in a variety of ways the poor and disadvantaged; and
 - are experiencing growth.
2. Both communities operate with a financial surplus and are free of debt.
3. Both communities have appropriate worship space.
4. Our Lady of Fatima is located centrally to both Sudbury and the combined parish boundaries and has adequate space for development. The church is north of Rt. 20 so that the vast majority of parishioners would not need to cross Rt. 20 to reach the church. This minimizes possible problems that could result from an additional flow of traffic onto Rt. 20. The worship space needs painting as noted in the inventory.
5. The buildings at St. Anselm are in excellent condition. There are no deferred maintenance items and a substantial renovation of the parish hall was completed in the fall of 2003. The facilities are located on the south end of Sudbury, very

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- close to the Framingham town line and over seven (7) miles from the northern border of Sudbury. St. Anselm is located south of Rt. 20 such that the vast majority of parishioners would cross Rt. 20 to reach the church. An already congested Rt. 20 traffic situation could be exacerbated, as parishioners leave St. Anselm at the conclusion of Mass or religious education classes and merge onto this busy state road.
6. Both communities are committed to assisting inner city parishes in need of help. Our Lady of Fatima already has a sister parish relationship with Holy Family Parish in Dorchester. St. Anselm has supported various inner city parishes through tithing grants and contributions to support Catholic Schools and would also like to have a sister parish relationship.
 7. St. Anselm is the smaller of the two parishes. One half of the parishioners live in Framingham and the other half in Sudbury. The parish refers to itself as “A Caring, Committed, Catholic Community.” Those words aptly describe the parish. Its smaller community is viewed as a great blessing to its parishioners and has fostered strong lay participation in a wide variety of areas. Under the guidance of the current and former pastors, the parish has already “reconfigured” by building an organizational structure lead by a part-time pastor and supported by a deacon, a full-time pastoral associate and strong and well formed lay commissions who handle many of the day-to-day functions in the parish.
 8. St. Anselm is also the home to the Deaf Community Center (DCC), which offers over three hundred deaf people of all faiths the opportunity to meet their religious, social, educational and communication needs. DCC became a part of the St. Anselm community in the summer of 2002 after Catholic Charities closed the DCC facilities in Framingham. The Director of the DCC has expressed concern that a second relocation of the Center, in such a short period of time will be a challenge for this community of primarily senior citizens.

It is difficult to make a recommendation for the Sudbury cluster in isolation from the surrounding clusters. St. Anselm parish is split between Framingham and Sudbury, so it is entirely possible that many parishioners from St. Anselm might choose to attend a Framingham parish like St. George rather than come to OLF. Similarly, if OLF was closed and the faith community moved to St. Anselm, many families from N. Sudbury might choose to attend mass at St. Bridget in Maynard or at Our Lady Help of Christians in W. Concord. While we can only speculate as to what may occur in other clusters, today, St. George has the greatest capacity to absorb additional parishioners, whereas both St. Bridget and Our Lady Help of Christians Church have smaller worship spaces and are close to capacity.

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This process has also been difficult because the character of the two parishes is so very different today. Our Lady of Fatima is a large parish with over 1450 registered families and thirty-nine active ministries including significant outreach to the community. In addition to the ministries within the parish, OLF helps Holy Family parish in Dorchester, houses Alcoholics Anonymous, Sudbury Scouting programs and the Sudbury Food Pantry, which feeds over 300 needy families a month from the surrounding communities. St. Anselm is a small parish with about 350 registered families with many active ministries that relishes the intimacy and familiarity possible in a small faith community.

This has been a very difficult and painful process for both faith communities. While we have no desire to see any vibrant parish close, we have tried to be responsive to the very specific question that has been asked of us by Bishop Lennon. In responding we have tried to take into consideration what is best for the overall Mission of the Church in the Archdiocese of Boston.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Fr. Michael Bova Conti

Dianne Baxter

Sr. Brenda Forry, CSJ

Michael Gilroy, PPC

Candy McMahan, Youth Minister

Deacon John Nicholson

Joseph Onorato, PFC