

**Bearing the Mission of Christ to our Transforming Communities:
A Pastoral Plan for Fargo, West Fargo, Horace and Kindred**



*Pastoral Letter by Most Rev. Samuel J. Aquila
Bishop of Fargo
May 3, 2011 – Feast of Saints Philip and James, Apostles*

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Introduction

1. In the last 20 to 30 years, the metro area of Fargo, West Fargo, Horace and Kindred has grown and changed immensely. Many roads that were once graveled are now paved for multiple lanes of traffic. Developments with new houses, apartment buildings and commercial properties have sprouted up and continue to grow with the steady increase in population. I am amazed at the transformation that has occurred in the past 10 years since my arrival here in June 2001, when I was named Coadjutor Bishop of Fargo by Blessed John Paul II.

2. In addition to population growth, the wet cycle we are experiencing with back-to-back floods for three years has changed development in the flood-protected areas of West Fargo and Horace, with much more development projected there in the near future. As shown in the 2010 census, West Fargo is the fastest growing city in North Dakota.

3. Churches, schools and businesses of 50 or 100 years ago were built for the lifestyles of the people of that day. Driving was not the constant activity that it is now. People walked to church, they pushed children in strollers to buy their groceries at the neighborhood store, and students walked to school. Parishes were much smaller, staffed by a pastor, possibly a part-time office worker, and pews full of volunteers who came out when a helping hand was needed.

4. Our communities are larger today; our needs more complex. Evangelization in our highly mobile, over-scheduled world has become increasingly difficult, yet the need for evangelization has grown significantly due to the secularization of our society. While the truths and teachings of the Catholic Church remain constant and ever relevant, the Church, in her physical structures, outreach and educational programs, continuously changes and develops in order to ensure that she can effectively bring the truths and teachings of Jesus Christ and His Church to the people of God.

5. In this light, a year-long review of parishes and schools in the metro area began in April 2010. Two other reviews were accomplished as well. One focused on the future of the Cardinal Muench Seminary buildings and land and the second reviewed the organizational structure and staff positions at the diocesan Pastoral Center. Changes at the Pastoral Center were announced in March and restructuring is underway. The seminary decision will be discussed later in this letter.

6. Drawing from statistics related to population history and projections for the future, parish membership, stewardship, sacramental practice, priest resources and other factors, staff members assisted me with writing and presenting, in January 2011, a proposal for parishes and schools that provided one view of a possible restructure within the metro area. It was clearly shared at the very beginning of the process that the proposal would change based on comments and recommendations of the faithful of the metro area. The proposal, which some asserted was a final decision rather than a true proposal, was the basis for discussion and reflection upon the strengths, weaknesses and areas that could be improved upon within our parishes and Catholic schools. I requested from the faithful prayerful consultation, a study of the demographics and projected growth, and an examination of the whole fabric of the area rather than just one's own particular parish. I am grateful for the many responses and ideas I have received.

7. After review and consideration of dozens of comments, ideas and concerns provided through meetings and in writing, I consulted the diocesan Priests' Council, the Deans of the Diocese, the Diocesan Finance Council, and spent time in prayer discerning God's will for how the Church can best serve the metro area of our diocese. Knowing that no decision would please all of the faithful, I drafted, revised and have now formalized the decisions. Confident in the Holy Spirit's guidance and listening to the consultation with the faithful and recommendations of the Priests' Council, I announce with this document the final decisions in order to conclude the study made to respond to the growth of our area, the ongoing evangelization of all peoples, the continuing Catholic formation of our children, the common good of the entire metro area, and the living out of our Catholic faith in our society.

Blessed Sacrament Parish and Holy Cross Parish, both in West Fargo

8. In January 2011, it was proposed that Blessed Sacrament Parish be merged with Holy Cross Parish, the current Holy Cross worship area be expanded, and a Catholic school be built at the present Holy Cross site. After consultation and prayer, I have decided that:

- Blessed Sacrament and Holy Cross will not merge; but will remain separate parishes with separate resident pastors and staffs, as is the current arrangement.
- The parish boundaries for both parishes will be refined as noted in the appendix to this decision. The Code of Canon Law, 518, states: "As a general rule a parish is to be territorial, that is, one which includes all the Christian faithful of a certain territory." For that reason, a boundary is assigned to each parish in the diocese. Although a parish serves a particular territory, the faithful are not confined to these boundaries. As the study readily demonstrated, the faithful sometimes choose to become members of parishes that do not serve the territory in which they reside, and some even bypass several parishes to go to the parish they desire to attend.
- Holy Cross parish will be relocated after two to three years to a newly constructed church building on currently undeveloped property south of Interstate 94 and west of Veterans Boulevard. A Catholic school/Religious Education Formation facility will be built as part of the new Holy Cross campus.
- Blessed Sacrament parish will participate in the subsidy for metro area Catholic schools beginning with 5% of offertory as of July 1, 2012, and increasing by 1% each July 1 thereafter until the new Catholic school on the Holy Cross campus is completed. At that time, the

percentage of subsidy will be adjusted by increments determined by the bishop in consultation with the board of directors of the metro area Catholic schools.

- Blessed Sacrament parishioners will be included in the capital campaign for construction of the Catholic school on the Holy Cross campus, because the new elementary school will provide an excellent Catholic school option for Blessed Sacrament families. I am thankful for the proposal from Blessed Sacrament supporting Catholic schools and the construction of a centralized West Fargo/Horace area Catholic elementary school.
- Participation in the subsidy for metro area Catholic schools will be delayed for Holy Cross parish until construction of the new church and school is completed. It is anticipated the subsidy will begin July 1, 2015, starting at 5%. The percentage of subsidy will then be adjusted by increments determined by the bishop in consultation with the board of directors of the metro area Catholic schools.
- The name of the Catholic school/Religious Education Formation facility will be Holy Cross Elementary School.
- Holy Cross parish may immediately begin the capital campaign for this major project using funds from the previous campaign in accord with the wishes of donors and diocesan guidelines for capital campaigns.
- Holy Cross parish is to draw up a site plan for their new parish campus by December 2011 for review by the diocesan building committee and my approval as bishop.
- Holy Cross Elementary School will be built to accommodate two classrooms per grade, with the possibility of adding a third classroom per grade included in the site design.
- A liturgical consultant approved by the diocese will be involved in design and construction planning for the new Holy Cross Church, which is expected to seat 900 persons. All normal policies and requirements and diocesan approval for fundraising and building will be followed.

St. Benedict's Parish, Horace, and St. Maurice's Parish, Kindred

9. In January 2011, it was proposed that St. Benedict's Parish be relocated to currently undeveloped property northeast of the intersection of 64th Avenue South and County Road 17 in Horace and that a Catholic school be built at that site. After consultation and prayer, and considering the uncertainty of flooding and the placement of future flood protection, the industrial zoning of the area surrounding the present church, the location of residences within the parish boundaries, and the physical condition of the current church and education facilities, I have decided that:

- There is a rich history at St. Benedict's that is worthy of preservation and that can best be fulfilled at a new location. With the goal of "sharing our legacy of faith", St. Benedict's Parish will be relocated to the site at 64th and County Road 17.
- The Pastor and lay directors are to establish a building committee including parishioners in the new parish boundaries by December 2011. A site plan for the new location should be developed by June 2012 for review by the diocesan building committee and my approval as bishop. A capital campaign committee and plan for fundraising for the new Church is to be established by the Pastor and parish finance council no later than June 2012.
- If it is the wish of the parish, for historical purposes, to keep the current Church building or portions of it, these may be part of the new site plan.

- A liturgical consultant approved by the diocese will be involved in design and construction planning for the new St. Benedict's Church, which is expected to seat 900 persons. All normal policies and requirements and diocesan approval for fundraising and building will be followed.
- Construction of the parish Religious Education facilities will be done in such a way that the facility would be conducive for use as a Catholic school, as well, so that expansion to a two classrooms per grade level school would be possible if population growth and other factors warrant a Catholic school in Horace. The need for a Catholic school is to be evaluated in 2020.
- The parish boundaries for both St. Benedict and St. Maurice parishes will be refined as noted in Appendix I.
- The St. Benedict Parish cemetery will be maintained in its present historical location.
- Participation in the subsidy for metro area Catholic schools will be delayed for St. Benedict Parish until construction of the new church is completed. It is anticipated the subsidy will begin July 1, 2017. At that time, the percentage of subsidy will be adjusted by increments determined by the bishop in consultation with the board of directors of the metro area Catholic schools.
- St. Benedict's parishioners will be included in the capital campaign for construction of the Catholic school on the Holy Cross campus, because the new elementary school will provide an excellent Catholic school option for St. Benedict's families. I am thankful for the St. Benedict's parishioners who have expressed a desire to support Catholic schools and the construction of a centralized West Fargo/Horace area Catholic elementary school.

St. Anthony of Padua Parish and St. Mary's Cathedral Parish, both in Fargo

10. In January 2011, it was proposed that St. Anthony of Padua Parish and St. Mary's Cathedral Parish would "cluster", meaning the two parishes would have one pastor, an unspecified number of parochial vicars or priests in residence, and a fully shared staff. After consultation and prayer, I have decided that the full cluster arrangement will not occur; however, the parishes will have collaborative ministry development and other changes as outlined below.

- A resident pastor and some staff will remain on site at both locations.
- Separate finance councils and pastoral councils will continue to be maintained; however the councils will meet jointly as needed to work on collaborative ministry development.
- If it is determined to be feasible, the philosophical and theological library from Cardinal Muench Seminary will be housed and available at St. Anthony's.
- The office of the Permanent Diaconate program will be located at St. Anthony's and the education of future permanent deacons will take place there.
- Both St. Anthony's and the Cathedral will transition their accounting and payroll functions to the diocesan Parish Service Department beginning with their next fiscal year.
- For both of these parishes, the subsidy for metro area Catholic schools will transition as described in the schools section on page 6.
- Planning for collaborative ministry development will begin immediately. Beginning in the fall of 2011, all kindergarten through grade 8 Religious Education classes for both parishes will be conducted at St. Anthony's, and all grades 9 through 12 Religious Education classes for both parishes and the RCIA program for both parishes and St. Paul's Newman Center will be conducted at the Cathedral. This will allow for the better use of Directors of Religious Education

and the recruitment of trained volunteer catechists. Other plans for shared ministry will also be developed by the two parishes working together.

Holy Spirit, Nativity, and Sts. Anne and Joachim parishes

11. For all three of these parishes, the subsidy for metro area Catholic schools will transition as described in the schools section on the following page. In addition, the parish boundaries for Sts. Anne and Joachim will be refined as noted in Appendix I.

Metro area Catholic schools - Blessed John Paul II Catholic Schools Network

12. In January 2011, it was proposed that two new Catholic elementary schools be built; one at the current Holy Cross location and one at the new site for St. Benedict's. As is noted earlier in this document, I have decided that, at this time, one Catholic elementary school will be constructed at the new site for Holy Cross, and that the possibility of a second school will be ensured in the site planning for St. Benedict's should continued growth of the metro area occur.

13. All parish pastoral council and finance council members in the metro area should gain knowledge and understanding of the role of Catholic education in the universal Catholic Church through a focus on the Vatican's Congregation for Catholic Education's 1997 document "The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium". In the fall of 2011 each pastor in the parishes in the metro area is to lead his parish council and finance council in a reflection and discussion of the document. This knowledge and understanding will help parish leadership and parishioners make recommendations regarding Catholic schools and see the priority placed upon Catholic education by the universal Church. Catholic schools are an essential part of the evangelizing mission of the Church.

14. This document also calls for "courageous renewal on the part of the Catholic school." In response to this call, I have required a review of tuition, financial aid and development within our metro area Catholic schools and a restructuring of the board of directors and review of other school structures. The document also reminds us that a Catholic school "is to be a school for all". Our Catholic schools must both have the resources to assist those who are unable to pay full tuition and invite those who do have the personal resources to pay tuition at a rate that allows for fair and competitive wages for Catholic school faculty and staff.

15. Each metro area pastor is to promote Catholic schools in his parish. A brochure to promote our Catholic schools is to be created by the Board of Directors no later than September 2011. The brochure is to be given to couples preparing for marriage as well as to couples who have their children baptized. Parish staffs are to promote our Catholic schools as they are one of the best means for handing on the gift of our Catholic faith and evangelizing our young people. The new structure for the Catholic schools is contained in Appendix II.

16. As we move forward with anticipation for a West Fargo/Horace Catholic school, the name "Fargo Catholic Schools Network" will no longer tell the full story of who we are. As we embark on a renewal of our Catholic schools, the name has changed to "Blessed John Paul II Catholic Schools Network".

Knowing Blessed John Paul II's love for youth and Catholic education, we place our Catholic schools, youth, faculty and administration, under his patronage and intercession. (The network schools, or metro area Catholic schools as referred to earlier in this document, include Holy Spirit Elementary School, Nativity Elementary School, Sullivan Middle School and Shanley High School, and the new Holy Cross Elementary School, as well as any future schools in the metro area depending on population growth.)

17. In regard to the sponsoring parish subsidies, the present subsidy is 50% of the parish offertory collection. Starting January 1, 2012, the subsidy for sponsoring parishes is to drop 1% to 49%. The Board of Directors, the Finance Office and the Development Office of the network is to insure that this subsidy drops to a maximum of 45% of offertory income by January 1, 2016. That provides them with 5 years to work on increasing income from other sources and to develop a comprehensible and attainable financial plan for the good of our Catholic schools and not heavily depend on the parish subsidy.

St. Paul's Newman Center near the North Dakota State University, Fargo, campus

18. The two Newman Centers within the diocese, St. Thomas Aquinas' in Grand Forks and St. Paul's in Fargo, fulfill the critical role of reaching out to young adults during their college years, when many people either stray from or become deeply involved in their Catholic faith. Our diocese has been particularly blessed with the establishment of the Fellowship of Catholic University Students (FOCUS) at both Newman parishes. FOCUS has served as a great evangelization tool for young Catholics and has set the hearts of many students on fire with a deep love for Jesus Christ, the Scriptures, and the Church. Over the past 5 years many of our college graduates have gone on to become FOCUS Missionaries, serving on college campuses throughout the United States as well as here in North Dakota.

19. St. Thomas Aquinas' in Grand Forks has excellent facilities as they were rebuilt after the 1997 flood and fire. The facilities of St Paul's Newman Center were built in 1957 when the university served 5,000 students. Today the university serves over 13,000 students. Although St. Paul's was not originally included in the review of parishes and schools in the metro area because of its unique mission, I have decided, after consultation and prayer, that the site and facilities will be evaluated and a needs assessment overseen and conducted by the Properties Manager of the Diocese of Fargo in coordination with the pastor of St. Paul's Newman Center. This study is to be conducted during 2011-2012 with recommendations submitted to me by June 2012.

Cardinal Muench Seminary

20. In March 2011, after reviewing numerous options for use of the Cardinal Muench Seminary buildings and land, I announced a proposal to "offer for sale the seminary buildings and land to any interested religious or secular institution for use of their own choosing, provided this use is consistent with Catholic principles." After consideration of further recommendations received through verbal and written consultation, and consultation with the Priests' Council, Diocesan Finance Council, and College of Consultors, I have decided that the Cardinal Muench Seminary buildings and land will be sold. However, since the library and many other records and furnishings need to be relocated, the actual vacating of the buildings will take some time. A public 'For Sale' offering will be announced, and negotiations will begin in August of 2011. Proceeds from the sale will be used for clergy and seminarian

education needs, consistent with the intent of the donors who have supported Cardinal Muench Seminary through the years and with the need for sacramental ministry.

All parishes in the diocese

21. The Cathedral Church has a primacy of place in the heart of every diocese and is different from every other parish in the diocese. Since 1899 the Cathedral has been the “mother church” of the diocese. The Cathedral serves as the sign of the bishop’s teaching office and pastoral authority in the particular diocese he serves. In the diocesan liturgies celebrated in a Cathedral, both the building and the liturgy celebrated there by the bishop serve as a sign of the unity of faith proclaimed and taught by the bishop as shepherd of the flock of Jesus Christ (Ceremonial of Bishops 42). St. Mary’s Cathedral has had a long history of service in our diocese and will remain the Cathedral, as every bishop in the diocese has served there and shepherded the flock from there.

22. As the faithful of the diocese are aware, the Cathedral parish is located in downtown Fargo and has a limited population as well as income. The finances of the Cathedral have always been challenging due to the upkeep of the building as well as the diocesan liturgies which take place there. As the Cathedral situation was discussed at the Priests’ Council meeting, the priests unanimously recommended to me that support for the Cathedral be extended to all the parishes of the diocese through a minimal contribution from each parish. It was recommended that each parish in the diocese contribute 1% of the annual parish offertory income to a Cathedral fund that would be used and overseen by the bishop for diocesan liturgies, upkeep of the building, including maintenance of stained glass windows, parking needs, utilities, etc. The small contribution serves as a reminder to all of the faithful of the unique place of primacy the Cathedral has in a diocese and helps to “instill esteem and reverence for the Cathedral Church in the hearts of the faithful” (Ceremonial of Bishops 45). Further it is a reminder to all of the faithful of our unity as a diocese. St. Paul reminds us, that just as the body has many members, making up one body, so is it true with the body of Christ (1 Cor 12:12). The implementation of this contribution is to begin July 1, 2012.

Conclusion

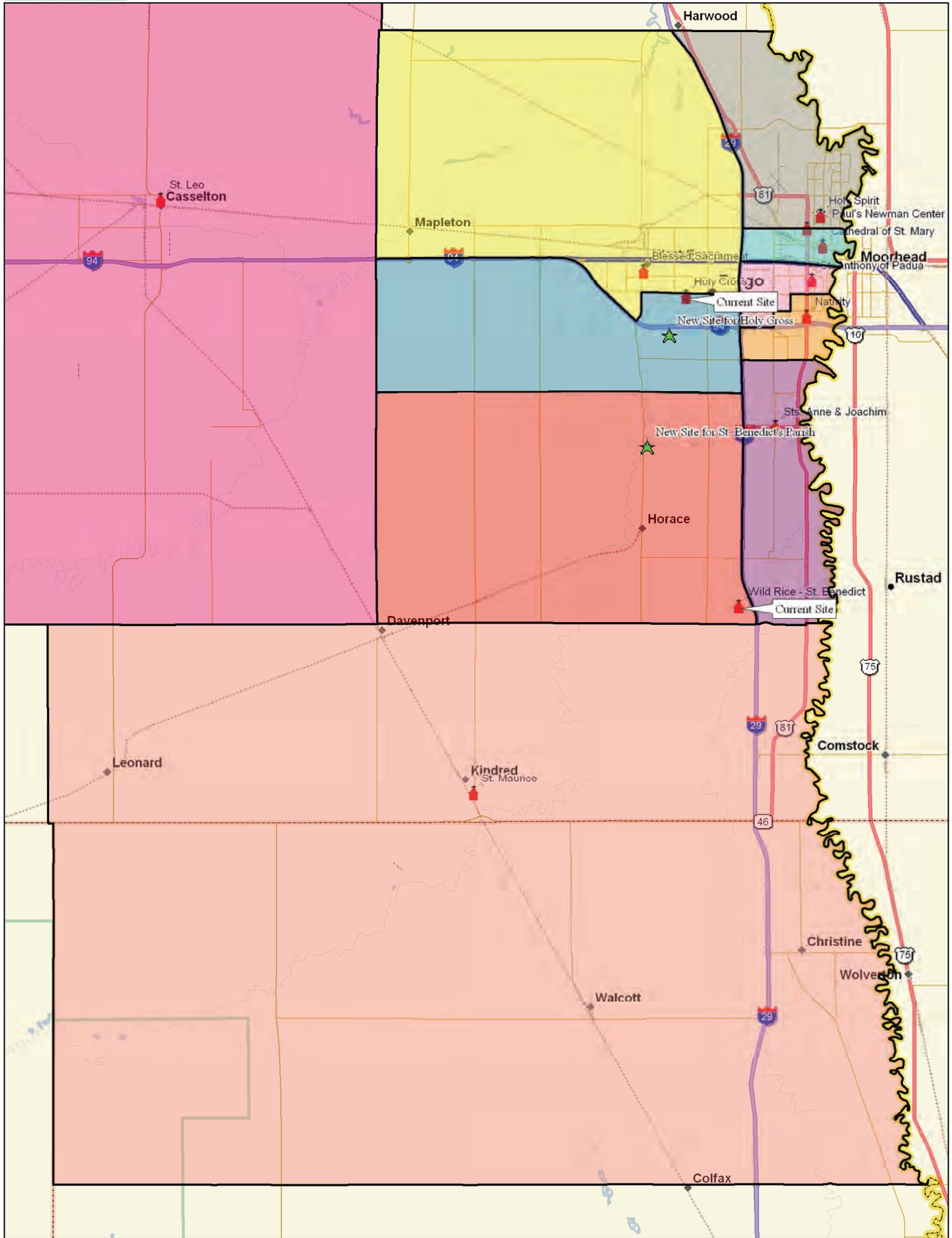
23. I acknowledge that the decisions announced today set into motion a wave of historic change for the parishes and schools in this metro area, and also impact every parish in the diocese with the small percentage contribution to be made to the Cathedral fund. This wave of change has been gently rolling into our metro area communities for many years now with the most dramatic changes in population over the past three decades. Our communities’ infrastructure, neighborhoods, schools and businesses have responded to the needs of our growing and shifting population, and we as the Church must respond as well. We cannot answer Blessed John Paul II’s call for a “new evangelization” if we as a Church remain fixed in place while our communities change and expand far beyond us.

24. In the Gospel for Divine Mercy Sunday, the day John Paul II was beatified, we heard of the hesitancy of Thomas. He would not believe that Jesus had risen until he saw Jesus with his own eyes and

touched Him with his own hands. During these next months and years, in faith, we trust that Jesus is truly with us and that the Holy Spirit will guide us. We are confident that our Lord is faithful to His promises and will continue to sustain us as we move forward, always keeping our eyes on our goal, Jesus Christ (Philippians 3:14). As pastors, parish leaders, architects and school administrators develop shared ministry goals, site plans and development strategies, we will be faced with challenges like our ancestors who, in faith, made considerable sacrifices to hand on our Catholic faith. Their sacrifices have served us well and it is now our time to continue the mission entrusted to us by Jesus Christ, to proclaim the Gospel to the entire world.

25. In February 2011, I shared with the faithful a vision for the Diocese of Fargo: Know Christ, Seek the Will of the Father, Walk in the Spirit. As we move ahead with these changes in the metro area and throughout the diocese, may we keep this vision ever before our hearts so that each one of us may “grow in holiness, in a deeper knowledge and understanding of our faith, and live out our faith each day!” In doing so, we imitate Jesus who sought the will of the Father in all things. May we, like Jesus, be a light to the world so that those who see our good works will give glory to the Father (Mt 5:15), who is the creator of all and the giver of all good gifts. In this Easter Season and month of May, we beg Mary, our Mother and Diocesan Patroness, to intercede for us as these decisions are implemented in the days and months ahead, helping each one of us to grow in obedience to the will of the Father.

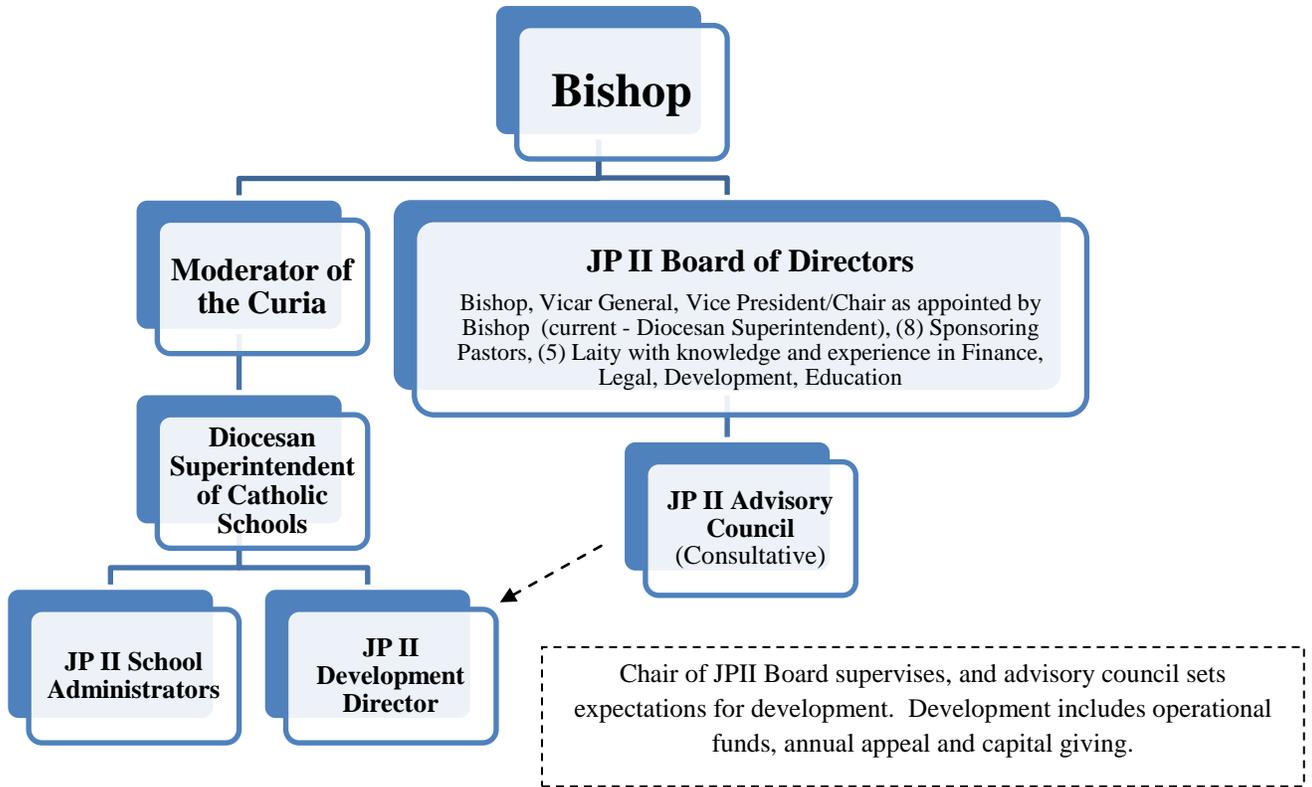
†Most Reverend Samuel J. Aquila
Bishop of Fargo



APPENDIX II

Blessed John Paul II Catholic Schools Network

Governance Model



Members

