



ST. SABINA CATHOLIC CHURCH

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July 31, 2020

Dear Parishioners,

In June, a communication was made available to you regarding the Blue Ridge Corridor study which has been underway since January of 2020. Even with all the challenges which the Covid-19 virus has given us, pastors and parish steering committees have been able to meet via video conferencing and several in-person meetings. The most recent meeting was held on July 21, 2020. This new communication to you will convey the most recent developments in the study.

New Considerations in the Study

1. **The inclusion of nearby parishes, Nativity of Mary and St. Thomas More.** As the study has progressed, it has become apparent that some parishes are actually closer to these nearby parishes than other deanery parishes.
2. **Reassessment of the deanery boundaries.** With the inclusion of the two parishes, it is likely that deanery 5 or the Blue Ridge deanery will be incorporated into other bordering deaneries. Parishes will make a recommendation which deanery they prefer.
3. **Reduction of the number of priests in the deanery from the current 5 to 4.** The study has revealed that the number of priests available for ministry in the current deanery will be fewer than now. The future strategy will be based on having one less priest serving the seven parishes.
4. **Priests serving more than one parish.** Already there are two sets of parishes which are sharing pastors so this is not a new experience within the deanery. After much discussion, it has been agreed that:
 - 1 priest can serve two parishes;
 - 2 priests can serve three parishes;
 - Priests should not be assigned to serve more than three parishes

The challenge for many of the parishes in the deanery is that membership and financial resources have been decreasing. The potential for parishes to reverse these trends on their own is quite limited. Some parishes may not be able to recover. There is agreement on three paths for the future:

1. Tapping into population growth where it is happening and will happen in the future – most of this growth is in the southern part of the deanery;
2. Grouping parishes together to share resources, personnel and ministries;
3. Developing new ministry initiatives for Hispanics and African-Americans who make up significant percentages of the population in the central and northern parts of the deanery.

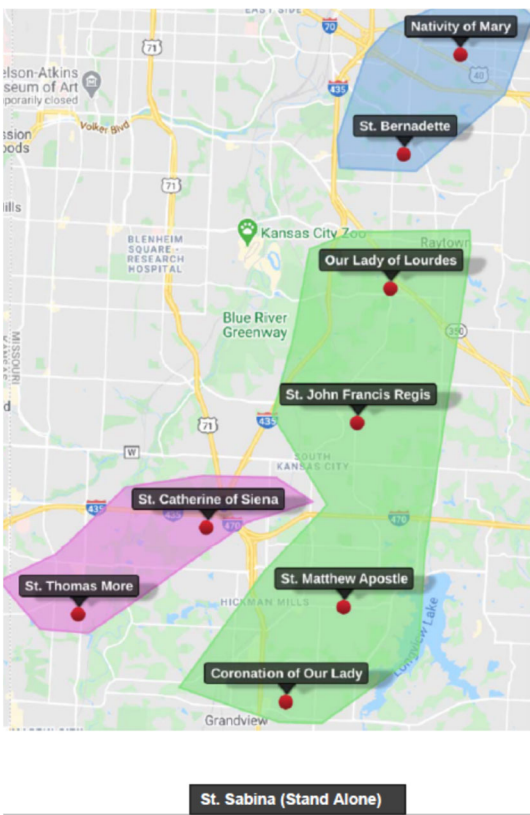
The study has now progressed to the point where a basic configuration of parishes has been tentatively agreed upon. Following, is the description of the configurations as well as a map for easy reference.

Proposed Future Configurations of Parishes

Based on these new considerations, the steering committees – which are comprised of the pastors and at least four other parish representatives from each parish – have agreed upon these basic configurations of parishes in the Blue Ridge Corridor area.

- A. **St. Sabina Parish** – Will be a free-standing parish but will assist with the development of Hispanic ministry at St. John Francis Regis as well as develop strategies for the coming population growth in the area.
- B. **St. Catherine of Siena and St. Thomas More Parishes** – These two parishes have a history of collaboration and will determine how they will work together in the future.
- C. **St. Bernadette and Nativity of Mary** – These parishes have some common geographical roots and potential for shared ministries.
- D. **Coronation of Our Lady, Our Lady of Lourdes, St. Matthew, St. John Francis Regis** – This is the configuration where many of the deanery initiatives will be focused – the introduction of Hispanic ministry, building a ministry to the African-American community, and strengthening outreach ministry to the needy in the area. Two priests will be assigned to serve the parishes. There has been and will continue to be discussion about potential mergers and the long-term strengthening of the parishes in the configuration.

Configuration Map



Next Steps

Pastors and steering committees will now be at work on developing recommendations and strategies. Large group meetings with parishioners have been difficult but as more detail is developed, every effort will be made to include the ideas and suggestions of those who have interest in the results. Pastors and steering committees will be devising ways for you to be engaged as the plan for the Blue Ridge Corridor takes shape.

According to the timeline we have been following, a final plan is to be presented to Bishop Johnston for his approval by the end of September. The plan will include specific timelines for the recommendations for each parish. Some of the recommendations may be implemented by the end of the calendar year while others may unfold over many months.

Your continued interest and support for the study is greatly appreciated!

Fr. Jeff Stephan, Pastor