

## **Family of Parishes for South Huron and Bluewater Area**

As was announced during the celebration of Epiphany Sunday, the Family of Parishes for our area will be activated on July 6th, 2020.

While there are many questions seeking answers on how the Family of Parishes will work for the specific Catholic faith communities in Mount Carmel, Exeter, Grand Bend, Zurich, St. Joseph and Goderich, here is what we know right now.

### **Overall Vision:**

The intent of this reorganization is to help us mature in our faith. Not only do we want to keep every Church open, but we want them to thrive.

Bishop Fabbro, along with Pope Francis, has called for each parish and community to be mission focused. This means that we are proclaimers of the Good News in all that we do and in turn are growing in our relationship with Jesus Christ and helping others to grow in their relationship with Jesus Christ. We are finding the “lost sheep” out there.

Yes, we acknowledge the declining numbers in active parishioners, in our resources both spiritual and financial, and in vocations to the priesthood. People in ministry are challenged to do more with less resources.

### **Priests to Serve the Family of Parishes:**

Pastor: Fr. Tony Laforet

Associate Pastor: Fr. Matthew George

Associate Pastor: Fr. Vince Gulikers

### **Next Steps:**

Over the next weeks and months, a Transition Team will be established, comprised of members from each parish in the Family (Priests, representatives from the Parish Pastoral Councils, etc.). This team will work on a communication strategy, as well as discerning the logistics of when Masses will be celebrated, office hours and locations, residency of the priests, etc. Answers to these questions emerge through communication that will work in both directions; meaning the team will communicate its discernment to the parishes, and also listen to the needs and voices of the parishes represented as well.

## **What will be the same?**

Our mission of proclaiming our love of God, through our words and actions, will not change. We will keep the mission of the Church, to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ at the forefront of our minds, decisions and actions! We will proclaim the Good News to all!

There will be Masses and a celebration of the Sacraments as always, though there may have to be adjustments in Mass times to accommodate the dynamics of all six parish communities in the Family.

Priests will be available for Anointing of the Sick, Sacrament of Marriage and Funerals.

Mass with the elementary schools will continue to be celebrated throughout the year.

The Catholic Woman's League and the Knights of Columbus will continue their activities and events for each of their parish communities. Each CWL and K of C council will continue to exist in their respective parish communities. However, joint Family of Parishes activities or functions could be a possibility.

A Parish Pastoral Council will remain, but will be comprised of representatives from each parish in the Family.

There will be one Finance Council for the Family of Parishes with a representative from each parish. While each parish will still be responsible for its own financial assets and liabilities, our hope is that the Family can discern what is best for the whole Family of Parishes and take care of its members. The Finance Council will oversee and monitor the financial results of parishes in the Family.

The name, identity, and history of each individual parish community in the Family will be respected, and maintained.

The finances of each parish will remain with that particular parish.

## **What will be different?**

The priests are assigned to the Family and not individual parishes. This means that each community will benefit from encountering each of the three priests from one week to the next, particularly during the summer months. Fr. Tony, Fr. Matt and Fr. Vince are here to serve all parishes in the Family from Our Lady of Mount Carmel in the south to Goderich in the north, and all points in between.

While no one parish or parishes will have a dedicated priest as in the past, they will gain the benefit of encountering three priests that have their own individual gifts to share as the Lord has gifted them. Over time, each of the priests will become well known to each parish community of the Family.

There may also be changes to the administrative functions, office hours and locations for the parish communities, and a better understanding of what this will look like will emerge in the months ahead after much discussion, prayer and discernment.

A Business Administrator will be a new role for the Family of Parishes. This will allow the priests, particularly the pastor, to focus on the spiritual and pastoral needs of the parish as opposed to dealing with employee, building and capital needs of our parishes. As a result, capital projects and administrative needs of the parish will be handled more professionally.

While the finances of each parish will remain with each parish, costs will be shared for salaries for the Pastoral Team and staff. Economies of scale may allow for the future hiring of a Pastoral Minister or a Youth Coordinator for this Family of Parishes, that no one parish or cluster of parishes in the area could afford in the past.

Given the distances and demands the priests have in serving a much larger geographic area than one priest has had to do before, more lay involvement in the parish is needed to bring Communion to the sick, fostering hospitality and welcome (particularly to new members of the parish), Baptism and Sacramental Preparation, leading activities and programs, all with the intention of building an every deeper relationship with the Lord and the Church.

The Family of Parishes for this area will eventually be given a name; a name which identifies the entire group of parishes coming together as one community of faith. In addition, there will be one Website for the Family of Parishes and one bulletin for the Family of Parishes. Information and events from each parish community will be communicated through this Family of Parishes structure.

The Families of Parishes model will create the needed stability that will allow our parishes to spread the Good News of Jesus Christ and to form intentional disciples. This is our goal and this is the mission of the Church. The transition to a Family of Parishes will lead us to focus on our mission. In an ever-changing landscape, we need to turn the negative thoughts of our circumstances back to the victory of Jesus on the Cross. We must bring the encounter of the Risen Lord to the many who are out there needing to find him and know him.

It is up to all of us to secure our future for each of our faith communities....

Becoming a Family of Parishes means that we are living our Baptismal call! We need to share our gifts where we can with each other and our parish Family. We must recognize that our faith is not just something we use from time to time, but a deep relationship with Jesus and the Church. We must celebrate and proclaim this truth to others, to allow for a future filled with hope to happen. For where Jesus is, there is hope and life...hope and life forever and ever.

No more then ever we need each member of our Parishes to be praying for our Family and our priests! More Information to Come.....