



ARCHDIOCESE OF HARTFORD
134 FARMINGTON AVENUE
HARTFORD, CONNECTICUT
06105-3784

OFFICE OF
THE ARCHBISHOP

May 6/7, 2017

Dear Parishioners at Nativity in Bethlehem,

I am writing about the results of the pastoral planning process that has been the focus of much attention in recent months. Every effort is being made to ensure that parishioners first hear the results from me at Masses this weekend, not from the media or other source. You will remember that after much preparation the pastoral planning process was inaugurated last year with an Archdiocesan-wide survey and with a mailing entitled *Stewards for Tomorrow* sent to every registered household.

Although change is usually difficult and often painful, the Church on earth, as the Second Vatican Council taught, is a “pilgrim people.” Here we have no lasting home, but are on the way to a heavenly city. Along the way we constantly experience change as we die and rise with Jesus every day. There is no denying that there have been tremendous changes in our Catholic population over the last century. We have to ask whether what we have from the past is still the best way to address the need for worship, education and service by and for the Catholic people within the various localities of the Archdiocese. Thanks to criteria that have been thoughtfully developed, I believe we have a sound and principled plan for reinvigorating our collective mission, one that ensures greater stability for both parishes and pastors over the next several years.

After a lengthy and prayerful period of consultation, discussion and research involving both clergy and lay leadership, a determination has been made that as of this June 29th Nativity Parish in Bethlehem and Saint Teresa of Avila Parish in Woodbury will merge. Each church building will retain the name with which it was dedicated, but together these two parish communities will form a new parish to be called Prince of Peace Parish. The canonical document of these changes is being posted at the church entrances for all to see, and is also accessible on the Archdiocesan Pastoral Planning website, stewardsfortomorrow.org. The Archdiocese will be providing personnel and guidance to make the merger successful.

Pastoral planning also involves the overall placement of our clergy in the most effective way possible. As a result, effective June 29th, I have appointed Father James T. Gregory to be the Pastor of Prince of Peace Parish. Much has been said about the shortage of priests. This is certainly a significant factor, but by no means the only one in pastoral planning. I earnestly encourage you to work and pray that more men whom God is calling to the priesthood will step forward and heed that call. Remember what Jesus said even during his earthly ministry: “The harvest is great, the laborers few. Pray the harvest master to send laborers into his harvest.”

It seems to me that today's announcements are not so much an end, but only the first step in preparing ourselves to face the future with courage, faith and hope. It is urgently necessary that to these we now add love, without which, as Saint Paul says, we are nothing at all (cf. 1 Cor. 13). Whatever your parish, we are all members of one Catholic family of faith, and we need to reach out in welcome to those whose parishes are merging or closing. I am confident that those of you who are hearing this letter will go out of your way to be good neighbors and friends to your fellow Catholics at a time of change.

If we look closely at the long history of the Church, including the history of our own Archdiocese, we will find many outstanding individuals and communities who were unafraid to face the difficult challenges of their day. Please join me in praying that you and I will also be remembered as people of faith, courage and vision at the beginning of the 21st century.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Leonard P. Blair". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small cross at the beginning.

Most Reverend Leonard P. Blair
Archbishop of Hartford