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The three Catholic parishes in the city of Ashtabula enjoy a truly cooperative relationship. Many of our programs, policies, and Sacramental celebrations are done together, as is our support and dedication to Catholic education through Saints John and Paul School.

Parishes of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Youngstown, Ohio

The Mission of the "Transition Team" is to preserve the integrity, autonomy, and traditions of each of the three Catholic Parishes in Ashtabula, while working to ensure that the faithful of the entire Catholic Community are pastorally well-served.

**Ashtabula City Tri-Parish Transition Team Meeting with Bishop Murry
January 23, 2008 -- Diocesan Chancery Office**

In Attendance: Bishop George Murry, Fr. Joseph Ruggieri, Dwight Beebe, Fr. Philip Miller, Linda Coblitz, Sr. Dorothy Bondi, John Shouplin, Sr. Laurie Divoky, Eloise Coxe, Bina Larson, Glenn Thomas, Maureen Smith, Donna Timonere, Tom Thornton, Msgr. Robert Siffrin, Paul Atzemis, Chancellor, Nancy Yuhasz

Bishop Murry welcomed everyone and introduced his staff. To begin, he said that he does not and has not read any letters that were sent anonymously.

Through his reading of signed letters and having conversations with parishioners and parish staff, he has determined that the concept/term Tri-Parish has different meanings to different people. Most people have expressed a belief that the Tri-Parish effort can succeed in Ashtabula, but how quickly and to what level is the question.

In his most current group of communications, Bishop Murry said the issue of the outreach to the Hispanic Community has arisen and seems to be causing some dissension in Mother of Sorrows parish. He asked the team, particularly the MOS parishioners, if the Hispanic community seems to be becoming the scapegoat for the transition. He also said that he will be meeting with members of our Hispanic community soon. Some discussion ensued regarding the fact that Mother of Sorrows parishioners have been dealing with the rumor of their parish closing for probably more than forty years. Other issues impacting the anxiety of MOS parishioners could be groups that do not take to change and the recent history of rapid turnover of pastors.

Bishop Murry said it is appropriate for Fr. Miller and Fr. Ruggieri to form a Pastoral Council at Mother of Sorrows Parish and that he has put them in charge of the spiritual needs of the people of the parish.

In response to a question, he explained the difference between a pastor and an administrator of a parish:

- A pastor is in charge of the spiritual health of the parish and is also in charge of the business needs of the parish. He can usually stay until the time that he feels the need to leave the community.
- An administrator can be a priest, a deacon, or a religious woman. An administrator is appointed when needed to hold a parish together until a pastor is assigned. This position sometimes evolves into a long term commitment rather than a short term appointment.

Bishop Murry thinks there is a very great need to educate parishioners of Ashtabula about leadership sharing and what the Tri-Parish concept really means. Ideas for education included reflection group discussion of the vision of what "church" is or hosting a dynamic speaker early in the Lenten season to speak about this topic. We could then use that beginning to follow up with some educational processes locally.

He also expressed his feeling that the healing process has begun, but that we may need to slow down the process.

After a ninety minute discussion, Bishop Murry concluded the meeting by summarizing our agreement on the following four items:

1. An official appointment of a leader needs to be made at Mother of Sorrows parish
2. Education needs to be ongoing for parishioners of the three parishes in Ashtabula.
3. Pastoral Councils and Finance Councils need to be established at each parish.
4. Bishop Murry needs to visit the Ashtabula parishes and speak with our parishioners.