



Exploring a New Means of Pastoral Governance for the Diocese of Pittsburgh

February 2009

At the direction of Bishop Zubik, the Diocese of Pittsburgh has been exploring a regional vicariate structure to assist the Bishop in his pastoral governance and to replace the deanery structure. This would be done through the appointment of "Regional Vicars." They would represent the Bishop to parishes and assist him in administration, pastoral planning and liturgical events at the parish level. They would also help to communicate parish needs and concerns to the Bishop.

The Bishop has formed an Ad Hoc Committee on Regional Vicariates made up of members of diocesan administration, priests, deacons and lay leaders to study this issue. He introduced the topic for consultation with the priests at this fall's deanery meetings and a further consultation will take place at the upcoming deanery meetings beginning in late February. The following may be helpful in understanding the proposed change.

Why is this change in diocesan governance being considered?

The basic purpose is to embrace what the Bishop has called for in his first pastoral letter, "The Church Alive!" The Bishop's goal is to grow the Church of Pittsburgh and to encourage excitement about the faith at the parish level. A primary goal of "The Church Alive!" is to establish a closer service relationship between the Bishop and his pastoral administration and the parishes. This new form of governance would:

- Facilitate a more cooperative effort among parishes, clusters of parishes and other faith communities in the Diocese.
- Strengthen the Bishop's connection with the life of the parishes.
- Allow appropriate decisions to be made at the regional level.
- Improve parishes' contact with the Office of the Bishop, through the Regional Vicar.
- Enhance the exchange of information and services between central administration and parishes.

The fundamental goal is meet the basic challenge of "The Church Alive!": that we more clearly see ourselves as a Servant Church.

What is a "Regional Vicar"?

A Regional Vicar is a qualified priest with pastoral and administrative experience appointed by the Bishop to oversee a specific region of the Diocese. He assists the Bishop in the exercise of his pastoral office in that

region and represents the Bishop on a daily basis to the clergy, religious and laity. This assignment entails full time responsibilities. The Regional Vicar represents the Bishop to the parishes in issues of administration, parish planning and sacramental life within their regions, and vice versa.

What does a Regional Vicar do?

The Bishop determines the areas of direct responsibility for the Regional Vicars based on the needs of the local Diocese. The Bishop, in other words, will determine the final "job description," but only after a very wide consultation among pastoral staff, priests, parish leadership and the laity as a whole.

In general, it could be expected that within his region a vicar will:

- Coordinate pastoral care
- Determine parish and regional pastoral needs
- Serve as the administrative representative of the Bishop
- Promote collaboration among parishes
- Resolve problems
- Visit local parishes regularly and help in local decision-making

Regional Vicariates would afford parishes greater local autonomy by working with a vicar who knows them well. It will also mean that some pastoral administration tasks could be eliminated, turned over to the Regional Vicars, or returned to the parishes.

Does this mean that diocesan pastoral administration would be decentralized?

The basic functions served by pastoral administration will need to be continued, either at the diocesan level or through the Regional Vicars. As part of the planning for this change, pastoral administration secretariats, department heads and staff have been reviewing all tasks and responsibilities. However, there is no intention to re-create all the functions of pastoral administration through "mini chanceries" on the vicariate level.

While certain tasks and responsibilities that are currently part of pastoral administration could be decentralized, pastoral administration will remain vitally necessary to assist the Regional Vicars in their responsibilities while continuing those tasks that must be performed at the diocesan level. New tasks and new responsibilities for diocesan pastoral administration will develop as well to assist the Regional Vicars.

How many Regional Vicars will be appointed?

That is being studied as part of the work of the Ad Hoc Committee on Regional Vicariates. It is considered unlikely, however, that there would be more than five Regional Vicars or fewer than three.

Does the Regional Vicar have to be a bishop?

It is not required that he be a bishop, but it is required that he be a priest. The authority of a Regional Vicar derives directly from Canon Law by virtue of his appointment by the diocesan bishop. He possesses the same general authority in his region as a vicar general does for the entire diocese. That authority exists only as long as the term of his appointment.

Is this something new in the Church?

Vicariates developed for the universal Church from the Second Vatican Council and subsequent Church instructions, including the 2004 *Directory for the Pastoral Ministry of Bishops*. There are a number of archdioceses/dioceses throughout the United States which already adopt this type of governance.

Is there a timetable on this change in the Diocese?

Many details have to be worked out and much consultation has to take place before this can be implemented. However, the Bishop has asked that we be ready if at all possible to put this in place by October 2009.