

Celina Cluster Plan – Mass & Bulletin Announcement August 24-25, 2019

Today's first reading from Isaiah describes the saving hand God extends to all people – "I come to gather nations of every language, they shall come and see my glory." The Israelite people had become selective of who was in and who was out, but God reminded them that Jerusalem was to become a place of holy worship for all peoples. So too our church is meant to be a place where God's saving hand is extended to all people and all are welcome.

Like the nations streaming to Jerusalem, Hebrews envisions a similar homecoming, but the way of return is not without hardship. Sometimes there are struggles, trials and pain, but we are exhorted or strongly encouraged to be disciplined and trust in the Lord, recognizing that the discipline of the Lord may at first seem "a cause not for joy but for pain, yet later it brings the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who are trained by it."

In all three readings, those who have sinned are disciplined so that they may be worthy of salvation. In the gospel today, Jesus turns from parables about the kingdom to entrance requirements for entering into that kingdom. He has been passing through towns and villages teaching the good news and in one a person asks, "Lord, will only a few people be saved?" In other words, who is going to make it to heaven? That continues to be our quest today, why we are people of faith, why we worship and pray. Our journey on this earth, is not merely a span of years, but also our journey home to the Lord. It is the Church that helps us on this journey.

This weekend the homily and words that I am sharing are about our church in the local area that has been called the Celina Cluster. The Celina Cluster includes Immaculate Conception Church in Celina, Our Lady of Guadalupe Church in Montezuma and St. Teresa Church in Rockford. This same homily is being shared at all the masses in these parishes this weekend and is being attached or included in each parish bulletin so that you can have a clear understanding even if you missed something that was said at Mass.

As many of you may know, the clustering process in the Archdiocese goes back over 30 years. In the early 2000's, the St. Mary's Deanery participated in a planning process called Ministry 2010. A committee, with representatives from all the parishes, worked on developing plans for the clustering of parishes in the deanery. The plan was approved in 2003 and all of the clusters except the Celina Cluster were implemented between 2008 and 2010. The plan called for a Celina Cluster which would include IC, OLG and St. Teresa. The initial plan was reviewed and updated in 2014. While the three parishes have collaborated closely over the years, the full cluster plan was not implemented since the Missionaries of the Precious Blood had available priests to serve at Our Lady of Guadalupe.

Due to the untimely death of Fr. Rick Neiberding, C.P.P.S., who had recently been appointed pastor of Our Lady of Guadalupe, the Archdiocese of Cincinnati and the Missionaries of the Precious Blood are now advising a review of the 2014 Celina Cluster plan and implementation of the cluster in the Fall of 2019. Our Precious Blood community and the Archdiocese explored several options for assigning another pastor to Our Lady of Guadalupe, but due to the timing and availability of priests, that was not possible. It is our belief that the full implementation of the cluster plan at this time will help ensure that the pastoral needs of all three parishes are met and enable them to grow and flourish.

We know this will be a time of transition and involve changes for all, and as we heard in the letter to the Hebrews there may be some struggles and pain, but we also believe there is a spirit of cooperation and goodwill among all three parishes that will allow it to be a positive transition enabling all three parish communities to remain open, alive and vibrant and moving us into the future with hope.

It will take time and lots of discussion among many folks to review the 2014 Celina Cluster plan and to forge and implement a new plan moving forward that includes and respects the uniqueness of each parish. The clustering will be a work in progress and we will keep all parishioners informed as it moves forward. The following are initial steps that are being taken now.

A cluster planning committee is being formed with representatives from each parish, including both parish employees and parishioners who have a good sense of what is happening in each of our parishes and what the needs are moving forward. We are planning to meet the first week of September to begin reviewing the 2014 cluster plan and identify next steps moving forward.

By coincidence, the next designated meeting night for the Our Lady of Guadalupe and IC Parish Councils was September 19th and St. Teresa the day before. All three Parish Councils are now planning on a joint meeting on September 19th to discuss the cluster process and then opportunity for each parish council to meet separately for specific parish business.

Early October we plan to send a common letter to parishioners of all three parishes describing the cluster process as it is unfolding and hopefully have a survey of 2 maybe 3 possible cluster mass schedules folks can choose from. One cluster wide mass schedule will be implemented. Our hope is the letter and survey will help inform parishioners of what is happening and provide opportunity for input in the process.

There will probably be a series of meetings with the cluster planning committee, parish staffs and parish councils and opportunities for parishioner input along the way. The hope is that we would have a cluster mass schedule to implement by the first weekend of November 2019. Many of the administrative planning details will continue to be discussed and unfold over the course of 6 to 8 months.

There are a few presumptions as we move forward in the Cluster process:

- Each parish will continue to provide onsite masses, but in a way that can be handled by two priests, along with weddings, funerals, nursing home masses, etc.
- We will continue having staff onsite at each parish for pastoral care, finance matters, administration, offering RE and other sacramental preparation.

We are very aware that this is a big transition for all parishioners, especially Our Lady of Guadalupe with the sudden death of Fr. Rick, but we are also very aware of the deep faith and commitment that has guided our parishioners for generations. When we think back to beginning of our parish and each in the Celina Cluster, there must have been a lot of unknowns, and probably anxieties and worries as well, but there was also that deep abiding faith and trust that they were about the work of God and that the Lord would guide them. That continues to be our hope and prayer today. Once again, a copy of this homily is in the parish bulletin and will be posted on the parish website.