

*“For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for wholeness...
to give you a future full of hope.” Jeremiah 29:11*



March 15, 2019

Dear Pastors and Parishioners of St. Dominic, St. Francis of Assisi, St. John of God, St. Thomas Moore, St. Patrick and St. Louis de France.

Lent is a very holy season in our Church. It is a time to embrace change, conversion, and reform. For the last several months, your six parishes have been embracing change through the hard work of strategic planning. Your work together is building bridges, while establishing new partnerships to help ensure a stronger future, together.

When your plan is complete, it will not mean the “end” of anything – just the opposite. It will represent a beginning of a new paradigm. In order for this strategic plan to succeed, it is vital that the planning that has begun, continues.

First Approval: To date, the good work of the strategic planning teams has led to a recommendation of creating two groups of three *linked* parishes to be:

1. St. Dominic, St. Francis, and St. John of God; and
2. St. Thomas More, St. Patrick, and St. Louis de France

I am in agreement with you. A *linked model* means that the three parishes in each group will remain independent at this time. However, in this new paradigm, each linked model of three parishes will operate with one central administration office and an appropriate staffing structure that will be put in place to 1) manage the administration – bookkeeping, operations, and facilities maintenance of the three campuses, and 2) provide leadership for all faith formation and evangelization programs along with coordination of parish ministries. This will allow our priests to be priests – freeing the clergy from the day-to-day burdens of administration.

A top priority for parish revitalization is to lead our young people and their families to a relationship with Christ. Therefore, as your planning continues, I have instructed our planning facilitators to assist each of your ministry planning teams in creating a laser-like focus around intentional outreach and invitation to each parish’s faith formation families that will ensure that their voices have been heard – and will be reflected in the goals that you create for the Catholic communities of Somerset and Swansea.

Next steps: In the weeks ahead, the six strategic ministry planning teams will be given dates to meet again to begin shaping their goals, as two *linked models* and to creatively design goals to promote greater engagement of the hundreds of youth and their families who are already within our midst.

The Clergy: At the end of June, Monsignor Fitzgerald will retire. On July 1, 2019, new leadership teams will be in place to lead each of the two groups of three linked parishes in Somerset and Swansea. I am grateful to Fr. Viveros, Fr. Cyriak, Fr. Brilhante, Fr. Bernier and Fr. Fitzpatrick for their openness to the needs of the Diocese and their willingness to take whatever assignments are available, where their gifts are best utilized for the good of the Church.

A pastor and a parochial vicar (to be announced at a later date) will be assigned to serve the good people of what will be three *linked* parishes of **St. Dominic, St. Francis, and St. John of God**; and a pastor and a parochial vicar (to be announced at a later date) will be assigned to serve the good people of what will be three *linked* parishes of **St. Thomas More, St. Patrick, and St. Louis de France**.

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We will optimize these next several months to prepare for this transition by completing the strategic plan, and in July these two tri-parish communities will begin to take steps to move from planning to implementation.

This transformation in our Church will only happen if we are all in this together, building on our strong parish traditions and consolidating our human and financial resources. Let us build the “future full of hope” that Jeremiah foretold – in Somerset, in Swansea and beyond!

May God bless us on this journey of *Rebuilding in Faith and Hope!*

Sincerely yours in the Lord,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Edgar M. da Cunha". The signature is written in a cursive style with a cross at the beginning.

Most Reverend Edgar M. da Cunha, S.D.V., D.D.
Bishop of Fall River