

DIOCESE OF PORTLAND
OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

September 12, 2006

My dear Parishioners of the Portland Parishes:

As you know, for the past year a Cluster Planning Committee has been working to develop a plan which will take into account the projected number of diocesan priests and priests belonging to religious orders available to be assigned to the parishes of the city of Portland by the year 2010, along with the needs for evangelization in the city looking toward the future. Unique to the Portland cluster is the number of religious priests who are presently serving in parishes and who bring a depth and breadth of distinctive spirituality to the diocese by the exercise of their particular gifts. One of the key questions facing the Cluster Planning Committee was how to respect the charism of each of these various religious communities and still address the need to look ahead and plan for the future.

After much discussion, the Cluster Planning Committee recommended to me a division of the original cluster into two clusters. After consultation with the Presbyteral Council and the Episcopal Council, I have agreed to accept this recommendation and approve the formation of two clusters in the city of Portland. Cluster 21 will now consist of St. Peter, St. Louis, St. Christopher, Sacred Heart/St. Dominic and the Cathedral parishes. The new Cluster 28 will consist of the parishes of St. Joseph, St. Patrick and St. Pius X.

Presently, Cluster 21 is served by two part-time diocesan priests and three religious priests. By 2010 at the latest, Cluster 21 will be served by one diocesan priest as its pastor, and other religious priests as parochial vicars. For example, the Marian Fathers at St. Louis have indicated that they are ready to have their priests serve in this capacity. The Franciscan Friars at St. Peter's Parish will be making decisions about this option at their next chapter meeting in May. If and when no religious priests at all are available to serve as parochial vicars in Cluster 21, the diocese would designate a senior diocesan priest to assist the pastor.

Currently, the Capuchin Franciscan Friars serve St. Joseph Parish. The Jesuit Fathers serve St. Pius and St. Patrick Parishes. In this new Cluster 28, it is now clear that the Capuchin Franciscans serving St. Joseph Parish will no longer be able to send friars to minister at St. Joseph after August of 2008. This weekend, the parishioners at St. Joseph Parish will receive a letter from the Provincial Superior of the Capuchin Friars informing them of the difficult decision the community has reached regarding their continued

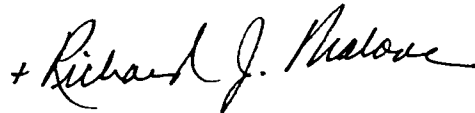
ministry in Maine. For thirty-one years the Capuchins have staffed St. Joseph Parish and the city and the diocese have been enriched by their presence. I am grateful for their ministry and know that they will be missed not only by the parishioners at St. Joseph but by the broader community.

In August of 2008, the Jesuit Fathers will be invited to assume the responsibility for St. Joseph parish in addition to their present commitments at St. Pius and St. Patrick Parishes in Portland. One of the Jesuit priests will be the pastor of the three existing parishes; other Jesuits priests will be the parochial vicars. If and when the time comes when the Jesuits are no longer able to serve these three parishes, there will be a maximum of two diocesan priests assigned to the cluster. One will be the pastor, the other will be the parochial vicar.

Obviously, there is much work that still needs to be done to complete the cluster plans for the two Portland clusters looking ahead to 2010. Now that these decisions mentioned above have been made, I trust that the two clusters will be able to establish their planning committees and present to me a cluster plan by December 30, 2006. As you move forward, Bill Schulz, Director of the Office of Parish Planning and Evangelization, is available to assist you. I remind you that it is the question of mission effectiveness that must shape our planning.

May God bless you with His peace. Please know that you are in my prayers.

Yours sincerely in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Richard J. Malone". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small cross at the beginning.

Most Reverend Richard J. Malone
Bishop of Portland

RJM/cc

c: Monsignor Paul Stefanko
Father Peter Kaseta, OFM Cap
Father Don Bosco Duquette, OFM Cap
Father James Hammer, OFM Cap
Father Larry Smith, SJ
Father Robert Regan, SJ
Father James O'Brien, SJ
Father Richard Bertrand, SJ
Father Frederick Morse
Father Roland Petinge, OFM
Father Ireneusz Chodakowski, MIC
Ms. Lori Arsenault