



ELEPHANTS IN THE LIVING ROOM
DISCUSSING WHAT NEEDS TO BE DISCUSSED

Website: elephantsinthelivingroom.com



December 5, 2006

Dear Father,

The Together in Faith program has brought to our attention concerns voiced by many people from numerous parishes. Among the factors that are generating such concerns are a precipitous drop in the number of available clergy, the acceleration of mergers and closures of parishes, and the apparent abandonment of the city.

We find the enclosed Best Practices to be an easily accessible and reliable set of guiding principles that can be consistently applied to the Together in Faith process. We invite all involved parties in this process to consider and embrace them. More pertinent information can be found on the Elephants in the Living Room website.

Respectfully,

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Fr. Gerry Bechard

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N.B.: Electronic signatures; actual signatures on file.

Best Practices for Preserving Vibrant Parishes In Time of Fewer Priests

- ❑ Parishes that are financially viable and have active lay leadership and apostolic outreach should not be closed or merged solely because there is no priest available.

- ❑ Before closing or merging vital parishes in areas where no priests are available, bishops should use all the latitude canon law provides for empowering lay ecclesial ministers and/or deacons to administer and lead parishes. (Canons 516.2 and 517.2.)

- ❑ Parishioners and lay leaders should be informed, consulted and involved in all decisions about the future of their parish. In collaboration with priests and/or parish life coordinators; lay leaders on parish councils, parish finance committees and other parish committees or commissions should be empowered to take ownership for the financial stability and gospel witness of their parish community.

- ❑ Abundant financial assets and the high commercial value of parish real estate should never be primary reasons for closing or merging any parish.

- ❑ Parish size and demographics should not be the only determinant for reconfiguring. Ethnic diversity and outreach to marginalized groups should weigh equally to size, presuming leadership and a viable community are also present.

- ❑ Our bishops should encourage vocation awareness for diaconate and lay ministerial ecclesial calls as well as ecclesial calls to the male celibate priesthood.

- ❑ Dioceses should work toward subsidizing theological and pastoral education for lay ministers at the same level as diaconate education.