

Ave Maria Pastorate
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Watertown, SD 57201
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Ave Maria: Parish Families of Watertown, Kranzburg, Henry, Clark, Florence, and Bryant

Bishop Donald DeGrood
523 N Duluth Ave
Sioux Falls, SD 57104

May 1, 2024

Dear Bishop Donald DeGrood,

Please accept our Set Ablaze Pastoral Plan for the future of Ave Maria Pastorate. This plan is a reflection of prayer, the Set Ablaze pastoral planning handbook guidelines and parameters, hours of committee meetings, seven town hall meetings, comments from the laity both online and in comment boxes. Additionally, auxiliary town hall meetings were held with the parishes which will no longer have Mass after the implementation of the plan.

Our committee is made up of twenty members from our seven parishes. We met twice a month. Once as a large group of twenty and once in small groups. We had four small groups that worked on each of the five pillars and then would present to the large group their ideas on each pillar. Our large group would synthesize the ideas from each small group to create the plan you will find attached.

One particularly important theme that emerged in our plan is the need to develop and support strong family life. All our pillars in some way come back to the need to have strong families practicing the faith. Without this essential element all the efforts in the other pillars will be greatly reduced in their efficacy. The family is the domestic church and without this most fundamental structure of the church being intact, the larger structures of the Church cannot be maintained nor grow as Christ intends.

In more concrete realities, an area of great concern was our weekend Masses in our Pastorate. We currently have eleven Masses in our Pastorate. Partner's Edge recommended for us to reduce this to seven Masses. However, we found a discrepancy in the seating capacity data they used to give their recommendation for Holy Name and Immaculate Conception Parishes. We made an appeal to the Set Ablaze Diocesan Committee for us to be granted nine Masses instead of seven. This would enable us to keep six Masses in Watertown. We were granted eight Masses in response to our appeal with the encouragement to re-appeal after some time of trying the new arrangement. We would still like to have nine Masses and we believe this is the best solution in our pastorate. However, if it is still your choice, bishop, for us to have eight Masses, we are willing to do so. We understand that God has gifted you to shepherd us, and you see the bigger picture of the diocese. Therefore, unless told differently, we have decided to no

longer have Masses in Bryant or Henry with December 29, 2024, being the last weekend with Masses. And we will only have one shared Mass on Saturday night between the two Watertown Parishes.

There still is a strong desire among committee members to keep Sunday Mass at both of our smallest parish communities of St. Mary in Bryant and St. Henry in Henry. However, we understand that you are asking us to make significant sacrifices along with the whole diocese given our limited number of priests and the prospects of having even fewer. We also understand that vocations to the priesthood come from families in our diocese who are open to life and that our families in the diocese have not produced the vocations to adequately serve our existing parishes. Recognizing our responsibility, we promise to do more to foster happy, healthy, holy, and fecund family life in our pastorate, as mentioned above. We promise to pray for vocations to the priesthood and encourage our sons to consider the call. We also recognize that in our history as a diocese more parishes have been closed than are currently open and that parishes do have a lifespan as demographics and faith shifts.

Regarding the school pillar, we are first recommending that our school be renamed from Immaculate Conception School to Ave Maria School to reflect the pastorate. Second, we have identified an imminent need to address the facilities of the school. An assessment was professionally done by CO-OP Architecture and Sichmeller Engineering in the Fall of 2022 with permission from the bishop. The results showed many repairs and even a remodeling, for security purposes, of the reception area of the school were needed. Our facilities manager believes these updates will be well over five million dollars. There was also identified a strong desire to explore the possibility of adding a Junior High and even a High School. We plan to commission an exploratory committee this summer to assess the viability of such an addition in grades and location of classrooms. Consideration of relocation, rebuilding in the same location, and having two school campuses (One at Immaculate Conception and one at Holy Name) will also be considered by this committee. Before all else, there is the preeminent need to address the disparity of teacher salaries. Currently a starting salary is \$36,000 in our school with \$47,500 in the Watertown public school. Our school foundation is currently addressing this last need with plans to expand our teacher salary endowment.

Lastly, we will look at ways in which the two parishes in Watertown can collaborate even more. We will explore the possibility of even merging into one parish with two campuses or one parish with one campus with room to build and expand and host pastorate level Masses and education programs and gatherings. These questions will be explored by our parish and finance councils of Immaculate Conception and Holy Name before we make any significant financial commitment to our current school facilities.

To conclude, we have built a plan we feel good about and that we believe God is asking us to implement. Though implementation has not yet fully happened, nor have the fruits of such great potential change shown itself. We have already seen in just the Pastoral Planning Committee what it can look like for many parishes to work together for a common goal. For walls to be broken down. For parishes to get out of their silos. For the gifts of

parishioners in one parish to not just serve their own but be a gift to all in the pastorate. We greatly enjoyed getting to know one another and learned how to think more about the greater church. We have been edified by the faith of others we didn't even know existed. We believe God has brought us together for a reason and it has already shown itself in how we have interacted with each other. Our prayer is that this collaboration will continue to its fulfillment beyond our committee and grow within all the faithful of the Ave Maria Pastorate. In the words of the ordination rite spoken by the bishop and St. Paul. "*May the Lord who has begun this great work in you bring it to fulfillment.*" Philipians 1:6

Sincerely in Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Fr. Shaun Haggerty". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned below the text "Sincerely in Christ,".

Fr. Shaun Haggerty & Members of the Ave Maria Pastoral Planning Committee
Pastor of Ave Maria Pastorate