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Pastoral planning, stewardship campaign share common mission: keeping parishes open and healthy

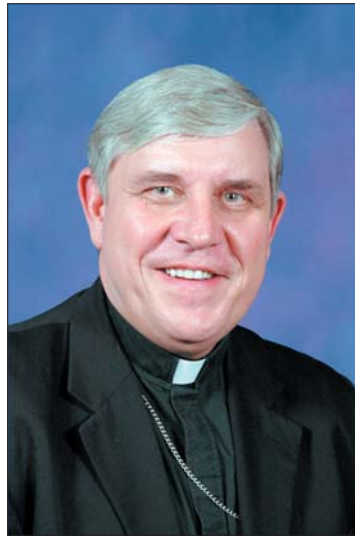
By FRANZ KLEIN
Staff Writer

LA CROSSE – When a person makes an investment, he usually satisfies himself that the company to receive his hard-earned money has strong future prospects. Given that 80 percent of the money collected by the diocese's five-year stewardship campaign will go directly to local parish communities, parishioners are looking closely at their own parishes' future. Some are even asking, "Will my parish be here in five, 10 or 15 years?"

Bishop Jerome E. ListECKI said these questions have arisen due to the current pastoral planning effort, which might restructure the diocese in upcoming years, due to the priest shortage and changing demographics.

The current plan, the bishop emphasized, is "a draft of the plan and not the plan." When it is presented in the various deaneries in the upcoming months, individual parishes will be able to give their input and modify its particulars.

To help allay some of the



Bishop Jerome E. ListECKI

fears people have about their parishes disappearing when the plan is eventually implemented, Bishop ListECKI said that it does not focus on parish closure, but on collaboration between communities. "One of the things I asked the (planning) committee is that they do not close the buildings that are associated with the communities," the bishop said.

The bishop said he gave the committee of priests who developed the pastoral plan a specific mandate, "of looking



Andy Gaertner

towards the future, attempting to keep as many of our parishes and our buildings identifiable to the community as possible."

"The plan will change the status of some parishes, (but) it's not going to look much different for a lot of the smaller communities," the bishop said. "They're going to have a Sunday Mass at the parish that they've known for years."

Andy Gaertner, director of the diocesan Office for Stewardship, said that keeping par-

ish communities open and viable is the shared goal of both pastoral planning and the campaign. "We can keep a lot of these communities open, but to maintain them, we have to put money into them," he said.

Gaertner argued that the current pastoral planning should provide an impetus for, rather than a fear of, giving to one's parish community. "We understand the value of keeping communities open," Gaertner said. "But it takes constant attention to keep them open. Delaying the campaign for any reason would be bad, because time is not on our side. There is every reason to do the campaign at this time."

Bishop ListECKI couldn't agree more. He emphasized that the current plan would be gradually implemented as it becomes necessary. Having financially sound parishes, he said, keeps the plan's worst-case scenarios from ever being played out.

"They are going to be able to see their investment," the bishop said to reassure worried parishioners. "And the investment in their local community is a support for the presence of the larger Church."