

BELIEFS & Values

Vicariate addresses needs

BY TODD WICKS
STAFF WRITER

The Vicariate of the Lakes is an example of strength in numbers.

Since 1969, the association has coordinated the programs, personnel and facilities of its 11 parishes to better serve Catholics in northwest Oakland County.

Today, the vicariate covers a geographic area from Prince of Peace in West Bloomfield to St. Anne in Ortonville. Population numbers of its parishes and religious schools are steadily on the rise.

"It's not a super-parish," said Monsignor Robert Humitz, vicar of the Lakes Vicariate. "We look at our common problems and concerns and share resources, so that each parish doesn't have to reinvent the wheel." (Adam) Cardinal Malda has asked that vicariates begin to do their own pastoral planning, because they know their problems best.

The Lakes organization is one of five vicariates in Michigan, created following the second Vatican Council. The state was divided into regions by the Archdiocese of Detroit, each with its own vicariate.

According to the Rev. Arnold Kosco at Prince of Peace, things were different then. "Parishes were more independent. They belonged to the pastor, so to speak," he said. "Now we understand that the parish belongs to the people. The decisions made here are not one-man decisions."



STAFF PHOTO BY DAN DEAN
Pastoral planner: Monsignor Robert Humitz explains his role as vicar in the Vicariate of the Lakes, an association of 11 parishes in northwest Oakland County.

While banding together as an organization is seemingly full of advantages, one distinct disadvantage in the Lakes area is the distance between churches. "You can't get there from here," joked Patricia Allsteadt, director of religious education at Our Lady of the Lakes in Waterford. "If you live out in Warren, where the nearest church is two miles away, it's easy to do. We travel."

"Meetings are so difficult," agreed Humitz. "We try to bridge that through the use of communications. We have all sorts of means today that we didn't have before."

Those means include a vicariate newsletter, an electronic bulletin board, and e-mail. Although St. Daniel and Prince of Peace already have their own web sites, next year a vicariate web site will allow people to keep track of events at different churches and to register for religious education classes.

"People have needs right now," said Frieda Arpokin, in charge of communications at St. Daniel. "If they want to know about annulments, they don't want to know six months from now, they want to know now."

The vicariate is also preparing for a crisis of sorts: its tremendous population growth. Expanding congregations and long waiting lists for religious schools led Humitz to conduct a detailed demographic study of the area, projecting growth into the next century as part of his pastoral planning.

"We want to know, 'What will the impact of growth be on our facilities?'" he said. "The parishes need to start dealing with this information."

More and more Catholics are moving into the Lakes area, said Kosco, but will meet with a decreasing number of priests. "I am 62, more or less the median age of a priest in the archdiocese of Detroit. We can retire at age 70, which means that in eight years, there could be half the priests there are today."

Humitz offered a similar forecast. "The priest-to-people ratio now is 1 to 5,000. By the year



STAFF PHOTO BY DAN DEAN
Working together: Patricia Allsteadt, director of religious education for Our Lady of the Lakes, and the Rev. Arnold Kosco of Prince of Peace coordinate the use of their churches' resources.

2010, it will be 1 to almost 10,000," he said. "Based on that, we need to respond to what our ministries must do."

There are many options open to the vicariate to deal with this problem. Humitz said they are considering building new churches and/or building additions onto existing ones.

"There could be some decisions about training people for special kinds of ministries, maybe pro-

viding space in parishes for these people to operate or function," said Humitz. "Someone might be an executive secretary for vicariates, things like that. Possibly a sharing of school support, financial support, facility support."

Although the vicariates have been around for some time, Humitz believes the system is finally coming into its own. "Now it's got more teeth to it because

now we're making decisions about the future and how to cope with the growth," he said. "We're all working toward and aware of the same problems."

The other churches of the Lakes vicariate are St. Rita in Holly, Holy Spirit in Highland, St. Perpetua in Waterford, St. Mary in Milford, St. Patrick in White Lake, Our Lady of Refuge in Orchard Lake, and St. William in Walled Lake.

Let us strive to be people of good will – even after Christmas, too

FOCUS ON THEOLOGY



REV. TIMOTHY F. BABCOCK

Christians from one end of the earth to the other assemble this week to celebrate the great festival of Christmas — the commemoration of the birth of our Savior.

We celebrate, as we understand and believe, the fulfillment of the ancient promises and the hope of the world to come. We celebrate the coming of the eternal word made flesh, who for us, and for our salvation, was born of the Virgin Mary and not only came to us, but became one of us. "The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us," the prelude of the Gospel of John announces. Orthodox and Eastern Catholic Christians enhance this celebration by

observing with almost equal solemnity the Epiphany, or manifestation of the presence of Christ to all nations of the world.

As we observe the feast of Christmas, we give witness to the incredible, saving love of the God of goodness and mercy, manifest over the centuries in His care for His human creatures. We celebrate the fidelity of this loving God to His ancient promises to send a savior to redeem humankind. We unite in wishing to all people the joy and hope that this celebration awakens anew within us — a hope which, when fulfilled, will help to make our world a better place to be.

I would like to focus today on the greeting of the angels to the simple shepherds on that first Christmas. "Glory to God in highest heaven, and on earth peace to all on whom God's favor rests!" Other transla-

tions would put this more simply: "on earth peace, good will to all."

The celebration of Christmas is a reminder of the "good will" of our benevolent God to and for us. It expresses God's eternal care and fidelity.

As we observe this Christmas, I would like to propose a slight variation on this theme, however. It is brought to mind by a re-phrasing of this greeting in some of our songs, and sometimes in common understanding. At times, we hear the words to say "peace on earth to all people of good will."

While this is not an accurate rendition of the Scriptural greeting, it does point out an aspect of the Christmas observance we too often overlook. For Christmas to be realized, what Christ came to bring must be accepted in "good will" — that is, with an appropriate disposition and understanding.

If what we celebrate at Christmas time is to become part of our lives, and part of a world that needs it very badly, we must ourselves strive to be "people of good will." In a world filled with resentment, fears and prejudices, we must witness to a different world, to a different asset of values. It is my observation that one of the reasons many people in our world have difficulty accepting

the Christian proclamation that the Savior has come is that His presence is not sufficiently manifest in the lives of those who believe in Him. We are not adequately, to use the phrase from the Christmas proclamation, "people of good will."

Peace on earth! Good will to all! Whether this is more than a wish, more than a dream is largely up to us. We celebrate

in this commemoration God's "good will" for us. The challenge, and the test, is in our willingness to bear this "good will" to others!

Blessings of peace and joy to all this Christmas, and well into the New Year!

Timothy F. Babcock is pastor at St. Andrew Catholic Church in Rochester. You can reach him at the church at (810) 651-3950.

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