



From the Cluster Facilitator's Desk

by Fr. Timothy Dore, OFM Conv • Brooklyn West Cluster #2

Brooklyn West Cluster Number Two is located in a fascinating and rapidly changing area of Brooklyn. It is also home to some of the oldest parishes in the Diocese. Most Holy Trinity, the parish in which I am the parochial vicar, was founded as a German parish in 1841. In those days many were immigrating from the "Old Country" while others who came to the area were simply trying to move away from the very congested Manhattan into the "suburbs" of Williamsburg. Many who immigrated into the area desired to live among people who spoke the same language and who shared the same cultural backgrounds. Ss. Peter and Paul, founded in 1843, and Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary (St. Mary's - Maujer Street), founded in 1853, served mostly Irish Immigrants. The Brooklyn West Cluster Number Two that exists today is the proud home of Most Holy Trinity, St. Mary's, Our Lady of the Rosary of Pompeii, Transfiguration, All Saints, Epiphany and Ss. Peter and Paul parishes. We continue to serve an immigrant population. In the not to distant past, many of our parishioners were of Italian descent. More recently, at least for the past fifty years, we experienced a great influx of people from Spanish speaking countries. The area experienced the effects of urban decay, with all of the problems such entailed from the 1960's until at least the early 1990's. In the very recent past we have experienced the influx of a new breed of immigrant -- young, artistic and professional people who have come from all over the country, and like the peoples of generations ago, have chosen Williamsburg for economic, cultural and social reasons. Many call these new immigrants "hipsters." Like other immigrant communities, they are putting their own mark on the face of Williamsburg.

I first came to Most Holy Trinity and Williamsburg in June of 1992. I have experienced first-hand the change and growth of the neighborhood. I have also witnessed the changing Catholic population, and its consequent drain on the personnel and material resources of the cluster parishes.

I have been blessed in my ministry as a Conventual Franciscan priest to have had a diverse collection of pastoral experiences. One experience I had was to have lived for two

years in Costa Rica. There I experienced the Church as a missionary church. Like other places in Central America, Costa Rica has many small towns and villages where there are no resident priests. Some faithful Catholics either have to travel for many hours in order to attend Mass on Sunday, or they must wait for the traveling priests who will visit the small chapels in their towns, once a month if they are lucky.

After my experience in Costa Rica I came to believe that the idea of a "priest shortage" in the United States, at least in my experience living and ministering in the Northeastern U.S.A., is not really an accurate understanding of our situation. While it would be wonderful to have more priestly vocations in the Church, I believe we really have not reached a point where there is a genuine "shortage." We actually have many priests, but also very many old buildings and properties to maintain, especially in urban areas where populations have shifted dramatically in the last fifty or one hundred years. The truth of the matter is that most of the descendants of the Germans, Irish and Italians, who lovingly established the wonderful parishes of our cluster, now live out on Long Island or in New Jersey or elsewhere. While the people who remain in our parishes are loving, dedicated and faith-filled people, the truth is that we are now in the situation of duplicating services, sacramental preparation programs, organizations and activities, etc. for congregations that might otherwise be enlivened and strengthened if they could be brought together in order to share resources, time and talent and perhaps even facilities.

I believe that the clergy and staff members of our cluster all share something of my point of view. I believe we work very well together as a cluster. I believe that we all desire to work closely with the Diocesan Office of Pastoral Planning so that together we may have a future in which the presence of the Roman Catholic Church in Williamsburg is vibrant, faithful, and forward moving. As a cluster, we discuss issues that seek to invite long time residents, as well as our ever changing immigrant population, young and old, racially and ethnically diverse, into a Church that will continue to be dynamically present to our area for many years to come.