INTRODUCTION

The Urban Ministry Task Force was created as a result of the work of the New Energies Project which began in 2002 in the Archdiocese of Newark. Every parish was involved in this Project; beginning with some of the more financially challenged parishes, and impacted all four counties throughout the entire Archdiocese. There have been many mergers, partnerships and parish linkages and implementation of Archbishop Myers’ decisions are taking place right now.

When Archbishop Myers initiated the Project, he said that the status quo regarding parish life in the 235 parishes in the Archdiocese of Newark was no longer sustainable. The work of parish and cluster planning as well as the work of the Task Force on Parishes, Executive Committee and many others at the Archdiocesan level reflected a commitment to create a sustainable model for parish life.

This new model for parish life is best articulated in the six Project goals. These include:
1. To enhance quality parish life throughout the Archdiocese.
2. To support increased understanding of and action on the 28 principles related to quality parish life in the areas of Spiritual Life, Educational & Formational Life, Service Life, Parish Community Life, Administrative Life, and Pastoral Life;
3. To strengthen the presence and ministry of the Church in urban and suburban areas;
4. To increase collaboration between and among leaders, parishes and the whole Archdiocese of Newark;
5. To act as good stewards of all human, financial and facility resources;
6. To build a greater sense of unity within the rich ethnic, cultural and age diversity present within the local Church.

As the Task Force on Parishes and Executive Committee completed their work in June 2007 and as the Archdiocesan Implementation Team assumed responsibility for the New Energies Project, several recommendations were made. One of the recommendations was related to the establishment of 4 Task Forces as follows:

- Urban Ministry;
- Waterfront Ministry;
- Multicultural Ministry;
- Youth/Young Adult Ministry.

The first task force to be established was to examine the reality of Urban Ministry throughout the Archdiocese of Newark and make recommendations for more effective ministry, where needed. The specific mandate for the Urban Ministry Task Force is threefold:

1. To review current realities and analyze the strengths and shortcomings of Urban Ministry in the Archdiocese.
2. To examine and study trends locally and nationally, including best practices, as they might apply to Urban Ministry in the Archdiocese.
3. To develop recommendations with timelines that support short term and long-term goals, and ultimately fully developed plans that will strengthen Urban Ministry.
The Urban Ministry Task Force first met in January 2008. The first discussion clarified the scope of the task force efforts. The task force limited its consideration to the urban parish setting, realizing however that the schools system and health care systems are additional major areas of impact on the urban area. All parishes in the cities would not be considered, but rather those, which might be called “inner-city.” This is a continually changing list as demographics continue to change.

Members of the Urban Ministry Task Force (UMTF) brought with them many years of parish experience throughout the Archdiocese. Members include:

- Rev. Patrick W. Donohue, V.F.
- Rev. Robert A. Antczak, V.F.
- Deacon Keith McKnight
- Very Rev. Philip J. Waters, O.S.B., V.F.
- Rev. Josephat Kato Kalema, O.S.B.
- Rev. John B. Martin
- Sister Jacinta Fernandes, O.S.B., Chair
- Sister Linda Klaiss, SSJ, Chair

Following a review of the preliminary report with Archbishop Myers, the Archdiocesan Implementation Team, Pastoral Center staff and inner city ordained and lay leaders, the task force will prepare a Final Report by December, 2008.

CURRENT REALITIES
The UMTF focused its attention on about 50 parishes in the urban areas of Newark, Irvington, the Oranges, Elizabeth, Plainfield and Jersey City. These parishes have a median Sunday Mass attendance of 673. Most parishes are made up of people from the immediate area as well as of people from other areas with other connections to the parish: family, cultural, or people who like a small, multicultural community with vibrant worship and a sense of social justice. Parishes often include recent immigrants, many of whom are undocumented. These parishes have the additional challenge of being located in areas of the cities where there is high crime, drug use, gang culture, poverty, substandard housing and homelessness. The Catholic Church has been an important presence in these areas for many generations. In addition to parish presence, the church has provided social services and educational institutions for its members and for all who come to its doors.

Catholic parishes in the inner city minister both to their members and to the larger community. Parishes provide the ministry that all Catholics are entitled to: religious education, sacramental preparation, social opportunities. Very often the parish provides these ministries with small staffs: a pastor, one or two paid staff members and many volunteers. Parishioners in the city often have different needs from those in suburban parishes. Pastoral staffs are frequently approached for help with legal, immigration, substance abuse, lost employment problems. The parish staff must rely on friends with expertise in these areas: lawyers, etc. Ministers must also be able to turn to the resources of the Archdiocese for those difficulties beyond parish means. Because of its ability to deal with urban problems, the parish is often a place where others may come to seek help. Many inner city parishes run food pantries, health clinics soup kitchens and other social service outlets. Many of these ministries are supported by people from suburban parishes with a desire to help in the city.
Catholic parishes in the inner city have many challenges. Chief among them are financial challenges: small congregations with little resources, old buildings in need of expensive repair and maintenance. Many inner city pastors spend an inordinate amount of time on building and financial issues rather than on ministry. Parish staff must do many tasks with little help. In addition, there are those skills which the average priest or pastoral minister does not have: language, cultural education, legal know how.

In spite of the difficulties, the church has been a beacon of hope in the city. Perhaps because ministers struggle with their parishioners and neighbors, ministry in the city is very effective. Vibrant liturgies, strong sense of community, a gospel commitment to the poor and suffering, hard working priests and religious are all characteristics which many lay people speak about when they describe their parishes. The Archdiocese provides some important assistance to people who live in the inner city. Catholic Charities and the New Community Corporation are places where many people turn for assistance with the basic needs of life. It is important that these services stay funded.

Catholic schools provide another important ministry and presence in the inner city. They have a long tradition of excellence in education and in spiritual formation. Once these schools were primarily "parish" schools; now they open their doors to the wider community. For members of the parish, they are a source of faith formation; for the wider community they provide a values based education and a viable alternative to the public school system.

FINANCIAL REALITIES
The urban parishes in the Archdiocese differ from county to county.

In Essex County there are 33 urban parishes, located in 4 cities (Newark, E. Orange, Orange, and Irvington). The average parish in Essex county: celebrates 4 Masses per Sunday in 2 languages and has an average attendance of 677 per Sunday. Their yearly collection is $128,456, their AAA goal is $13,483, their Archdiocesan assessment is $27,625, they have operating capital of $474,302 and they owe $81,996 to the chancery.

In Hudson County there are 12 urban parishes located in 3 cities (Jersey City, Union City, and West New York). The average parish in Hudson County: celebrates 7 Masses per Sunday in 2 languages and has an average attendance of 1673 per Sunday. Their yearly collection is $209,505, their AAA goal is $20,903, their Archdiocesan assessment is $43,104, they have an operating deficit of $161,779, and owe $217,914 to the chancery.

In Union County there are 8 urban parishes located in 2 cities (Elizabeth and Plainfield). The average parish in Union County: celebrates 6 Masses per Sunday in 3 languages and has an average attendance of 1719 per Sunday. Their yearly collection is $237,682, their AAA goal is $25,082, their Archdiocesan assessment is $37,976, they have operating capital of $149,741 and owe $163,437 to the chancery.

It is hard to generalize about the financial challenges which inner-city parishes face. Usually parishes face a combination of several problems. Many have aging buildings that require over due repairs and high cost maintenance. Many owe debts to the Archdiocese, often going back several years. Most parishes have small congregations whose members have limited resources. Low collections translate into cash flow difficulties. Archdiocesan assessments and other
obligations eat at parish resources or create additional debt. Some creative approaches to finances, e.g., renting buildings, run counter to Archdiocesan policies.

Often pastors spend an inordinate amount of time on finances and buildings rather than on pastoral care. Parish staffs must do many tasks with little help. Frequently, pastors are unable to find adequate professional help from within the parish and must spend money for needed assistance.

**TASK FORCE PROCESS**

In addition to their own experience, the task force sought the input of others through surveys and listening sessions. A summary of the process used follows:

1. Surveys were distributed to about 100 pastors, and other staff members. While the survey may have been too complicated, 22% of those who received a survey responded and some of the suggestions were supported by some of the other processes.

2. One of the most positive means of feedback took place at three listening sessions, which were held in Essex, Hudson and Union Counties. Through the invitations of members of the task force and local deans, lay leaders from urban parishes were gathered together. The task force found that there were many realities common to all the counties.

3. Listening sessions were also conducted with staff members in the Archdiocesan Pastoral Center. Members of the task force were encouraged by the interest which various offices and agencies articulated in being involved in the process and offering their expertise to the urban church.

4. Finally, a second survey was sent to parishes and it sought information on the ways that parishes currently received or gave assistance to others and the possibility of developing twinning relationships between urban and suburban parishes.

5. The Urban Ministry Task Force met regularly as a total group to explore a variety of issues, discuss the findings from the surveys and listening sessions, and develop draft recommendations and a rationale for them in a preliminary report.

**LEARNINGS**

**STRENGTHS**

The Task Force listened to many voices which spoke of the Strengths of the Urban Church. The liturgy and preaching in urban parishes is a real strength and source of inspiration. Parishes in the urban area demonstrate a strong sense of welcome and a vibrant sense of community. The response to the Gospel message is strong and it is lived out with a commitment to social justice and programs that meet the critical needs of the local community.

We came to understand that the urban parishes continue to meet the pastoral needs of the local community despite the limitations of time, finances and personnel. Those working in the urban church are loved by the people they serve and the laity exhibit a strong love for the Church and a
strong, lived faith. The parishes and grammar schools of the city are indeed beacons of hope to
the community they serve but there are high schools, programs of Catholic Charities and non-
parish centers which enhance the presence of the Church in the cities of the Archdiocese.

In meetings with the Pastoral Center Staff, the Task Force recognize the skilled and qualified
staff which is eager to respond to the needs of the urban church and recognizes the initiatives of
the Human Concerns Office which has been able to call on the resources of parishes throughout
the diocese in meeting the needs of the urban church and promoting advocacy which would help
the poor and disadvantaged.

CHALLENGES

The urban churches face several challenges. For many urban parishes, the maintenance and
repair of old buildings has become a major concern. For the most part, the small parish
communities lack wealthy benefactors who might help ease such concerns. The size of parish
staffs are limited and the demands of fundraising often restrict the ability of such staffs to
evangelize. While the current economic situation impacts parishes throughout the diocese, it
seems to be hitting the urban churches harder as their parishioners find their resources stretched
very thin.

There is a sense that there is a gap between urban and suburban parishes within the diocese, and
sometimes between urban parishes themselves. This may be a perception but perceptions are
real. There is a tradition of suburban parishes sharing food at Thanksgiving and gifts at
Christmas but deeper relationships, collaboration and communication are somewhat lacking. One
challenge we face is for better collaboration at all levels. When the task force gathered people
together, whether on the local level or among Archdiocesan offices, the need for better
interaction was articulated.

Changes in demographics have presented new challenges in urban ministry. We recognize that
schools have been closed and parishes merged. In the course of the listening process of the task
force, the important contribution of parishes and schools to the urban scene was often cited. The
challenge which parishes face is to provide quality Catholic education and formation which can
help to stabilize neighborhoods and foster family life and to do so in the face of financial
limitations.

URBAN RECONFIGURATION

As the Archdiocesan New Energies Implementation Team needs to continue their work of
reconfiguration, this task offers a special challenge in the urban areas. Given all of the realities
and challenges previously named, decisions need to be made that will address the financial
limitations, better use the facilities and enable the church to sustain a strong, active, ministerial
presence among the poor and most vulnerable of our urban areas.

Deferred Needs

The city is an especially challenging environment to the youth of our present time. Violence,
drugs, gang life, etc., threaten our young people daily enticing them to false values and
materialistic life goals. We recognize and call for a strong response on behalf of our youth, but defer to the Youth-Young Adult Task Force yet to be formed.

Another area that we recognize, but defer to, is multicultural issues that are so intertwined throughout the urban church. We recognize this is the scope of the Multicultural Task Force, newly formed.

**Beacon of Hope**

We believe that again we stand at a significant time in our history, which calls us to step out in faith, and with great trust in God to be what Pope Benedict XVII called us to at Saint Patrick’s Cathedral during his recent visit to our area:

> “Dear brothers and sisters, in the finest traditions of the Church in this country, may you also be the first friend of the poor, the homeless, the stranger, the sick and all who suffer. Act as beacons of hope, casting the light of Christ upon the world, and encouraging young people to discover the beauty of a life given completely to the Lord and his Church.”

We look to our chief shepherd, Archbishop Myers, and his colleagues to lead our Archdiocese of Newark to a renewed sense of mission and unity. The task force realizes that there are many valuable resources of time, talent and treasure in the wider community of the Archdiocese, and many gifts in the skilled professional ministers of our archdiocesan and parish staffs. The vision and response to the challenges of today, lie within our collaborative effort.

The recommendations that follow will explore ways to begin to make needed connections among groups throughout the Archdiocese. Change does not happen as a result of recommendations, unless the leadership and structures support an urban vision and a renewed commitment to mission for our cities that are such a gift to all of us who call the Archdiocese of Newark home.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

The recommendations contained in this preliminary report are for a 5-year period and are listed in three distinct timeframes as follows:

- **IMMEDIATE (THROUGH JUNE 2009)**
- **SHORT TERM (JULY 2009 – JUNE 2010)**
- **LONG TERM (JULY 2010 – JUNE 2013)**

**IMMEDIATE (THROUGH JUNE 2009)**

The Urban Ministry Task Force recommends that:

A. The Archdiocesan Implementation Team assume responsibility for developing and coordinating a collaborative process leading to ongoing dialogue throughout the Archdiocese regarding urban issues, and keep the needs of urban church as a priority in planning processes on every level. This responsibility could
eventually be transferred to someone designated by Archbishop. This process should exist on all levels and would involve the Regional Bishops, Pastoral Center Staff, Deans and Deanery leaders, Parish Staffs and lay leadership.

B. The Archdiocesan Implementation Team convenes “Urban Church, Beacon of Hope”, a day of dialogue between all inner city pastors, urban deans and representatives of the Archdiocesan Pastoral Center. This dialogue would: create a forum to address the pastoral and temporal realities of urban parishes, identify priorities and develop shared strategies, and create a network of support among urban pastors and strengthen their connection with the Pastoral Center staff.

C. The regional bishops and the urban deans create and engage an annual collaborative process at the county level to bring lay leaders, pastoral staffs, and archdiocesan pastoral center representatives, to examine the realities of the urban church and engage in planning and development of goals to strengthen the Church presence in their county, building a Beacon of Hope.

D. The offices at the Archdiocesan Pastoral Center hold biannual meetings for collaborative planning in support of deanery, cluster and parish needs and goals, and create pastoral strategies to strengthen or support church presence and effectiveness in the urban areas of the Archdiocese.

E. Parishes or parish clusters in conjunction with the Office of Evangelization develop a local program for evangelization. These programs should include parishioner involvement and should be a integral part of all parish planning. The School of Evangelization and Mission, a developing new initiative of the Office of Evangelization, can assist parishes in their evangelization processes.

F. Since many urban parishes lack the advantage of a professional minister of faith in the area of religious education programs, total parish faith formation, RCIA, sacramental and liturgical ministries, parishes, the Catechetical Office, Office of Divine Worship, Evangelization Office and Finance Office should work together to develop a plan to ensure that every urban parish or parish cluster has the service of qualified personnel. New models may need to be developed in collaboration with pastors.

G. Office of Communications assist in proclaiming the Catholic Church in the urban area as a Beacon of Hope, by creating in “The Catholic Advocate”, a regular section of coverage, educating and highlighting the presence and efforts of our parishes, schools, and the many works of service and justice already occurring our cities.

**SHORT TERM (JULY 2009 – JUNE 2010)**

The Urban Ministry Task Force recommends that:

A. Parishes and parish clusters along with the help of the Archdiocese re-establishes and revitalizes a formal “Twinning Relationship Project” between urban and suburban parishes or clusters. These relationships need to extend beyond Christmas gifts and food
collections to create new mutually enriching relationships. They should include social interaction, exchanges of volunteers, shared worship, justice advocacy and community organizing. Urban and suburban parishes each have unique charisms that can be shared with one another.

B. In light of the centrality of social justice in the urban community, parishes, parish clusters and deaneries work with the Office of Human Concerns in developing a collaborative response to the concrete needs and injustices so evident in our urban areas. Participants of programs such as Just Faith, Catholic Charities Reducing Poverty, members of parish justice and social concern committees, and parish twinning relationships should be called on to strengthen our Church response of justice advocacy, community organizing, and direct services.

C. Opportunities be provided in the seminary and in the continuing formation of priests to expose our seminarians and clergy to the unique opportunities and challenges of the urban church and prepare them to offer strong pastoral leadership in urban parishes.

D. The Archdiocesan Schools office continue their efforts at maintaining Catholic schools in the city. The Schools office, in collaboration with the Development Office continue searching for funding for Catholic education especially in the inner city where there the term Catholic education has broader implications than class instruction.

E. The Family Life Ministry Office, in collaboration with the Catechetical Office and the Office of Divine Worship, work with parishes to create resource material and programs that will help parishes deal with the particular challenges of urban family life and strengthen urban Christian families.

F. The Office of Finance develop strategies and policies in conjunction with urban pastors, with special sensitivity to the financial realities of inner city parishes.

G. The Office of Property Management recognize that urban parish buildings and property are assets for ministry, and efforts should be made to maintain and preserve them for the ongoing ministry of the Gospel.

H. An annual Beacon of Hope Celebration at the Cathedral Basilica of the Sacred Heart be created to recognize those who serve in and support the urban church. Volunteers, fundraisers, twinning partners, social justice committees and special programs and projects can be recognized and celebrated.

LONG TERM (JULY 2010 – JUNE 2013)

The Urban Ministry Task Force recommends that:

A. The Archbishop work with inner city leaders in preparing a Pastoral Letter on the gifts and blessings of Urban Ministry in the 21st century.

B. The Archbishop consider naming someone to animate and help in the coordination of Urban Ministry throughout the Archdiocese.