

My Appointment as Dean – from Father Derek Sakowski

As of October 15, Bishop Callahan has appointed me to serve a three-year term as Dean of the Eau Claire Deanery. I will continue in my present roles as pastor of St. Mary's and St. Raymond's, as Hispanic Minister for the Eau Claire area, and as mentoring pastor to Fr. Thelen. Thankfully, he continues to thrive in his role as Chaplain at Regis High School and Middle School and as Parochial Vicar of our two parishes. It won't be hard to get him ready to be a pastor.

What is a "Dean"? Deans are official representatives or "vicars" of the Bishop for a particular region – in this case, the nine parishes of Eau Claire County and a little beyond. Most of you are already familiar with the title "vicar" from Fr. Guanella and Fr. Thelen's role here as "Parochial Vicar." In Fr. Thelen's case, he carries a share in my authority as Pastor and can do many things on my behalf. Likewise, I now as Bishop Callahan's vicar in this part of the diocese, given authority to represent him in certain situations.

Canon Law gives various titles for this role, saying that the priest fulfilling it is called Vicar Forane, Dean, Archpriest, "or some other name." I laughed at those words, "or some other name." I'm sure there are names that some people would like to call me! I think that's part of the nature of authority and leadership. Bishop and I were joking about that at Fall Clergy Conference this last week as we talked with one of the younger priests. We reminisced about how easy it was to be well-liked as a newly ordained priest – normally able to say "yes" to people's requests and rarely having to make any hard pastoral decisions. But once a Pastor (or Dean or Bishop) it is totally impossible to please everyone – and some people really get upset. It was true for Jesus, and he promises that it will be true for his shepherds. Some of our sheep are eager for conflict and divisions; others are terrified of conflict. As shepherds, we have to pray and discern when to be gentle and when to be firm. Certainly we won't be perfect in our leadership, but uniting the whole flock in Christ's love is an important task, and we do our best.

What exactly does a "Dean" or "Archpriest" do? Our duties include the following:

1) *Promoting and coordinating common pastoral activity in the vicariate.* First and foremost, in our case is Regis Catholic Schools, which is run collectively by six of our parishes, including St. Mary's. We rely strongly on the lay leadership of our schools, but the six pastors (and ultimately the Dean) bear the final decision-making authority.

Additionally, there are other shared pastoral efforts of our Deanery such as the programming offered by our shared Youth Minister (Kristin Betlej), our ministry in the

various area hospitals and nursing homes, Confession offerings such as the “24 Hours for the Lord,” and much more.

Bishop Callahan reiterated to me the importance of helping everyone work well together, rather than guarding their turf, being divisive, or looking after their own interests.

2) *Looking after the well-being of the other priests.* This includes holding them accountable if they are living in a way clearly not in keeping with their state in life, but also encouraging and supporting them, “especially those who find themselves in more difficult circumstances or are beset by problems.” If one of our priests falls ill or dies, the Dean’s role becomes especially important.

3) *Administrative recourse.* Bishop Callahan relies on the Deans to be the first line of defense, as it were, in resolving conflicts that arise in our parishes, schools, or hospitals. He is hoping most of these conflicts can be resolved justly and peacefully at the local level, rather than needing appeal to him. Even better, he hopes that effective leadership will help ensure the kind of justice that, in the long run, prevents new conflicts from arising.

How did all this happen? Each time a Dean’s term is up, the Vicar General (Fr. Dhein) polls the priests of the Deanery, asking for our votes. The Bishop reviews those votes and then makes his own decision on who should be his vicar. I am a bit stunned at these new responsibilities, but very encouraged that my brother priests and my Bishop are putting their trust in me. With God’s help, I can hopefully serve them (and you) all well.

I ask for your understanding and support. This new ministry for me will involve, at times, a good amount of generosity, sacrificing, and service – not just on my part, but on your part. I will be less present and available, especially if there is a crisis that needs attention. I will have to say “no” to a lot more things. You will have to be patient and generous, as will I. But as I pray daily, I see that God has prepared us all for this. He has built us all up the last 5+ years and has called many of you have stepped up into greater roles of leadership. Thank you – and I will be counting on you!

Finally, please pray for me. I will need more Faith and trust in God than ever. May His will be done!