



Parish Pastoral Planning Overview

Background:

In the Fall of 2010, a pastoral letter “Called to Conversion and Holiness,” was distributed to all the faithful of the Archdiocese. It outlined the necessity of examining all 266 parishes in order to determine if they possess the resources to accomplish their role in the mission of Christ and remain sustainable and vibrant faith communities.

In response to this need, the work of Parish Pastoral Planning formally began in early 2011 under the leadership of Reverend Monsignor Arthur E. Rodgers, Coordinator of Archdiocesan Planning Initiatives, and the Archdiocesan Strategic Planning Committee. This planning committee includes lay persons, pastors, and Archdiocesan personnel.

Pastoral Planning Areas:

To facilitate this process, the Archdiocese was divided into 44 Pastoral Planning Areas (PPAs), each made up of several parishes in the same geographic vicinity. Monsignor Rodgers and his team work with the pastors from each PPA to guide them through a prayerful and participative process by which each parish clearly defines its identity, mission, and goals and works to determine if it has the resources required to sustain itself. It is expected that the first 22 PPAs will complete the work of planning and implementation over the next two years and that an additional two years will be required for the remainder of the PPAs.

Statistics from the past two decades show that numerous factors including demographic shifts, a decline in weekly Mass attendance, a high density of parishes in a relatively small geographic area, the availability of clergy, serious financial challenges, and underutilized parish facilities have seriously impacted the quality of parish life. The Archdiocesan Strategic Planning Committee seeks to address concerns about parish stability by conducting a comprehensive study of parishes throughout the entire Archdiocese. As part of their work, parishes will be consulted via their pastor, together with the parish and finance councils, on how to best go forward. Parishes will also be consulted about the best way for the Pastoral Planning Area to provide for the Catholic community into the future.

The Three Stages of Parish Area Pastoral Planning:

Stage 1: Pastors meet with the Coordinator of Archdiocesan Planning Initiatives and members of the Archdiocesan Strategic Planning Committee to review the process as well as demographic trends, spiritual activity and financial data pertaining to their parishes over the past several years.

Stage 2: Pastors bring this information to their parish pastoral and financial councils and work to formulate recommendations regarding how best to carry out the mission of the Church in their area. This effort is meant to ensure that resources of parishes in the pastoral planning area are being used to create the most vibrant and sustainable parishes possible.

Stage 3: Pastors in each PPA submit recommendations to the Coordinator of Archdiocesan Planning Initiatives who reviews them with the Archdiocesan Strategic Planning Committee. After continued communication with pastors, a final recommendation is presented to the groups of priests who advise the Archbishop (College of Consultors and Presbyteral Council) and to the Archbishop.

The Two Possible Results of Parish Area Pastoral Planning:

Result 1: When changes in parish structures (mergers) are recommended by the parishes or by the situation itself, the Archbishop, accepts recommendations of the Archdiocesan Strategic Planning Committee after that body has consulted with pastors in conjunction with their parish councils. The Archbishop also consults with the College of Consultors and Presbyteral Council. In this case, the planning work of the parishes is to decide how the newly merged parish(es) will be formed and operate.

Result 2: When changes in parish structure (mergers) are not required, the Archbishop accepts recommendations for continued sustainability from the pastors in an area after they have consulted with the Archdiocesan Strategic Planning Committee. In this case, the planning work of the parishes is to decide what needs to be done in cooperation with the other parishes in the PPA to ensure the continued vitality of all parishes.

Criteria for Parish Mergers and Parish Merger Plans:

The need for mergers will be determined by a combination of the following criteria:

- Demographic shifts in Catholic population;
- the density of parishes in a limited geographic area; and
- a history of declining sacramental activity (e.g. baptisms, marriages, funeral, and Sunday and weekly Mass attendance);
- unsustainable parish debt;
- the decreasing availability of clergy to staff parishes.

When two or more parishes merge to form one new parish, all parish property, assets and debts will be assumed by the newly created parish, which will also assume responsibility for the care of all sacramental records. Parishioners will attend Mass at the newly created parish church and the churches of their former parishes will be maintained for the time being as worship sites. At the discretion of the pastor, these sites will be utilized for weddings, funerals, feast days, and traditional devotions.

The pastor of the newly created parish will consult administrative leaders from all affected parishes to create new parish and finance councils, liturgical committees, and identify the appropriate staffing of all parish ministries.

Communicating the Results of Parish Area Pastoral Planning:

Once the recommendations of the Archdiocesan Strategic Planning Committee for each PPA are considered by the Archbishop and his decisions are made, the results will be communicated first to the parishioners by the pastor through a letter to every registered household in the parish as well as through announcements at all weekend Masses and postings in weekly parish bulletins and websites. After the parish community has been notified, the Archdiocese will issue a formal announcement to the media, which will also be posted on the Archdiocesan website.

The Timeframe for Parish Area Pastoral Planning:

It is expected that the first 22 PPAs will complete the work of planning and implementation over the next two years and that an additional two years will be required for the remainder of the PPAs.