



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 the Archdiocese 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. It now continues under the leadership of Reverend Monsignor Gerard C. Mesure, 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 has been divided into 44 Pastoral Planning Areas (PPAs), each made up of several parishes in the same geographic vicinity. Monsignor Mesure 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 now and into the future.

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.

In 2011 - 2012 # of PPA's were studied. In 2012 - 2013 # PPA's were studied. In 2013 - 2014 # PPA's were studied.

The Three Stages of Parish Area Pastoral Planning:

Stage 1: Pastors of the parishes in the PPAs under study 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 from each of the parishes in the PPA, along with selected representatives from the parish pastoral and/or financial councils form a Pastoral Planning Committee to work with the local Dean, a facilitator, and the Regional Bishop (or Regional Vicar) 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: The Pastoral Planning Committee in each PPA submits 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 by the Strategic Planning Committee to the Presbyteral Council and to the Archbishop for his decision.

Criteria for Parish Mergers and Parish Merger Plans:

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

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

In determining the seat of a newly merged parish, consideration will be given to the location of the parish churches relative to the population and transportation, the condition of the parish properties, and the potential for future usability.

When two or more parishes merge to form one newly merged parish, all parish property, assets and debts will be assumed by the newly merged parish, which will also assume responsibility for the care of all sacramental records. Parishioners will attend Mass at the newly merged parish church and the churches of former parishes will be maintained 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 merged 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 announcements at all weekend Masses. Information will also be posted in weekly parish bulletins and parish 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 along with a copy of the formal decree merging the parishes.