

ARCHDIOCESE OF PHILADELPHIA PASTORAL PLANNING – FAQs

Why is Parish Pastoral Planning necessary?

The purpose of Parish Pastoral Planning is to prepare for the future. Planning together can help parishes to become financially sustainable and pastorally vibrant.

It is hoped that the parish pastoral planning will bring about:

- ❖ Stronger parish communities throughout the Archdiocese
- ❖ Parishes ready to meet the spiritual and pastoral needs of future generations
- ❖ Revitalization and evangelization throughout the Archdiocese.

For more information check the Archdiocesan Pastoral Planning web page at http://archphila.org/conversion/conversion_index.php

How does Parish Pastoral Planning work?

Each Pastoral Planning Area involved in the study forms an Area Pastoral Planning Committee made up of the pastor and two representatives from the pastoral and/or financial councils for each parish. Led by the area dean (or another priest designated by the Archbishop) and a lay facilitator, this committee meets approximately monthly from the Fall into the early Spring to develop a pastoral plan for the area. They first study statistical information for all of the parishes and for the area, such as demographic information, financial information, and a report on parish facilities. They also consult with parishioners, often by means of a survey. Parishioners are kept informed with communiqués issued after each meeting. By early next spring the Area Pastoral Planning Committee is to submit a recommendation to the Archdiocesan Strategic Planning Committee (ASPC), which is made up of various archdiocesan officials. This committee often adopts this recommendation but they may also make some adjustments to the plan before forwarding it to the Archbishop. The Archbishop reviews the recommendation from the ASPC with the Council of Priests. A decision should be announced by late May 2015 with implementation on July 1, 2015.

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Why can't things just remain as they are?

Even if we do nothing, things will not remain as they are. Many parishes have already seen large groups of parishioners move from one section of the archdiocese to another, families have fewer children, immigrant groups who came in the past assimilate and new immigrant groups arrive with new traditions and needs, and buildings get older and need more expensive repairs. The list could go on, but the point is that simply keeping things as they are is rarely an option. By planning we can better adapt to these changes and provide viable and vibrant parishes now and for future generations.

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How were areas chosen for study in Pastoral Planning?

All parishes in the archdiocese will engage in pastoral planning. The parishes in certain areas have been given priority, however, because they face particular challenges. These challenges can include dramatically changing demographics, declining sacramental activity, financial difficulties such as large debts and/or ongoing operating deficits that are draining parish savings, a density of parishes in a small area, and buildings in disrepair. Situations vary but the hope is that by working together parishes will be better able to address these issues and be in a better position to serve future generations.

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Can I offer input on the parish planning in my area?

Yes. Often the Area Pastoral Planning Committee, which is working on a recommendation for the parishes in the area, will conduct a survey of parishioners. You are always welcome to mail or e-mail your own parish with your comments. Please remember to be as concise and concrete as possible. Include your name and contact information. Be realistic. Doing nothing is not a realistic option. Be positive. Don't just object to what you do not like, but offer positive suggestions as to what can be done. Be open. Focus on the needs of all of the people in your area, not just your own parish. Be Christian. There is no place for vitriol, gossip, or for imputing bad intentions to others. Reasonable people can disagree as to what is best for the church in your area. Everyone is making a good faith effort to do what is best.

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If parishes are merged, does the archdiocese take any parish property?

All financial resources and other property of the parishes remain with the parishes. If parishes are merged all of the money, other property, as well as any debts, from the parishes involved remain with the newly merged parish. It does not go to the archdiocese. If property is sold in the future, those proceeds likewise belong to the parish.

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PASTORAL PLANNING - FAQ

What information is used by the Area Pastoral Planning Committee in formulating their recommendation to the Archdiocesan Strategic Planning Committee?

The Area Pastoral Planning Committee reviews the following:

Pastoral demographic trends for the area, which includes the number of registered parishioners, the number of registered households, the number of baptisms, marriage and funerals, the Mass attendance recorded in the October Count

Financial data trends for the parish and the forecast for sustainability

The condition of parish buildings and the maintenance of the parish physical plant

The number of priest available for parish ministry

The geography of the parishes

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What happens if parishes are united in a merger?

A merger is when two or more parishes are united into one parish. When parishes are merged one church is designated as the parish church. The name of the parish will be the same as this church. Other churches will remain open for some limited use as a Worship Site Church (more information on Worship Site Churches next week). A pastor is appointed for the newly merged parish. He may be one of the pastors of the parishes involved in the merger or an entirely new pastor may be appointed. A transition team, made up of parishioners from both merged parishes, is formed to assist the pastor in organizing the newly merged parish. This would include consideration of issues such as the Mass schedule and other parish activities. They would also assist the pastor in determining what staffing the newly merged parish will need. This new parish staff is normally taken from among those already working for the parishes involved in the merger. Uniting parishes is admittedly a challenging task but when parishioners work together in a spirit of Christian love, great things can be accomplished.

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What happens to the churches when parishes are united in a merger?

One church is designated as the “Parish Church.” Most Sunday Masses, Sacraments of Initiation (Baptisms, First Holy Communion, Confirmations), and the Easter Triduum (Holy Thursday, Good Friday, and the Easter Vigil) are to be celebrated only in the parish church. Any other church will normally remain open as a “Worship Site Church.” Weddings, funerals and special devotions will usually continue to be celebrated in the worship site church. If clergy staffing permits and if the pastor, in consultation with the pastoral council, finds it pastorally helpful, Sunday Mass can also be celebrated in the worship site church.

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