

INTRODUCTION TO THE PROPOSAL of THE ARCHDIOCESAN PASTORAL PLANNING COMMISSION

Last week the Archdiocesan Pastoral Planning Commission began a series of 25+ consultations around the Archdiocese to discuss a proposal to strengthen our parishes. It is part of a larger set of mission initiatives we are discerning, at the present time.

The proposal is **not** about a restructuring of our 290 parishes. It is **not** a proposal to close parishes or churches or to merge parishes or churches. It is a proposal to **reorganize the way we serve parishes**. It's about serving the 290 parishes that we have.

The proposal has two parts to it. The first is that the Archdiocese re-organize itself toward a new mission (a new evangelization) more in keeping with the needs of the Church, at this time. The vision behind this step would be to build up a Church that is welcoming, nourishing, thriving and evangelizing. The proposal includes new major initiatives, such as: (1) welcoming Catholics; (2) growing the Church (3) developing excellence in faith formation for all generations; (4) re-energizing pastoral leadership. It is proposed that each of the major initiatives would have action steps, accountability structures and benchmarks. These major initiatives are proposals that were developed after three years of consultations around the Archdiocese.

The second part of the proposal would be to develop a **new structure of parish servicing**. That is, we are not proposing to close parishes but to serve them in a new way. The first new way is by having a mission-orientation rather than a maintenance-orientation. The Cardinal has indicated that we must move "from maintenance to mission." Today, parishes are organized largely to maintain what is. But, "what is" is not working well enough and cannot work effectively into the future. The reality is that less than 16% of Catholics go to Church. Therefore, the Cardinal wants parishes to be organized around a new mission of evangelization and outreach. That leads to how we serve our parishes.

The second proposal is around organizing our priests and parish staffs differently. Every parish would be obligated to develop a pastoral plan of action with one or two other parishes in the area. In fact, we are proposing that the majority of our parishes be served by one pastor and one staff. We have used multiple criteria for linking these parishes. While the parishes would retain their unique and distinct identity and integrity, funds, assets and liabilities -- they would be served differently. That is, they would share a parish staff that would be re-trained for mission, collaboration, and partnership.

Why are we doing this? Because the data indicates that, in ten years, we will go from 346 priests available for parish ministry to 178-185 (for 290 parishes). Our data also indicates that our pastoral associates, the lay men and women who serve parishes as the next tier of parish leaders, and other key lay ecclesial ministers (i.e. religious education professionals) could shrink by 65-80%, if we don't do more and better things to attract a new generation. We need to re-energize our pastoral leadership at every level.

The proposal entails a new and intensive re-training program.

This is a proposal. The Commission is seeking the wisdom and insight of parish staff members and parish/finance council members and parishioners over the next several months to see if there is support for this approach. And, if this approach is not acceptable, what approach would people recommend, given the realities and challenges we face.

We thank all our parish leaders, staff and parishioners, as you work with us to discern our next steps as an Archdiocese.