

With the publication of the Strategic planning data summary last week a number of people have approached myself or Deacon Duane with questions. Many of these questions do not have answers currently because they are contingent on what decisions the Strategic planning committee recommends to the Archbishop and what the Archbishop decides to do with those recommendations. We were asked to participate in the planning process, Deacon Duane was asked to oversee data collection and writing up a report because of his previous professional experience. He sent the data to the planning committee for further review. We have arranged for a meeting with all of you and the Archdiocesan planning team on Friday, April 16, from 6:00 - 7:30 pm. Unfortunately, it still has to be on Zoom because of the numbers present but it will give all of you the chance to speak to the Archdiocese directly before anything goes to the Strategic planning committee for review. Then the committee will make a recommendation to the Archbishop and at some point, he will make a decision.

It can be helpful to be reminded that we are not the only parishes undergoing this participation at this time. This is part of a much wider effort across the Archdiocese to refocus on the mission of Jesus Christ to "Go make disciples of all nations." It has been a consistent cultural trend across the nation that participation in Church has been declining. We have seen this trend play out in our own parish communities over the last number of years, (data can be seen in the Strategic planning report online). Often churches find themselves spending the bulk of their efforts to maintain existing institutions rather than spreading the Gospel as Jesus asks us to. The Archbishop has started this strategic planning process to try and get all the people of God moving in the right direction again and finding our churches full of vibrant believers.

I know it can be hard to live with the unknown, but this can also be a glorious time of rebirth in our own faith and community. People have been asking "What can we do?" The answer is first pray and look into your own hearts. Ask yourself the question have I been guilty of focusing more on the existing structure than I have on spreading the Good News of Jesus Christ? If the answer is yes than regardless of what the Archbishop asks of us, we have our marching orders from the Lord. Nowhere in the scriptures does He ask us to build churches, schools, or outreach centers. These things are only good in as much as they foster the spread of the Gospel. The people in the Early Church did not even have churches to worship in because Christianity was illegal, yet they continued to spread the Good News undeterred.

The fact that our numbers have been dropping so steadily over the last numbers of years is symptomatic of a spiritual illness growing in our midst. If we want this to change it must start with each one of us. Often when faced with adversity our human tendency is to find someone to blame but we need to resist that temptation. Through self-introspection we can find our own moment of Encounter and have a reason to share this with someone else. If our churches are places of Encounter there will be no reason to change anything because we will be vibrant, growing, and alive with the Lord. Sadly, sometimes the opposite may be true where we participate in the wider cultural phenomenon of tribalism where I feel very comfortable with my small circle of friends and how we all prefer to practice our faith. This is spiritually barren, because I become the gate keeper of who gets included and who does not. This is not authentic parish life and is the reason churches across America are dying.

Again, I don't have answers for what the Archbishop will choose to do with the planning report recently submitted. I do know that now is an important moment for both of our churches to become the true centers of Evangelization that we are called to be. If we can work together in reaching out to all those around us and not focus on what we might lose or what might be taken away we will be far better off as people of God and individuals, our churches will also healthier as well. Make sure to mark your calendars for April 16, 6:00 -7:30 pm and bring your questions.