



20 Most Frequently Asked Questions from Parish Consultation Sessions

- 1. What new realities are affecting parishes in the Diocese of Pittsburgh?** From 2000 to 2015 Mass attendance in the Diocese of Pittsburgh decreased 40 percent while participation in the sacraments declined 40 to 50 percent. Half of all parishes now experience operational deficits, and by 2025, the number of diocesan priests available for active ministry is expected to decrease from the current 216 priests to 112.
- 2. How is *On Mission* addressing these challenges?** Many people have lost their connection to Jesus and the Church. That is why this initiative is first and foremost about sharing our faith in Jesus with everyone we meet. We must help our parishes, schools and every faith community have the resources necessary to ensure vibrant worship and service.
- 3. What is a draft model?** A draft model is a description of how a group of parishes could potentially look in the future with respect to:
 - a. Ministerial strategies - including evangelization, stewardship, and worship
 - b. Parish structures - including church buildings, Mass times, and care provided at hospitals, nursing homes, prisons and other institutions
 - c. Leadership structures - including clergy and lay staffThe draft models propose changes that include parish mergers and the use of fewer facilities, as well as improved liturgies, catechesis and evangelization. In addition, more opportunities will be available to engage youth and young adults. Moreover, greater attention will be given to the needs of the homebound and senior citizens.
- 4. How will bringing parishes together help to grow the Church of Pittsburgh?** The purpose of a parish is to nourish its people for the mission—to make the world a holier place and create more disciples of Jesus. In order to support parishioners in fulfilling their baptismal call to share the faith and use their gifts to serve others, directing more resources to staffing and ministries in every parish will assist pastors in their desire to focus more on pastoral care and evangelization of every age group in the parish.
- 5. How were the models created?** The models were developed by the On Mission Commission and its steering committees, along with diocesan regional vicars, staff, and our consultant, the Catholic Leadership Institute, based on 21 criteria that account for future growth, pastoral care of the faithful and available resources and clergy.
- 6. How will the feedback collected at the parish consultation sessions be used to inform the final decisions?** The responses and comments are being gathered and analyzed, and will be shared in the Cluster and District Consultation Sessions in 2017. All feedback will be considered in the final recommendations made by the On Mission Commission.
- 7. What are the various roles of the clergy and laity in the proposed parish models?**
 - **Pastors** are priests entrusted with the pastoral care of a parish under the authority of the diocesan bishop.
 - **Parochial vicars** are priests who assist the pastor in this care.
 - **Parish Chaplains** are priests whose parish assignments will be dedicated to ministry to the sick and dying, especially in hospitals and personal care and nursing homes within the parish boundaries.
 - **Permanent deacons** are ordained ministers who perform works of charity and service, proclaim the word of God and assist in the liturgical and sacramental life of the church.
 - **Lay ecclesial ministers** are educated, trained and authorized to lead a particular area of pastoral ministry. They include school principals, directors and coordinators of religious education, youth ministers, directors of music ministry, parish business managers, parish social ministers and pastoral associates.
- 8. Who decides where priests and deacons are assigned?** The diocesan bishop, Bishop David Zubik, determines clergy assignments in consultation with the clergy personnel board.

9. **What are the plans for Catholic elementary schools?** The Department for Catholic School Administration is planning a regionalization of Catholic elementary schools across the diocese. This will help to further promote the passing on of the faith to our children and youth while maintaining academic excellence. These new regions will employ a joint governance model. Individual schools within a region may have a variety of structures, campuses and staffing.
10. **How will parish cemeteries be managed in the future?** The diocese has formed a separate nonprofit corporation for the management and operation of 116 parish cemeteries. This new structure will provide opportunities for greater care for the resting places of our beloved dead.
11. **Why was *Our Campaign for The Church Alive!* conducted before the *On Mission* initiative?** The campaign was initiated to set the stage for the *On Mission* initiative by addressing the extraordinary needs of our local Church. The focus of the campaign was Catholic education and catechesis; formation and evangelization; and stewardship and charitable needs. These resources are vital for the Church's mission and are having a positive impact diocesan-wide. The campaign also supports important parish projects, with donations are being used for long-deferred repair and maintenance projects.
12. **How will campaign donations be used in the future?** Any unused campaign funds of closed or merged parishes will be redirected to the successor parish for its future approved use. The diocese will not assume any campaign donations directed for parish use.
13. **What happens to the assets and any debt of a parish?** According to Canon Law, when parishes come together to form a new parish, the new parish assumes all assets and liabilities of the parishes which come together. This includes any savings, debt and buildings.
14. **How will we deal with the sense of loss and grief for parishioners whose parishes close or merge?** As part of the implementation process, resources are being gathered to respond to people's grief and promote healing with understanding, compassion and prayer.
15. **What is evangelization and social outreach?** Evangelization is not a program, but rather an approach that invites people to learn Jesus, love Jesus and live Jesus. Social outreach is the mercy of God at work through the Church, concretely seen through the corporal works of mercy. God invites us to be the spiritual and temporal instruments by which he provides for His people.
16. **How are you promoting vocations to the priesthood?** In addition to the many programs sponsored by our diocesan vocations office, a major focus of *On Mission* is to strengthen family life by encouraging all members to consider God's unique plan and purpose for their lives, whether it is a vocation to the single life, married life, religious life or the priesthood.
17. **Are other dioceses engaged in planning initiatives?** Many dioceses and archdioceses throughout the United States are facing the same realities and undertaking similar initiatives.
18. **What are next steps in the *On Mission* timeline?** Pastors, administrators and parish teams begin consultations at the cluster level in late January through mid-March. A second round of district consultations will be conducted in late April through mid-May. Beginning in June 2017 the *On Mission* Commission will analyze feedback and refine the models. Recommendations will be submitted to Bishop Zubik by the end of 2017. He will announce his decisions in early 2018, as well as timelines for implementation.
19. **What are parishioners to do in the meantime, before decisions are made?** First, we must pray for the success of the *On Mission for The Church Alive!* initiative. Second, we all need to grow in awareness of the Church as the Body of Christ by exploring relationships with neighboring parishes.
20. **How can I become more informed and give valuable feedback?** Visit www.OnMissionChurchAlive.org for prayer resources, parish models, inspiring stories, and to sign up for regular e-mail updates.