
Diocese of Buffalo

Office of Communications



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

May 22, 2020

Diocese of Buffalo Launches Initiative to Re-envision the Catholic Church of Western New York

(Buffalo, NY) - Bishop Edward B. Scharfenberger, Apostolic Administrator of the Diocese of Buffalo, has launched a broad-based initiative focused on re-envisioning the mission of the Catholic Church of Western New York and bringing about Diocesan-wide renewal. The purpose of the initiative is to strengthen the impact of the Church's many ministries, support the healing of victim survivors of abuse, and to promote a culture of co-responsibility among laity, clergy and religious members in carrying out the work of evangelization and service.

"We have no more urgent priority than to reassert the vital relevance, role and tremendous impact of our Catholic faith in serving so many needs across Western New York," said Bishop Scharfenberger. "The very harsh realities that have caused so much hurt and disappointment and damaged credibility in recent years must in no way obscure the vitality of our parish communities. It is in these vibrant parish families that we see such remarkable determination to live the Gospel of Jesus Christ in conspicuous ways that lift and empower others, while creating hope and opportunity among those most in need. This initiative to bring about renewal across our Diocese is all about creating greater reliance on one another, and creating even greater impact by combining our resources and harnessing the abundant expertise, talent and zeal of our people to bring about immense good."

The scope of the initiative will entail working closely with pastors and parish leaders to create a structured, decision-making process to ensure Diocesan resources are focused on the Church's essential mission which is carried out primarily at the parish level and supported by Diocesan ministries and programs, as well as the extensive ministries of Catholic Charities of Buffalo. The process will involve conducting a thorough assessment of all aspects of Catholic ministries and operations, looking closely at the current construct of parishes and schools; identifying resources that are able to be shared and leveraged more broadly; identifying underlying financial and operational strengths and weaknesses; and making decisions about the long-term viability of parishes and schools, as well as other programs carried out at the Diocesan level.

The emergence and continuing threat of the Covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated financial challenges confronting parishes as well as Diocesan operations. In light of a sharp decrease in parish revenues, as well as an anticipated decrease in donations to the annual "Fund for the Faith" appeal, the Diocese will be identifying options for potential mergers of parishes and schools, as well as identifying partnerships with other organizations and donors committed to Catholic education and the ministries determined to be vital. The Diocese has communicated that it will not be in a position to continue the subsidy provided to Catholic schools given the current environment.

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Re-envisioning Catholic Mission

This will necessitate an immediate process among school leaders, working with School Superintendent Michael C. LaFever, to assess the implications of this development and to work collaboratively in developing options that will enable the continuation of Catholic education across Western New York. Currently, there are 34 Catholic elementary schools throughout the Diocese.

“The responsibility for Catholic education must be seen as an equal one, which begins in the home and which is then supported in our parishes, and promoted by our dedicated teachers, priests, religious and other mentors throughout early childhood and into adulthood,” said Bishop Scharfenberger. “Although we recognize the obligation to live within our means, we are not relinquishing our greater obligation to promote a culture that truly reflects Christ’s Gospel of love, caring and relentless service to young and old alike.”

Bishop Scharfenberger has been conducting daily meetings with the Vicars Forane (the 12 regional representatives of the Bishop), the Presbyteral Council of the Diocese, as well as pastors and parish administrators.

The Renewal Initiative will be led by the Diocese’s newly-appointed Chief Operating Officer, Sister Mary McCarrick, OFM, Msgr. David LiPuma, Chair of the Presbyteral Council, and Mr. James J. Beardi, Chair of the Diocesan Finance Council. They will be working closely with pastors and parish leaders in order to obtain a full picture of the challenges facing the Diocese and define steps to ensure the long-term sustainability of Catholic ministries and institutions.

The Buffalo Diocese is home to approximately 571,000 Catholics, spanning almost 6,500 square miles and encompasses eight counties: Allegany, Cattaraugus, Chautauqua, Erie, Genesee, Niagara, Orleans, and Wyoming. Established on April 23, 1847 by Pope Pius IX the diocese initially covered an expansive 16 counties and had just a handful of priests to serve a rapidly growing population. Today, there are 161 parishes, 49 Catholic schools, over 360 priests, 546 women religious; 129 permanent deacons; and a wealth of lay leaders and committed volunteers who serve God’s people every day. Annually, the social, pastoral, and ministerial works of the Diocese provide spiritual support and outreach services to more than 500,000 people in need, of all faiths and backgrounds.

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