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February 2017

Dearly Beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Greetings of peace in the New Year!

After two years of work and visitations to every parish in our diocese, the Diocesan Pastoral Planning Task Force has completed and presented to me the enclosed report containing recommendations for ongoing pastoral planning in our diocese. I am very happy to accept these recommendations and offer my support as we move forward toward implementation.

You will notice that the report is divided into 4 sections: 1) An Introduction, outlining the history of the work of the Task Force and the process used in creating this document; 2) Part One: Immediate Need Adjustments; 3) Part Two: Infrastructure Changes; and 4) Part Three: New Pastoral Planning Infrastructure.

The recommendations contained in the report range from areas such as the celebration of Masses, to the ongoing formation of parish lay leadership, our commitment to ongoing pastoral planning in our diocese, and many other areas. Some of these recommendations have already been implemented or are in process; such as a resource for priests to help them obtain assistance with weekend Masses in case of emergency and the establishment of a Parish Pastoral Resource Team. This team consists of 25 to 30 volunteers from throughout the Diocese of Baton Rouge and is designed to assist pastors and parishioners develop a specific pastoral plan for their individual parishes for present and future ministry needs.

Members of the Task Force are currently visiting each of the six deaneries in our diocese to present this report to you and seek your thoughts. Thank you for your participation in this part of our pastoral planning process.

This report would not have been possible without the diligent work and assistance of the members of the Pastoral Planning Task Force, SSA Consultants of Baton Rouge, and the many volunteer members of our Parish Visitation Teams. I thank them for their time and effort, and I thank all of you, the faithful of our diocese, for your openness to this process and your continued commitment to pastoral planning.

Yours always in Jesus, the Good Shepherd,  
Robert W. Muench  
Bishop of Baton Rouge

# **Diocese of Baton Rouge Pastoral Planning Task Force**



## **Report and Recommendations to Bishop Robert W. Muench**

**February 2017**

## INTRODUCTION

*“Amen, I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything for which they are to pray, it shall be granted to them by my heavenly Father. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them”* (Matthew 18:19).

In April of 2014, Bishop Robert Muench announced the establishment of a *Pastoral Planning Task Force* consisting of clergy<sup>1</sup>, consecrated persons and laity to consider present and future needs of the Diocese of Baton Rouge. In his homily during the Chrism Mass, Bishop Muench stated, “The Task Force will consider the development of a diocesan long-range plan that integrates creative proposals for clergy personnel to provide parish ministry in new ways along with the design and possible redesign of some parish configurations” (Chrism Mass Homily, April 16, 2014).

Along with considering ways to offer sacramental ministry in light of an increasing number of Catholics and declining number of priests, the Bishop also stated that the work of the Task Force would include an emphasis on lay ministry formation and a revitalized focus on vocation discernment. Invaluable to this entire process has been the assistance offered by SSA Consultants of Baton Rouge. Their time, energy and resources offered have been an amazing act of stewardship to our church. We thank them for their guidance.

## MISSION STATEMENT

The Diocesan Pastoral Planning Task Force is an advisory body to the Bishop of Baton Rouge. It reviews long-term and short-term needs including demographic shifts in different areas of the diocese and the number of clergy available for ministerial service in order to recommend to the Bishop possible reconfigurations of parishes and models for parish leadership with the goal of meeting the pastoral needs of the faithful in this local Church in the most efficient and effective ways possible (November 2013).

## A PROCESS OF DIALOGUE

The Task Force developed and implemented a basic process of dialogue to gather the information and insights necessary to fashion the recommendations included in this report. Beginning in the fall of 2014 and concluding in August of 2015, the Task Force, assisted by volunteer facilitators from throughout the diocese, initiated a three-part dialogue with priests and laity.

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<sup>1</sup> Clergy is inclusive of priests and deacons.

First, a confidential survey was administered to all priests. Second, visits to all 67 parishes of our diocese were scheduled and conducted; these included open group conversations and the completion of individual surveys. More than 1,200 Catholics participated in this visitation process. Third, smaller focus group conversations with priests and other stakeholders were organized and completed.

## **Dialogue Process Components**

### **Survey of Priests**

The goal of this survey was to gather relevant information from the active and retired priests of the diocese as a means of better understanding the pastoral planning challenges and opportunities facing the diocese over the next five to ten years. The survey included 11 rated (close-ended) statements, three general open-ended questions and four demographic questions. The online survey instrument was distributed by email to a total of 102 active and retired priests. A total of 82 surveys were completed, yielding an excellent return rate of approximately 80 percent. In their responses to the survey, priests were very clear that the first priority of the Task Force should be to enter into a dialogue with laity across the diocese.

### **Parish Visitations**

In late spring 2015, the Task Force enlisted the help of 20 Catholics from across the diocese to facilitate the parish visitations. During these visits participants from the parish were invited to discuss nine open-ended questions covering issues such as the greatest strength of their parish, their anxieties regarding the future, how to better promote a “culture” of vocations and how to offer sacramental ministry with fewer priests. Each participant was also given the opportunity to complete an individual written survey consisting of 21 questions. More than 1,200 parishioners from our 67 parishes took part in this component of the process. SSA Consultants compiled the visit results and created a detailed report showing the results of the verbal input gathered through the visit dialogue and the data gained through administration of the individual surveys. The Task Force enlisted the help of eight volunteers to assist with reviewing and categorizing the verbal input gathered.

### **Focus Group Conversation with Parish Directors of Administration**

Task Force members visited at length with various lay directors of administration from throughout the diocese. This conversation yielded much helpful input. Two of the primary concerns that emerged were:

1. The development of a process for training potential lay and deacon directors of administration and parish life coordinators, and
2. The need to impress upon pastors, directors of administration, parish life coordinators and parish staffs the importance of a collaborative working relationship between one another.

## Focus Group Conversations with Priests

During the summer of 2015, priests of the diocese were also invited to attend smaller focus group sessions centered around an informal meal. These sessions were hosted by Father Trey Nelson, Chair of the Pastoral Planning Task Force. In advance of these gatherings, priests were asked to submit “three specific actions that you would suggest for consideration at the diocesan level to help meet immediate and long-term needs in our diocese.” From these conversations six categories of suggestions emerged:

1. Clustering (of parishes);
2. Masses and weekend mass assistance;
3. Finances (parish and diocesan);
4. Administration of parishes;
5. Apostolates and campus ministry; and
6. Priestly morale.

These focus groups were opportunities for priests to further elaborate on their ideas and occasions for priestly fraternity.

## DEVELOPMENT OF RECOMMENDATIONS

During the fall of 2015, the Task Force began to review all input and data received through the dialogue process – with the goal of presenting to the bishop an initial set of recommendations in the first quarter of 2016. Through an initial review and assessment of all the dialogue results the Task Force established a three-part framework for development of specific recommendations, including:

1. Immediate tactical adjustments
2. Infrastructure changes in the Diocese of Baton Rouge; and
3. Ongoing pastoral planning in the Diocese of Baton Rouge.

Task Force members then formed three work groups to develop the specific recommendations included in this report.

## CONTINUED DISCERNMENT OF GOD’S WILL

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We recall the words of our Holy Father Pope Francis who writes, “By the gift of the Holy Spirit, the members of the Church possess a *sense of faith*. This is a kind of *spiritual instinct* that makes us *‘sentire cum Ecclesia’* (to think with the mind of the Church) and to discern that which is in conformity with the apostolic faith and is in the spirit of the Gospel” (Pope Francis, *Joy of the Gospel*, 2013).

Together with the entire Diocese of Baton Rouge we pray that our efforts will continue to be led by the Holy Spirit. May the Lord bless all of us with the gifts of hope and courage and, as Bishop Muench urged us at the beginning of this process, may we continue to offer our

“prayerful understanding, support, assistance and cooperation in this initiative. Commitment to and reliance upon the grace of the Holy Spirit to lead and guide us are essential. Truly we are and will be called to pray that ‘the master of the harvest send laborers to the vineyard’ (Mt. 9:38). Through it all we can trust the promise of Jesus to be with us ‘until the end of time’ (Mt. 28:20) and the enduring gift of the Holy Spirit to guide us” (John 14:26).

## TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATIONS | PART I

### IMMEDIATE NEED ADJUSTMENTS

*“The People of God believes that it is led by the Lord's Spirit, Who fills the earth. Motivated by this faith, it labors to decipher authentic signs of God's presence and purpose in the happenings, needs and desires in which this People has a part along with other men of our age. For faith throws a new light on everything, manifests God's design for man's total vocation, and thus directs the mind to solutions which are fully human” (Gaudium et Spes, Part 1: Paragraph 11).*

*“The community of believers was of one heart and mind, and no one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they had everything in common. With great power the apostles bore witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great favor was accorded them all. There was no needy person among them...” (Acts 4:32).*

While it is prudent that pastoral planning would continue to discern current and future trends, it is imperative that our efforts consider *immediate needs* and develop adjustments in response to those needs as soon as possible. These adjustment strategies and tactics should have the spiritual welfare of all of God’s people as their objective: clergy, consecrated persons and laity alike. Adjustments should not be made simply as a means of momentary relief but intended to assist our diocese throughout the next several years. Most importantly, the first adjustment to which we are all called is one of mind and heart. As members of the Body of Christ, each and every one of us is called to embrace an attitude and mindset of collaboration that is rooted in God’s Word and the wisdom of our Church.

We are one family of faith called to assist one another truly as brothers and sisters rather than individual communities and persons. Adjustments of any type should encourage an even greater sense of community and make the declarative statement that we have prayerfully discerned the call of the Holy Spirit by listening to the people of God and are determined to resolutely move forward based on what we have heard.

The Pastoral Planning Task Force recommends the following five *Immediate Tactical Adjustments* be implemented as soon as possible:

- 1. Adopt a more collaborative approach regarding the celebration of Masses throughout the diocese.**

The Task Force recognizes that the communal celebration of Eucharist is primary to the life of the church. There are several factors that affect the quality of the Eucharistic experience. One of these is the number of Masses that a priest might be asked to celebrate on a weekly basis. While it is imperative that parishes offer Masses in an appropriate, timely and quality manner, we must also consider the reality that an unbalanced and/or unrealistic schedule of Masses will affect the quality of the

experience and the health of the celebrant. The Task Force makes the following specific recommendations regarding the celebration of Masses throughout the diocese:

- a. ***A corporate, diocese-wide reduction of masses.*** It is our recommendation that every parish conduct an annual review of its Mass schedule to determine whether or not the schedule of Masses (in a parish or cluster of parishes) is excessive and/or unrealistic. Factors to consider are: the health and availability of priests, parish finances, the ability to secure an adequate number of lay liturgical ministers, and, of course, the overall quality of the liturgical experience.

Furthermore, parishes that find a church to be less than half full for one or more Sunday Masses are strongly encouraged to reduce their total number of Masses by at least one. Such a formula and diocese-wide approach would assist priests in making decisions that are necessary, though perhaps difficult.

- b. ***A standard for Saturday vigil Masses.*** It is the recommendation of the Task Force that *only one* Sunday anticipated or Saturday vigil Mass be celebrated in a parish or cluster of parishes.
- c. ***A standard for simultaneously scheduled Masses.*** It is the recommendation of the Task Force that no more than one Sunday Mass be celebrated in a parish or cluster of parishes at the same time, except in extraordinary circumstances.
- d. ***A reminder of the current policy.*** Pastors and all priests are reminded that in the Diocese of Baton Rouge the following policies remain in effect: *Masses of obligation* (i.e. – on Sundays or holy days of obligation, and anticipated Masses on the days preceding these) may be celebrated outside of a church building only with the explicit permission of the local ordinary. *An anticipated Mass* on Saturday or the day preceding a holy day of obligation is not to begin prior to 4:00 p.m. *Nuptial or funeral Masses* on Saturday or on a day preceding a holy day of obligation are not to begin later than 3:00 p.m. in the Diocese of Baton Rouge (Consult the *Pagella and Policies* of the Diocese of Baton Rouge for full text).
- e. ***The celebration of Masses for specialized groups and events.*** The Task Force recommends that Masses traditionally celebrated for specialized groups and events be incorporated into the regular Mass schedule of a parish. One such example would be the request for a priest to travel to a Confirmation retreat site for the celebration of Mass.

We do recognize, however, that there may be special pastoral needs that require the scheduling of particular Masses, such as the need to celebrate Mass in Spanish.

- f. ***The development of collaborative Mass schedules.*** Given the number of opportunities available for Mass, especially in rural areas of the diocese, it would be extremely beneficial for pastors to design and embrace a schedule of Masses that minimize duplicate Mass times across contiguous parishes. Such an approach would serve at least three beneficial purposes: it would contribute to the overall health and happiness of priests, offer lay faithful a greater variety of Mass times from which to choose and enable priests to substitute for one another when they are unable to secure supply help for Masses.

This recommendation applies to weekend Masses (the Saturday anticipated or “vigil” Mass and Sunday Masses) and daily Masses. Again, we recommend that a formula be developed to determine a realistic number of participants for a daily Mass to remain on a parish’s schedule. *An Ecclesial Mind and Heart* – this recommendation represents a more ecclesial (and less parochial) approach to the offering of Mass across the diocese. It requires looking, thinking and acting beyond the boundaries of one’s own parish in the service of all parishioners in all parishes.

- g. ***Diocesan consultation prior to adjusting a Mass schedule.*** The Task Force recommends that a pastor consult with the Task Force or the bishop’s delegate prior to implementing any change to a Mass schedule. Communication between individual parishes and the appropriate office(s) of the diocese is essential if we are to work and grow together in a spirit of collaboration as a diocese.

To ensure, as best as possible, the above mentioned consultation, the Task Force recommends that an annual review of the effectiveness of Mass schedules throughout each deanery be initiated by the local dean in conjunction with the Task Force or other appropriate persons delegated by the bishop.

- h. ***An accurate compilation of current Mass schedules.*** The Task Force recommends that each dean annually compile an up-to-date schedule of Masses for all parishes in his deanery and submit this compiled schedule to the Task Force or other appropriate persons delegated by the bishop.

## 2. **Establish a resource that assists priests in securing weekend supply help.**

The Task Force recommends that a resource be designed and established for the purpose of helping priests secure help with weekend Masses in the event of illness or an emergency. This resource could be designed using one of many potential models including the following three models.

- Volunteer model – a lay person or deacon
- Paid position model financed by the Diocese of Baton Rouge

- Parochial model – responsibility assumed by a staff member of a parish that might be in the position to offer this as a service to the diocese

Some other standards should apply here as well:

- a. Priests who are able would be asked to have their name included on a resource list as someone who could possibly help another parish when help is needed. Parishes who, for example, do not have an evening Mass on Sunday could be in the position to assist another parish in a time of emergency need.
- b. In parishes where more than one priest is assigned, the priests of the parish would rely primarily on one another for assistance when such assistance is needed. Priests in these parishes would turn first to the other resident priests to cover Masses in their particular parish.
- c. This recommended new resource to assist priests would not be utilized to secure help with Masses due to vacation – but only in cases of need due to illness or emergency.

### **3. Broaden the sense of financial collaboration throughout the diocese.**

The Task Force recommends the diocesan definition of *Extraordinary Income* be broadened to include “any income received by a parish as a tithe from another parish” and that the *Extraordinary Receipts* category within the *Parish Share Guidelines* (July 2013, Diocese of Baton Rouge) include the additional category entitled *Tithe from Other Parish*.

### **4. Eliminate celebrations of Mass at chapels of ease.**

Pastors, in consultation with the Task Force or others delegated by the bishop, should annually review the necessity of celebrating Masses at chapels of ease within their parish boundaries. Standards to utilize in these reviews should include:

- a. The distance that a priest is asked to travel to and from a chapel;
- b. Whether or not traveling to a chapel at a particular time makes it difficult for a priest to exercise his ministry at his parish church;
- c. The number of persons in attendance at Mass at the particular chapel; and
- d. Whether or not the celebration of Mass at a chapel fosters a sense of community that is separate from the church parish.

**5. Design and inaugurate an annual priests' appreciation effort.**

The Task Force recommends the establishment of an annual priests' appreciation day – a large scale event in which clergy, religious and laity would be invited to participate. This effort would be designed to build morale among priests and foster a greater sense of union between the Presbyterate and the people of the diocese.

## **CONCLUSION**

We conclude this part by again recalling the words of our Holy Father Pope Francis, who, in *Joy of the Gospel*, reminds us, “the word *solidarity* is a little worn and at times poorly understood, but it refers to something more than a few sporadic acts of generosity. It presumes the creation of a new mindset which thinks in terms of community and the priority of the life of all over the appropriation of goods by a few” (Pope Francis, *Joy of the Gospel*, 2013, Paragraph 188).

It is our hope and prayer that our efforts as a Task Force and as a diocese will increase our understanding of our call to true solidarity with one another and with Christ in His Church. We are more than a set of parochial entities. We are an ecclesial community which demands that we envision our life together, not in isolation, but for the common good.

## TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATIONS | PART II

### INFRASTRUCTURE CHANGES

*“Bishops, to whom is assigned the task of ruling the Church of God, should, together with their priests, so preach the news of Christ that all the earthly activities of the faithful will be bathed in the light of the Gospel. All pastors should remember too that by their daily conduct and concern they are revealing the face of the Church to the world, and men will judge the power and truth of the Christian message thereby. By their lives and speech, in union with Religious and their faithful, may they demonstrate that even now the Church by her presence alone and by all the gifts which she contains, is an unspent fountain of those virtues which the modern world needs the most” (Gaudium et Spes, Part IV: Paragraph 43).*

#### **Relationships**

The Bishop is the chief shepherd of the diocese and oversees the diocesan parishes in collaboration with the local pastors. The Bishop’s knowledge of the local parish is enhanced with a system of regular parish visits, using a specific agenda to understand, evaluate and make suggestions for the local church. Pastors are responsible to the Bishop and to their parishioners for their personal ministerial and spiritual development.

Pastors should be able to seek the Bishop’s support when dealing with potentially controversial or particularly difficult pastoral decisions. Pastors are best selected for parish assignment based on their experience, maturity and intellectual and spiritual acumen. Pastors must be assured the diocese recognizes that daily life in the parish might have challenges that even the most experienced pastor might not be able to handle. To facilitate the relationship between the Bishop, the diocesan departments and the pastors, mentoring, training, guidance and discernment should be given as often as needed.

The Pastoral Planning Task Force recommends the following structural refinements<sup>2</sup>.

1. Institute a regular parish visitation process by the Bishop that includes a protocol of objectives, outcomes and accountability. The Office of Pastoral Planning would collaborate with the chancery on the design and implementation of this process.
2. Develop a mechanism designed to gather from parish councils, parish finance councils and parish school boards descriptions of a parish’s priority needs and the clergy attributes that would best meet those needs. These “parish-need summaries” would be requested (as needed) by and delivered to the Personnel Board and the Pastoral Planning Task Force.

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<sup>2</sup> Adoption and implementation of the recommendations included in this part may require revisions to some Diocesan policies and the Diocesan Pagella.

3. The Bishop and Personnel Board should develop and provide a set of specific expectations to every priest assuming a new pastoral assignment. These expectations would address personal objectives, ministry experiences and skills to be developed and hoped for outcomes regarding parish ministry and parish structures.

### **Business Administration of Parishes**

The Task Force recommends the following structural refinements.

1. All parishes (or parish clusters) should design and fill a business administrator position with a person whose knowledge and ability is commensurate with the complexity of the parish served. This position would be full-time or part-time as appropriate to meet the essential needs of the parish. If deacons are to be considered for this position, a specific part of diaconal formation should include business administration.
2. A program to form parish business administrators containing minimum requirements, standards and procedures should be created. This program would be developed collaboratively by the Office of Catechesis and Evangelization, the Diocesan Finance Office and the Pastoral Planning Task Force.
3. An assessment of data gathering tools and processes should be conducted to address the recognized need for more accurate spiritual and pastoral statistics and financial reports on the parish and diocesan level.
4. An ad hoc exploratory committee should be commissioned to develop guidelines that would support the design of parish school subsidy formulas.

### **Fraternity and Mentoring Programs**

The Task Force recommends the following structural refinements.

1. The mentoring program for newly-ordained priests should be re-instituted for the first three to five years after ordination. The program would complement the priest support groups and informal deanery advice and assistance. This program may be created by using one of the national priest mentoring processes available.
2. Mentoring programs for new parochial vicars, first-time pastors and first-time pastors with a school should be developed. These newly-created mentoring programs for priests should be complementary to the mentoring program for newly-ordained priests and consistent (in design) with available and recognized mentoring programs of this type.

3. An ongoing leadership formation and orientation program should be developed and required for third and fourth year theology students regarding what the diocese will expect from a newly-ordained priest and what a newly-ordained priest can expect upon entering diocesan life. This orientation program could be created in collaboration with the Diocesan Vocations Office and Priest Continuing Formation Committee.
4. Priest support groups should be continued and encouraged. Membership in one should be strongly recommended and participation strongly encouraged at regular intervals by the Bishop and Priest's Continuing Formation Committee.
5. A diocesan clergy personnel evaluation process should be created and used for pastors to evaluate parochial vicars and parish deacons. This process should be designed and implemented in collaboration with the Priest Personnel Board, the Priest Continuing Formation Committee and the Office of the Diaconate.
6. All seminarians should receive language and cultural training focused on providing ministry to the growing Hispanic population in our diocese. This effort would be coordinated by the Diocesan Office of Vocations.
7. A new protocol for the reception, orientation, development and evaluation of foreign born priests who serve in the Diocese of Baton Rouge should be established in collaboration with the Diocesan Personnel Board and the Priest Continuing Formation Committee.

### **Public Affairs and Relations with Public Media**

The Task Force recommends the following structural refinements.

1. The Communications Secretariat should coordinate all conventional diocesan media, social media and digital resources, and recommend ways to add value to the diocese's current multi-media communications activities to facilitate positive and accurate outreach to the public.
2. The Communications Secretariat should develop clear directives and protocols for all diocesan personnel relative to media engagement and interaction. These directives would include all forms of new/social media.
3. The Communications Secretariat should develop and implement a crises media training initiative that includes all parish and diocesan leaders.

### **Catholic Life Center Mission Statement of Service to Parishes and Institutions**

The Pastoral Planning Task Force recommends the following structural refinement.

1. The Office of Human Resources should direct an annual process of revisiting, clarifying and articulating the core values that flow from the mission statement and diocesan office employees should be evaluated annually on how their actions and behaviors align with these core values.

### **Parish Councils and Finance Councils**

Finance Councils are required by Canon Law and Parochial Parish Councils are required by diocesan particular law. However, in some parishes one or both do not exist or they function without any reference to diocesan expectations, norms or desired results. The Task Force recommends the following structural refinements.

1. An ad hoc committee should be established to guide a diocesan process that enables every parish to have an effective, accountable Parish Council and Finance Council. This committee should develop specific recommendations on the structure, activities and desired outcomes of these councils. The Office of Pastoral Planning and the Finance Office of the diocese should collaborate on this process.
2. Each parish should be transparent regarding parochial finances by publishing an annual financial summary to parishioners.

### **Child Protection Training and Awareness Program**

The Task Force recommends the following structural refinement.

1. The Office of Child Protection should continue its rigorous training of personnel and volunteers to provide for the security and protection of children in our care, and this training should be refreshed on a regular basis.

## **CONCLUSION**

Over 50 years ago, the Diocese of Baton Rouge was established to serve this part of Louisiana and the Church in the world. Carrying, as our heritage, the inspiration of the Second Vatican Council, we draw upon the Holy Spirit, who refines our hearts and minds with wisdom and charity so that the structures we create to serve will be effective and fruitful for the Mission of Christ.

## TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATIONS | PART III

### NEW PASTORAL PLANNING INFRASTRUCTURE

*“The Church has always had the duty of scrutinizing the signs of the times and of interpreting them in the light of the Gospel. Thus, in language intelligible to each generation, she can respond to the perennial questions which men ask about this present life and the life to come, and about the relationship of the one to the other. We must therefore recognize and understand the world in which we live, its explanations, its longings, and its often dramatic characteristics” (Gaudium et Spes, Paragraph 4).*

Effective pastoral planning is an ongoing process involving a cross section of diocesan and parish leadership including clergy, consecrated persons and laity. To plan wisely, the Church must recognize an ever changing ministerial environment while being honest about evident challenges which arise. She must diligently seek out effective opportunities to proclaim the Gospel in these times. As one Church, we embrace this visionary commitment as a community of disciples.

Through constant prayer and listening, study and dialogue, we are called to discern steps that are necessary at this time to move this vision forward with a sense of dedication, while allocating resources with an attitude of good stewardship.

#### **The Pastoral Planning Task Force recommends the establishment of a permanent Office of Pastoral Planning to facilitate ongoing pastoral planning efforts in the Diocese of Baton Rouge.**

The roles and responsibilities of this new Office of Pastoral Planning would ideally include:

1. The gathering of data and development of objectives and strategies for effective long-range planning, including recommendations for parochial structural modifications as necessary. The Office would be responsible for aggregating and analyzing information supplied by parishes regarding growth and decline for the purpose of offering any needed alternatives to meet the pastoral mission of the corporate local Church. The Office would create individual parish profiles with statistical data pertinent to pastoral planning including financial histories, spiritual and pastoral statistics, and notable ministry and demographic changes.

This Office’s scope of responsibility would include the evaluation of current parish needs, the potential restructuring or closing of parishes, the establishment of new parish boundaries, the adjustment of current parish boundaries, the projection of future property needs and the acquisition of property. The Office would provide to the Bishop recommendations regarding ministerial leadership throughout the diocese based upon

criteria including, but not limited to, income changes, cultural nuances, demographic growth and decline, and the history of parochial operations in any geography.

2. The Office of Pastoral Planning would create a process to involve parishes affected by significant growth or decline in crafting recommendations for new configurations of ministry based upon their own lived experience and particular needs. The Office would effectively prepare parishes for structural changes (such as opening, clustering, merging, closing) before such changes are executed. The Office would also provide continued support in the wake of such changes.

This would best be accomplished using proven methods and professionals appointed as a committee of the office to be called *The Parish Transitioning Committee*. Experts appointed to this committee would include individuals skilled in administration, spirituality, civil and canon law, staff dynamics, human resources and in various other disciplines. Aside from preparing parishes for structural concepts such as clustering, the Committee would also assist parishes, pastors and their staffs in other transitions and changes that affect the life of a parish.

3. This Office would take a proactive approach to planning and examining how ministry is currently operating in every parish and every deanery, testing the assumption that the status quo is effective.

*A Focused Effort in Support of Rural Parishes* – Many parishes [over 50%] are located in what can be considered rural areas of the diocese. The Office of Pastoral Planning, in collaboration with other diocesan departments and the deaneries should develop a protocol to explore the implications of this reality and to make recommendations with respect to the vitality of these parishes.

These recommendations could include, for example, how the diocese can best offer faith-formation of the laity, how innovative models of parish structure could lead to shared ministries within the deaneries, and how the future financial needs of the rural parishes can be assessed and addressed.

4. The Office would explore the effectiveness of all territorial, parochial and deanery boundaries with special consideration for demographic shifts – to facilitate improved ministry and the equitable distribution of priest personnel resources.
5. The Office would support diocesan priests in the creation (and ongoing update) of personal portfolios that include: educational summaries, inventories of the priest's gifts and talents, ministerial acumen, priority interests and developmental goals, and ministry service history (curriculum vitae). These personal portfolios would be made available to the Clergy Personnel Board and the Bishop and used to facilitate ministerial placements.

6. The Office would identify other determinants for ministry placement in collaboration with the Clergy Personnel Board, to assist in effectively utilizing all available personnel with its goal of being a more equitable use of human resources and the paring of individuals and their gifts with the needs of a particular parochial situation.
7. The Office would design and facilitate a process for all diocesan priests to complete annual self-evaluations and share these self-evaluations with the Office of Pastoral Planning which will share these with the Bishop and Diocesan Personnel Board.

## CONCLUSION

The work of this Task Force has encompassed two years of deliberate and collaborative work. While producing the recommendations encompassed in this report is one tangible result, the Task Force sees the possibility of such work continuing with the recommendation to establish an Office of Pastoral Planning for the Diocese. During the time this recommendation will be considered, it is the Task Force's strong hope that the work embodied in the mission of such an Office of Pastoral Planning continue with the initiative and guidance of the Task Force until the office is established.

The work of creating effective structures for mission within the Catholic Church is never finished. Relying on the Holy Spirit to *fill up what may be lacking*, the Task Force offers this work with a determined love for our Diocese and an invitation for all to embrace a future filled with hope.