

# Beacons of Light, Frequently Asked Questions

## BeaconsAOC.org

### **What is Beacons of Light?**

Beacons of Light is a process of comprehensive pastoral planning for our third century of faith in the Archdiocese of Cincinnati. The overall plan for Families of Parishes across the archdiocese will be completed by the end of 2021. The planning and implementation within each Family of Parishes, under the leadership of each pastor, will unfold over the next several years.

### **What is a Family of Parishes?**

A Family of Parishes is a grouping of parishes led by a common pastor and characterized by collaboration and shared resources. A parochial vicar (or multiple parochial vicars) or retired priest may also serve a Family of Parishes.

### **Why is Beacons of Light happening now?**

We have a responsibility to make the best use of all the means which God has provided us to pursue the sacred mission of the Church. To do this, parishes need to be vibrant, evangelizing communities that continuously draw parishioners and attract new members into a more intimate relationship with Jesus. Unfortunately, this is too often not the case because:

- Religious practice has been declining in both the United States and in the Archdiocese of Cincinnati. From 2010 to 2019, sacramental practice (including baptisms, first communions, confirmations and weddings) in the archdiocese declined by 23%.
- Our current infrastructure and schedules were built for a different era. In many cases, our church buildings are grossly underutilized. In the Archdiocese of Cincinnati, the average Sunday Mass is about one-third full.
- Our resources are largely consumed by efforts to maintain the status quo and are spread too thin to be truly effective. In particular, our priests are stretched to the limit, and we will have fewer priests who can serve as pastors over the coming years. The number of archdiocesan priests available for assignment is projected to decline by approximately 20% over the next five years.

After careful consideration of these factors, along with input from the priests of the archdiocese, it has been determined that this is the time to act, recognizing that the status quo is no longer an option.

### **What is the timeline for Beacons of Light?**

**Fall 2020:** Beacons of Light project launch announced. Data gathering from parishes and schools begins.

**Winter 2020/21:** Six principles of Beacons of Light are established. Design of parish planning process (including vision points and parameters) begins.

**Spring 2021:** Parish and school data is analyzed. Current reality is assessed.

**Summer 2021:** Families of Parishes modeling begins. Draft of parish planning process is completed.

**Fall 2021:** Draft models of Families of Parishes are published for comment. Parish planning process (including vision points and parameters) is finalized.

**Winter 2021/22:** Families of Parishes are finalized and announced.

**Spring 2022:** Pastors and parish leaders begin preparing for the parish planning process.

**Summer 2022:** Families of Parishes implementation begins. Each Family starts its parish planning process.

### **How is the archdiocese forming Families of Parishes?**

The first phase of Beacons of Light involved gathering and analyzing parish demographic, sacramental, financial, and school data and trends. In addition, priest availability was analyzed and projected. Combining this information with the pastoral considerations that affect life in our various communities, a draft Families of Parishes will be created for examination and input by priests, Catholic school principals, and the laity. All feedback will be taken into account in the final formation of Families of Parishes.

### **How is Beacons of Light different from previous planning processes?**

The previous planning processes resulted in “clusters” or “regions” of free-standing parishes under a common pastor. Beacons of Light intends to go further by supporting each newly formed Family of Parishes in becoming a fully integrated community of faith with the expectation of becoming, over time, one canonical parish.

### **Will churches close as a result of Beacons of Light?**

Each Family of Parishes will begin by bringing parish staff and pastoral councils together. The pastor, staff and councils will discern Sunday Mass schedules and locations. The pastor and lay leaders will develop a plan for parish programs and activities with a long-term goal of becoming one community of faith. The disposition of all parish assets, including church buildings, will be decided within each Family of Parishes based on particular circumstances and opportunities. The expectation is that, over time, a Family of Parishes will become one canonical parish. With that expectation in mind, it is important to remember that a parish can be made up of a single church or multiple churches.

### **Is Beacons of Light led “top down” or “bottom up”?**

The initial phase of Beacons of Light – the analysis of data and formation of Families of Parishes – is necessarily led from the “top down.” The subsequent phase – the planning for the future of each Family of Parishes – will be done at the local level by the pastor in collaboration with his staff and Family leaders.

### **What is the difference between a pastoral region and a Family of Parishes?**

Many of the 210 parishes in the Archdiocese of Cincinnati have been grouped together in pastoral regions since the early 2000's. Pastoral regions have been led by a single pastor or, at times, multiple pastors have led parishes within a region with a plan to transition to a single pastor over time. While the original plans for pastoral regions did include occasional elements of unified ministry and parish life, the reality is that in most pastoral regions each parish has remained autonomous and there has been little collaboration between parishes. As one pastor noted at a meeting, "the only thing my parishes have in common is me."

The plan for Families of Parishes is different. The parishes in the Family will have a common pastor and will be characterized by collaboration and shared resources. A parochial vicar (or multiple parochial vicars) or retired priest may also serve a Family of Parishes.

**How are lay people involved in Beacons of Light?**

There are two ways in the near term for every member of the archdiocese to be involved in Beacons of Light. The first is by praying for the success of the Beacons of Light pastoral planning process. The second is by staying informed about Beacons of Light, including participating in the public comment period concerning the Families of Parishes draft. All the faithful are encouraged to offer their feedback about the draft during the October 1-20 public comment period.

After the formation of the Families of Parishes, in July 2022, there will be more ways for people to be involved within their Family of Parishes under the leadership of their pastor.

**When will the Families of Parishes be finalized and announced?**

After Oct. 20, the conclusion of the public comment period, all of the input provided by priests, deacons, school leaders and lay faithful will be considered in order to finalize the Families of Parishes. Once finalized the recommended Families of Parishes will then be presented to Archbishop Schnurr by those who have guided the Beacons of Light process. The final recommendation will be the product of more than eight months of consultative work and numerous iterations. Upon the approval of the Families of Parishes the plan will be announced. The announcement is expected by the end of November.