



PROMOTE AND PROCLAIM A COMMUNION OF  
FAITH, HOPE, AND LOVE

## QUESTIONS and ANSWERS from LEADERSHIP UPDATE MEETINGS May – June 2010

Document Updated: June 17, 2010

### CONSULTATION/COMMUNICATION

**Q:** *Is it too late for parishioners to become involved in the process?*

**A:** No. While the input gathering phase of this process has ended, there is always a need for parishioner involvement. The key right now is engaging parishioners about the likely scope of the upcoming changes, the factors triggering those changes, and the Church teaching guiding those changes. An important message to share with all parishioners is that we are all members of this same Local Church and we all want to take steps to ensure that the Church is here and healthy for us now and for future generations.

**Q:** *Many parishioners are saying “what does this have to do with me?” How do we help people understand that every parish will be affected? How do you help parishioners shift their sense of “Local Church” from parish to Archdiocese when it is so deeply ingrained in us that the parish is the Local Church?*

**A:** Although Catholics frequently experience their faith most concretely, in the physical sense, at their parish level, it is the Archdiocese that is defined theologically as the Local Church. All parishes will be affected to one degree or another by the outcomes of this planning process. Some parishes may merge, others may begin sharing a pastor or staff, for example. All parishes will be called into greater collaboration with other parishes. This planning process also initiates a new way of “doing business”, requiring all parishes to periodically evaluate resources and adjust accordingly. We are all called to change our mindsets and consider the health of our entire Local Church, the whole Archdiocese.

**Q:** *Will all pastors begin sharing messages about the planning process and upcoming changes with their faith communities during the summer?*

**A:** All pastors have been asked to share planning related messages for more than a year, through bulletin inserts provided by the Archdiocese and other means. Pastors are asked to continue sharing information throughout the coming months.

**Q:** *Comment on how the data/input from leadership, staff, parishioners and others gathered over the past year was transmitted to the deaneries and/or the task force for incorporation into the planning?*

**A:** The input gathered via the web, the voicemail hotline, letters as well as the leadership, ministry group and parishioner meetings was recorded and categorized. Frequency of particular questions and comments were noted and the resulting data was summarized for the deaneries and the task force. This information was provided to the deaneries and task force electronically.

**Q:** *Priests started drafting deanery proposals early in the process. Does that mean they have been aware of what the task force is doing and hearing?*

**A:** Pastors are aware of discussions in their respective deaneries, but pastors have not seen the recommendations the task force is giving to the Archbishop in the summer of 2010.

**Q:** *Whom do we contact at the Archdiocese if we have questions or comments about the planning process?*

**A:** If you have a **question**, first please check out the **planning process web pages** (<http://planning.archspm.org/>), the pages provide a wealth of information about the process.

If you have a question and don't have internet access, please call: 651-290-1616

If you want to make a **comment**, please do so by clicking on the **feedback button on the upper right hand corner of any of the planning web pages**.

Or, you may leave your **comment** on the voicemail hotline: **651.291.4435**

Or, you may mail a letter to:

**Archdiocese of Saint Paul and Minneapolis**  
**PST - Planning Process Comments**  
**328 Kellogg Boulevard**  
**St. Paul, MN 55102**

**Q:** *What is being done to engage immigrant populations in their native languages?*

**A:** Concern for immigrants is one of the core principles Archbishop Nienstedt identified to guide the planning process. The Archdiocese has reached out to immigrant populations and we ask parish and school leadership to help us continue this outreach.

Everyone was invited to the regional parishioner meetings. Additional input gathering meetings were held with Latino, Filipino, and Vietnamese communities. Input was also collected via a web form in 5 languages (English, French, Korean, Spanish and Vietnamese), a voicemail hotline in 2 language (English and Spanish) and letters which were translated as needed. Input was included in summaries for the deaneries/task force. Everyone is encouraged to continuing sharing their feedback throughout the process by web form, voicemail hotline, or letter. Contact information is noted above.

## **ANNOUNCEMENT OF DECISIONS**

**Q:** *Will the information distributed on October 16/17 be parish-specific or will every parish get information outlining changes taking place throughout the Archdiocese?*

**A:** All parishes will receive the same information about the planning decisions at the same time. We are all members of the same Local Church. The Archdiocese's goal is to make as much information as possible available to as many people as possible at as close to the same time as possible.

**Q:** *When the planning announcements are made on October 16/17 in what format will the materials be made available?*

**A:** The materials will be made available in the following formats: printed (in a booklet and in *The Catholic Spirit*), video, and on the web.

**Q:** *If our parish or school is slated for merging or clustering, will we be provided on October 16/17 with the reasons why this decision was made?*

**A:** The written materials will outline the changes. Archdiocesan representatives will be on hand at significantly impacted parishes on announcement weekend. These archdiocesan representatives will be able to provide a brief summary of the rationale behind the decision impacting that particular parish. Additional meetings will also be held at impacted parishes and schools in the weeks following announcement weekend. These meetings will provide greater detail about the upcoming change as well as more information about the rationale for the change.

**Q:** *Will there be any indication to pastors and or trustees about a possible change prior to October 15?*

**A:** Pastors are aware of the discussions which took place in their deaneries. It is best for the entire archdiocesan plan to be revealed to everyone at as close as possible to the same time as we are truly all members of one Local Church. If significant information were relayed prior to the announcement weekend in piecemeal fashion, that would only feed rumors and result in the spread of potentially damaging misinformation.

**Q:** *How will parish staff and leadership be informed about the decisions? Do they hear it from the pulpit on Sunday?*

**A:** Pastors were asked in May and June of 2010 to schedule a meeting with leadership and staff on the evening of Friday October 15 and/or the morning of Saturday October 16 to discuss any changes in the parish community. We request that these meetings be put on the calendar as soon as possible, so that people can block out the needed time in their schedules.

**Q:** *Isn't October 16/17 MEA weekend?*

**A:** No. Education Minnesota weekend (formerly MEA weekend) is not the weekend of October 16/17. The Education Minnesota long weekend is October 21-24, 2010.

## **PROCESS**

**Q:** *Will all parishes experience collaboration/clustering/merging?*

**A:** Not all parishes or schools will be directly affected by a merger or cluster, however all parishes will experience a greater degree of collaboration than in the past. We are all members of the same Local Church and as such, the Archbishop asks that all local Catholics pray for our brothers and sisters who will be directly impacted by changes to their parish and/or school communities.

**Q:** *Will there be changes in the structure/staffing of the central offices of the Archdiocese?*

**A:** Yes, Chancery staff will also undergo reorganization related to this process.

**Q:** *Will there be an appeal process?*

**A:** Yes. Details regarding the appeal process will be posted online when the details are finalized.

**Q:** *Is establishing or designating a Church building as an oratory just delaying the inevitable and an unnecessary expense?*

**A:** Designating a building as an oratory means that the site is used for special occasions such as weddings, baptisms, and other special gatherings. No regular liturgy would be held at the site. The cost of maintaining the site would be the responsibility of the merged parish community. Therefore, there must be careful consideration as to whether the ongoing expense is sustainable. Designating a church building as an oratory does not necessarily mean the building will eventually be closed, but in other dioceses which have designated oratories during strategic planning, many of the oratories were ultimately closed.

**Q:** *In order to help people discuss the upcoming change, can you share any information about the implementation phase?*

**A:** Unless there are compelling reasons, no mergers, clusters or other structural changes will happen before January 2011. However, some parishes or schools may be asked to have preparatory conversations, make decisions, or begin discussions with other parishes or with the Archdiocese before January 2011. Changes will not happen at all locations at the same time. They will happen on a cascading schedule to ensure the proper resources are available to each community going through change.

**Q:** *The Archdiocese has determined that some parishes and/or schools will be designated as “mission critical”. What are the criteria used to determine mission critical status? What options are being considered to subsidize these facilities?*

**A:** Mission critical sites are those sites which are not likely to be sustainable for the foreseeable future, but whose survival the Archbishop determines to be critical for furthering the mission of the Church. Recommendations regarding a viable model for financing mission critical sites are being formulated for the Archbishop to consider.

**Q:** *What do you mean by “regional school”? How will you determine what parishes support a regional school? How will the school be supported?*

**A:** A regional school is a school that serves an area that includes more than one parish. The support of a regional school is expected to be the responsibility of all the parishes within the designated region. There are many different models for regional schools. These models are being evaluated by the task force which will offer its recommendations to the Archbishop.

**Q:** *What factors are driving current Catholic school enrollment trends?*

**A:** There is a demographic trend toward lower enrollment in all schools: public; Catholic; and private. This current trend has been observable for the last 7-10 years.

**Q:** *Has a possible increase in Catholic school enrollment when the economy improves been factored into planning?*

**A:** Yes, this potential for an increase in enrollment has been factored into planning discussions. However, demographic trends exist which impact schools in ways that are independent of economic upturns or downturns.

**Q:** *What happens in the interim between announcement and implementation? For example, families may pull their children out of a school which is announced as closing.*

**A:** This is a challenge faced in any announced school closing, yet each closing has will have its own unique circumstances. The Catholic schools office and other area schools will work with families to find a Catholic school which meets their needs and provides as much as possible for an orderly transition.

**Q:** *One of guiding principles which Archbishop Nienstedt established for this planning process is “full sacramental ministry”. Please define full sacramental ministry. What are the criteria for this?*

**A:** Full sacramental ministry means every local Catholic will know where to find spiritual assistance and where to participate in the sacraments. Our sacramental life is essential to us as Catholics. It is possible that parishes in a geographical area will be asked to coordinate their Sunday Mass times, ensuring that Masses will be celebrated at various times on a Sunday morning or Saturday/Sunday evening. Some parishes may find it necessary to reduce the number of Sunday masses because they may be clustered with another parish. Daily Mass or confession times may be coordinated in a geographical area. Sacramental preparation for our children and teenagers may be done collaboratively between several parishes. Families need to know that a priest will be available to anoint the sick or dying, whether he is a parish priest or hospital/institution chaplain.

**Q:** *Define competent pastoral leaders. What are the criteria for this?*

**A:** Competent pastoral leaders are competent and compassionate clergy, religious and lay leaders. The planning process may suggest that ongoing training and education opportunities be offered for clergy and lay leaders. Competent pastoral leaders should have the necessary education to serve the Church,

but should also be imbued with a spirit of prayer and genuine concern for others. Competent pastoral leaders work effectively and collaboratively with other pastoral leaders, and are committed to mentoring younger clergy and parish staff members. They should also be able to work with a diverse population, for example: children; elderly; men; women; immigrants; and people of various ethnic backgrounds. Competent pastoral leaders should also seek out and nurture parishioners for leadership roles in elements of parish life.

**Q:** *Could you give some example of a regional solution?*

**A:** A regional solution would be developed by asking the parishes /schools in a particular region to come up with a plan to address an issue in their area (school over-capacity is one example of such an issue). The parishes/schools would then present their ideas to the Archdiocese for review and potential modifications prior to implementation.

**Q:** *Could you give an example of collaboration?*

**A:** One example of collaboration may be two parishes with relatively small faith formation programs combining their faith formation programming to create a stronger ministry in that area.

**Q:** *What decisions have already been made regarding changes, i.e. school/church building closings/mergers/clusters as a part of this planning process?*

**A:** No decisions have yet been made as a part of this planning process. The Archbishop will make decisions the summer and fall of 2010 based upon recommendations from the task force. The task force recommendations were informed by the input of thousands of pastors, parish and Catholic school leaders and staff, parishioners, Catholic school families and others. The Archbishop's decisions will be announced at Masses the weekend of October 16/17.

**Q:** *Will small parishes disappear as a result of the planning process?*

**A:** No. The Archbishop recognizes the need for parish communities of a variety of sizes.

**Q:** *The Archdiocese has been careful not to use the word "close" when describing potential changes to parishes. Why is this? Is there really a difference between merging and closing parishes?*

**A:** The simple answer is under canon law, parishes do not close. However, parish buildings may be closed or relegated to another use. It is very likely that some parish and school buildings will close under the plan.

**Q:** *What precipitated the timing of this process: why now?*

**A:** The need for a reexamination of distribution of resources has been evident for some time. This need was triggered by demographic and economic changes that predate the current economic situation. For example, the number of priests eligible to be pastors has been declining for some time, and will continue to decline for the foreseeable future. Additionally, the current economic situation simply

further exposed the underlying economic sustainability issues challenging some parishes and schools, as it has in dioceses throughout the U. S.

**Q:** *Will there be additional changes beyond those announced on October 16/17?*

**A:** Yes. There will be additional changes as the result of regional solutions to challenges in particular areas. There may also be additional changes at locations which are being monitored under the plan. Finally, under the plan, all sites will be expected to periodically reevaluate resources and adjust accordingly.

## **SUPPORT DURING CHANGE**

**Q:** *Will parish leaders receive guidance on how to help parishioners understand the need for change before AND after the announcement of changes on October 16/17?*

**A:** Yes. Many resources related to the need for change are posted on the archdiocesan planning pages at <http://planning.archspm.org/resources.html> The series of parish and school leadership meetings in May and June of 2010 were designed to provide preliminary guidance to leaders in helping parishioners, Catholic school families and others understand the need for change.

Additional resources will be posted on the archdiocesan planning process pages in the coming months as well as after the announcements this fall. The Archdiocese will also organize meetings at significantly impacted sites for leadership, staff, parishioners, Catholic school families and others following the announcements.

**Q:** *How can parish leaders help people work through anxiety, anger, grief and other emotions?*

**A:** Please coordinate with your pastoral minister to help parishioners address these emotions. The Archdiocese is also developing a resource contact list to distribute to leaders.

**Q:** *What change management support will the Archdiocese offer to help leadership and staff at the affected parishes and schools?*

**A:** The Archdiocese is in consultation with nationally recognized change management experts regarding issues related to organizational change. The Archdiocese will help connect parish and school leaders with resource people to help manage change.

**Q:** *What kind of training will the Archdiocese provide to leaders and staff at parishes and schools experiencing change?*

**A:** A series of training sessions are being planned. Potential topics include: coping with change and grief; pastoring a clustered parish; reductions in force; accounting/back office collaboration/consolidation; sacramental records protocol for merging parishes; consolidating faith formation programs; establishing regional schools; liturgical practices in merging parishes, and potentially other topics as needed. More information regarding this training will be communicated at a later date.

**Q:** *What kind of assistance will be given to parishes and schools to help promote greater collaboration with other parishes and schools?*

**A:** The Archdiocese will do what it can to facilitate collaboration, cooperation, and conversation. There are already many examples of successful collaboration throughout the Archdiocese.

**Q:** *If two parishes merge and now there are now two DREs (for example) in the merged parish, is it possible that one of the staff in duplicated positions will be laid off?*

**A:** Yes. There will likely be a need for parish and school staff reductions as a result of the planning process.

## **CLERGY**

**Q:** *Are priests being trained to accommodate changes?*

**A:** Yes, priests are being trained to accommodate changes and to help parishioners deal with changes. The Archdiocese is also developing a resource contact list to distribute to leaders.

**Q:** *Could priest reassignments be a part of this plan? Could priest reassignments affect even those parishes not directly impacted by a merger or cluster?*

**A:** Everything is on the table as a part of this planning process.

**Q:** *What is the Archdiocese doing to promote more vocations to fill the need for more priests?*

**A:** There are no short term solutions to the shortage of priests eligible to become pastors. All Catholics in the Archdiocese are asked to regularly pray for vocations to the priesthood, diaconate, religious life and for those living their married vocation. The Archdiocesan vocations office regularly organizes gatherings for those considering entering seminary, the diaconate or religious life.

Discerning the call by God to a particular state of life, especially to the priesthood, has been confidently encouraged and supported throughout the history of this Archdiocese. There are currently a sizeable number of men in formation for the Archdiocese. However, from the time a man enters seminary, it requires at least 8-12 years for him to be educated, trained, ordained and have enough pastoral experience to be eligible for assignment as a pastor

**Q:** *As the number of priests eligible to be pastor will decline for the foreseeable future and as more priests will be asked to lead clustered parishes going forward, perhaps more deacons could help ease the burden on priests. Given that, why was admission to permanent diaconate training suspended?*

**A:** Admission to the permanent diaconate program was only temporarily suspended. Formation for those men in the program continues. Seven men were ordained to the permanent diaconate last year. Eight more men will be ordained to the permanent diaconate in 2010. The reason the admission of men to the permanent diaconate training program was suspended in February, 2008 was to allow the

Archbishop's Task Force on the Diaconate time and contemplation to review the current formation program in light of the US Bishops' norms on the Diaconate.

**Q:** *There is concern about the increasing demands on priests as changes, particularly the cluster arrangements, are implemented. Parishioners are worried priests' administrative workload will increase and their available time for pastoral care will decrease. Are resources being considered to ease the administrative burden on priests so that they can maintain personal relationships with their parishioners?*

**A:** Currently, 25% of parishes in the Archdiocese are in cluster arrangements, so this is not a new model. However, the Archdiocese recognizes the need for priests to have competent administrative support so that they can focus more fully on preaching, teaching and sanctifying and building pastoral relationships with parishioners. Consideration of this need is included in the planning process.

## **OUTREACH**

**Q:** *How will the Archdiocese encourage disaffected Catholics to "come back" and be part of the Church?*

**A:** The Archbishop recognizes the need to reach out to disaffected Catholics and is considering ways to incorporate this outreach into the plan for the future of the Archdiocese.

**Q:** *What will the Archdiocese do to encourage 18-35 year olds to be involved in the Church?*

**A:** The Archbishop realizes the importance of reaching out to young adults and young families and is considering ways to incorporate this outreach into the plan for the future of the Archdiocese. There are currently some exciting options for young people to get involved in the Church, including Lectio Divina groups, Theology on Tap, Catholic Singles as well as parish young adult programs.

**Q:** *Young people communicate in a digital world. What is the Archdiocese doing to reach out to young people in cyberspace?*

**A:** The Archbishop, in harmony with the new communication vision recently outlined by Pope Benedict XVI, recognizes the need to reach out to young people via social media and other electronic means. The Archdiocese recently launched a compelling new web site and is exploring how to most effectively use social media as an outreach tool.

## **FINANCES**

**Q:** *Is the assessment formula being re-evaluated through the planning process? In particular is the formula being reexamined in light of the needs of parish schools?*

**A:** The assessment formula for parishes is being re-examined by a committee. This re-examination actually began before the planning process was initiated. The needs of parishes and schools of the whole of the Archdiocese are the reason this re-examination was begun.

**Q:** *Is there a plan for a possible disposition of parish property in mergers? Where will the assets go? Where will liabilities go?*

**A:** Assets that become available through mergers or closures as a result of the planning process will be dealt with according to the precepts of civil and canon law. That means that none of the assets will go to the Archdiocese. The assets are to be used first to address any debt held by that particular community. Then, if any assets remain, they are assigned to the new parish or entity that is created by the merger or closure.

**Q:** *Will the Archdiocese assume the mortgage of a church or school building if it closes?*

**A:** Because of the variety of contractual and covenants obligations involved in debt, each case must be addressed individually.

**Q:** *Will the Archdiocese help parishes sell buildings or other property which are no longer being used so that such property does not become a burden on a merged parish?*

**A:** Yes, the Archdiocese will help communities deal with their assets in an appropriate manner. Consideration of the “burden” on a community is one of the guiding factors.

**Q:** *Are costs related to priest sexual abuse cases a factor in the economic triggers for change?*

**A:** No. Costs related to priest sexual abuse cases were not a factor in making this strategic planning and resulting reorganization necessary. The Archdiocese announced seven years ago the results of a full audit, certified by an outside team of investigators (most of them former FBI agents), that showed all of the costs related to priest sexual abuse were fully covered either by insurance or by a Clergy Benefit Fund established 80 years ago by two prominent Catholic families. No funds to pay for costs related to priest sexual abuse have ever come from our parishes or from annual giving by parishioners.

**Q:** *Will the annual Catholic Services Appeal change as a part of the planning process? Will any changes to the Appeal be announced on the weekend of October 16/17?*

**A:** The Catholic Services Appeal is currently under review both as part of the planning process and because it is reviewed each year for its focus and its effectiveness in supporting the mission of the Church. The planning process has helped clarify priorities for the mission of the Local Church and this clarification will help hone the focus of the Appeal.

## **PLANNING PROCESSES IN OTHER DIOCESES**

**Q:** *Have other dioceses gone through similar planning processes in recent years? Is the Vatican asking dioceses to undergo such planning?*

**A:** Dozens of other dioceses in the United States, mostly in the Midwest and Northeast regions, have gone through reorganization processes during the past ten years. These reorganizations have been triggered by local demographic and economic factors, not by a directive from the Vatican. The challenges that are facing our Archdiocese are common to those facing many dioceses today.