

“Beacons of Light is a pastoral planning process through which the parishes of the Archdiocese of Cincinnati will come together in new ways, forming communities of faith that are united as members of Christ’s Body, the Church.”

Starting in the early 2000s, the Archdiocese of Cincinnati has embarked on a long-term planning strategy as it relates to all parishes. In 2005, the Futures Project resulted in eleven recommendations. The recommendation that most affected us was the realigning the Archdiocese into pastoral regions or clusters. The realigning of regions was to allocate for 100 diocesan priests to serve as pastors. This number did not include priests from religious communities such as the Missionaries of the Precious Blood and others.

This situation has continued to develop over the past 15 years. During this time, the Archdiocese has had time to evaluate the 2005 plans and experience life in the pastoral regions or clusters. It has been such a blessing to see an increase in priestly vocations but there are still a great number of priests who have retired or are nearing retirement. In addition to this, the number of Missionaries of the Precious Blood are decreasing which has led to parishes being turned over to the Diocese. As most are aware, the St. Henry cluster, which the Missionaries have served for over 180 years is being turned over to the Archdiocese beginning July 1, 2021.

It is projected that by 2026 we will have 75 priests assigned as pastors. The Archdiocese is working towards creating 75 pastorates or what is now being called “Families of Parishes.” In November each parish had to submit data related to registered families, Mass attendance, baptisms, weddings, funerals, and finances. This data was analyzed to identify the best possible parish groupings throughout the 19 counties of the Archdiocese.

All of this information should be available in the coming year. Once the new parish groupings are announced we will enter a phase of pastoral planning. At this point parish leaders will discern the shape and future of parish life to create a pastoral plan for the future.

When we look at the number of priests today vs what we had 25 + years ago there is a difference. How can we expect the same number of parishes to run like they once did with a fewer number of priests? Why is there a priest shortage? There are many factors that come into play regarding this

question. First, the demographics are much different now than they once were. Second, the number of newly ordained does not equal or exceed the number of those priests who have retired or are nearing retirement. Third, the number of people living in the Archdiocese is much different than it was a number of years ago. Fourth, it is a symptom of decline of people living the Catholic faith and fostering vocations within the domestic church. The Archdiocese as a whole has fewer Catholics, fewer priests and basically the same number of parishes as it did 25+ years ago.

The stated goal of Beacons of Light is to move our parishes from maintenance to mission. We can't live in a mindset in which we try to simply maintain what we have or live in the nostalgia of the past. We must be on mission to spread the Gospel. Part of the goal of the Beacons of Light is for each pastor to have one parish. This doesn't mean that buildings will suddenly close. It means that we may have to reimagine what a "parish" is. A parish could have one main Church and a couple chapels that may have Sunday Mass or may be open for weddings and funerals. These decisions come as part of the pastoral planning phase.

We realize that this pastoral planning initiative will not be easy, but we have been through it before and did very well. We will all sit anxious about what is next for the Marion Catholic Community (as we now are known) as it relates to our current parishes, buildings, Mass times, future weddings, priest assignments, etc. You may be asking yourself "what can I do?" We ask that you pray, keep a positive attitude about our future and do not jump to conclusions. As this process moves forward, we will provide information which will most likely answer all the questions you may have. It's so easy to think of all the "what if's" but right now we are laying out all of the information we have to date.

Please join our pastoral staff in praying for the future of our parishes and Archdiocese.

God Bless You.