

DIOCESE OF SUPERIOR  
THE CATHOLIC CHURCH OF NORTHERN WISCONSIN  
**A NEW SPRINGTIME**

November 1, 2001  
Solemnity of All Saints

My Sisters and Brothers in Christ:

Almost twenty years ago, in December of 1982, my predecessor, Bishop George Hammes, and I wrote to you about the future of our local church. At that time we challenged ourselves as a diocese to take stock of ourselves as Church, as the People of God, and to make an unbiased assessment of our strengths and our weaknesses. We noted that it was time to look to the future, to proclaim a vision and to design a plan with attainable goals and objectives.

Clergy, religious and laity accepted that challenge. The Planning and Research Commission of the Diocese of Superior, chaired by Rev. Philip J. Heslin, proposed the plan, known as *2000 Here We Come*. That plan provided the guiding principles the diocese has followed during the past two decades. Parish clusters were organized. Programs for lay formation were begun. Parish Pastoral and Finance Councils became important parts of parish life. The laity became more involved in the ministry and governance of parishes.

As we moved into the Third Millennium, Pope John Paul II challenged us to prepare for a new springtime of Christian life. He noted that the Jubilee celebration had given us the extraordinary opportunity to travel together for a number of years on a journey common to the whole Church. He also directed the Bishops throughout the world, with the help of God's people, to plan confidently the stages of the journey ahead for their local churches.

I now invite each of you to join me in responding to the Holy Father's challenge. I urge you to read prayerfully my pastoral letter, *A New Springtime*, which outlines the principles that should guide our response to the challenges we face at the dawn of this new millennium. I encourage you to participate in your parish's deliberations on how to implement these principles in the life of your parish, your deanery and the diocese.

I ask my brother priests, deacons, religious, lay ministers and you, along with the entire faithful of the diocese, to give me your support in this essential task. I count on your prayers for the success of this endeavor-an endeavor that has the potential to move our local church to that new springtime of Christian life our Holy Father has challenged us to reach.

May the saintly men and women of every time and place pray with us for the success of this new plan.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Raphael M. Heslin". The signature is written in a cursive style with a cross at the beginning.

Bishop of Superior

## PREFACE

---

"I am with you always, to the close of the age" (Mt 28:20). This assurance, dear brothers and sisters, has accompanied the Church for two thousand years, and has now been renewed in our hearts by the celebration of the Jubilee. From it we must gain new *impetus in Christian living*, making it the force which inspires our journey of faith. Conscious of the Risen Lord's presence among us, we ask ourselves today the same question put to Peter in Jerusalem immediately after his Pentecost speech: "What must we do?" (Acts 2:37).

We put the question with trusting optimism, but without underestimating the problems we face. We are certainly not seduced by the naive expectation that, faced with the great challenges of our time, we shall find some magic formula. No, we shall not be saved by a formula but by a Person, and the assurance which he gives us: *I am with you!*

It is not therefore a matter of inventing a "new program". The program already exists: it is the plan found in the Gospel and in the living Tradition, it is the same as ever. Ultimately, it has its center in Christ himself, who is to be known, loved and imitated, so that in him we may live the life of, the Trinity, and with him transform history until its fulfillment in the heavenly Jerusalem. This is a program which does not change with shifts of times and cultures, even though it takes account of time and culture for the sake of true dialogue and effective communication. This program for all times is our program for the Third Millennium.

But it must be translated into *pastoral initiatives adapted to the circumstances of each community*. The Jubilee has given us the extraordinary opportunity to travel together for a number of years on a journey common to the whole Church, a catechetical journey on the theme of the Trinity, accompanied by precise pastoral undertakings designed to ensure that the Jubilee would be a fruitful event....But now it is no longer an immediate goal that we face, but the larger and more demanding challenge of normal pastoral activity. With its universal and indispensable provisions, the program of the Gospel must continue to take root, as it has always done, in the life of the Church everywhere. It is in the local churches that the specific features of a detailed pastoral plan can be identified — goals and methods, formation and enrichment of the people involved, the search for the necessary resources — which will enable the proclamation of Christ to reach people, mold communities, and have a deep and incisive influence in bringing Gospel values to bear in society and culture.

I therefore earnestly exhort the Pastors of the particular Churches, with the help of all sectors of God's People, confidently to plan the stages of the journey ahead, harmonizing the choices of each diocesan community with those of neighboring Churches and of the universal Church.

....What awaits us therefore is an exciting work of pastoral revitalization — a work involving all of us.

*Novo Millennio Ineunte*

Pope John Paul II

Jan. 6, 2001

§29

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

---

A. New Springtime	4
Guiding Principles	5
I. Maximize the opportunities for the faithful to receive the sacraments for Church	5
II. Strengthen Catholic identity in our homes, parishes and diocese	5
III. Respect the gifts that the priests of the diocese bring to the community of faith	6
IV. Invest the resources necessary into the affirmation and strengthening of priesthood within the diocese	7
V. Respect the gifts that the laity of the diocese bring to the community of faith	8
VI. Invest the resources necessary into the affirmation, formation and involvement of the laity in the mission of the laity in the mission of the local church	9
What Do We Do Now?	11
Prayer	12
A New Springtime: Frequently Asked Questions	13
Assumptions	13
Configuration	13
Information	13
Shortage of Priests	14
Other Questions	14
Notes	23

## A NEW SPRINGTIME

---

Nearly 2000 years ago, Jesus instructed his followers to "make disciples of all nations baptizing them" and teaching them to observe all He commanded.<sup>1</sup> The Diocese of Superior can trace its roots in northern Wisconsin to the heroic efforts made by such people as the Jesuit missionaries in the 17th century and Bishop Frederic Baraga, missionary to the native peoples and all of northern Wisconsin, who came to Madeline Island in 1835, responding to our Lord's command.

In 1982 the Planning and Research Commission of the Diocese of Superior, chaired by Rev. Philip J. Heslin, proposed the 2000 plan for the diocese. The goal of the proposal, entitled *2000 Here We Come*, was:

To establish a program whereby the Diocese of Superior will, by the year 2000, achieve the maximum feasible utilization of its personnel and resources for carrying out the mission of the Church.

Eighty-two (82) diocesan priests and 16 religious order priests actively served the parishes of the diocese in 1982. The Planning and Research Commission projected that in 2000, the diocese would have approximately 45 diocesan priests, nine (9) religious order priests and 10 permanent deacons actively ministering to the faithful. As the Diocese of Superior entered the new millennium, 49 active diocesan priests served the faithful of the diocese, 13 religious order priests were assigned to minister within the diocese. The diocese was also served by 46 permanent deacons. In 1990 the diocese served 83,845 Catholics. By 2000 that population had increased to 87,419, a 4.26% increase over a ten-year period. As the local church approached 2000 it faced a decline in the number of priests available for ministry. At the same time it needed to minister to an increasing number of parishioners. Parish clusters were organized. Programs for lay formation were begun. Parish Pastoral and Finance Councils became important parts of parish life. Laity became more involved in the ministry and governance of parishes.

As the Universal Church moved into the Third Millennium, Pope John Paul II, challenged it to prepare for a new springtime of Christian life. He reminded us of the signs of hope present in the last part of the 20th century, in society in general and in the Church. We were challenged to renew our hope "in the definitive coming of the Kingdom of God, preparing for it daily in [our] hearts, in the Christian community to which [we] belong, in [our] particular social context, and in world history itself."<sup>2</sup>

The Catholic Church of Northern Wisconsin is summoned to a future of growth, not decline. Its mission to spread the Good News through evangelization, catechesis and sacramental initiation into the Catholic faith continues. Confident of the Lord's support, clergy, religious and laity must be missionaries to a culture increasingly unfamiliar with the Gospel and disconnected from it.

Today the Diocese of Superior is called to meet these challenges in our midst and to prepare for a future Church that will continue to be a sign of faith, hope and unity. This document outlines principles that should guide our response to the challenges we face at the dawn of the Third Millennium. Some possible strategies are also included that could assist us in that response as we strive to create a new springtime for our local church.

## Guiding Principles

---

The planning efforts undertaken by the Diocese of Superior, its deaneries, clusters and local parishes should:

### I. MAXIMIZE THE OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE FAITHFUL TO RECEIVE THE SACRAMENTS OF THE CHURCH.

The sacraments are an integral part of Catholic life. They "touch all the stages and all the important moments of Christian life; they give birth and increase, healing and mission to the Christian's life of faith."<sup>3</sup> The local church must make every reasonable effort to provide the faithful with ready access to them.

According to the United States Census, the population in the sixteen counties that make up the Diocese of Superior was 370,996 in 1990. The 2000 Census shows that population has increased to 417,669, an increase of more than 12.5%. It is reasonable to expect that a similar rate of population growth will take place in the future.<sup>4</sup> At the same time, the number of diocesan priests are expected to decrease from current levels.<sup>5</sup> Consequently as we look to the future, the priests of the diocese will need to serve more parishioners than they do today. Without confronting this issue now, access to the sacraments will become more difficult for the laity.

Possible strategies for providing maximum availability of sacraments for the faithful could include:

1. Scheduling all weekend Masses in the largest church available within a cluster. If this becomes necessary, an effort should be made to assure that each parish within the cluster would have a Mass on a weekday at least twice a month, if it did not have a weekend Mass.
2. Scheduling Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest in parishes which are unable to have a weekend Mass.
3. Using authorized ministers, other than priests, to provide services to the faithful for baptisms, weddings and funerals that occur outside of the Mass.
4. Increasing the seating capacity of worship spaces so that the people of the cluster attending Mass can be accommodated with four services per weekend.
5. Recruiting candidates for priesthood from within the diocese.
6. Recruiting priests from religious orders to serve within the diocese.
7. Recruiting priests from areas with surplus priests to serve within the diocese.
8. Recruiting candidates for the Permanent Diaconate from within the diocese.

### II. STRENGTHEN CATHOLIC IDENTITY IN OUR HOMES, PARISHES AND DIOCESE

The pastor, the proper shepherd of the parish, carries out for his parish the duties of teaching, sanctifying and governing.<sup>6</sup> Under his leadership, "the parish initiates the Christian people into the ordinary expression of the liturgical life; it gathers them together in this celebration; it teaches Christ's saving doctrine; it practices the charity of the Lord in good works and brotherly love."<sup>7</sup> As the parish

communities increase in size and as priests become responsible for more parishes, it becomes more difficult to fulfill these mandates. The priest has fewer opportunities to provide the services needed to nurture the faithful and their practice of the faith outside of the sacraments. As provided by Canon 519, the priest is encouraged to seek "the cooperation of... deacons and the assistance of lay members of the Christian faithful"<sup>8</sup> in meeting the challenge of strengthening the Catholic identity of the people within the parish.

Possible strategies for enhancing Catholic identity among the faithful could include:

1. Employing a parish director, for a parish or parish cluster, responsible for those activities within the parish(es) not requiring ordination and who is supervised by a neighboring pastor.
2. Encouraging the establishment of Small Christian Communities within parishes.
3. Implementing the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) in each parish cluster.
4. Providing adult catechesis that allows the recipients "to grasp and live the immense, extraordinary richness and responsibility received at Baptism."<sup>9</sup>
5. Providing, within clusters of parishes, opportunities for young adults to socialize, to participate in volunteer service activities and to deepen and share their faith with peers.
6. Providing catechetical programs within clusters of parishes that support parents in their efforts to form their sons and daughters in the Catholic faith.
7. Providing opportunities, within the context of youth ministry, for youth to socialize, to participate in volunteer service projects and to share their faith with peers.
8. Supporting Catholic schools that enable students to grow and flourish in spiritual, academic, physical and community service education.
9. Employing, at least on a half-time basis, qualified people, responsible to the pastoral leader of the cluster, for directing:
  - a. the financial operations of the cluster.
  - b. the catechetical ministry within the cluster.
  - c. the evangelization ministry within the cluster.
  - d. the outreach efforts within the cluster.
10. Providing the faithful of the clusters of parishes with ample opportunities to participate in the full range of sacramental and prayer activities that are available within the Catholic tradition.
11. Placing the offices and/or residences of pastoral staff members among the parishes that make up a given cluster.

### III. RESPECT THE GIFTS THAT THE PRIESTS OF THE DIOCESE BRING TO THE COMMUNITY OF FAITH.

A priest fulfills an indispensable role in Catholic life. There is no end to the tasks that call for his time and his talents. However, without time to pray, recreate, study and rest, the ability of the priest to meet the expectations placed upon him can be seriously compromised. Though the community appreciates and hungers for the services that a priest can provide, the faithful must also realize that with

fewer priests and increasing population, realistic limits on those services need to be respected.

Possible strategies for respecting the gifts that the priests of the diocese bring to our communities of faith could include:

1. Encouraging priests to establish a balanced work schedule that includes:
  - a. taking a full day off each week including an overnight;
  - b. celebrating no more than four regularly scheduled Masses for the weekend obligation or holy day observance;
  - c. limiting additional liturgical celebrations outside of Mass and funerals, at which a priest presides, to no more than two per weekend.
2. Arranging clusters of parishes in such a way as to minimize the amount of travel between worship sites.
3. Reducing the number of meetings that the priest must attend through the use of cluster-wide committees and councils.
4. Encouraging priests to delegate as many tasks as possible to the staff and volunteers within the cluster of parishes as may appropriately be done.
5. Providing a salary package for priests that recognize the work load and variety of working situations that priests experience within the diocese.
6. Assuring that priest residences are carefully maintained and adequately furnished.
7. Creating alternative ministry assignments for older priests who wish to continue to minister but no longer want to bear the full responsibility of a cluster of parishes.

#### IV. INVEST THE RESOURCES NECESSARY INTO THE AFFIRMATION AND STRENGTHENING OF PRIESTHOOD WITHIN THE DIOCESE.

Since the beginnings of agriculture, farmers have recognized the importance of holding part of their crop in reserve for next year's planting. By selling or consuming the entire production of the land, the farmer would have no seed for the next year. As the American generation of baby boomers mature, the importance of investing some of their current resources, so that the resources will continue to be available in the future, has been emphasized again and again. This wisdom can also be applied to the resource of priests who serve the diocese.

It is not good stewardship to expect priests to carry an ever increasing workload without taking appropriate vacations, holidays, retreats and sabbaticals. It is not wise to expect a newly ordained priest to move from the seminary to full responsibility for a cluster of parishes without having ample time to experience parish life as an associate pastor. It is not wise to expect priests to deal with the variety of stresses and strains that arise in pastoral ministry without providing them with opportunities for emotional support and additional skill development.

Possible strategies for investing the resources necessary into the affirmation and strengthening of priesthood within the diocese could include:

1. Assuring that 10% of the priests available to serve the Diocese of Superior are assigned to responsibilities other than that of pastor or parochial administrator.

These priests would then be available to help out in parishes when the pastor or parochial administrator is away for vacation, continuing education or sabbatical. These assignments could include such positions as:

- a. Associate pastor
  - b. Vocations, Campus Ministry, Tribunal, Worship, Diocesan Administration
2. Assuring that newly ordained priests are assigned as associate pastors for a minimum of three years before being given full responsibility for a cluster of parishes.
  3. Designating one of the priests of the diocese as Vicar for Priests who then will be responsible for advocating for the interests of priests and for assuring that individual priests receive appropriate physical, emotional and spiritual support.
  4. Assuring that priests avail themselves of the 1 opportunities to:
    - a. Take thirty days of vacation each year.
    - b. Take eleven free days associated with holiday leave.
    - c. Fully participate in the opportunities provided within the Continuing Priestly Formation Program including an annual retreat, priests' assemblies, conventions, workshops, seminars and sabbaticals.

V. RESPECT THE GIFTS THAT THE LAITY OF THE DIOCESE BRING TO THE COMMUNITY OF FAITH.

"The lay faithful have an essential and irreplaceable role in [the living and personal Gospel... that the Church announces each day, and to whom the Church bears testimony before all people]; through them the Church of Christ is made present in the various sectors of the world as a sign and source of hope and of love."<sup>10</sup>

*Apostolicam Actuositatem* states,

"Participants in the function of Christ, priest, prophet and king, the laity have an active part of their own in the life and action of the Church. Their action within the Church communities is so necessary that without it the apostolate of the pastors will frequently be unable to obtain its full effect....Nourished by their active participation in the liturgical life of their community [the laity] engage zealously in its apostolic works; they draw [men and women]... towards the Church who had been perhaps very far away from it; they ardently cooperate in the spread of the Word of God, particularly by catechetical instruction; by their expert assistance they increase the efficacy of the care of souls as well as of the administration of the goods of the Church."<sup>11</sup>

For the Diocese of Superior to fully proclaim the Good News in word and action, the lay faithful of the local church must be empowered and entrusted to fulfill

their unique roles of service, a service which complements rather than competes with priestly ministry. Just as the time limitations facing clergy must be respected, so also must the limitations of time, family and occupation that the laity experience be respected. Given that the future direction of the church in northern Wisconsin will impact the lives and faith of the laity within the diocese, they have the right, as well as the obligation, to participate in appropriate, meaningful and frequent consultation with the leaders of their parish, cluster, deanery and diocese as that future is planned.

Possible strategies for respecting the gifts that the laity bring to the communities of faith within our diocese could include:

1. Establishing cluster councils that facilitate efficient and effective communication among lay representatives of the parishes of which the cluster is comprised.
2. Encouraging collaboration between laity and clergy and among parishes.
3. Implementing processes that invite broad participation of the laity in the design, development and effectuation of planning for parishes and clusters within the diocese as well as for the diocese itself.
4. Developing and implementing "job" descriptions for those tasks that are carried out by volunteers in the parish which detail the expectations the Church has for the person carrying out the task.
5. Recruiting volunteers to participate in ministries such as catechesis, evangelization and outreach.
6. Establishing a diocesan placement process that facilitates the recruitment of qualified candidates for professional parish staff positions and also provides the opportunity for current staff members to become aware of available employment positions elsewhere in the diocese.

#### VI. INVEST THE RESOURCES NECESSARY INTO THE AFFIRMATION, FORMATION AND INVOLVEMENT OF THE LAITY IN THE MISSION OF THE LOCAL CHURCH.

A primary way of affirming laity is to provide training for those ecclesial services they are asked to undertake. "A training, at once many-sided and complete, is indispensable if the apostolate [of the laity] is to attain full efficacy. This is required, not only by the continuous spiritual and doctrinal progress of the ... [laity] ..., but also by the variety of circumstances, persons and duties to which ... [the activity should be adapted]..."<sup>12</sup> It is equally important to provide opportunities for those actively engaged in such service to gather with their peers for continued formation and mutual support.

In a recent Harris poll it was found that three factors appeared to have a major impact on job satisfaction. These factors included: (1) having control over one's work; (2) using one's talents and skills and (3) recognition and appreciation.<sup>13</sup> If these factors are important for job satisfaction in the marketplace, it likely that they are also important for those performing lay ecclesial ministry.

Possible strategies for investing the resources necessary into the affirmation, formation and involvement of the laity in the mission of the local church could include:

1. Establishing a scholarship or loan forgiveness program that would provide support to individuals seeking professional formation for lay ecclesial ministry within the Diocese of Superior.
2. Continuing and enhancing the lay ministry formation program currently existing in the diocese with particular focus on use of distance learning techniques and internet based instruction.
3. Implementing appropriate initial formation/training sessions for typical parish ministries on a regional basis throughout the diocese.
4. Implementing appropriate in-service sessions for typical parish ministries on a regional basis throughout the diocese.
5. Implementing an annual, diocesan-wide day for recognition of lay ecclesial ministers within the local church.

## What Do We Do Now?

---

In the near future, our diocese will need to be organized in such a way that our 113 parishes and 17 Catholic schools can be effectively served by half the number of pastors and parochial administrators currently serving the local church. Priests having an assignment as a pastor within the Diocese of Superior will have responsibility for more parish communities than our priests do today. Soon it will not be possible to have a weekend Mass in every parish on every weekend.

### Active Priest Assignments In the Diocese of Superior

Deanery	Current	Expected	
	9/15/01	7/1/05	7/1/10
Northwest Pastors	7	5	4
Southwest Pastors	15	13	8
South Central Pastors	11	9	6
North Central Pastors	7	5	4
East Pastors	9	7	5
Other Assignments	10	8	5
Total	59	47	32

Transitioning the Diocese of Superior from what we now have to what needs to be, is a task that will involve every member of our Local Church. The principles outlined above are constitutive elements in the plans for that transition. The planning for that transition must take place within each parish, each parish cluster, each deanery, as well as within the diocesan councils who advise the Bishop.

Since the inauguration of the 2000 Plan, the diocese has learned how, through collaboration, to minister to the faithful through a clustering of parishes rather than through single parishes. As we prepare for a new springtime within our local church, those lessons in collaboration must be applied beyond our parish and cluster boundaries to the deaneries within the diocese and to the diocese in its entirety. Now is the appointed time for us to build the structures that will make that collaboration possible.

Lord God,  
Your Spirit of Wisdom fills the earth  
and teaches us your ways.

Grant us insight, patience and wisdom  
as we, clergy, religious and laity together,  
strive to discern your will  
for the future of the Church in  
northern Wisconsin.

Bless our efforts as we  
journey ahead to a  
new springtime of Christian life  
in the Third Millennium.

We ask this in the name of Jesus,  
who, with you and the Holy Spirit,  
reigns as one God, now and  
forever.

Amen.

# A NEW SPRINGTIME

---

## *Frequently Asked Questions*

Any planning process can raise issues, concerns, and questions. The following are the questions and issues that are frequently asked by people involved in parish or diocesan planning processes. These questions and answers will be best used by pastors and parish directors along with their leadership teams to respond to questions and concerns raised by members of their parishes. If other questions are raised or if these answers do not respond fully to a question or concern, please contact Richard Lyons, Director of Pastoral Services and Planning: (715)392-2937, ext. 103, or [rlyons@catholicdos.org](mailto:rlyons@catholicdos.org).

## Assumptions

1. What does it mean to be a vital parish cluster in our diocese?
2. What are the assumptions underlying the process?

## Configuration

3. Who should be members of the Deanery Planning Group?
4. How will being in a Deanery Planning Group impact a successful cluster of two or more parishes?
5. Will sacramental and religious education programs be combined?
6. Is it possible and allowable for us to function as a parish without a priest pastor?
7. Are there models of effective parishes whose pastoral care has been entrusted to someone other than a priest pastor?
8. How do we accomplish the functions of a parish without a priest?
9. Why will parishes need additional staff?

## Information

10. What criteria must a deanery plan meet?
11. What tasks must be completed at the parish level to facilitate this process?
12. What tasks must the Deanery Planning Group complete?
13. Should the Deanery Planning Groups plan for growth or decline in parish membership?
14. Will this process have an impact on parish life?
15. Won't this whole thing be driven by numbers, rather than the Spirit?
16. Is this short-term or long-term planning?
17. How do we help people re-identify with a new parish configuration and with other changes which may come out of this process?

18. To what extent will parishioners' input make a difference?
19. Will the Deanery Planning Group be the decision making body?
20. How much input will the total parish have in the plans?
21. Will there be enough lay leaders representing a cross-section of the parish?
22. In the end, won't the Bishop and the Chancery staff do what they want regardless of what we plan?
23. How can a small group do the planning for an entire region?
24. How will accountability for the deanery plans be established?

## Shortage of Priests

25. If there were no shortage of priests, would there be any need for this process?
26. How will this impact the availability of Mass?
27. If there is a shortage of priests, what is the diocese doing to recruit men into the priesthood?
28. Why is there no consideration given to seeking priests from the universal church?
29. When can a region anticipate that it will lose the services of a priest?
30. If a deanery cannot be certain when a priest's service will be lost, how can the Deanery Planning Group prepare a plan for the region?

## Other Questions

31. How will this planning affect our parish school?
32. How will this stimulate creativity rather than simply working from old models?
33. How will the value of "Small Christian Communities" be respected in the process?
34. How will we integrate institutional needs (Catholic Charity operations, hospitals, nursing homes, jails, etc) into this process?

## Assumptions

1. What does it mean to be a vital parish cluster in our diocese?

In some ways, it is impossible to answer that question fully and completely. The diversity within our diocese makes a simple answer unrealistic and deceptive. Yet, there are some common elements that are indications of life.

- A. First, a vital parish cluster in this diocese will be working to incorporate the six principles listed in A New Springtime into its parish life.
- B. Second, a vital parish cluster will be actively engaged with its local community, seeking to bring God's peace and justice to the life of its community and especially to those who are marginalized.
- C. Third, a vital faith community will have the physical, human, and financial resources to support its liturgical, sacramental, and pastoral life. To the extent that

a parish or parish cluster finds itself lacking sufficient life in any of these areas, it must ask some challenging questions about its ability to sustain an appropriate level of vitality, whether it can achieve that level through collaborative actions with other faith communities, or whether it should not continue as an individual faith community.

- D. Fourth, a universal sign of life is growth. Regardless of its material circumstances, faith communities will be growing. Through its proclamation and its living of the gospel, it will attract men and women who are seeking meaning and wholeness in their lives. A community enlivened by the Spirit will be a community marked by an active hospitality, an openness to all, and a concern for spiritual healing.
2. What are the assumptions underlying the process?
- A. We are guided by the "Mission Statement of the Diocese of Superior".
  - B. At a minimum, a parish or parish cluster will assess its vitality and determine its priority issues and concerns described in the previous question. Although each parish will have its own set of challenges, as a diocesan church we face challenges of an increasing rate of change in all the major institutions of our communal life, the growing materialism of our contemporary culture, a decline in the number of active priests, shifting populations, increased demand for the quantity and quality of pastoral care, and reductions in government funding for social and economic justice programs.
  - C. Plans prepared by the Deanery Planning Groups will respect Church law in the design and implementation of plans. To the greatest extent possible, the Bishop will use his discretionary authority to facilitate the plans developed. For example, the general norms for appointment of a parish director are determined by Canon Law but the local educational and other selection criteria are established by the local Bishop. Changes in those local criteria to implement Deanery Planning Group plans would be fully considered by the Bishop and be decided on their merits in addition to Canon Law.
  - D. The Director of Pastoral Services and Planning will provide each Deanery Planning Group with demographic, financial and sacramental data relative to the parishes within the deanery.

## Configuration

3. Who should be members of the Deanery Planning Group?
- A. The dean and the other pastoral leaders (pastor or parish director) of each parish within the deanery.
  - B. The Diocesan Pastoral Council members from the deanery.
  - C. One lay representative from each parish. These members might be drawn from the parish trustees, the chair of the pastoral council, vice-chair of the pastoral council, other parish members particularly skilled in planning and collaboration. The lay representative is to be appointed to the Deanery Planning Group by the pastoral leader of each parish after consulting with the parish pastoral council.

4. How will being part of a Deanery Planning Group impact a successful cluster of two or more parishes?

There is nothing about being in a Deanery Planning Group which should have a negative impact on a successful cluster of two or more parishes. In fact, those parishes have experience with successful collaboration which is a resource for the other members of the Planning Group. The collaborative programs at the Planning Group level will address common priority concerns and thus should strengthen the vitality of individual parishes and clusters.

5. Will sacramental and religious education programs be combined?

Based on the priority concerns of parishes and clusters, collaborative programs could address issues in sacramental and religious education programs. There is nothing that requires such combination, however.

6. Is it possible and allowable for us to function as a parish without a priest pastor?

Under Canon Law, the Bishop can entrust the pastoral care of a parish to a person other than a priest pastor, such as a lay person, religious, or permanent deacon. In most situations the assumption of the responsibility for the pastoral care of a community and the consequent accountability to the Bishop usually require a full-time professional minister even though he or she may be serving more than one faith community. While part-time staff and volunteers are important elements of a vital parish, it would be difficult for such people to provide the leadership and accountability required in a parish.

7. Are there models of effective parishes whose pastoral care has been entrusted to someone other than a priest pastor?

There are. In the Diocese of Superior five parishes are served by three parish directors. These parish directors function as pastors in all areas except the celebration of sacraments; however, Canon Law reserves the title of "pastor" to priests. By all

accounts, these parishes are vital and alive. A priest is assigned as supervising pastor and sacramental minister to celebrate the sacraments for such a community.

8. How do we accomplish the functions of a parish without a priest?

Apart from the sacramental functions of the parish reserved to priests—Eucharist, Reconciliation, and Anointing of the Sick—all functions of a parish can be accomplished without a priest if that becomes necessary. Baptism and Matrimony can be and often are celebrated by permanent deacons. Pastoral counseling, sacramental preparation, and parish leadership can be and often are provided by lay persons as well as permanent deacons.

Whether or not priests are available, there are questions that must be resolved about a parish's ability to afford the people to provide ministry as well as questions about the quality and life-giving style of that ministry.

9. Why will parishes need additional parish staff?

A viable parish community needs to be engaged in evangelization, catechetical ministry, and outreach. The financial operations and facilities of the parish must be properly maintained to provide a suitable base for these ministries. As the sacramental workload increases for the priests of the diocese, it becomes necessary for qualified laity to take a more active role in the ministry and operations of the parish. These functions may be performed by qualified, designated parish volunteers or by employed parish staff.

## Information

10. What criteria must a deanery plan meet?

Each deanery plan must meet the following criteria:

- A. The plan must incorporate the six principles identified in *A New Springtime*.
- B. The plan must provide for using two fewer priests within the deanery by 2005 than are currently serving the deanery.
- C. The plan must provide for one-half the number of priests within the deanery by 2010 than are currently serving the deanery.
- D. The plan must be ratified by two-thirds of the parish pastoral councils within the deanery before it is submitted to the Bishop.
- E. A ratified plan is to be submitted to the Bishop no later than January 30, 2003.

11. What tasks must be completed at the parish level to facilitate this process?

The pastoral council of each parish in the Diocese of Superior is asked to complete an analysis of *A New Springtime* that is forwarded to the Bishop before March 20, 2002. This information will be used by the Deanery Planning Group to formulate the plan for the deanery. The parish pastoral council will also be asked to ratify whatever plan is developed by the Deanery Planning Group before the plan is submitted to the Bishop.

Parishes are encouraged to involve pastoral council committees, as well as, other interested parishioners in the preparation of the parish analysis and in review of the proposed deanery plan.

12. What tasks must the Deanery Planning Group complete?

The Deanery Planning Groups will be convened by the local dean. The planning group will review the analysis provided by the local parishes. It will then develop a

plan for the deanery that incorporates the six principles identified in *A New Springtime* and that, when fully implemented, will use one-half the number of priests who are currently serving in the deanery.

Once the plan has been completed, it is to be submitted to the parishes of the deanery for ratification. When the plan has been ratified by two-thirds of the parish pastoral councils within the deanery, the plan will be submitted to the Bishop for his approval. If the initial plan is not ratified by the required number of parishes, the Deanery Planning Group has the responsibility to create an alternative plan that is acceptable to the required number of parishes.

Deanery Planning Groups are encouraged to create committees that might be helpful in carrying out their responsibilities. These committees might be established on the basis of region (county, school district, etc.) or on the basis of function (communications, facilities, etc.)

13. Should the Deanery Planning Groups plan for growth or decline in parish membership?

The plan should be for *growth* in parish membership. As noted in *A New Springtime*, the number of Catholics within the Diocese of Superior continues to grow. Over the past decade the total population residing within the boundaries of our diocese has increased by over 12.5%. It is estimated that our parishes would increase their membership by as much as 20% if those individuals residing within our diocese who have a Catholic allegiance but who are not registered in one of our parishes were brought into active parish membership. Another critical consideration is to plan not only for *growth* in parish membership but also to plan how to *increase* the number of people actively participating in the mission of the parish, the cluster, the deanery and the diocese. This growth of membership and increase in participation will not happen without a commitment to outreach and evangelization.

If the only reasonable expectation is a declining membership in a particular parish, serious consideration should be given, in the planning process, to incorporate the declining membership into neighboring parishes.

14. Will this process have an impact on parish life?

This process is designed to increase the vitality of parish life. This process is not about reducing the scope of the Church but rather about increasing its scope by increasing its vitality.

15. Won't this whole thing be driven by numbers, rather than the Spirit?

If numbers alone would provide the answer, there would be no need for this planning process and the involvement of members of parishes and faith communities. Numbers that measure the human and other resources available to our Church are an important part of the process of reading and facing the signs of our times. What we do about the

challenges and opportunities, however, cannot be determined by these or any other numbers. This process relies on both qualitative and quantitative information and on the faith-based inventiveness of clergy and lay people. Our response to the signs of our times must come from our full humanity enlivened by the Spirit.

16. Is this short-term or long-term planning?

The planning process in which we are engaged will need to deal with short-term realities while striving to prepare for optimal ministry over a longer period of time.

17. How do we help people re-identify with a new parish configuration and with other changes which may come out of this process?

Any changes in a parish are typically accompanied by pain and discomfort for some parishioners. If this process is about becoming "less parochial," it will require adjustments on the part of the parishioners and pastoral leadership. There is a need to become more Church and less parish in a way which does not diminish our personal engagement with the members of our parish or cluster. It will not be easy. Each Deanery Planning Group should include in its deliberations ways to help people honor and let go of the past and celebrate the new.

18. To what extent will parishioners' input make a difference?

This process is based on the assessment of parish issues by parishioners and the development of collaborative plans by Deanery Planning Groups. The process requires at both the parish and the deanery level that parish reaction be included and respected. Certain aspects of a deanery plan will require approval by the Bishop. These are the issues which currently require his involvement and approval: sale or purchase of property, investment of diocesan funds, reconfiguration of parishes, assignment of priests, use of parish directors, etc. These issues will continue to require his approval. However, most collaborative programs will not require the approval of the Bishop but rather the affirmation of local parishes.

19. Will the Deanery Planning Group be the decision making body?

Once approved by the Bishop, the decisions of the Deanery Planning Group set the stage for implementation without any further approvals. Unless a Deanery Planning Group requests changes in current diocesan policies, it is assumed that current guidelines and policies will be reflected in group plans.

20. How much input will the total parish have in the plans?

While most of the work of analysis, assessment, and planning will be done by the parish council, the results of the analysis and planning must have credibility with the entire faith community. The process also calls for an affirmation of a deanery plan by the parish council of each parish within the deanery.

21. Will there be enough lay leaders representing a cross-section of the parish?

Some parishes have more active members than others and thus are more easily able to convene groups that are representative of the parish community. Ultimately the answer to this question will have to come from the parish or cluster. It is part of the Catholic faith that Christ's promise to be with us to the end of time means that the gifts of the Spirit are present in the people of every faith community.

22. In the end, won't the Bishop and the Chancery staff do what they want regardless of what we plan?

This question comes up in a number of different forms. At its base is a perception or a concern that a plan already exists and that no matter how well a Deanery Planning Group follows the process, if it deviates from that plan, the Bishop will not accept the deanery plan. **There is no secret plan.** *A New Springtime* describes a set of principles to be used to guide the planning process; it does not make final decisions about planning issues.

23. How can a small group do the planning for an entire deanery?

A small group cannot do the planning for an entire parish, cluster or deanery. It can do the assessment and analytic work and then involve the parish or cluster in a review and affirmation of its conclusions. The small group will also benefit from ongoing input from the larger community. The planning process includes this important affirmation process.

24. How will accountability for the deanery plans be established?

Once the deanery plan has been approved by the Bishop, an annual report of progress in implementation will be provided to the diocese. If the experience of a deanery differs significantly from the approved plan, consultation with deanery and parish leadership will be initiated by the diocese. It is anticipated that the first formal review will be completed by December 31, 2003.

## Shortage of Priests

25. If there were no shortage of priests, would there be any need for this process?

If the diocese was not facing a shortage of priests, it probably would not be involved in a comprehensive and systematic process of planning. While this planning initiative may be driven by this shortage, it seeks to address a broad range of issues all bearing on the vitality of parishes and clusters.

26. How will this impact the availability of Mass?

The availability of Mass is directly affected by the number of priests and their location. As that number declines, it is reasonable to anticipate that there will be fewer Masses in any given location. This planning process looks at more than the availability of Mass. It seeks to assess the vitality of parish life and to increase that vitality through collaborative action. Part of that collaborative action will need to be increased cooperation on the timing and location of Masses so that availability for a specific deanery or cluster might not be affected substantially.

27. If there is a shortage of priests, what is the diocese doing to recruit men into the priesthood?

The Diocese has an active vocations program headed by Fr. Kevin Gordon. He is assisted in this effort by Fr. Andrew Ricci and Sr. Bonnie Alho, OSM. This is an effort to promote priestly vocations, to inform people of this opportunity to serve God's people, to support men in their discernment process, and to assist them throughout the formation and education process. Anyone who would like more information about vocations should contact Fr. Gordon directly at (715) 234-5083.

28. Why is there no consideration given to seeking priests from the universal church?

We have welcomed priests from the universal Church whose own pastoral call has led them to live either permanently or temporarily in the United States. We have not diverted time and resources from our domestic vocation efforts to the recruitment of foreign priests. Differences in language and pastoral leadership styles make the recruitment of foreign priests a difficult and time consuming task. The United States and Canada have more priests per Catholics and fewer Catholics per parish than all other major geographic areas of the Church. For example, Africa has 46 percent more Catholics than the United States and Canada but 64 percent fewer priests and 64 percent fewer parishes. The Bishop has chosen to devote our limited resources to the development of our own vocations.

29. When can a deanery or cluster anticipate that it will lose the services of a priest?

No one can predict when a particular priest will no longer be available to minister within the Diocese of Superior. Many pastors have generously continued to serve our local church beyond their possible retirement age. As the clergy ages, unexpected health problems could seriously curtail the ministry an individual priest may be able to provide. At the same time, no one can be certain how fruitful our efforts to produce priestly vocations will be.

Given these uncertainties, it is almost impossible to determine when a particular region will lose a priest. At the same time, it is virtually certain that each deanery will have fewer priests in the future than it has now.

30. If it cannot be certain when a priest's service will be lost, how can the Deanery Planning Group prepare a plan for the region?

This is a critical point. The Deanery Planning Group, in terms of middle to long range planning for the region, needs to establish ways to enhance collaboration among the region's parishes and economize on the number of priests needed to serve the region. An initial step in this direction is to identify how the deanery's parishes can be served with two fewer priests by 2005 and by half as many priests as the deanery currently has by 2010.

## Other Questions

31. How will this planning affect our parish school?

Catholic schools are parish based and generally supported by the parishes from which students come. In a parish where a Catholic school is an important ministry, it will naturally be included in a review of the life of the parish. How such a review might affect a specific school would depend upon the insights and plans developed by the parish and the Deanery Planning Group.

32. How will this stimulate creativity rather than simply working from old models?

This process does not have a specific set of solutions or collaborative actions in mind. There are a diverse set of models and examples in use within the Catholic Church that can stimulate thinking about possible solutions to challenges and key issues.

33. How will the value of "Small Christian Communities" be respected in the process?

Small Christian Communities are specifically encouraged by *A New Springtime*. Nothing in this process should diminish their importance. Sometimes that question refers to the fate of smaller parishes. While the size of a parish may be relevant to the future of the parish, vitality is the key concept.

34. How will we integrate institutional needs (Catholic Charities operations, hospitals, nursing homes, jails, etc.) into this process?

This will require flexibility and good faith by both institutions and parish communities. Parishes need to begin to see the pastoral needs of these ministries as their concerns, and also as concerns of the diocesan church. This presupposes that the various institutional ministries are open to the concern and support of parish cluster communities.

# Notes

---

1. Mt. 28:19-20
2. Pope John Paul II, *Tertio Millennio Adveniente: On the Coming of the Third Millennium* (November 10, 1994), no. 46
3. United States Catholic Conference-Libreria Editrice Vaticana, *Catechism of the Catholic Church* [CCCj] (1994), no. 1210.
4. In 1999, Woods and Poole Economics, Inc. projected that the population in the Diocese of Superior will increase by 24.7% from 12000 to 2020.
5. Recent projections indicate that the number of diocesan priests serving the sixteen counties of northern Wisconsin drops from 49 on Dec. 31, 2000 to 31 in 2020—a decrease of 36.7%. According to our *Status Animarum Report*, there were 87,419 Catholics in our diocese at the end of 2000. These Catholics were served by 62 priests (49 diocesan priests and 13 order priests). This equates to one (1) priest in the diocese for every 1,410 Catholics. If the local church were to have only the currently anticipated 31 diocesan priests available to serve the faithful in 2020, the Diocese of Superior could well have one (1) diocesan priest for every 3,516 Catholics, assuming that the current estimated 87,419 Catholics increases by 24.7% to 109,011 by 2020. This suggests that every priest serving the local church in 2020 may well be serving almost two and one half (2 1/2) times as many Catholics as are being served by an individual priest today.
6. Canon Law Society of America, *Code of Canon Law* [CIC] (1983), c. 519.
7. CCC, no. 2179.
8. CIC, c. 519.
9. Congregation for the Clergy, *General Directory for Catechesis* (August 11, 1997), no. 258.
10. Pope John Paul II, *Christifideles Laici: The Lay Members of Christ's Faithful People* (December 30, 1988), no. 7.
11. Second Vatican Council, *Apostolicam Actuositatem: Decree on the Apostolate of Lay People* [AA] (November 18, 1965), no. 10.
12. AA, no.28.
13. Taylor, Humphrey, *The Harris Poll #74, Dec. 20, 2000: Three Factors Appear to Have Big Impact on Job Satisfaction*. © 2000 Creators Syndicate, Inc.