

New Committee will Recommend Plan for Future Evangelization

A committee made up of lay people, priests and religious will be named by Bishop Richard J. Malone, Th. D. in June which will recommend changes in the composition of parishes in order to most effectively carry out the Church's mission—namely evangelization.

For a number of years, the Diocese has been evaluating the configuration of our 135 parishes and 44 missions in light of the number of priests available to serve them and the shifts in population within the state. This led to “clustering” of some parishes: several parishes in a geographic area worked together to share resources, plan workshops and training sessions, and discuss common concerns. Now, in Bishop Malone's words, “The time has come to work toward a common vision [of reconfiguration] for the entire Diocese”.

The rationale for a new plan can be seen on the Portland Diocese's website: www.portlanddiocese.net at the bottom of the home page. Highlighting the driving forces or the reasons for a new approach to our mission are:

- The decline in the number of active priests over the next 7-10 years. Currently, we have about 100 active priests; about 65 active priests are projected by the year 2010.
- Most parishes were established around the year 1900, with a few more established around 1960. Population has shifted significantly over that time. For some parishes, the result is insufficient numbers for supporting life-giving, weekend celebrations of the Eucharist, while others have outgrown their churches.
- In some cases, there are not enough trained people to draw from for competently staffing faith formation programs and various ministries required to serve the needs of the parish.
- The finances of some parishes over the past few years have decreased making it difficult to support a pastor and to continue the work of the Church.

The new committee members (nominated by clergy) will work with a set of guiding principles, including that the number of canonical parishes be reduced through mergers (meaning fewer, larger parishes, each with a single local administration), without necessarily closing any churches/worship sites at this time. The recommendations must also be mission driven, that is, they must contribute to the entire Diocese's ability to live, grow in and share the love of Jesus Christ. Until the reconfiguration plan is in place, a moratorium on new construction projects is in effect. Bishop Malone's address to clergy regarding reconfiguration can be seen on the diocesan website at http://www.portlanddiocese.net/a_rationale_pt2.php

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