

Bishop Malone Unveils Plan for Parish Reorganization

Bishop Richard Malone has approved a plan that will reconfigure parishes in our Diocese in order to re-energize the mission of the Church and to face the current challenges of a declining priesthood and shifting population. The plan emphasizes collaboration, local input and the role of the laity.

The plan groups all 135 parishes of the Diocese into 27 clusters that will work together, each with one pastor. Some clusters would have other priests assigned to assist. The clergy and parishioners from the clusters will determine what resources are available in terms of worship spaces, clergy, and lay ministers and how to make more effective use of them. Recommendations will be sent to the Bishop for his approval.

Four structural/administrative models will be considered by the clusters:

- One pastor, merge parishes into one new parish, one staff, finance council and Pastoral council, with multiple worship sites
- One pastor, separate parishes, one staff, one cluster Pastoral Council and Finance Council
- One pastor, one staff, merge parishes and build new larger church.
- Combination of models: Some parishes may merge, some may remain separate, or new larger church may be built.

This not a one-size-fits-all plan, nor does it target any particular churches for closure. Recommendations for possible future closures would begin on the local level through full consultation with the clergy, staff and parishioners of a cluster. While some clusters will begin implementation this fall, the plan envisions full implementation over the next five years.

The mission of the Church will be supported throughout the plan by bringing larger groups of people together to pool their resources of time, talent and treasure in a manner that is more effective than any individual parish could accomplish on its own. The changes will also challenge and call all Catholics to a fuller participation in the ministry of the Church due to the collaboration necessary for its implementation. The plan will remove any sense of isolation by associating parishes with other local communities who share the same faith journey. And it re-focuses each new cluster community on how to best carry out the sacraments—most especially the celebration of the Sunday Eucharist.

Ernie Lebel, a human resources consultant has been hired by the Diocese as the new Director of Parish Planning for Evangelization. Ernie will be supporting the new parish clusters as they determine the direction of their transitions.

For a more detailed look at the reorganization plan and the clusters that will be formed, please visit the Diocesan website at: www.portlanddiocese.net