



# PLANNING FOR OUR FUTURE

## Implementing the Fourth Plan for Parishes

*“Through pastoral planning, we are not losing our history. Rather we are changing our structures and the way that we celebrate our faith.”*

**T**he Diocese of New Ulm continues to implement the *Fourth Plan for Parishes* in union with priests, religious, pastoral leaders, and parishioners of the diocese.

In an effort to carry out the *Plan*, over the last two years, Tom Keaveny, director of Pastoral Planning for the diocese, and I, in consultation with the diocesan Committee on Parishes, the Priests’ Council, and the Priest Personnel Board, have been working with priests, deacons, pastoral leaders, and parishioners on parish mergers.

In a merger, the assets of the merged parish – such as its church building, its cemetery (if it has one), and other financial resources – become the responsibility of the receiving parish.

It is not true that the church building of a merged parish automatically shuts down once a merger takes place. Baptisms, funerals, weddings, and other forms of divine worship can still occur there as well as an occasional weekday Mass can be celebrated there.

### **THE NECESSITY OF PARISH MERGERS**

When the diocese was founded in 1957, there were 68,094 Catholics, 98 priests, 86 parishes, seven Catholic high schools, and 37 Catholic grade schools.

Today, the statistics are much different. The diocese has 57,495 Catholics as of June 30, 2014 (down about 10,600), 37 active diocesan priests (down 61), 75 parishes (down 11), three Catholic high schools (down four), and 15 Catholic grade schools (down 22).

It is significant to note that with just 11 less parishes since the inception of the diocese, the number of priests has declined by 61, which means more stress for our priests. I observe the effects of stress on our priests now.

### **WE ARE LIVING IN DIFFERENT TIMES**

Projections show that the number of active priests in the diocese, age 70 and under, will decline even more in the next five years to 27. Also, due mainly to deaths, the diocese is losing about 850 parishioners per year.

In addition, there are only about 33 percent of Catholics who attend Mass on the weekends. The decrease in active parishioners usually means a decrease in financial support for parish facilities, and fewer people to plan and work at parish activities. Active parishioners are being asked to invite back home those who have left the practice of the faith, but this process takes time.

It is clear. It is not possible to continue operating as we have been.

[Prayer - Planning - Possibilities](#)

(back side) 

For a copy of the *Diocesan Plan for Parishes: From 2013 to 2020 and Beyond* visit [www.dnu.org/fourthplan/](http://www.dnu.org/fourthplan/) or call 507-233-5339.

# Prayer - Planning - Possibilities

**M**any parishes are currently working together to move forward and plan for the future. The diocesan director of Pastoral Planning and I have been involved in the pastoral planning for Region 1 and the Holy Cross Area Faith Community. We have met with priests, deacons, and pastoral leaders in Regions 2 and 4. In these regions, priests and pastoral leaders are moving forward and holding discussions with parishioners.

These discussions are also taking place in Region 5. Discussions involve the reduction of the number of Masses and merging of parishes. Planning meetings are scheduled this winter and spring with Regions 3 and 6. This means that planning is moving forward in all 6 regions of the diocese.

## **THE OVERALL GOAL**

The goal of the *Fourth Plan for Parishes* and pastoral planning is to look honestly and prayerfully at our situation in the Diocese of New Ulm.

Things have changed a great deal since the diocese was formed in 1957. More change is happening.

However, these changes do not have to be negative. With prayer and proper planning, there can be more vibrant parishes and area faith communities, even though there is real pain and sadness involved as we leave some of the past behind.

As I visit parishes, I see a new vibrancy already in area faith communities where Mass schedules have been pared down. Due to fewer Masses, the number of people at each Mass has increased. The sense of community is stronger. The worshipping communities are more robust. The Mass responses and singing are more vigorous. Priests are less stressed.

## **PRAY FOR VOCATIONS TO THE PRIESTHOOD**

A significant part of the *Plan* is to encourage young men to consider the priesthood and to pray that more young men answer God's call to the priesthood. Currently, the diocese has nine men in the seminary. Most still have many years of formation ahead. Please pray for their continued priestly formation and that more men will answer God's call.

## **A COLLABORATIVE EFFORT**

As the bishop of the diocese, I need help in making the decisions about pastoral planning. I need the input from people in the diocese: priests, deacons, pastoral administrators, diocesan officials, parishioners, and committees. Please share your ideas with your pastor or pastoral leader and be supportive of their efforts to address these issues.

All of us are members of the diocese and all of us are called to work together. Prayer and honest dialogue will help me to discern what God's will is for us as a diocese. Please continue pastoral planning efforts to reduce the number of parish Masses and to merge parish operations, and ultimately to merge parishes. Through pastoral planning, we are not losing our history. Rather we are changing our structures and the way that we celebrate our faith based on an honest and prayerful look at what is happening in our parishes and in our diocese.

May Jesus Christ be our guiding light.



The Most Reverend John M. LeVoir  
Bishop of New Ulm