



A SUMMARY OF THE PASTORAL PLAN

(This summary is to be inserted in the parish bulletin and distributed to all parishioners. It is suitable for sharing at meetings about the PASTORAL PLAN, including in *The Messenger* and on diocesan and parish websites, and for releasing to the secular media.)

The PASTORAL PLAN FOR PARISH RENEWAL AND RESTRUCTURING FOR THE DIOCESE OF BELLEVILLE is an initiative of the Diocese of Belleville under the leadership of Bishop Edward K. Braxton to renew and strengthen the Catholic communities of faith in southern Illinois. It is being undertaken as the Catholic People of God approach January 7, 2012 with gratitude and thanksgiving. This date commemorates the 125th anniversary of the establishment of the Diocese by Pope Leo XIII on January 7, 1887. The goal of the PLAN is to examine prayerfully our parish communities and our Catholic elementary schools, to build upon the strengths of these communities while making careful, prudent, and sometimes difficult decisions about the long-term futures of these communities. This discernment will give consideration to the size of the Catholic community in the present and its projected size in the future. The age and health of our priests, deacons, religious, parish life coordinators and others in pastoral service are also important factors in this discernment process.

The need to develop a PASTORAL PLAN has been discussed by pastors and parishioners for many years. Now is the time to formalize that discussion and move toward appropriate decisions and actions for the good of all. The basic structure of the PASTORAL PLAN has been developed in consultation with the Presbyteral Council; the College of Consultors; the Bishop's Cabinet; the Directors of the departments of the Diocese; the priests, deacons, religious, and parish life coordinators who participate in the deanery meetings; the Diocesan Pastoral Council and others.

The PASTORAL PLAN will not be focused on a particular geographical area of the Diocese. All parishes and all Catholic schools are required to participate. The PLAN will unfold in two phases giving all of the parishes, schools and parish leaders a sufficient amount of time to participate fully in the process, keeping in mind the scheduling needs of those who will be guiding the process. There can be little hope of success unless the Christian faithful and those who serve them in pastoral ministry are willing to make this effort a high priority and make some sacrifices of personal time. The initial part of the PLAN, Phase One (September 2011-March 2012), is an extensive consultation during which all parishes and schools will be invited to study prayerfully the Bishop's Pastoral Letter and the PLAN, and then begin a careful process of gathering current data making use of the various attachments: Parish Profile, the Criteria for Determining Parish Viability, the Parish Evaluation Instrument, and the School Evaluation Instrument.

During this process the leadership of each parish and school will be asked to participate in meetings during which they examine and discuss frankly the strengths and challenges they see in their communities of faith. They must also raise the questions that must be asked and answered about the well-being and long-term strength and viability of these communities. The core leadership of the parish will then extend the circle to a larger representation of the parish and engage this larger group on the same issues. In some parishes, especially in situations where a pastor has more than one parish, it may be possible to hold the meetings of the core leadership group and the larger representative group at the same time.

After these initial meetings, there is to be an open town hall-style meeting (or meetings) during which all parishioners are able to express freely their views about all of the issues under consideration, making use of the same instruments used by the smaller group. These meetings will be followed by meetings of the leadership groups from the clusters (and others who wish to participate) under the guidance of the Vicar Forane (Dean). These meetings will be particularly important for determining ways in which parishes and schools can cooperate more effectively or in considering the possibility of consolidating parishes and schools. All of these meetings will be fruitful only if they are conducted in an atmosphere of prayer and mutual respect. They must be dialogues of faith in which the temptation to embrace skepticism and cynicism will give way to the embrace of Christian hope.

It is very important for the participants in Phase One to make every effort to propose realistic, concrete suggestions for the future of their parishes and schools and not simply offer vague, optimistic generalities. Every parish should search honestly for ways in which it might be of help to another parish. This process will make all involved more deeply aware that southern Illinois Catholics, who have a deserved reputation for being generous missionaries to Christian communities in need in faraway lands, must now be missionaries in our own communities.

The specific proposals and recommendations will be summarized by the pastor, administrator, or parish life coordinator and sent to the Committee for Parish Renewal and Restructuring, chaired by the Vicar General and Moderator of the Curia, the Very Reverend John W. McEvelly by March 30, 2012. The work of this committee is the beginning of Phase Two (May 2012-February 2013). The Committee will study the recommendations coming from the parishes and schools. The Committee may wish to meet with the core leadership of a specific parish to encourage addressing any serious matters that have gone unaddressed in the process or to answer questions that the parish has raised. Obviously, no one will have the answers to all questions the faithful may have.

The Committee for Parish Renewal and Restructuring will make final recommendations to Bishop Braxton. Up to this point, the PASTORAL PLAN has been an in-depth consultative process. No final decisions will have been made. Nevertheless, many valuable ideas may emerge during Phase One that do not require the bishop's approval. The committee may well recommend that these ideas for renewal and restructuring go into effect without waiting for a mandate from the bishop. The bishop's mandate will primarily concern recommendations that require canonical action that only the bishop can make. These canonical actions include the consolidation or suppression of parishes and consolidation or closing of schools.

All of the members of our diocesan family and our well-wishers outside of the Diocese are urged to pray for the success of this important undertaking. Pray that, like the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, we may be transfigured by the power of the Holy Spirit.