



ATTACHMENT C

THE PASTORAL PLAN FOR PARISH RENEWAL AND RESTRUCTURING

CRITERIA FOR DETERMINING PARISH VIABILITY

The following criteria are intended to guide parish communities in assessing the vitality of their parish life and to pinpoint areas that need renewed emphasis or development. These criteria should assist parishes in determining ways in which they might cooperate with and/or offer support to a neighboring parish. They should also serve as a set of guidelines for dialogue and conversation about the future of their parish, including possible restructuring, consolidation, merging, or closing. A significant weakness in one or two of these criteria would not mean that the parish is not viable. It would, however, point to an area that needed further attention. Significant weakness in five or more criteria would be a strong indication that a parish does not have long-term viability.

1. **THE CHRISTIAN FAITHFUL:** The Christian faithful are the heart of every parish. To survive, every parish needs a core of members who are truly committed to the Gospel of Christ and are willing to make the parish a priority, giving generously of their time, talent and treasure. A viable parish probably needs a minimum active membership of 50-75 households. A parish that is smaller than this and has experienced decline rather than growth during the past five years cannot easily expect to have the services of a priest, even a sacramental minister, five years from now. Ways for a parish to determine membership include taking note of the ratio of baptisms to the number of funerals each year over a 5-10 year period; studying the increase, decrease, or stability of the general population in a geographic area and trends in aging over a 5-10 year period; reviewing the stability, rise, or fall of the October Count over a 5-10 year period; evaluating employment opportunities in the community; and taking note of how many newly married couples remain in the parish. If the Christian faithful participate in this process with a true spirituality and an unselfish openness to doing what is best for all, they may be surprised to see the renewal in their community of faith even when two parishes are consolidated into one.
2. **LEADERSHIP:** A viable parish must have at least one full-time or part-time salaried priest who is actually able to oversee the parish. Otherwise, it must have at least one full-time or part-time salaried, appropriately trained deacon, religious, or layperson as

pastoral leader, assisted by a priest who provides at least for the sacramental needs of the parish. There must also be a sufficient number of active parishioners offering leadership by assisting the professional parish leader as parish pastoral council members, music ministers, lectors, extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion, ushers, servers, etc., so that a small group does not burn out. If your pastor is likely to retire within the next two to five years, you should be asking what you will do if the Diocese does not have a priest to replace him, even as a sacramental minister. This possibility will have a real impact on your viability that must be taken into account. (It is not reasonable to ask priests to provide pastoral ministry to an unrealistic number of parishes, nor is the Eucharistic identity of a parish sustained by inviting a priest from outside of the Diocese who has no other contact with the parish to celebrate a weekend Mass. Appointing additional parish life coordinators does not meet this challenge since a priest will still be needed.)

3. **ACTIVE INVOLVEMENT OF THE PEOPLE:** A viable parish, today more than ever, needs the active involvement of a significant number of the parishioners. In parishes in which the same small, aging group of parishioners bears the burden of parish leadership and gives their time, talent, and treasure in large measure, there can be serious concern about future viability. As that small group retires or experiences burnout and withdraws from active involvement, the parish is at risk of failing if younger parishioners are unwilling or unable to take their places. If the percentage of the faithful taking an active role in parish life can not be increased, viability can be at risk. Parish leadership often plays an important role in inviting a greater active involvement of the faithful.
4. **WORSHIP AND SPIRITUAL LIFE:** A viable parish demonstrates that worship is at the center of its life. The ultimate goal of every parish is to bring the faithful closer to Jesus Christ. This is why the Sunday Eucharist is, or should be, the heart of every parish. A viable parish is concerned about the spiritual growth of its members and makes every effort to invite parishioners of all ages and backgrounds to participate in the Eucharistic life of the parish. The celebration of the sacraments calls the parishioners to conversion. Prayer, Scripture-based preaching and the study of Sacred Scripture are of great importance. A viable parish nurtures the spiritual growth of the parishioners and supports their devotional life. A viable parish works with neighboring parishes, whether or not they are in the same cluster, in developing a realistic Mass schedule. There is an understanding that it is not possible in today's circumstances to offer Sunday "Masses of convenience."
5. **EDUCATION AND ONGOING FORMATION:** A viable parish gives evidence of being able to hand on the Catholic faith to children, young people, and adults by means of regular programs in religious education and Christian formation. This usually requires a trained, qualified person to oversee a program (parish school of religion) of religious education for adults as well as children. If there is a school, it should not be a "private" school. It

should be a truly Catholic school, a Christian community in which the young are formed in Christ in every aspect of the school environment. The faculty should be examples of Christ-centered living. A key component of the PASTORAL PLAN FOR PARISH RENEWAL AND RESTRUCTURING must be a critical evaluation of the parish's ability to maintain its school for the next five years. Enrollment increase/decrease? Affordable tuition? Stable, qualified faculty? A nearby struggling school? Clusters that have already been engaged in studies of the number of schools actually needed must resume this study in earnest with the help of the Office of Education and bring it to practical conclusion in time for the 2012-2013, or, at the latest, the 2013-2014 academic year. In clusters where school consolidations/closings in the next five years seem probable, a special subgroup should be formed to focus on this process. (Parishes with schools: See ATTACHMENT E, SCHOOL EVALUATION INSTRUMENT.)

6. **OUTREACH:** A viable parish extends a spirit of hospitality and invites people to become members. It is committed to evangelizing the un-churched by means of an active program for the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults. It encourages inactive members to return. It cultivates an ecumenical relationship with other Christian communities and an interfaith relationship with communities that are not of the Christian faith. A viable parish demonstrates a clear awareness of and support for the larger Church at the diocesan and universal levels. By itself or in conjunction with cluster parishes, a viable parish exhibits practical outreach and service to the poor, the needy, and the homeless. Priests, deacons, religious, and the lay faithful in a viable parish answer the call to share responsibility for the life of the parish in accord with their distinctive roles and ministries as members of the Body of Christ.

7. **FINANCES:** A viable parish should have an annual income that is sufficient to cover the expenses of the parish. There must be a reliable level of stewardship among the faithful who willingly give of their time, talent, and treasure in the amounts that are needed by the parish. If the parish has a school, no more than 40% of its income should go to the support of the parish elementary school. (This is the percentage recommended by the Office of Education and many national documents on viable Catholic schools and parish resources.) If the percentage is significantly higher than this, there should be evidence of a real effort to lower the percentage. A viable parish should not be dependent on the Diocese for its ordinary expenses. It should be able to make reasonable payments on its debts to the Diocese as well as the *cathedraticum*. There should not be an expectation that the Diocese will forgive the debts of a parish so it can meet parochial expenses. The parish should be able to make a serious effort to reach its goal in the annual Catholic Service and Ministry Appeal. Parishes that are blessed with greater resources are urged to explore ways of assisting parishes in financial need.

8. **FACILITIES**: A viable parish should be able to maintain the parish facilities and property in good condition. It should not undertake building projects, renovations, or improvements that it cannot afford. On the other hand, simply having the funds needed for improvements in the buildings does not mean these should be undertaken if it is apparent from other criteria on this list that the future of the parish is uncertain. The members of a parish must have an appreciation of the fact that understandable deep personal attachment to the church building or the parish cemetery on the part of the parishioners may not be an adequate reason for maintaining a parish or judging it to be viable. (N.B. When parishes merge, appropriate arrangements are always made with the parish in question for the future care of the cemetery.)

9. **GEOGRAPHIC DISTANCE**: A viable parish is influenced by its location. The proximity of neighboring parishes can have a real impact on the viability of a parish. If several parishes are in close proximity with large, aging buildings that are not needed and churches that are never even half-full, this can be a serious factor in viability. If there is one parish facility that is in good repair and large enough to accommodate nearby smaller parish families, this must be seriously considered. Parishes are not private chapels maintained simply because the parish has enough money to cover the expenses. Good stewardship of church personnel and resources may dictate examining the need for several parishes in a small area, even though this will mean that some of the faithful will have to drive a little farther for Mass and Church life as they do for shopping and other activities. (Can you drive to your nearest neighboring parish in fifteen minutes or less?)

10. **PARTICIPATION IN CLUSTER**: A viable parish must be involved in the cluster of which it is a part. Is your parish active in a cluster with other parishes? What positive benefits have come from the clustering process (e.g., shared resources, personnel, sacramental preparation, faith formation programs; adjusting of Mass schedules in a realistic way; schools cooperating, projecting future enrollment and taking serious note of the percentage of parish funds are used for the school). Have the parishes in your cluster been able to address the challenges of future projections in an open and honest manner? Has the question of possible future merging or suppressing of parishes been put on the table for serious discussion? If your parish has not been involved in the cluster process, what is the reason for this? Have there been any negative consequences of clustering? Have there been negative consequences from not participating in your cluster? Should your cluster or deanery be reconfigured? If yes, how should it be configured? **Please propose a specific new cluster/deanery arrangement.**