

**Archdiocese of Boston
Pastoral Planning Committee Report
May 2007**

PREAMBLE

Today, members of the church of Boston need to be called by their archbishop into a “culture of planning,” one permeated by a spirit of trust, unity and hope, and one intended to breathe new life into our archdiocese. Despite the fears and anxieties that any change engenders, this planning effort can be undertaken confidently, because God makes equips and readies us to undertake various tasks and offices for the renewal and strengthening of the Church [1 Cor 12]. Even more, we who have been given the privilege and responsibility of membership in the one Body of Christ must be called, in this time and place, to come together in a “unity of service” to our Church. As workers with the Lord in the vineyard, we can then also share in the joy of discovering a new way of “being Church,” of living and serving in the Church. As those who have gone before us have done for us, now is the time to ensure the viability, vision and vitality of the People of God in Boston for future generations. Now is the time to pray for a new Pentecost, the rebirth of the Church in Boston, that we trust will come through God’s grace and with the help of this planning initiative.

I. INTRODUCTION

In January 2006, Cardinal Sean O’Malley identified three areas of pastoral life that he considered particularly challenging for the archdiocese today—Faith Formation, Marriage, and Pastoral Planning. He appointed a committee to study each area and charged each committee with bringing its findings and recommendations to him and to the Presbyteral and Archdiocesan Pastoral Councils.

In elaborating on his charge to the Pastoral Planning Committee, the Cardinal asked that the Committee look at what exists in terms of services and programs; review the best practices locally and nationally; and formulate recommendations and priorities to guide the archdiocese into the future. He expressed concern about the limited number of priests likely to be available in the future in this archdiocese, given the loss of about 25 active priests per year through retirement, death or disability and the low levels of ordination (only 5 in 2006). He pointed out that many parishes in the archdiocese do not have the resources for evangelization and community building. We need to prepare for the future, he stated, through increased collaborative efforts among neighboring parishes. We need a plan that would put us in a position to address the challenges ahead, including: enabling vibrant worship communities, reaching out to both the uninvolved and the alienated, and serving the poor and those on the margins of society. The plan must take into account the roles of parish pastoral and finance councils; the contributions of competent, trained laity in various pastoral ministries; and the services of professional and volunteer staff that this plan will require.

The Committee as a whole has met 18 times during the course of the past 15 months, including one interim meeting with Cardinal Sean. There also have been a few subcommittee meetings and a retreat day. Members of the Committee have reviewed literature and have contacted a number of North American dioceses that have initiated or implemented steps to establish new parish models to address similar challenges. These findings have helped to develop the recommendations contained in this report.

II. FINDINGS

The National Catholic Reality

Among national Church leaders, there is widespread awareness of the changing nature of parish staffing. Research data confirms what is experienced at the local level throughout the country. The Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) reports that “there are 18,891 parishes in the United States and 42,528 priests. Of these, 28,374 are diocesan priests, and more than a quarter of those are retired, sick, or otherwise unable to minister actively. Within the next twenty years, 29,000 of the priests serving in the U.S. today will be over the age of 75. In the same twenty-year period, if the current rate continues, only some 9,000 priests will be ordained.” Sister Katarina Schuth’s *Priestly Ministry in Multiple Parishes* (2006) shows that the percentage of worship sites being staffed by priests who serve more than one parish (or church within a parish) stood at 44% of Latin-rite parishes and missions. Regional variations are notable. For a high, 48% of priests in the Minnesota and the Dakotas serve more than one parish or worship site; on the low end, only 12% in Pennsylvania and New Jersey do so. In New England, 15.5% of priests serve in that way.

Currently, more than 30,000 lay ecclesial ministers have parish leadership roles, and some 15,000 permanent deacons are serving in parishes. The U. S. Bishops, recognizing the changing nature of parish ministry, have recently published “Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord: A Resource Guide for the Development of Lay Ecclesial Ministry.” The Lilly Foundation has funded a five-year study beginning in 2005, entitled *The Emerging Models of Pastoral Leadership Project*. The interim and final reports of this study should be helpful as dioceses implement new models.

The Reality in the Archdiocese of Boston

Within the archdiocese there is a keenly felt need for rebuilding trust in church leaders, structures and teachings. Whatever is done to plan for the future of pastoral care has to be done in a way that engenders trust. Those designing any processes or initiatives must be constantly alert to this reality. Trust is connected with transparency, consultation, communication, integrity, follow-through, and many other desirable qualities.

One of the factors affecting the low trust level in pastoral planning is the thirty-year history within the archdiocese of initiating pastoral planning and then stopping midstream when the hard questions surfaced. In the late 1970s the staff of the Center for Planned Change in St. Louis were engaged by the archbishop to launch a diocesan-wide pastoral planning process under the direction of Auxiliary Bishop Daniel Hart. Within two years, support for the process was withdrawn. Although efforts continued in each region of the Archdiocese, they floundered and eventually ceased. In 1990, parishes in the Merrimack Region began to plan collaboratively. This effort continued and led to several successful examples of good parish planning. Unfortunately, such planning gradually ceased until the reconfiguration in 2004 led to the closing of a number of parishes.

After the Synod of 1988, the archbishop established the Archdiocesan Office of Planning and Research and mandated the establishment of parish pastoral councils in every parish. These councils carry the primary responsibility for advising the pastor and collaborating with him in planning processes that will enhance and renew the pastoral life of each parish. Guidelines were issued for the development of Parish Pastoral Councils, formation workshops were offered, and a planning manual (*Long-Range Planning Manual for Parish Pastoral Councils*) was developed to guide these efforts. Where effective

councils were established, pastoral life was strengthened, but in most cases the hard questions that required collaboration with neighboring parishes were avoided.

In 1994, the Archdiocese identified pastoral planning within and among parishes as its highest priority. At that time clusters of parishes were formed. Many of the clusters, with cooperation of clergy and laity, recommended parish closings or mergers. Between 1994 and 2003, 42 parishes were closed outright or as a result of a merger. Some clusters worked together far better than others.

In 2004 the Archdiocese launched a planning process that called upon clusters to identify one or two parishes within their cluster that could be closed if the Archbishop found it necessary. Without the appropriate training in facilitation and planning for those leading the process, coupled with the very short time provided for parishes to develop their recommendations, many of these cluster processes floundered, and some became downright ugly. Recommendations from the clusters were reviewed by the appropriate vicars and regional bishops and then revised in some cases before being sent to the Archdiocesan Central Committee, established to make the final recommendations to the archbishop. When dissension arose among parishioners of parishes recommended to close, an outside review committee was established to revisit the recommendations; sit-ins occurred, appeals were made to the Vatican, and some decisions were reversed. Today, 295 parishes remain open, but the statistics below will indicate that even this number cannot be sustained for long.

The Archdiocese of Boston is currently served by a total of 500 active priests. Of these, 38 are on health leave or unassigned, 97 in special ministry and 365 in parish ministry. Of those in parish ministry, 108 are 65 years of age or older. At a projected average net-loss rate of 25 active priests per year and a projected average of 5 newly ordained priests per year, **by 2015 there will be only 292 active priests, i.e., priests who are not retired or permanently disabled; only an estimated 212 will be available for parish ministry. This will leave approximately 10-12 priests in each of the 20 vicariates in full-time parish work.** Not all active priests will be capable or willing to serve as pastors. It is likely that more religious communities -- as have the Marists, Oblates and Franciscans -- will be turning their leadership of parishes back to the archdiocese, owing to insufficient numbers of priests; a few new communities will likely take responsibility for some parishes. The current dependence on many senior priests to assist with liturgical life will surely continue but their numbers will begin to decrease.

According to Katarina Schuth (2006), 2.9% of Boston's parish-assigned priests serve more than one parish or an additional church within a parish. 8.5% of Boston's worship sites are served by priests with multiple parishes or churches. These Boston figures are likely still low enough that the phenomenon and its ramifications are only slowly being faced.

The archdiocese is also served by 219 permanent deacons. Of these, 163 are active, 17 are unassigned, 5 are externs, 30 are senior deacons, 2 are on sick leave, and 2 are on special assignment. Also serving the archdiocese are various lay ministers, including 97 pastoral associates, 89 directors of religious education, 41 coordinators of religious education, 74 administrators of religious education, 186 business managers, and 128 youth ministers. Some within all these groups serve in dual roles (and have been counted twice here).

It is encouraging that many Catholics in the archdiocese are deeply committed to Christ and the Church; to the parish and its programs; to the universal Church's teaching and values; to Sunday Mass; to participation in ministries, councils and activities; to daily Mass and to devotions. These parishioners want and need support for their commitments, but the support can be provided only within the context of availability of resources that many times are limited. On the other hand, many Catholics in the

archdiocese struggle with their allegiance to the Church. Many parishioners are “on the fringe” of Church life. These are missionary times that make parish ministry difficult. Enlisting parishioners to assist with parish activities and ministries can be very challenging, time-consuming, and limited in results. Less committed Catholics are apt to be the very ones making demands on strained parish resources in their time of need. Very many priests find themselves and their colleagues to be stressed, frustrated and highly pressured in their roles on the front lines of the Church’s leadership.

Parish life -- with its policies, report forms, and regulations -- has become quite complicated. Pastoral mission often competes with business procedures for the time of the pastoral minister, especially the pastor. The costs of maintaining parish facilities and of paying just staff salaries and benefits compete with pastoral programs for limited financial resources. Some parishes are heavily dependent on revenue streams like rental income, bingo, or various fundraisers rather than on the developed stewardship of parishioners. Even after the many parish closings that tended to effect the smallest parishes most of all, continuing shifts in demographic patterns have made some parishes high in buildings and bills, but rather low in parishioners.

For many years, the environment within the Archdiocese has cried out for effective pastoral planning at all levels, but particularly in and among the parishes. Each parish, though unique in gifts and challenges, needs to meet sound and workable criteria for a vibrant parish and to utilize effectively its limited resources for the sake of mission. (See *Signs of a Healthy and Vibrant Parish*, developed for use in parish visitations prior to 2001.)

Currently the Archdiocese lacks an infrastructure that can sustain effective pastoral planning. There are too few collaborative connections among parishes. There are far more clergy-led pastoral tasks and liturgical celebrations now being conducted than can be sustained by an aging and numerically diminishing pool of clergy. Without a strong mandate, issued by the archbishop to all parishes, to engage in pastoral planning for the future, the pastoral life of the archdiocese will continue to decline at a more rapid pace. The mandate must be accompanied by the necessary authority delegated to each Regional Bishop to oversee the planning, and it must include a call for accountability from the parishes. At the same time the regional bishops must be accountable both to one another and to the archbishop for the exercise of this authority. Sharing of this delegated authority with their respective vicars forane makes good sense.

Across the US: Diocesan Responses to Similar Realities

Contacts with other dioceses indicated that there have been two modes of response to the current reality: 1) an ad-hoc, case-by-case approach to an individual parish staffing issue or, 2) the development of a diocesan-wide effort to plan and implement future parish staffing solutions, as evidenced by Louisville, Cleveland and Portland in Maine. This second approach is characterized by:

- The diocesan bishop’s call for all parishes to plan for parish staffing solutions;
- Careful use of all existing consultative bodies, e.g., Presbyteral Council, Archdiocesan Pastoral Council, in supporting planning strategies;
- The creation of a respected planning (or *implementation*) committee that determines with the diocesan bishop the array of staffing options available and acceptable within the diocese;
- Articulation of criteria for parishes to be considered vibrant;
- Arrival at diocesan-wide expectations of which pastoral and liturgical services can reasonably be carried out in and among parishes, and to what extent (e.g., frequency and numbers of liturgical events) and by whom (clergy, lay ecclesial ministers, committee laity);

- The engagement of all parishes (organized into pre-determined groupings) in a thorough consultative process leading to recommendations about future parish staffing solutions for each set of parish groupings;
- Determination and communication to parish groupings of a reasonable forecast of numbers of clergy who will be available to serve an area;
- The engagement of regional leaders (regional bishops and vicars) to animate and supervise the consultative and planning process at the local level;
- The assessment of all recommendations by the planning committee, as well as of the quality of the consultative process and of the practicality of the recommendations;
- Submission of the total plan to the diocesan bishop for his review and acceptance;
- Publication of the recommended diocesan-wide plan, with time for additional information to be considered and modifications to be made; and
- Promulgation of the decisions, often with a timeline for implementation.

The parish models currently in place in the United States are these nine:

- Individual parish with priest pastor
- Formal coordinated ministry, in which two or more neighboring parishes are to work with another to provide specified services and avoid duplication of ministries
- Individual parish with pastoral administrator--a deacon, religious or lay man or woman
- Two or more parishes with one pastor
- Two or more parishes with one pastoral administrator
- Two or more parishes served by a team of priests serving *in solidum* (Canon 517.1)
- One parish and one pastor serving multiple worship sites
- Merger of two parishes, with one pastor and with one worship site
- Closing of a parish

Those who have undertaken the diocesan-wide approach have pointed to this approach as a way to create: a new understanding of ministry and parish (Portland, Maine); a fuller, vibrant parish life for those who participate (Cleveland); and an opportunity to educate the faithful and draw them to more participation in the Church through their involvement in the process (as has been the case in the three dioceses already cited). All of these models presume that parish staffs are in place to complement the ministry of the pastor. Any model implemented is meant to take into account and promote the importance of the celebration of the Eucharist, especially on Sunday.

III. RECOMMENDATIONS

If no proactive diocesan-wide planning approach, guided by the Archbishop, is undertaken, the Archdiocese faces a continuing series of parish closings resulting especially from staffing limitations and financial problems. It will also face the hurt and anger accompanying such closings.

Whatever the approach to the future that is taken, it is inevitable that many aspects of the present parish structures will no longer be sustainable in even the immediate future. Parish life will have to look very different from the present as parishes strive to use more limited resources for mission. Features such as the number of parishes, the availability and modes of leadership, as well as the extent of liturgical and pastoral services offered will undoubtedly have to change. Factors such as typical parish size, sharing of financial resources among parishes, and criteria for parish vitality all will require careful thought.

Developing suitable models and priorities for the parishes is very important. It is all the more important in view of the great need to help people to encounter the Lord, to cherish and know their faith, to live their faith wholeheartedly, and to respond to the Baptismal call to holiness and participation in mission. Failure to develop suitable staffing models and diocesan-wide guidelines for provision of pastoral services will result in burnout of staff, especially priests, and in parishes' focusing on mere maintenance rather than on mission.

The Pastoral Planning Committee recommends steps that need to be taken to achieve the changes necessary to meet the challenges ahead. These steps can be viewed at two levels: parish and archdiocese.

Parish Level

- ❖ First and foremost is this recommendation: The Archdiocese of Boston, led by its archbishop, should undertake a planning process based on what has been detailed above in “Diocesan Responses...” (including the different models of parish currently in place in the United States). Tailoring a process for Boston’s situation, the archbishop would decide, after careful consultation, which parish models are workable here. It is crucial that carefully combined planning be done, as has happened in other dioceses, through a process that links planning within the parish and among existing parishes with an overall archdiocesan planning effort. The provision for the archbishop’s choosing an array of different possible models is meant to assure consistent diocesan-wide parameters while it allows for a flexibility at the local level that is still always under his direction. This provision is considerably broader than one allowing only the possibilities of a parish’s staying open or closing. (This process is described in the next section: Archdiocesan Level.)
- ❖ A related recommendation is made in view of the fact that declining numbers of priests warrant changes in how priests and other staff carry out parish ministry. It will be essential that – before and after any implemented changes in models of parishes -- there be cooperation and collaboration among priests and staff members in neighboring parishes or among those formally associated in new ways. These changes include *but are not limited to* the following, and further consultation will undoubtedly expand or refine these suggestions:
 - Required and regular meetings to address collaboratively common pastoral coverage issues and to broaden cooperative efforts among priests and pastoral staffs in a given locale;

- A pastoral plan for coverage of funerals, sacramental emergencies, and other pastoral issues as well as days off, retreat and vacation, in a given locale;
- Adjustments in the daily Mass schedule of neighboring parishes to ensure that liturgy is available each day albeit at different local parishes;
- Development of collaborative initiatives among neighboring parishes for hearing confessions at communal Reconciliation services.

In view of these kinds of specific changes that might be envisioned, it should be noted that the following policy issues will likely have to be addressed and settled by the archbishop:

- *whether funerals can regularly not be celebrated on a parish-selected day per week;*
 - *whether a communion service in a parish is ever an allowed option;*
 - *the highest and lowest number of daily Masses that a priest should/may celebrate – and that a parish be expected to offer – per day and also per week, and the number of Sunday Masses in a parish, with allowances for local circumstances (e.g., church seating capacities, distances between churches, number of churches in a parish).*
- ❖ Many ecclesial ministers and parishioners need to understand what is meant by the term and process of “pastoral planning for mission,” a process that should already be existing in parishes: in staffs and in parish pastoral councils especially. To engage well in this process, all parishes will need help from beyond their own resources, and with the assistance of archdiocesan resources that will need to be existing and available. Those parishes that have undertaken effective, ongoing planning are to be congratulated, supported and encouraged in their efforts. Those that are struggling with it need to be assisted with appropriate facilitation and other resources. Those that have never engaged in any planning will need a mandate and strong support from the archbishop and his delegates to begin.
- ❖ Going forward, within parish groupings and with a diocesan-wide consistency, a grouping’s pastoral plan – worked out collaboratively among parishes involved -- must address matters such as the following:
- A realistic workload for all parish ministers that recognizes the appropriate roles of staff members and acknowledges the need for periodic and regular renewal, both physical and spiritual, as well as ongoing formation. Standard practices need to be stipulated as acceptable and in fact normative for consistent pastoral coverage throughout the archdiocese. These include but are not limited to the following, and consultation will likely produce a refinement of this list:
 - Delegation of Extraordinary Ministers to bring Holy Communion to the sick, homebound and dying. Lay ministers can identify those parishioners in need of Reconciliation and the Anointing of the Sick, as well as those who may warrant more pastoral care by the priest.
 - Enlisting deacons and trained lay ministers to provide pastoral care to grieving families and to preside at wake services, funerals without a Mass and graveside prayer services;
 - Provision of a system for contacting a priest in an emergency when the priest is not on parish premises, e.g. a beeper, cell phone;
 - Stipulation of office hours for normal parish business with the provision that a priest (even if from another parish) can be contacted for a sacramental emergency;
 - Pastoral demands ordinarily not interfering with regularly scheduled days off for priests and pastoral ministers;
 - A limitation on the number of Masses a priest is to celebrate on a regular basis;
 - Criteria for the number of Masses to be offered on Sunday and weekdays to provide equitably for the needs of parishioners in all area parishes

- Hiring of parish business managers by all parishes or groups of parishes by a certain date to ensure more time for the pastor to provide greater focus on the pastoral care of the parish;
- The specific needs of priests who are alone in a parish as regards Mass schedules and the provision of sacramental/pastoral ministry;
- The specific needs of pastors with more than one parish or church as regards Mass schedules and the provision of sacramental / pastoral ministry;
- The sharing of resources -- administrative, pastoral, sacramental, formational and educational -- among parishes in a geographic area;
- Provision of sacramental/pastoral ministry within geographic areas for hospitals, nursing homes, senior citizen housing, schools, etc.;
- Coverage for parishes during the planned and unplanned absence of a priest;
- Alternative possibilities for priests to live with other priests, especially for those who serve as the only priest in a parish.

Archdiocesan Level

This committee sees the need for a basic administrative infrastructure change. It is required to bring about significant and meaningful pastoral planning on the parish level, as follows:

- **A mandate from the archbishop for all parishes to engage in the diocesan-wide pastoral planning process**
- Delegation of the appropriate authority to the regional bishops to carry out the mandate and delegation of the appropriate authority by the regional bishops to their respective vicars forane
- The selection (after consultation with diocesan officials and diocesan consultative groups) of an archdiocesan **Implementation Committee** to review the parish staffing options currently available (see page 5 above under Findings) and to consult with the archbishop about acceptable options
- The assignment of Regional Bishops and Vicars to work with the Implementation Committee to determine by Region the most suitable grouping of parishes (by Vicariate or subdivision of a Vicariate.) These determinations would be assisted by wide consultation with pastors, parish staffs and Parish Pastoral Councils.
- The development of a communications process that is all encompassing and distinct for this initiative, with an expectation that communication cannot be left to each parish to devise and also with an aim for high-quality media methods
- Education/formation of all clergy, staff and parishioners around the **attitudinal shifts** necessary for developing more creative responses to parish pastoral needs in the 21st century
- Presentations to parish groupings of the planning agenda and timeline, including an orientation about deliberations concerning the staffing option that best fits the reality of each grouping (see page 5 re: staffing options)
- The commitment of resources for urgently needed and on-going formation of lay, religious, seminarians and clergy, if sufficient numbers are to be available to serve well (See page 10)
- The strengthening of parish pastoral councils by mandating and supporting the effective carrying out of their primary role as advisory to the pastor for pastoral planning
- The re-establishment of a planning mechanism that fosters inter-parish planning meetings

- Development of a program for the preparation and formation of potential parish administrators (if this model of parish staffing is approved). Some current pastoral associates and some permanent deacons could be among the first candidates
- A plan for enhancement of the seminaries' formation programs of workshops, courses or programs for the development of skills in pastoral planning, group dynamics, interpersonal relationships and leadership/organization. These workshops, courses and programs should in many cases be open to lay and religious participants.
- A method for tracking/assessing the learnings or outcomes related to new parish leadership and staffing models, given the newness of the models
- A method for providing, on a level higher than that of the parish or of the local grouping of parishes, some financial help for parishes without means to hire necessary parish staff (e.g., business manager) or to provide other essential parish services

Important elements of the proposed parish planning processes for the archbishop are these:

- Articulating a vision for the Archdiocese of Boston, his priorities for pastoral planning, and criteria for vibrant / vital parishes
- Mandating archdiocesan-wide pastoral planning in and among parishes
- Authorizing regional bishops, and in turn the vicars forane, to oversee the implementation of the mandate in light of the articulated vision and priorities.
- Mandating that all clergy and parish pastoral councils be formed and educated in the steps for effective pastoral planning; along with the commitment of financial, personnel and other resources to assist parishes in this challenging undertaking
- Enunciation of the expectation of involvement of clergy, parish staffs and parishioners in the planning process, and of the expected involvement of the parish pastoral council
- Keeping groupings of parishes aware of the likely supply of priests possible for carrying out ministry in those groupings
- Taking sufficient time for education about any proposed change in staffing models and about the relationship between the roles of parish and archdiocese in the process
- Calling all Catholics of the archdiocese to be concerned not narrowly for the good of their own parishes but more broadly for the welfare of the entire archdiocese
- Stating an expectation that there should be formation of seminary students and all potential parish staff members for this new reality
- Guiding the archdiocese in setting reasonable expectations for provision of liturgical and pastoral services in parishes and groupings of parishes

Considerations Related to Well Prepared Parish Personnel

The success of these efforts to reinvigorate parish pastoral life, in view of the reality of personnel and financial limitations, is dependent on the ability of well prepared parish staffs to collaborate among themselves and to collaborate with neighboring parish staffs. In view of this reality, certain priorities emerge:

- ❖ To support these efforts it is imperative that some (though not all) training for seminarians, deacon candidates, and lay ecclesial ministers take place with these groups gathered together within our formation programs. Certain classroom or workshop discussions will be more real and fruitful if pastoral issues are viewed both from the perspective of those being trained for the clergy and those

entering lay pastoral ministry. These dialogues in instructional settings will lay the groundwork for effective collaboration in ministry.

- ❖ When the archbishop, the regional bishop, or the vicar gathers people to address hopes, plans or issues of parish pastoral life, all the various pastoral staff persons should ordinarily be invited to participate. This does not preclude the appropriateness, at times, for priests, permanent deacons or other ministers to gather together to address issues as separate groups.
- ❖ Regular ongoing formation and updating must be offered to parish staffs with an expectation that every staff is engaged in some form of professional development together as a staff, if the collaborative process is to be effective.
- ❖ Since the Master of Arts in Ministry program of St. John's Seminary is one of the major training grounds for prospective personnel, it needs to be competitive with other programs and increase the number of available graduates. There is need to explore the financial strains that can hold back students from enrolling. Major donors might be asked to contribute to the establishment of a scholarship fund or a fund supportive of the program. Archdiocesan support for the program's fundraising and/or grant writing could assist this.
- ❖ Since the potential for offering a wide variety of pastoral services within a given parish is seriously hampered by the lack of trained volunteers to provide the leadership for these services, a program similar to the defunct AIM program needs to be re-instituted to complement what is now offered on a diocesan level. Lay volunteers need not only skills development but also more importantly the solid theological and formational base that AIM had offered the laity. The number that had participated in these programs throughout the Archdiocese demonstrates the hunger for solid formation in particular ministries, and parishioners' desire to share talents in service to their parish communities.

Further Considerations Regarding Archdiocesan Agencies and Bodies

- ❖ **In order to sustain and enhance pastoral planning efforts on the parish level, a culture of planning at all levels of the Archdiocese must be developed and fostered. It is a well-known principle of "best practices" that the culture of an organization is established by the person(s) at the top. For our local church, unless the archbishop establishes an annual pastoral planning process as a priority for his cabinet, for all archdiocesan agencies, and for each parish in cooperation with neighboring ones, then a culture of reactivity will easily win out over a culture of planned responsiveness to pastoral needs.**
- ❖ Pastoral planning begins with the setting of pastoral priorities by the archbishop, in collaboration with the presbyteral council, the archdiocesan pastoral council and his cabinet. The annual archdiocesan budget reflects these pastoral priorities and as such gives direction for the annual Catholic Appeal. Under the leadership of the cabinet secretaries, every agency must be engaged in ongoing planning: annually setting goals that reflect the archbishop's priorities; developing a budget to support these goals; modifying these plans, if necessary, to meet budgeted allocations; periodically evaluating progress towards the achievement of the goals; and annually preparing an accountability report. To be effective, these efforts must be viewed as more than a mere formality or

exercise to be completed. The quality of each agency's planning efforts must be an integral part of the annual job performance evaluations.

- ❖ The staff of pastoral agencies, in particular the Office of Planning and Research, are natural resource persons for the expertise that parishes will seek. That office's *Long Range Planning Manual for Parish Pastoral Councils* offers a step-by-step approach to developing a long-range plan. *Signs of a Healthy and Vibrant Parish*, developed in the early 90's as part of the parish visitation manual, could be reviewed, perhaps updated, and then used to guide planning.
- ❖ In the past an annual convocation of parish pastoral and finance councils with the archbishop provided the opportunity for parishioner-members to be energized by the vision of the archbishop and to share experiences and resources with one another. At present the Office of Regional Services is developing mechanisms for linking parishes with archdiocesan services that can best service parishes' needs. The establishment of new "collaboratives" is a step in the right direction as long as the recommended infrastructure that creates real accountability for pastoral planning on the parish level is also developed. Care may well need to be given toward making these groupings truly workable, considering the harsh legacy resulting from reconfiguration.
- ❖ The roles of the Presbyteral Council and the Archdiocesan Pastoral Council in assisting the archbishop to create this culture of planning cannot be overemphasized. As representatives of both the clergy and laity, the council members have their finger on the pulse of the archdiocese and should faithfully communicate to the archbishop what they are hearing, as well as recommendations for addressing the pastoral concerns of the faithful of the archdiocese.

Concluding Points

As we make our report, we on the Committee are very aware that the efforts to meet what is called for in this report may be costly in terms of time, energy and finances. We ourselves can anticipate the question: Can we afford to attempt this? Our answer has to be: Can we afford not to do it? That being said, we hope it can be carried out in a way that is as simple as reasonably possible without sacrificing courage, wisdom and respect, and be carried out in a way that does not place too heavy a burden on priests, parish and archdiocesan staff members, and parishioners.

Our Committee has tried to point to some of the important issues we have seen and considered. There are bound to be many others, ones related to what is contained here but also deserving of attention in their own right. These would include a mix of matters, like the following: parish preparedness for transitions of new pastors, personnel planning to complement new parish models, the prospect and challenge of international priests serving our local church, the specific content of formation programs in view of pastoral planning needs, realities of pastoral planning among culturally diverse groups, the availability of sabbaticals for pastoral ministers, ramifications for ministerial morale, aspects of travel time and distance in more remote areas of the archdiocese, finding ways of sharing good pastoral initiatives. Those who receive and read this report will very likely think of more. If this report starts some good reflection and leads to further specification and expansion of issues, it can be helpful. Moreover, if it also leads to thoughtful and concerted action for the good of the Church's mission, then it will be successful.

Committee Membership

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Archdiocese of Boston Pastoral Planning Process Proposed Timeline for Action Steps

The dioceses and archdioceses that have been most successful in making forward progress to meet the challenges outlined in this report have had an uncompromising time line for implementation. The forecast of this report for Boston gives us approximately a seven year window in which to make changes in the way we administratively run our parishes and provide pastoral services. Seven years forces the timeline to be aggressive, allowing only 36 months for the infrastructure changes to be made, the parish plans to be developed and implementation begun. All the proposed time sequence is measured from the start date of the initiative. With this in mind the following time line has been proposed.

Start	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A commitment is made by the Archbishop to address the need for acute changes in the models/staffing of the parishes in the Archdiocese of Boston. • Mandate from the Archbishop for all parishes to engage in the Pastoral Planning process.
2 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delegation of appropriate authority to the Regional Bishops Delegation of appropriate authority by each Regional Bishop to their respective Vicars Forane • An Implementation Committee (IC) is formed and informed • A communication process for all levels, regional, parish and the wider community developed
6 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The IC articulates a clear directive as to what is being asked of the regions and parishes. • The Archbishop agrees to this initiative and communicates it to the Regional Bishops • Re-establishment of planning mechanisms for inter-parish planning. (collaboratives)
9 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education and formation begun of all clergy and parishioners around the attitudinal shifts necessary • Mandate of effective implementation of Parish Pastoral Councils as the primary advisor to the pastor for pastoral planning
12 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IC Presents final planning agenda and timeline to include the determination of parish structure and staffing options for the next 5 years • Development of a program for the preparation and formation of potential parish administrators • Inclusion into the seminary/religious/lay formation programs or workshops more opportunities for developing the skills for effective pastoral planning, group dynamics, interpersonal relationships and leadership/organization
24 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Each collaborative provides to its Regional Bishop, for approval, a plan responding to the pastoral issues of the next 5 years • Commitment of resources for on-going formation of lay, religious, seminarians and clergy
28 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regional Bishops in consultation with the Archbishop and other designated parties respond to the parishes, outlining agreements, questionable areas and new directions for the collaborative
34 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaborative may again submit a plan taking into consideration the prior feedback from the Regional Bishop

36 months

- A final plan approved for the collaborative
- Pastoral services and staffing aligned with the agreed upon plan and timeline for the collaborative

The Report's Highlights

- Within the next 7 years, the number of active priests in the archdiocese is forecast to be 292, or an average of 10-12 per vicariate (allowing for some non-parish priests); present arrangements cannot be maintained. The archdiocese will need to rely upon permanent deacons, religious and other appropriately trained lay ministers to an even greater extent than it does today.
- Several other U.S. dioceses, faced with similar priest shortages as all dioceses are today, have adopted a diocesan-wide effort to plan and implement various parish staffing options rather than accept a case-by-case approach.
- If no proactive archdiocesan-wide approach to future staffing, guided by the archbishop, is undertaken, the archdiocese faces hard results: a series of parish closings due to staff limitations and financial problems, and the accompanying hurt and anger. Many aspects of the present parish structures will not be sustainable in even the immediate future.
- A basic administrative infrastructure change is needed that will enable the faithful to continue to participate as they should as part of their responsibility growing out of their Baptism and not as driven merely by the shortage of priests.
- For the archdiocesan-wide planning effort to be successful, it will be necessary for:
 - The archbishop to articulate a vision for the archdiocese, priorities for pastoral planning, criteria for vibrant / vital parishes and for levels of provisions of liturgical and pastoral services, forecast of numbers of priests likely available for future needs of parish groupings
 - A mandate from the archbishop that all parishes engage in the pastoral planning process with involvement of clergy, parish staffs and parishioners engaged in the process under the leadership of the parish pastoral council and in relation to the planning occurring in other parishes in each parish's grouping
 - Delegation of the appropriate authority to the regional bishops to carry out the mandate and delegation of the appropriate authority to their respective vicars forane;
 - The selection of an archdiocesan Implementation Committee to review various staffing options and to consult with the archbishop about acceptable options;
 - The requirement that each parish grouping provide to its regional bishop for approval a plan that responds to issues such as a realistic workload for all parish ministers; the specific needs of priests, given the conditions faced in individual parishes; the sharing of resources among parishes; Mass schedules; provision of sacramental/pastoral ministry for hospitals, nursing homes, schools, etc.
 - The development and fostering of a culture of planning at all levels of the archdiocese. Unless the archbishop establishes an annual pastoral planning process as a priority for his cabinet, for all agencies of the archdiocese and for each individual parish in cooperation with neighboring parishes, the culture of reactivity, rather than responsiveness to pastoral needs, will not change.
 - Pastoral planning to begin with the setting of pastoral priorities by the archbishop, in collaboration with the Presbyteral Council, the Archdiocesan Pastoral Council and the Cabinet. These pastoral priorities will not only provide direction for the annual Catholic Appeal, but also for every agency which, under the leadership of the cabinet secretaries, must be engaged in on-going planning:
 - Setting goals that reflect the archbishop's priorities,
 - Developing a budget to support these goals,
 - Modifying these plans, if necessary, to meet budgeted allocations,
 - Periodically reviewing progress toward the goals, and
 - Preparing an annual report of achievement.

December 14, 2007

My dear friends in Christ,

As we move through the Advent season, a time of hope and expectation, allow me to take this opportunity to provide you an update on the work of the Archdiocesan Pastoral Planning Committee. In January of 2006 I appointed this group to assess the present reality of our parishes and options we will need to consider for the future. The committee's report, which is not a plan but rather a call for a grass roots planning process, received widespread publicity following its release in May and has been available for review through the Archdiocesan web site, www.rcab.org <<http://www.rcab.org>>, since then. During the past several months there have been consultations with a variety of groups, including the Presbyteral Council, the Archdiocesan Pastoral Council, the Cabinet and the Auxiliary Bishops, to obtain their reaction to the report's findings and recommendations and to hear their suggestions.

In order to move ahead to promote vibrant parish life, we need to assess the best way to staff our parishes with the limited number of priests we see for the foreseeable future, and to provide well-qualified staff and well-formed and dedicated volunteers to assist the clergy and religious. This in turn requires that parishes collaborate so that each one is able to have a full pastoral and spiritual life with the available resources.

Some parishes and vicariates have already begun meeting to assess the report and consider its implications. I encourage them to continue to meet and to plan for the future. We are working to develop an implementation plan that which will include identifying the resources necessary to assist parishes (e.g., the use of professional facilitators). This is a major undertaking that will require the care and commitment of all aspects of our Archdiocese. When this implementation plan is finalized, we will announce the next steps to ensure a culture of planning in the Archdiocese and to support parishes in this process.

A clear and thoughtful response to the Archdiocese's needs as presented in the Pastoral Planning Committee's report must be among our highest priorities. Your input is welcome and needed. Please consider the opportunities to work with your parish staff and vicariate leadership to plan for the future. Also, we would appreciate your sharing your comments and recommendations concerning the report with Sr. Marian Batho, CSJ, Secretary for Regional Services. Sr. Marian can be reached by telephone at 617 746 5637 or through email at: sr_marian_batho@rcab.org <mailto:sr_marian_batho@rcab.org>.

Please be assured of my prayers as together we go forward to build up the Church,

Archbishop of Boston

Seán Patrick Cardinal O'Malley