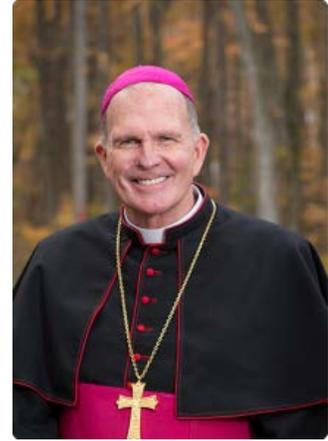


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LETTER FROM BISHOP O’CONNELL

A pastoral letter on our future together



INTRODUCTION

As we move into a New Year, the time is right for us to adjust our vision to “new things” for our Diocese. While what “has been” in our past experience is comfortable, we are a living, changing Catholic community, a changing local Church that is, in St. Augustine’s words, a “beauty ever ancient, ever new (**Confessions, X**).”

Our ancient faith always remains beautiful, true and eternal although times and circumstances have changed and require us to develop “new ways” to foster, promote and witness to our faith in order to address and re-engage an ever-changing environment. Such adaptation has been the case throughout the Catholic Church’s 2,000-year history and we must now seize the moment again, in our time, in the Diocese of Trenton, “ever new,” as we look forward with “Faith in Our Future.”

THE INSPIRATION OF POPE FRANCIS

I begin this letter with excerpts from two homilies given by our Holy Father Pope Francis several years ago:

“The law of the Spirit ‘leads us on a path of continual discernment to do the will of God,’ and this scares us. A fear that has two temptations: the first is that of ‘going back,’ saying that up to this point is fine, but ‘no farther’ and so in the end, ‘let’s stay here.’... this temptation of ‘going back,’ because we are safer there. But complete safety is in the Holy Spirit, who carries you forward, who gives you this trust. In this

moment in the Church's history, we can neither go back nor go off the road (Pope Francis, Homily at Casa Santa Marta, June 12, 2013)."

"Jesus tells us that new wine requires new wineskins. In the Christian life, and also in the life of the Church, there are old structures, outdated structures, they have to be renewed! And the Church has always been attentive to this...It always allows itself to be renewed according to places, times and persons. The Church has always done this work, right from the beginning! ...Don't be afraid of this! Don't be afraid of the innovation of the Gospel. Don't be afraid of the innovation that the Holy Spirit works within us! Don't be afraid of the renewal of structures! ...If we are afraid, we know that our Mother is with us and, like children who are a bit afraid, let's go to her and she — as the most ancient antiphon says — 'guards us with her mantle, with her protection as mother' (Pope Francis, Homily at Casa Santa Marta, July 6, 2013)."

THE CONTEXT

In recent years, dioceses all over the country have had to come to terms with the changing realities in the life of the Catholic Church and its faithful. It is no longer the Church of "our parents or our grandparents;" it is not even the Church that many of us knew growing up. This realization has not always been "comfortable" or easy — it never is — but change and adaptation has always been necessary for our faith not only to remain strong but also, and more importantly, for our faith to grow stronger. We must acknowledge and endure the "growing pains" that accompany any process of change but we cannot be overcome or discouraged by them. God's grace and the presence of the Holy Spirit have always seen the Catholic Church through change, and so it will be now and into the future if we open ourselves to God's grace with a living faith.

THE CURRENT SITUATION IN THE DIOCESE OF TRENTON

To help us understand the current situation in the Diocese of Trenton, let us consider some important facts gathered directly from its 107 parishes. These facts are sobering but, as Bishop, I do not believe that we are in irreversible or terminal danger. I do believe, however, that we have some genuine causes for concern. Here is why.

In the Diocese of Trenton, it is estimated that there are between 673,500 and 774,000 Catholics living in the 107 parishes in our four counties, with 267,416 registered households. In the past, the Catholic population was estimated at

830,000. The average parish size includes approximately 2,500 of these registered households, with the lowest parish count of 250 households and the highest parish count of 7,436 households.

Present statistics drawn from annual parish reports reveal a weekend Mass attendance of between 17% and 18% of Catholics in the Diocese. Sadly, the numbers have steadily declined within our lifetime.

Participation in the Sacraments of Baptism, First Holy Communion, Confirmation and Marriage has also declined. Surprisingly, even the number of Funeral Masses, once considered a faith obligation of families of deceased active Catholics, has also decreased.

That having been said, the Gospel has not changed; the Church's teachings have endured; and obligations incumbent upon Catholics — for example, the commandment to “keep holy the Sabbath” — have remained in place, but their compelling importance in the daily life of Catholics today has diminished or, at least, wavered significantly. Add to that the declining enrollments reported each year in our Catholic schools and parish religious education programs and we discover a generation or two of Catholics who are largely unfamiliar with the tenets of the Catholic faith. We cannot neglect youth and young adults in the Diocese and our parishes. They are the best, the only, hope for our future.

National research studies among baptized Catholics born after 1980 dramatically bear out the developments we see locally. When society replaces faith and religion with secular alternatives that are directly opposed to Church teaching and practice, Catholics do not know how to respond, defend against or resist such alternatives. They have become “cultural Catholics” or “Catholics in name only.” This is not to say that they are not good people doing good things but, rather, they are simply uninformed about their faith and the influence that faith should have in their lives as Catholic individuals and as Catholic communities within the local Church.

As a consequence, we also see that young Catholic men and women are no longer pursuing priestly or religious vocations as in the past in the kind of numbers needed to minister to and serve Catholics who DO want to practice their faith, who DO hear the Gospel at Mass, who DO receive the Sacraments, who DO reach out in service to the poor and DO perform the Church's works of mercy. Currently, there are 163 active Diocesan priests serving Catholics in the Diocese, and 266 religious women and 57 religious men. At the same time, priests and religious currently serving in the Church but reaching retirement age seem to be the only numbers

steadily increasing. Twenty-three priests have retired in the last five years and 63 priests are eligible for retirement in the next 10 years.

With these sobering spiritual realities confronting us in the Diocese of Trenton and beyond, and the constantly shifting Catholic demographics within the four counties of the Diocese — Monmouth, Burlington, Ocean and Mercer — it simply does not make any sense to cling to sentimental memories of “the way we were;” or to nostalgically fantasize about a return to “the good old days.” Time moves forward and it is not possible to go back. We must forge ahead to meet and embrace the future with a living, dynamic and active faith.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

In addition to these spiritual circumstances, we must also acknowledge that the economy has not been on our side in most of the parishes of the Diocese. Families have also experienced similar financial burdens in their homes. Parishes — our “spiritual homes” — are not much different. The costs of operating our Catholic churches, schools and institutions continue to escalate while the condition of physical plants and buildings deteriorate in many of our 107 parishes, regularly draining already limited resources with expenses that parishes just cannot afford.

While the Annual Catholic Appeal helps fund Diocesan operations one year at a time, it, too, has experienced a significant downturn. For the first time since 1992, the Diocese has embarked upon a major fundraising campaign, “Faith to Move Mountains,” the sole purpose of which is to endow the wide-reaching spiritual works as well as the “mountainous” material needs of the Diocese and its parishes for a future that we “can have faith in.”

The Catholic Church in our Diocese is not simply about raising money, as some suggest. It is impossible, however, to continue to support current ministries to our parishioners or to establish any new faith-based initiatives without the resources necessary to provide what people want and need from the Catholic Church. On average, only 42% of registered households in the Diocese give financial support.

We also need to be aware of the multicultural realities that are part of the changing landscape of the Diocese. Statistics indicate that our Catholic population is now 15% Hispanic or Latino requiring ministries specific to these growing numbers. Six of the 10 parishes with the greatest number of baptisms in the Diocese have significant Hispanic populations. Attendance at Masses celebrated in Spanish has

increased by 45% over the last four years. Currently, in addition to English and Spanish, Mass is celebrated in 10 other languages throughout our four counties.

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

So what do we do? Giving up is not an option. The Lord Jesus assured “Where two or three gather in My name, there am I in the midst of them (Matthew 18:20).” Losing faith is not an option. The Lord Jesus promised “I will be with you all days even to the end of time (Matthew 28: 20).” Surrendering to societal or cultural trends is not an option. The Lord Jesus proclaimed “I am the Way, the Truth and the Life (John 14: 6)” and, in another place, “You are Peter and upon this rock I will build my Church and the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it (Matthew 16: 18).”

Some within the Church have concluded that Catholics should simply accept the “fact” that we are destined to become less, to become a smaller Church. While statistics and other data might suggest such a view, the Church’s duty to undertake a “new evangelization” argues against it. I believe that it is not so much a case of growing smaller or “becoming less” as a Church, a Diocese or a parish; I believe it is a case of “doing more WITH less.” The challenge before us all is to figure out “how.”

FAITH IN OUR FUTURE

As Bishop, I consulted other bishops and considered the experiences of their dioceses, seeking successful models and effective strategies used to address similar challenges we face here. I then interviewed and engaged a Seattle-based Church consulting firm, The Reid Group, with its proven record of success working with various dioceses in the United States for over 20 years, among them the Archdioceses of Indianapolis, New York, Newark, and Seattle as well as the Dioceses of Orange, Orlando, Peoria, Rochester, St. Petersburg, Syracuse and Scranton. Their mission is “to help leaders and organizations transform their challenges into opportunities” for the strengthening of their own institutional mission. Although most of their clients faced similar challenges as the Diocese of Trenton, I directed the firm “not to impose ‘boiler-plate’ strategies” upon us but, rather, to work with our pastors and parishes to develop recommendations specific to our own Diocese.

I launched an initiative called “Faith in Our Future” in the Diocese almost two years ago with consultation of the Diocesan Curia, the Episcopal Council and the Diocesan Presbyterate. Rather than initiating a “top-down” approach, I sought from The Reid Group a “grass roots” team effort involving the laity as well as the clergy throughout the Diocese.

Twenty-five “Cohorts” or small teams of neighboring parishes utilizing lay leaders as well as clergy were established by pastors to surface a “sense of the faithful” regarding the future direction of all our 107 parishes. The Reid Group provided training to the members of these 25 Cohorts, under the guidance of recently retired pastor Msgr. Leonard Troiano and Diocesan Director of Pastoral Life and Mission Mrs. Terry Ginther. The Cohorts then used various means to gather information and data from our parishes including surveys, questionnaires, town hall meetings, small group discussions and other conversations focused on the future direction of the Diocese. The effort was unlike anything the Diocese has ever seen. To avoid any controlling influence or intervention by the Bishop, I was asked to remain neutral throughout the entire process until the Cohort recommendations were processed by a Diocesan-wide Planning Commission (DPC) created by Msgr. Troiano and Mrs. Ginther.

Following many months of discussions, conversations and even lively debate within and among the Cohorts and the DPC, a series of “final recommendations” were presented to me by the DPC in late November 2016. I shared these recommendations with all the priests of the Diocese in meetings held in each of the four vicariates — Monmouth, Burlington, Ocean and Mercer Counties — and with both the Diocesan Curia and the Episcopal Council in separate meetings throughout December 2016. The task then fell to me, as Bishop, to make decisions regarding the recommendations and input I received. These recommendations became for me the subject of much prayer, reflection and soul searching prior to finalizing them.

I chose the date of Jan. 25, 2017, to make my decisions public because of the important feast the Church celebrates on this day, the Feast of the Conversion of St. Paul whose entire life was changed by his encounter with the Lord Jesus Christ.

An Implementation Commission will be established to guide and encourage parishes in the process of putting my decisions in place and monitoring their progress. Msgr. Troiano and Terry Ginther will coordinate the process and will be the contact persons at the Chancery for any questions. It is important to note that the recommendations and decisions offered through the “Faith in Our Future” initiative are a “first step” in the reorganization of the Diocese, a “work in progress.” Once implemented, these decisions, no doubt, will give rise to other decisions and changes as the future of the Diocese unfolds.

PRINCIPLES AND PRIORITIES FOR DECISIONS

Following the lead and example of Pope Francis in developing “principles” for the reorganization and revitalization of the leadership of the universal Church, I have identified my own set of principles and priorities for the task at hand. These include:

(1) evangelization, the all-important and all-encompassing effort to bring the Gospel prayerfully and effectively to the parishes and people of the Diocese for our future;

(2) collaboration, the strategic model chosen by the Cohorts and DPC, to ensure that parishes work together with programs, staffing and resources to meet the spiritual and pastoral needs of the people of the Diocese for the sake of evangelization;

(3) stewardship, the effort to establish the best possible use of parish resources, assets, facilities and properties — “doing MORE with less” — for the sake of evangelization;

(4) accountability, the process of providing transparency in the management of the Diocese and all its parishes for the sake of evangelization, and

(5) service, spiritual and pastoral “in-reach” and outreach to the populations that need to be served by the parishes of the Diocese, especially the sick, the elderly, the poor, the immigrant, youth and young adults, families and Catholics who have become estranged from the Church, again, for the sake of evangelization.

I would like to express my own thanks and that of the entire Diocese to everyone involved in this lengthy process; there are too many to name. Their monumental effort and investment of time give great witness to their “Faith in Our Future.”

Most Reverend David M. O’Connell, C.M.
Bishop of Trenton

DECISIONS

As Bishop of the Diocese of Trenton, I now announce the following decisions concerning the recommendations presented to me preceded by “working definitions” so that their meaning can be properly understood:

• WORKING DEFINITIONS

COLLABORATIVE PARISHES Model: Parishes within a Cohort enter into formal, collaborative relationships, working together on specific, agreed-upon shared areas of ministry, shared programs, shared staffing, shared resources; **parishes remain distinct** with their own pastor, pastoral and finance councils, finances, census and sacramental books; collaborative parishes work together whenever possible to do what a single parish cannot do effectively alone.

LINKAGE PARISHES Model: Two or more parishes within a Cohort **share one pastor** for all parishes involved but remain distinct with their own pastoral councils (linked parishes may prefer to share a pastoral council together) and finance councils (must remain separate), finances, census and sacramental books; whenever appropriate and possible, linkage parishes work together to share ministries, programs, services, etc. Linked parishes should collaborate with other parishes in the Cohort.

MERGED PARISHES Model: Two or more parishes within a Cohort merge to **become one new parish in order to minister more effectively to one newly combined population with one pastor**; the new parish may have more than one worship site with each church site retaining its current name; all organizations, ministries, programs, finances, assets and liabilities belong to the one new parish; one new staff is formed; one new finance council and one pastoral council are formed; a new name may be established to be approved by the Bishop or the combined names of both parishes can be used. Merged parishes should collaborate with other parishes in the Cohort.

PERSONAL PARISH Model: According to canon law (canon 518), a personal parish may be established by reason of rite, language or nationality of the Christian faithful of some territory. A personal parish is subject to all Diocesan policies and is primarily responsible for the faithful for whom it exists. Personal parishes should collaborate with other parishes in the Cohort.

CENTERS FOR MINISTRY: Specialized ministry among ethnic or language groups will also be provided by designating “centers” in different parishes around the Diocese. The designation as a center for a particular ministry (for example, a Center for Hispanic ministry) means that, in addition to its responsibility for the residents of its territory, the parish provide both ministerial outreach and liturgical celebrations for the named ethnic or language group. Although not guaranteed in each case, every

effort will be made to assign at least one priest from the ethnic or language group to minister to them.

CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

The current and future status of Diocesan or parish Catholic schools will continue to be evaluated by the Diocesan Department of Catholic Schools and the individual schools themselves according to the “School Sustainability Study” issued in 2013.

PASTORAL CARE IN INSTITUTIONAL SETTINGS

Pastoral care for Diocesan or parish Catholic high schools will be determined by the Bishop in the appointment of priest personnel.

Pastoral care for Catholic students on non-Catholic college or university campuses will be determined by the Bishop in the appointment of priest personnel and will continue to be supervised by the Diocesan Office of Pastoral Life and Mission.

Pastoral care for Catholic patients and residents in non-Catholic hospitals and other non-Catholic health related facilities will be determined by the Bishop in the appointment of priest personnel in consultation with pastors in whose territory these institutions exist. Parishes should continue to provide pastoral care, as needed or upon request, to their own territorial parishioners in these institutions.

Pastoral care for Catholic residents in prisons located in the Diocese will continue to be arranged whenever possible by the Diocesan Coordinator for Prison Ministry.

BURLINGTON COUNTY

COHORT 1

Corpus Christi, Willingboro • Jesus the Good Shepherd, Riverside • Resurrection, Delran

1. Collaborative Model for all three parishes in the Cohort
2. Jesus the Good Shepherd Parish will suspend all operations at St. Peter Church and will use St. Joseph Church, Beverly, only, no later than July 1, 2017
3. Jesus the Good Shepherd Parish designated as a Center for Hispanic and Portuguese Ministry, no later than July 1, 2017

COHORT 2

Our Lady of Good Counsel, Moorestown • Our Lady of Perpetual Help, Maple Shade • Sacred Heart, Riverton • St. Charles Borromeo, Cinnaminson

1. Collaborative Model for all four parishes in the Cohort

COHORT 3

Holy Eucharist, Tabernacle • St. Joan of Arc, Marlton • St. Mary of the Lakes, Medford • St. Isaac Jogues, Marlton • St. John Neumann, Mt. Laurel

1. Collaborative Model for all five parishes in the Cohort
2. Continue current Linkage Model for St. Isaac Jogues and St. John Neumann Parishes

COHORT 4

St. Andrew, Jobstown • Assumption, New Egypt • St. Ann, Browns Mills • Our Lady Queen of Peace, Hainesport • Sacred Heart, Mt. Holly • Christ the Redeemer, Mt. Holly

1. Collaborative Model for all six parishes in the Cohort
2. Linkage Model between St. Andrew and Assumption no later than July 1, 2017; Merger Model no later than July 1, 2018
3. Continue current Linkage Model for Christ the Redeemer and Sacred Heart Parishes with Christ the Redeemer designated as Center For Hispanic Ministry
4. St. Ann designated as a Center for Hispanic Ministry, no later than July 1, 2018

COHORT 5

Sts. Francis and Clare, Florence Township • St. Katharine Drexel, Burlington • St. Mary, Bordentown

1. Collaborative Model for all three parishes in the Cohort
2. Linkage Model for Sts. Francis and Clare and St. Mary, no later than July 1, 2017; Merger Model, no later than July 1, 2018

MERCER COUNTY

COHORT 6

Our Lady of Sorrows-St. Anthony, Hamilton • St. John, Allentown • St. Gregory the Great, Hamilton Square • St. Raphael-Holy Angels, Hamilton • St. Vincent de Paul, Yardville

1. Collaborative Model for all five parishes in the Cohort
2. Linkage Model for St. John and St. Vincent de Paul, no later than July 1, 2019
3. Our Lady of Sorrows-St. Anthony designated as a Center for Haitian Ministry
4. Periodic review of St. Raphael-Holy Angels; potential suspension of operations of Holy Angels Church as early as July 1, 2017.

COHORT 7

St. Ann, Lawrenceville (Church of the Korean Martyrs at St. Michael, Trenton will be treated separately) • St. David the King, West Windsor • St. Paul, Princeton • St. Anthony of Padua, Hightstown • St. Hedwig, Trenton

1. Collaborative Model for all five parishes in the Cohort
2. St. Hedwig designated as a personal parish for Polish Catholics, effective immediately
3. St. Paul and St. Anthony of Padua each designated as a Center for Hispanic Ministry, no later than July 1, 2017

COHORT 8

St. James, Pennington • St. Alphonsus, Hopewell • St. George, Titusville

1. Continue current Linkage Model for all three parishes

COHORT 9

Blessed Sacrament-Our Lady of the Divine Shepherd, Trenton • Our Lady of Good Counsel, West Trenton • Incarnation-St. James, Ewing

1. Collaborative Model for Our Lady of Good Counsel and Incarnation-St. James
2. Collaborative Model for Blessed Sacrament-Our Lady of the Divine Shepherd with Sacred Heart, Trenton, in Cohort 10 beginning July 1, 2017, leading to Merger Model for Blessed Sacrament-Our Lady of the Divine Shepherd with Sacred Heart, no later than July 1, 2018, with Gospel Mass transferred to Sacred Heart, beginning July 1, 2018

COHORT 10

St. Mary of the Assumption Cathedral, Trenton • St. Joseph, Trenton • Divine Mercy, Trenton • Our Lady of the Angels, Trenton • Sacred Heart, Trenton

1. Collaborative Model for all five parishes in the Cohort
2. Continue current Linkage Model for St. Mary of the Assumption Cathedral and St. Joseph; both parishes designated as Centers for Hispanic Ministry
3. Our Lady of the Angels designated as a Center for Hispanic Ministry
4. Merger Model of Divine Mercy and Sacred Heart, no later than July 1, 2017; Spanish Mass transferred to Our Lady of the Angels

MONMOUTH COUNTY

COHORT 11

St. Catherine of Siena, Farmingdale • St. William the Abbot, Howell • St. Veronica, Howell

1. Collaborative Model for all three parishes in the Cohort

COHORT 12

St. Robert Bellarmine Co-Cathedral, Freehold • St. Joseph, Millstone • St. Rose of Lima, Freehold • St. Thomas More, Manalapan

1. Collaborative Model for all four parishes in the Cohort
2. St. Rose of Lima designated as a Center for Hispanic Ministry; continue Vietnamese Mass in consultation with pastor according to availability of Vietnamese-speaking priest

COHORT 13

St. Benedict, Holmdel • St. Catharine, Holmdel • St. Gabriel, Marlboro • St. Mary, Colts Neck

1. Collaborative Model for all four parishes in the Cohort

COHORT 14

St. Joseph, Keyport • Jesus the Lord, Keyport • Holy Family, Union Beach • St. Clement, Matawan

1. Collaborative Model for all four parishes in the Cohort
2. Merger Model for St. Joseph and Jesus the Lord, no later than July 1, 2018
3. Potential Linkage Model for Holy Family Parish with the newly merged St. Joseph/Jesus the Lord to be determined no later than July 1, 2019
4. St. Joseph/Jesus the Lord designated as a Center for Hispanic Ministry, no later than July 1, 2018

COHORT 15

St. Ann, Keansburg • Our Lady of Perpetual Help-St. Agnes, Atlantic Highlands • St. Catherine, Middletown • St. Mary, Middletown

1. Collaborative Model for all four parishes in the Cohort
2. Potential Linkage Model for St. Ann and St. Catherine to be determined no later than July 1, 2018

COHORT 16

Holy Cross, Rumson • Nativity, Fair Haven • St. Leo the Great, Lincroft • St. James, Red Bank • St. Anthony, Red Bank

1. Collaborative Model for all five parishes in the Cohort
2. St. Anthony, designated as a Center for Hispanic Ministry, no later than July 1, 2017

COHORT 17

St. Jerome, West Long Branch • St. Mary, Deal • St. Dorothea, Eatontown • Christ the King, Long Branch • Precious Blood, Monmouth Beach • St. Michael, West End (Immaculate Conception, Eatontown, will be treated separately)

1. Collaborative Model for all six parishes in the Cohort
2. Merger Model for St. Jerome and St. Mary, no later than July 1, 2018
3. Linkage Model for St. Dorothea and Precious Blood, no later than July 1, 2019
4. Christ the King designated as a Center for Hispanic and Portuguese Ministry, no later than July 1, 2017

COHORT 18

Holy Innocents, Neptune • Mother of Mercy, Asbury Park • St. Anselm, Wayside

1. Collaborative Model for all three parishes in the Cohort
2. Mother of Mercy Parish designated as a Center for Hispanic Ministry and a Center for Haitian Ministry

COHORT 19

Ascension, Bradley Beach • St. Elizabeth, Avon • St. Rose, Belmar • St. Catharine-St. Margaret, Spring Lake • St. Mark, Sea Girt

1. Collaborative Model for all five parishes in the Cohort

2. Merger Model for Ascension and St. Elizabeth, no later than July 1, 2019
3. St. Mark designated as a Center for Hispanic Ministry, no later than July 1, 2017

OCEAN COUNTY

COHORT 20

St. Denis, Manasquan • Epiphany, Brick • St. Martha, Point Pleasant • St. Peter, Point Pleasant Beach

1. Collaborative Model for all four parishes in the Cohort
2. Status of Epiphany to be reviewed no later than July 1, 2018

COHORT 21

Sacred Heart, Bay Head • St. Pio of Pietrelcina, Lavallette • St. Catharine of Siena, Seaside Park • Our Lady of Perpetual Help, Seaside Heights

1. Collaborative Model for all four parishes in the Cohort
2. Linkage Model for Sacred Heart and St. Pio of Pietrelcina, no later than July 1, 2019
3. Merger Model for St. Catharine of Siena and Our Lady of Perpetual Help, no later than July 1, 2018
4. Provision of ministry to Hispanic Catholics by bilingual priest in consultation with the Conventual Franciscan Order, no later than July 1, 2018

COHORT 22

Visitation, Brick • St. Dominic, Brick • St. Mary of the Lake, Lakewood • St. Anthony Claret, Lakewood

1. Collaborative Model for all four parishes in the Cohort
2. Shared facilities between St. Mary of the Lake and St. Anthony Claret, no later than July 1, 2018; Linkage Model for St. Mary of the Lake and St. Anthony Claret, no later than July 1, 2019; Merger Model for St. Mary of the Lake and St. Anthony Claret, no later than July 1, 2020
3. St. Anthony Claret designated as a Center for Hispanic Ministry, no later than July 1, 2017

COHORT 23

St. Aloysius, Jackson • St. Monica, Jackson • St. John, Lakehurst • St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, Whiting

1. Collaborative Model for all four parishes in the Cohort
2. Status of St. Monica to be reviewed periodically, beginning July 1, 2018

COHORT 24

St. Joseph, Toms River • St. Justin, Toms River • St. Luke, Toms River • St. Maximilian Kolbe, Toms River

1. Collaborative Model for all four parishes in the Cohort
2. St. Joseph designated as a Center for Hispanic Ministry, no later than July 1, 2017

COHORT 25

St. Barnabas, Bayville • St. Mary, Barnegat • St. Theresa, Little Egg Harbor • St. Pius X, Forked River • St. Francis of Assisi, Brant Beach

1. Collaborative Model for all five parishes in the Cohort
2. St. Barnabas designated as a Center for Hispanic Ministry, no later than July 1, 2017
3. Designation of a Center for Hispanic Ministry in the southern part of Ocean County to be determined no later than July 1, 2018
4. Periodic review of St. Francis of Assisi in consultation with the Franciscan Order

DIOCESE OF TRENTON
FAITH IN OUR FUTURE
IMPLEMENTATION INTRODUCTION

OVERVIEW

Bishop O’Connell has asked Catholics throughout the Diocese to work together in *Faith in Our Future*, preparing for the long term future of the Church in the Diocese of Trenton. At this stage of the process, it is time, trusting the Holy Spirit’s guidance, to implement the Directives which the Bishop has issued to all parishes. We will, therefore, be good stewards of all God has given to our Diocese and its parishes.

The Bishop’s Directives for each Cohort are related to parish structure, centers for ministry and collaboration between parishes. Each Cohort will also receive recommendations, drawn from the Cohort’s own work in the preliminary phase and the advice of the Diocesan Planning Commission, to be used as a starting point for considering how they will collaborate in ministry. Cohort Implementation Team members are asked to come up with a course of action that will best ensure that the Directives are fulfilled. In doing so, they must keep in mind the goals of *Faith in Our Future*.

After consultation with the various consultative bodies of the Diocese of Trenton and prayerful reflection, Bishop David O’Connell has established several goals for this important diocesan planning initiative.

1. **Strengthen and enliven** the parishes of the Diocese as well as Diocesan-sponsored organizations and ministries.
2. Explore **new models of leadership** in parishes and ministries in institutional settings (schools, colleges, hospitals, nursing homes, prisons, etc.) in order to address the challenges presented by the anticipated retirement of a large number of clergy and religious over the next ten years.
3. **Improve our stewardship** of personnel, finances, and facilities and other parish and Diocesan resources.
4. Establish **collaborative relationships** among the parishes and ministries of the diocese **that will build upon the gospel to re/evangelize the local church**, especially those who live on the fringes of the church, as well as those who do not yet know Christ.
5. Provide for pastoral ministry to **Hispanic Catholics**, the fastest growing segment of our Diocesan population, within our parishes and organizations.

DIOCESE OF TRENTON

FAITH IN OUR FUTURE

ASSUMPTIONS FOR FAITH IN OUR FUTURE

Assumptions inherent in *Faith in Our Future* Implementation process include:

1. The Paschal Mystery is both central to our faith and to this planning process. Changes in parish structures are potential examples of the life-death-resurrection mystery.
2. Some parishes have already been involved in planning with their neighboring parishes for the future and are doing some essential collaboration.
3. Parishes exist for the mission of the Church, and as a presence of Christ and His Church to the local area.
4. A commitment to Eucharist, prayer and spirituality is a necessary component of the diocesan planning process.
5. Stewardship of human, financial and facility resources is essential for quality parish, regional and diocesan life.
6. One's vision of the Church must be larger than one's own local, geographic or ethnic community. People must be helped and encouraged to think locally, regionally and diocesan-wide in a forward looking and positive fashion.
7. Strong leadership – by clergy, religious and laity – is needed for planning to succeed.
8. All parishes will be more effective if they plan for the future, especially when planning is an ongoing process and not employed only in a crisis.
9. Parishes also will be stronger and more effective, if they work together.
10. When planning is done at the local level and there is meaningful involvement by those who will be affected by the changes, there is more ownership of and less resistance to planning.
11. If and when parish mergers are needed, they will be less traumatic and more natural if people and parishes have already been in relationship with one another. In the future, some parish mergers will be suggested by parish partners who have come to believe that consolidation is the best way to go forward.
12. When parishes merge there is a need for expert advice in the evaluation of buildings and assistance with the disposition of real estate.

DIOCESE OF TRENTON

FAITH IN OUR FUTURE

DIOCESAN COORDINATING FUNCTION

The Bishop has appointed appropriate staff to organize, support and oversee the implementation process, and provide assistance to the Cohorts and Implementation Commission as needed.

This staff will include:

- Msgr. Leonard F. Troiano, Episcopal Vicar for Diocesan Planning
- Mrs. Terry A. Ginther, Executive Director for Pastoral Life & Mission
- Mrs. Sherrie Sporek, Administrative Assistant

ROLE OF DIOCESAN PLANNING PERSONNEL

1. Clarifies the how and when of ongoing accountability for the implementation of the Bishop's Directives;
2. Ensures that the Cohorts and parishes have access to the resources and training they need to successfully accomplish their goals;
3. Coordinates the work of the Project Management Team
4. Considers and seeks Diocesan staff resources and training responsive to the needs of the Cohorts and parish leaders;
5. Responds to questions about the implementation process and facilitates the resolution of conflicts;
6. Ensures appropriate communication with the Bishop's other advisory bodies, diocesan offices and agencies, by the parish Cohorts with regard to implementation and initiating future planning

The Diocese will assign a Project Manager with substantial strategic or pastoral planning experience as a resource for each cohort.

ROLE OF THE PROJECT MANAGEMENT TEAM:

1. Directly support the Pastors and Cohort Implementation Teams to articulate shared mission, vision and values for the cohort; establish annual action plans; monitor implementation; and facilitate evaluation;
2. Provide special assistance to parishes that are merging, linking or transitioning to a new leadership model;
3. Provide on-going phone consultation and in-person coaching throughout the implementation as needed.

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FAITH IN OUR FUTURE

ROLE OF THE PARISH IMPLEMENTATION TEAM

WHAT IS THE PARISH IMPLEMENTATION TEAM?

The Parish Implementation Team is made up of the pastor or pastoral administrator and four individuals whom he selects to plan for and implement the Bishop's Directives at the parish level and the Cohort level. Members should be:

- Committed to collaboration with surrounding parishes and willing to implement the bishop's decisions without change or adjustment
- Prayerful parishioners of some influence in the parish capable of encouraging positive attitudes and engendering cooperation between people and ministries
- Persons who are at ease with articulating goals, objectives and action steps

Members may be the same as for the planning phase, completely new or some combination of new and some returning leaders as long as they clearly fit the criteria. As before, you might consider someone from the Parish Pastoral Council, someone from the Finance Council and two at-large members. They may not be members of the parish staff or clergy who will have a distinct role in the implementation as they have direct responsibility for ministry initiatives.

The Parish Implementation Team works as part of the Cohort Implementation Team to plan for implementation of the Bishop's Directives.

WHAT IS THE ROLE OF THE PARISH IMPLEMENTATION TEAM?

The Parish Implementation Team has four primary roles. These include:

1. To participate with the Cohort in planning for and implementing all of the Bishop's Directives for the Cohort over several years.
2. To take leadership at the parish level to ensure the implementation of the Bishop's Directives for the Cohort.
3. To be responsible, if the Bishop's Directive calls for a merger, that all the steps are taken in collaboration with the other parishes involved to ensure an effective merger process.
4. To recruit others to work on subcommittees as appropriate to implement the Bishop's Directives.

WHAT IS THE ROLE OF PARISH IMPLEMENTATION TEAM CHAIR?

1. Schedule parish meetings as needed.
2. Seek out assistance from your Cohort's assigned Project Manager or Diocesan Planning Personnel as needed.
3. Ensure that there is a working agenda.
4. Convene the group and lead prayer or ask someone to be prayer leader.
5. Act as a communication link with other parish leadership groups.
6. Ensure that the parish implementation team accomplishes its task in a timely manner.

7. In Cohort meetings, work with other Parish Implementation Chairs to facilitate the work and accomplish the tasks needed to produce a Cohort Plan for Implementation
8. Work with the Cohort Implementation Chair to ensure the implementation of the Directives according to the plan developed by the Cohort Implementation Team
9. Acts as the “liaison” or primary connector between the Cohort Implementation Team and his or her own parish.

WHAT IS THE ROLE OF THE PARISH IMPLEMENTATION TEAM SECRETARY?

1. Keep parish notes or minutes from each meeting and distribute them appropriately.
2. Ensure that Cohort minutes are distributed appropriately.
3. Oversee on-going communication with the parish on appropriate aspects of the work of the Parish Implementation Team, especially if there is a merger in process, and the Cohort Implementation Team.

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FAITH IN OUR FUTURE

ROLE OF THE COHORT IMPLEMENTATION TEAM

WHAT IS THE COHORT IMPLEMENTATION TEAM?

The Cohort Implementation Team is made up of the pastor or pastoral administrator and four leaders from each parish in the Cohort who have been appointed by their parish leader. The Cohort Implementation Team's role is to ensure the Cohort implementation of the Bishop's directives.

MAY THE COHORT IMPLEMENTATION TEAM HAVE SUBCOMMITTEES?

Yes. For instance, a subcommittee may be formed to work on Cohort youth ministry activities, liturgical celebrations, adult formation, catechesis of children, Catholic schools, Respect Life, human concerns, leadership formation etc.

WHAT IS THE ROLE OF THE COHORT IMPLEMENTATION TEAM?

The Cohort Implementation Team has six primary roles. These are:

1. To lead the parishes in the Cohort through the implementation process based on the Bishop's Directives.
2. To be responsible for the Annual Cohort Implementation Plan and Progress Report to be submitted to the Diocesan Implementation Commission in the spring of each year.
3. To be accountable for setting up appropriate subcommittees with manageable goals, resources and processes for accountability.
4. To be present to subcommittees as needed, to offer support and suggestions.
5. To ensure that effective communication about implementation efforts happens within each parish in the Cohort and among all parishes in the Cohort.
6. To engage in timely communication with the parish pastoral councils and to consult with and obtain support from the councils when needed.

WHAT IS THE ROLE OF COHORT IMPLEMENTATION TEAM CHAIR?

1. Schedule meetings.
2. Work with the Project Manager assigned by the diocese to the Cohort.
3. Ensure that there is a working agenda.
4. Convene the group and lead prayer or ask someone to be prayer leader.
5. Keep the group on task.
6. Ensure that the group accomplishes its task according to the timeline.
7. Work with the Parish Implementation Team Chairs to develop and ensure good communication with parishioners in all parishes in the Cohort and with other Cohort parish leadership groups.

WHAT IS THE ROLE OF THE COHORT IMPLEMENTATION TEAM SECRETARY?

- Develop and distribute a membership contact list to the members and the Diocesan Planning Office.
- Keep notes or minutes from each meeting and distribute them appropriately.

- Submit the action plans and progress reports in a timely manner to the Diocesan Implementation Commission.

HOW WILL PARISHES DIRECTED TO MERGE PREPARE FOR THE CONSOLIDATION AND BE PART OF THEIR COHORT AT THE SAME TIME?

Parishes directed by Bishop O’Connell to merge in 2017 or 2018 will need to focus most of their time and energy working with each other on that process. These parishes will, of necessity, be less involved in the general collaborative plans for the wider Cohort while preparing to merge, allowing them to turn their attention toward coming together to form one new parish. Members of the Cohort team from these parishes may serve on Cohort subcommittees for particular areas of ministry if time permits.

If the merger directed by Bishop O’Connell is to happen after 2018, these parishes will participate fully in the Cohort Implementation Team’s creation of an action plan for collaboration in ministry. In future years as merger plans begin to take shape, regular updates regarding progress toward merger should be given at the Cohort meetings.

Once the merger is completed, the pastor or pastoral administrator and (now only) four parishioners from the newly merged parish will participate on the Cohort Implementation Team. Special care should be taken that the four parishioners selected to serve are able to represent the whole of the new parish community. The Cohort should have realistic expectations for the new parish regarding their involvement in the Cohort process.

Those who will no longer serve on the Cohort Implementation Team might be considered for participation on the new parish’s pastoral council or other committees. They are encouraged to visibly support the newly-formed parish community and its initiatives.

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FAITH IN OUR FUTURE

THE DIOCESAN IMPLEMENTATION COMMISSION

WHAT IS THE DIOCESAN IMPLEMENTATION COMMISSION?

The Bishop appoints the Diocesan Implementation Commission. The Commission is made up of clergy, religious and lay people representative of various areas and constituencies in the diocese. The Commission will meet regularly on an as needed basis.

ROLE OF THE DIOCESAN IMPLEMENTATION COMMISSION

The Diocesan Implementation Commission . . .

1. Provides input and advice to diocesan planning personnel about the implementation process, along with the resources and training that parish and Cohort leaders need to successfully accomplish their goals;
2. Reviews all reports and monitors the progress being made, including the offering of direction when further steps need to be taken, when conflicts arise, or as circumstances change;
3. Expresses acknowledgement and appreciation for successful ongoing implementation to the Cohorts;
4. Ensures that implementation and future planning is mindful of all the parishes, schools, and cemeteries of each Cohort which might be affected by Cohort decisions;
5. Makes recommendations to the Bishop about the structures of parish Cohorts and ministry needs as they may change in the future.

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**CRITERIA FOR APPROVING IMPLEMENTATION PLANS AND
REPORTS TO BE USED BY THE
DIOCESAN IMPLEMENTATION COMMISSION**

1. Cohorts will demonstrate good faith efforts in developing plans to implement Bishop O’Connell’s Cohort Directives according to appropriate timelines.
2. Cohorts will describe their plans to implement the Directives of the Bishop according to appropriate timelines.
3. Plans will show evidence of due diligence with the level of detail called for on the Annual Cohort Implementation Plan forms.
4. The Annual Cohort Implementation Plans (beginning in May 2017) will show evidence of cooperative ongoing planning for implementation by representatives of all parishes of the Cohort.
5. The Annual Cohort Progress Reports (beginning in May 2018) will confirm what has been done, and describe the difference the implementation of the directives is making in each Cohort and beyond.
6. Where obstacles and/or struggles have prevented the implementation plan from moving forward, the Cohort will have sought the assistance of the appropriate diocesan offices.

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TIMELINE FOR IMPLEMENTATION

- **MARCH 2017**
 - County training sessions to help Cohort Implementation Teams learn how to develop action plans for implementation at the parish and cohort level.
- **MARCH – MAY 2017**
 - Develop a proposed action plan (mission, values, vision, goals and objectives) for Year 1 of implementation of Bishop O’Connell’s Directives, including Parish Merger Plans for the 12 month period from July 2017 – June 2018.
- **MAY 2017**
 - Cohort Implementation Teams present their proposed action plan for review to the Diocesan Implementation Commission by May 31, 2017.
- **JUNE 2017**
 - The Diocesan Implementation Commission reviews the proposed action plans submitted by the Cohorts and approves them as is or with further suggestions.
- **JULY 2017**
 - *Faith in Our Future* implementation begins.
- **MAY 2018**
 - Progress Reports are submitted for the first eleven months of implementation together with proposed action plans for the second year of implementation.
- **JUNE 2018**
 - The Diocesan Implementation Commission reviews the progress reports and proposed second year action plans submitted by the Cohorts and approves them as is or with further suggestions.
- **JULY 2018**
 - *Faith in Our Future* begins its second year of implementation.

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FAITH IN OUR FUTURE

PARISH MODELS

COLLABORATIVE PARISHES

Parishes within a Cohort enter into formal, collaborative relationships, working together on specific, agreed-upon shared areas of ministry, shared programs, shared staffing, shared resources. Parishes remain distinct with their own pastor, pastoral and finance councils, finances, census and sacramental books. Collaborative parishes work together whenever possible to do what a single parish cannot do effectively alone.

From Bishop O’Connell, Pastoral Letter

One of the underlying values of Collaborative Parishes is being good stewards of spiritual, personnel, and financial resources. This significant topic surfaced in the surveys most of the parishes completed. Collaborative Parishes may avoid unnecessary duplication of services by working together. They might also employ a collaborative effort to enhance what they are already doing, develop new ministries which they cannot do alone, or which will be more effective if done with other parishes.

Some examples of collaboration among parishes include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Common training of catechists and liturgical ministers;
- Parts of youth ministry programs held in common, such as service projects, retreats, and mission trips;
- Jointly planned and implemented adult formation programs;
- Sharing of some staff;
- Developing priestly, religious, diaconal, and lay ministry vocation strategies;
- Staff in-services, pastoral council in-services, etc.;
- Joint outreach programs, i.e. food pantries, sharing space for AA meetings, etc., cooperative programs with Catholic Charities;
- Mutually beneficial sharing of programs and other resources among and between urban, suburban, and/or rural parishes;
- Training RCIA and various catechetical teams.

LINKED PARISHES

Linked parishes are two or more parishes that share one pastor but remain distinct parishes with their finance councils, finances, census and sacramental books. Linked parishes may each have their own pastoral councils or share a pastoral council together. Whenever appropriate and possible, linked parishes work together to share ministries, programs, and services.

from Bishop O’Connell’s Pastoral Letter

Linked Parishes may also be in collaborative relationships with other parishes in the cohort or beyond the cohort.

MERGED PARISHES

Two or more parishes within a Cohort merge to become one new parish in order to minister more effectively to one newly combined population with one pastor. The new parish may have more than one worship site with each Church site retaining its current name. All organizations, ministries, programs, finances, assets and liabilities belong to the one new parish. One new staff is formed; one new finance council and pastoral council are formed. A new name may be established to be approved by the Bishop or the combined names of both parishes can be used. Merged parishes should collaborate with other parishes in the Cohort.

from Bishop O’Connell’s Pastoral Letter

The merging of parishes is not an end in itself. The result of merging parishes should be stronger and more enlivened parishes. ***Faith in Our Future*** is designed to help parishes respond to the needs of the people which were surfaced during the parish self-evaluations. The parishioners voiced their desire for vibrant parish communities.

Vibrant parishes happen where:

- Strong, pastorally sensitive leadership is present;
- Parishioners have a sense of belonging and co-responsibility for the mission;
- Liturgy is the “source and summit” of parish life;
- Quality Catholic educational and formational programs are available for children, youth, young adults and adults;
- The ministry of service and outreach overflows into the entire community, so people will know us “by our love for one another.”
- The parish has the financial resources to meet its obligations, and its facilities are adequate and in good repair.

PERSONAL PARISHES

According to Canon Law (canon 518), a personal parish may be established by reason of rite, language or nationality of the Christian faithful of some territory. Personal parishes are subject to all Diocesan policies and are only responsible for the faithful for whom it exists. Personal parishes should collaborate with other parishes in the Cohort.

from Bishop O’Connell’s Pastoral Letter

CENTERS FOR MINISTRY

Specialized ministry among ethnic or language groups will also be provided by designating centers in different parishes around the diocese. The designation as a center for a particular ministry (for example, a center for Hispanic ministry) means that, in addition to its responsibility for the residents of its territory, the parish provides both ministerial outreach and liturgical celebrations for the named ethnic or language group. Although not guaranteed in each case, every effort will be made to assign at least one priest from the ethnic or language group to minister to them.

from Bishop O’Connell’s Pastoral Letter