

1. What is *On Mission for The Church Alive!*?

On Mission for The Church Alive! is a consultative strategic planning process that invites participation from clergy, lay ecclesial ministers, parish volunteers and all the faithful. The purpose of the consultation is to foster viable, sustainable, and vibrant parishes and schools that support the mission of Jesus Christ and His Church.

The first year is dedicated to prayer and study. We pray the prayer for *On Mission* at our Masses. We study the changing realities of our diocese such as fewer people attending Mass, aging buildings without the financial resources to care for them, and less priests.

Our parishes are changing rapidly. In less than five years we will have more parishes than priests. *On Mission for The Church Alive!* is an effort to re-envision parish life, taking into account the changes we face. It is an effort to inspire every Catholic in our diocese to make Christ a focal point of their lives, and offer their prayers, service and material goods in order to promote vibrant worship, life-changing faith formation, outreach to the marginalized and evangelization to those who don't know Jesus.

This spring, six (6) parishioners identified by their pastor as *On Mission* parish leaders, will work with the On Mission Commission to consider new models of parish life that take into account the needs of their communities, material resources and available clergy.

This fall, consultation will take place at the district, cluster and parish level to provide feedback from the priests, deacons, religious and lay faithful on the draft models of ministry, so they can submit a recommendation to Bishop David Zubik by December 31, 2017.

This process will require realignment of resources in every district of our diocese. It will result in new structures, staffing and strategies for our parishes and schools, ensuring effective pastoral care so that Catholics in the six counties of the Diocese of Pittsburgh can "learn Jesus, love Jesus and live Jesus."

2. Why is it needed?

The realities listed below are directly influenced by the drastic decline in participation.

Reality 1 — Mass attendance in the Diocese of Pittsburgh has dropped steadily. In 2000, nearly 250,000 people attended Mass weekly. By 2015 that number had fallen by 40 percent to 150,000. The number of parishioner weddings fell 48 percent, from 3,258 in 2000 to 1,700 in 2015. In the same years, infant baptisms declined 47 percent. This reflects a widespread decline in responding to Jesus' command to "go and make disciples," which is the primary motivation for *On Mission for The Church Alive!*.

Reality 2 — There are fewer priests to minister in our 200 parishes and local hospitals, nursing homes and prisons. Within 10 years, the number of active diocesan priests is projected to decline from 225 to approximately 125.

Reality 3 — Many of our parishes are struggling financially. Despite the decline in Mass attendance, giving has remained stable due to the generosity of our parishioners. However, as we all experience in our households, parish operating costs continue to increase. Currently nearly half of our 200 parishes run annual deficits, up from one-third three years ago. Many parishes are depleting their savings or borrowing from the diocesan Deposit and Loan Fund (which is a credit union in where all parishes place their excess funds) to pay the bills.

Reality 4 — In most areas of our six counties, the number of school-age children is declining. Enrollment is down in both public and Catholic schools. Since 2000-2001, enrollment in our 59 Catholic elementary schools has dropped by half, from about 24,000 to 12,000. This makes it difficult to keep tuition affordable and places great pressure on parish finances.

Reality 5 — Parishes in affluent areas usually have the resources to provide a greater breadth of ministry than parishes in less affluent areas. As a result, the ministry and services available to parishioners and communities is uneven, and those who are most in need often receive the least. We must help parishes harness their material and spiritual resources in the most effective way possible so that they can all support evangelization, faith formation in our Catholic schools, religious education programs, adult faith formation programs and works of mercy. Vibrant parishes with effective ministries will inspire more men to consider a call to priesthood and hopefully inspire young men and women to consider serving the Church as a Lay Ecclesial Minister (Director of Religious Education, Parish Business Manager, Pastoral Associate, Director of Music Ministry etc.).

3. How is *On Mission for The Church Alive* addressing these issues?

Some suggest that the decline and struggles illustrated above are really symptoms of the fact that many people have lost their connection to Jesus and the Church. To address these issues, *On Mission for The Church Alive!* is first and foremost about bringing people to Jesus. This is the ultimate goal of Bishop Zubik's initiative and is primarily the work of the baptized. We are called to share our faith in Jesus with everyone we meet.

To be strengthened for this task we naturally rely on our parishes to fortify us. The parish is where we are nourished for the sake of our mission; a mission that spreads the love of Jesus. We grow in faith and holiness by truly listening to God's Word in Scripture and by embracing His presence in the sacraments. Through our own spiritual development, we become truly loving and merciful Christians who are called to transform the world.

The goal of *On Mission* is to help our parishes and schools, our campus ministry programs and every faith community in our diocese to have the ministerial and financial resources necessary to ensure vibrant communities of worship and service.

4. What are the desired outcomes of *On Mission for The Church Alive!*?

The desired outcome of the process is to ensure that our parishes and schools are mission-driven and vibrant centers of Word, Worship and Service that create faithful disciples of Christ who are alive in faith and actively give witness to and share that faith. This will require:

- Fostering the baptismal call to holiness to be more like Christ in proclaiming the Good News, living in justice and faithfully serving others' needs.
- Growing the Church by sharing the joy of the Gospel and the message of salvation.
- Increased support and formation of the priests and deacons so that they can best exercise the ministry of Holy Orders bestowed upon them.
- Increased formation of lay ministers in leadership development and evangelization.
- Realignment of parish structures and regionalization of elementary schools.
- Ministerial strategies that promote growth through evangelization and lifelong catechetical formation.
- Staffing models that increase collaboration on all levels, e.g., between clergy and lay leaders, between parish staff and diocesan staff, etc.
- Increasing vocations.

5. What is the On Mission Commission?

The On Mission Commission, comprised of representatives from each of the 21 districts, will oversee the process of recommending to Bishop Zubik how parishes and schools can best deliver vibrant sacramental celebration, effective formation for discipleship, and compassionate pastoral care in the context of changing circumstances including demographics, financial conditions, and the projected number of priests. They have the important responsibility of reviewing all of the draft models and gathered feedback from the priests, deacons, religious and lay faithful so they can submit a recommendation to Bishop David Zubik by December 31, 2017. The On Mission Commission members serve also as ambassadors of the planning initiative to their fellow parishioners in the district they represent.

The On Mission Commission members have five primary responsibilities:

1. Discern, discuss and advise the Diocesan Bishop on strategic questions and opportunities for the *On Mission for The Church Alive!* planning initiative.
2. Validate and/or offer refinement to the draft district models provided by the On Mission steering committees so that the model creation process is based in authenticity and transparency.
3. Attend the consultation sessions at the district and cluster levels in order to gather feedback on future models.
4. Publicize and support the *On Mission for The Church Alive!* planning initiative in their daily interactions so that as many people as possible can receive the invitation to participate in the process.
5. Support Bishop Zubik's decision and be a hopeful and Gospel-centered witness as the People of God move toward *The Church Alive!*

6. What are the "models" of parish ministry?

A model is a description of how a district could potentially look in the future with regard to physical structures, organization, staff and ministerial strategies. There are 21 districts in the 4 vicariates and 6 counties of the diocese. These models will be created with the needs of an entire district in mind, and some may address needs across more than one district.

The On Mission Commission is developing various models of how parishes and ministry can be organized, but these are meant to be unfinished starting points for discussion. Feedback from the parishes, clusters and districts will shape the final recommendation to Bishop Zubik.

Each model must take into account:

- a. All of the people in the 21 districts to whom we need to bring the love and message of Jesus.
- b. Opportunities for evangelization so that the Church may grow in a particular geographic area.
- c. Pastoral care of the needs of those who are members of each parish within the district.
- d. Financial viability so that every parish can be sustained into the future.
- e. Clergy distribution so that each parish can have an assigned priest.
- f. Accessibility, parking and other physical plant considerations so that the parishes are able to welcome and serve all who come.

Sources of data for these criteria include the church-related demographics service MissionInsite, our October Count reports, our financial data, and information from the Clergy office.

7. What do the new models of parish ministry look like?

A “model” is a description of how a district could potentially look in the future with respect to:

- parish structure including church buildings and Mass times,
- ministerial strategies including evangelization, stewardship, and worship,
- school configurations,
- all institutional ministries within the district,
- leadership structures, including clergy and lay staffing,
- catechetical strategies will also be developed to strengthen religious education programs/adult formation.

These models are meant to be unfinished so that feedback and input can be given on them.

These models are meant to be a starting place. Steering Committees and the people will help refine them with their feedback.

There is no perfect model. Each model addresses different challenges with different degrees of effectiveness.

8. What is the timeline for the consultation process and for Bishop Zubik to make his decisions?

July 2015 to June 2016: Steering committees generate and refine 2-4 potential models for each of the 21 Districts.

September 2016 to June 2017: Consultations and feedback from clergy and lay faithful at the District, Cluster, and Parish levels.

June 2017 to December 2017: Refinement of models by the On Mission Commission and recommendations to Bishop Zubik.

9. What will guide these recommendations made to Bishop Zubik?

- Recommendations are made in light of making the Church present and the Gospel preached everywhere it needs to be.
- Recommendations are seeking to effect systemic transformational change; not merely adapting or fine tuning current structures.
- Recommendations are directed toward the growth of disciples, parishes and schools.
- Recommendations are prophetic, calling us to have the courage to be who we are to be in Christ and to implement necessary changes to advance the message of the Gospel and grow our local Church.
- Recommendations are made in light of the Church's teaching, discipline and law.

10. Are average parishioners involved in this planning process?

Each pastor was asked to recommend up to six parishioners to serve as On Mission Parish Leaders. Collaborating with the pastor and councils of the parish, these On Mission Parish Leaders will serve as ambassadors to their fellow parishioners concerning On Mission and as ambassadors of the parish to the On Mission Commission.

The On Mission Parish Leaders of every parish have five primary responsibilities:

1. Publicize and support the *On Mission for The Church Alive!* planning initiative in their daily interactions so that as many people as possible are invited to participate.
2. Refine the description of their parish provided by the On Mission Commission so that the baseline for discussion about future change is as accurate as possible.

3. Participate in consultation sessions at the district and cluster levels and give feedback to the On Mission Commission regarding future models of parish life.
4. Lead parish consultation sessions to inform parishioners about the planning initiative and obtain their feedback on future models of parish life.
5. Summarize that feedback from parishioners so that the On Mission Commission can benefit from the timely and thoughtful insights of parishioners.

11. How will parish leaders, staff, and councils be equipped to navigate the changes in structures, staffing and strategies precipitated by *On Mission for The Church Alive!*?

The Secretariat for Leadership Development is already working with parish leaders, Lay Ecclesial Ministers, Parish Finance Councils and Parish Pastoral Councils. The Secretariat for Leadership Development is prepared to support pastors and professional staff, as well as key volunteers and advisory council members as they navigate the transition through training days, team building workshops, and in-depth consultative services. Formation in leadership with the heart of Christ is the mission of the Secretariat for Leadership Development.

12. *Our Campaign for The Church Alive!* was very successful. How can parishes still be in financial trouble?

The campaign was very successful in raising money for special projects proposed by each parish, including building renovation, major repairs and the creation of new ministries. The campaign does not fund regular operating expenses, such as utility bills. That money comes from the offertory and sometimes from other fundraising.

13. Will campaign funds be used to help parishes offset operating deficits?

No. The campaign was designed to fund capital projects, deferred maintenance and new ministry initiatives. Monies received from the campaign can ONLY be used for the purposes stated on the parish's case statement. The campaign was not intended to fund the ongoing operating expenses of the parish, which should be funded from ongoing revenues such as offertory and fundraising.

14. If my parish closes or merges and I still have a balance on my campaign pledge, what do I do?

You may redirect the balance on your campaign pledge to your new parish. The campaign funds of closed or merged parishes will be redirected to the successor parish.

15. Why can't Bishop Zubik forgive parish debts?

Parish debts are not owed to the Diocese of Pittsburgh. Parishes that need to borrow money use the Parish Deposit and Loan Fund, a "credit union" administered by the diocese for the benefit of parishes. If a parish has savings, they are deposited in the Deposit and Loan Fund. The funds are either invested in bonds or are loaned to other parishes at interest. That interest and the earnings on bonds provide interest paid to the parishes on their savings. Therefore, parish debts are owed to other parishes, not to the diocese itself. When those debts are not repaid, each parish loses a portion of its savings.

16. Could my parish priest and Mass time be affected?

Yes. Canon Law limits the number of Masses a priest can offer. Our declining number of priests is one of the reasons why we will have fewer Masses.

Therefore the pastors, taking into account parish needs and the advice of their staff and councils, will create new schedules of Mass times and locations. A concern in many parishes now is lack of sufficient Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion, Readers and Altar Servers for celebrations that are vibrant and participatory.

Having fewer Masses will ensure that each Mass is well-attended, which contributes to that vibrancy. This is keeping with our diocesan guidelines, which say that the attendance at any Sunday Mass should not be less than 50 percent of the seating capacity of that church. The Mass is the source and summit of our lives as Catholics, so we want to gather as a community for the Eucharist.

17. Why can't we bring priests from another country and keep our parishes as they are?

Generations ago, when the United States was new mission territory, many priests came to help from Catholic countries that had an abundance of priests. Today most of those countries have a priest shortage. In fact, despite the decline from the all-time high numbers of priests in the mid-20th century, the United States

still has one of the best priest-to-parishioner ratios in the world. It would be unjust to take priests from other countries simply because we feel we should have them. It is not a long term solution.

18. Why can't we use religious order priests and keep our parishes as they are?

Most religious orders in the United States are also experiencing a decline in numbers.

19. Will any parishes, church buildings and schools close or merge at the end of this planning process?

More than likely. However it is not known at this time which ones. This is a consultative process. The feedback received during the consultation phase in the fall of 2016 will help to determine new models, including the structures, for parishes and schools. Additionally, the Diocese of Pittsburgh will engage in a process to objectively evaluate the physical condition of all the buildings in the Diocese of Pittsburgh. Finally, buildings need to support the ministry of the parish, and the Sunday Liturgy is the center of our lives as Catholics.

20. Could some people on parish staff lose their jobs?

The plan for *On Mission for the Church Alive!* is for parishes to have the people required to carry out the mission of the parish. Each district and parish will develop a team that is equipped to carry out its mission. Support will be provided to those who may be affected by a change in job status.

21. Is *On Mission* like the parish reorganization the diocese experienced in the early 1990s?

In some ways it is. In many ways it is NOT. The stated goal of the Parish Reorganization and Revitalization Project was "to reorganize and revitalize the parishes of the Diocese of Pittsburgh structurally, programmatically and spiritually." So, in some ways, the intent 25 years ago is similar to the goals today. The differences however are notable. For one, the schools are included in *On Mission* whereas they were not in the early 1990s. Secondly, and most significantly, we have learned that for the renewal desired to accompany any structural change, we need to be more earnest in providing the resources, the

support, the formation and the ministerial strategies needed. Guidelines for programmatic and spiritual revitalization as were provided in the 1990s are not enough. As Pope Francis reminds us in *The Joy of the Gospel*, “‘Mere administration’ can no longer be enough. Throughout the world, let us be ‘permanently in a state of mission’.”

22. What is the New Evangelization?

The New Evangelization is the Church’s call for us to bring the love, mercy and message of Jesus to everyone, including baptized Catholics who may no longer participate in Church life. It is re-telling the story of Jesus and how in God’s plan all people are invited to intimacy and relationship with the Lord. We must invite those who have left our pews to come back, and find new ways to address their questions about God. As Bishop Zubik stated in his pastoral letter, *The Church Evangelizing!*, we must “be a friend, be a friend of Jesus and make friends for Jesus.”

Pope Paul VI coined the term in his document *Evangelization in the Modern World*; Pope St. John Paul II explicitly called for a New Evangelization; Pope Benedict provided the framework for how we should engage in this New Evangelization; and Pope Francis is our example of how to live it out. *On Mission for the Church Alive!* is part of our diocese’s response to the call of the New Evangelization.

23. What does an evangelizing parish look like?

Everything a parish does should focus on the goal of evangelizing unbelievers and making believers into disciples who will follow Jesus in their daily lives. Parishes are meant to be active communities, moving people closer to Christ through all that they do, especially through the sacraments. An evangelizing parish engages parishioners and non-parishioners, invests time and resources in them, and invites them into closer relationship with Christ.

An evangelizing parish does not necessarily offer more programs. Rather, it encourages the faithful to be active, engaged and intentional disciples of Jesus. An evangelizing parish promotes personal prayer and deeper Christian witness. An evangelizing parish is where people learn Jesus, love Jesus and live Jesus, and then go out to share His love with others.

These twin goals of discipleship and evangelization should pervade parish activities, including social events, faith formation, the promotion of vocations, liturgical and sacramental life, and service and charitable endeavors.

24. What is Catholic Leadership Institute, and what role do they play in all of this?

Catholic Leadership Institute (CLI) has long worked with the Diocese of Pittsburgh to develop the leadership skills of its clergy and lay staff. Many priests have been trained through CLI's *Good Leaders, Good Shepherds* program, and many of our lay leaders participated in a similar program called *Tending the Talents*. CLI works with numerous dioceses nationally and internationally, helping bishops to build diocesan teams, training parish leaders assisting in the development of strategic plans. Because of CLI's skills, its focus on evangelization and its knowledge of our diocese, Bishop Zubik contracted CLI to provide parishes and diocesan staff with critical assistance with the *On Mission for The Church Alive!* planning process.

25. What should I read in order to better understand all of this?

Information regarding *On Mission for The Church Alive!* is available at www.onmissionchurcalive.org. Special editions of The Pittsburgh Catholic will be published in April and September. Parishes will publish a monthly bulletin insert on topics related to *On Mission for The Church Alive!*