



Communications Office  
**DIOCESE of ERIE**  
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**Criteria regarding the development of the Preliminary Plan  
for Parish Restructuring in Erie County**

In response to the Preliminary Plan for Parish Restructuring in Erie County, some have asked what criteria were used to formulate the plan.

As Bishop Lawrence Persico said when he unveiled the plan, due to the many complexities involved, it is not a simple matter of applying a formula. It requires far more than looking at numbers, although factors such as population and Mass attendance trends, financial status, unnecessary duplication of ministries and staffing, Mass times, proximity to other parishes and more cannot be ignored. It has been a lengthy process, and the preliminary plan is not based on a singular report.

Preparation for the plan began in 2021, when the pastors from parishes in the East Erie Deanery asked the bishop if they could work on a parish restructuring plan for their deanery. Bishop Persico agreed with two conditions: 1.) That all of the parishes in the deanery be involved and 2.) that parish lay leadership be included in the effort.

Parishes in the East Erie Deanery decided to begin with a robust self-study, collecting data that included parish information as well as materials gathered through parishioner surveys. In response to the East Erie Deanery, about four months into the effort, the diocese arranged for a facilitator to help the parishes develop a plan. Although the effort stalled when not all of the parishes maintained their commitment, the work was not without fruit. The deanery provided

summaries to diocesan administrators in the hopes Pastoral Planning Committee might develop a plan for their consideration.

While they had been working, Bishop Persico recognized it was important that all parishes in Erie County be invited into a similar process. Since the East Erie Deanery parishes had collected their own data, the Meitler organization was asked to provide similar data for parishes in the West Erie Deanery. That information has been and remains available at <https://www.eriescd.org/planning-deaneries.html>. West Erie Deanery parishes were then asked to submit potential scenarios for the future of their parishes, individually.

Using summarized materials presented from both deaneries, members of the Pastoral Planning Committee began work on a plan for all of the parishes of Erie County. In addition to the data, they also sought advice from experienced pastors and administrators. Recognizing why it had been so difficult for Erie County parishes to create a plan, they did their best to integrate the data with solutions that also made good common sense and paved the way to more vibrant parish life. This led to the creation of a plan that would only be considered preliminary. Recommendations have been put on paper, but they are not set in stone.

Insights from those who will be impacted by the restructuring are always extremely valuable. As Bishop Persico has emphasized, preliminary plans for schools and for parishes in other parts of the diocese were significantly refined as a result of the recommendations that were submitted through the feedback process. While not every submission can be implemented, all feedback will be taken into consideration to achieve a plan that addresses the real challenges parishes and the diocese are facing while also fostering vibrant parish communities.

Once the feedback is considered and integrated, a final plan will be created. Members of the Priest Council, made up of pastors from across the diocese, will have the opportunity to review the plan and offer further refinements before it is expected to be approved by Bishop Persico in the spring of 2024.