New Paths of Possibility
For the Future

Erie West Deanery
Diocese of Erie

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INTRODUCTION

"*We must restore hope to young people, help the old, be open to the future, spread love. Be poor among the poor. We need to include the excluded and preach peace."* - Pope Francis

Pope Francis has written and spoken much about the Church of the future. These three sentences capture his thinking well. Each one of these phrases constitutes a major task. As easily as we can agree with each phrase, we realize how difficult it will be to accomplish even some of these in our lifetimes. But, to accomplish even a little, we must have a vision of where we are going and what we ought to be doing.

The task before parishes in the Diocese of Erie can seem daunting. After a decade of decline in community population and parish membership, parishes are looking for ways to grow. There are two typical ways that parishes grow in the United States. First, some parishes are fortunate to grow because the surrounding area is experiencing population growth. Second, other parishes grow by attracting parishioners from other parishes. The kind of growth that the Diocese of Erie envisions is different but accessible to every parish no matter the size.

Parishes today face an unprecedented challenge and opportunity for growth. There are large numbers of self-identifying Catholics who are not joining parishes. Most Americans, while professing a belief in God and trying to live a spiritual life, do not belong to any religious congregation or community. It is a new Pentecost moment for the Church and yet there can be hesitation about where to start and how to begin.

Considering the challenge, this document offers some possibilities for parish configurations, leadership approaches, and ministries. It is a resource for thought, dialogue, and action. Every effort in human history begins with the first steps. The report is intended to provide pastors and parish leaders with ideas for their next steps.

It is not often that a weak organization is able to generate superior results. Parishes should, as part of this phase of planning, take a good look at how well they are organized for the future. There are four indicators of a successful organization which are used in the business world and three more have been added for parishes.

1. **Innovation –** a good organization is creative and able to generate new ideas.
2. **Adaption** – everything does not go according to plan and good organizations find ways to adjust.
3. **Graduation –** good organizations allow people to move to higher levels and prepare the next leaders.
4. **Evaluation –** there is much to be learned by finding out what is done well and what should improve.

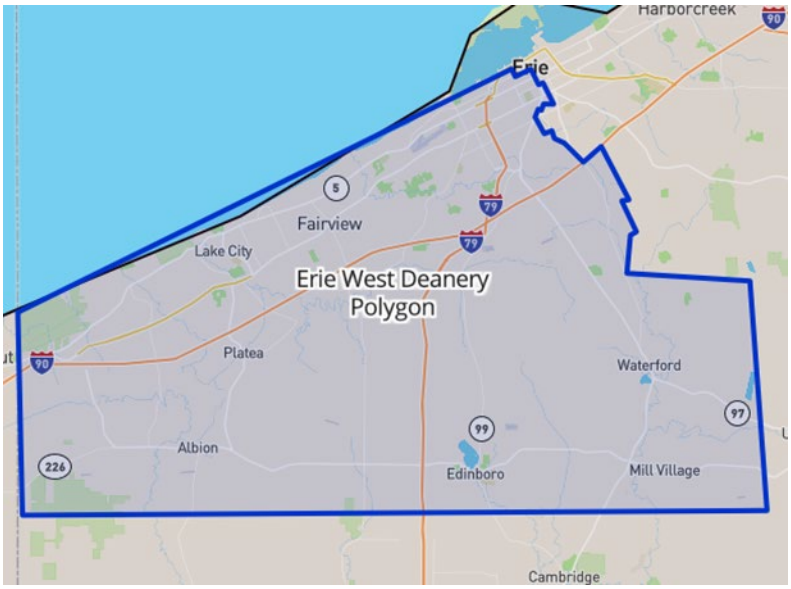
The next three are added for parishes to bring the number to seven – think of virtues.

5. **Inspiration –** there is a reason the message of Jesus is called the Good News. Parishes must inspire.
6. **Collaboration –** most parishes today cannot and should not approach the mission we share alone.
7. **Celebration –** parishes must worship and pray well and enjoy one another's company like the *agape.*

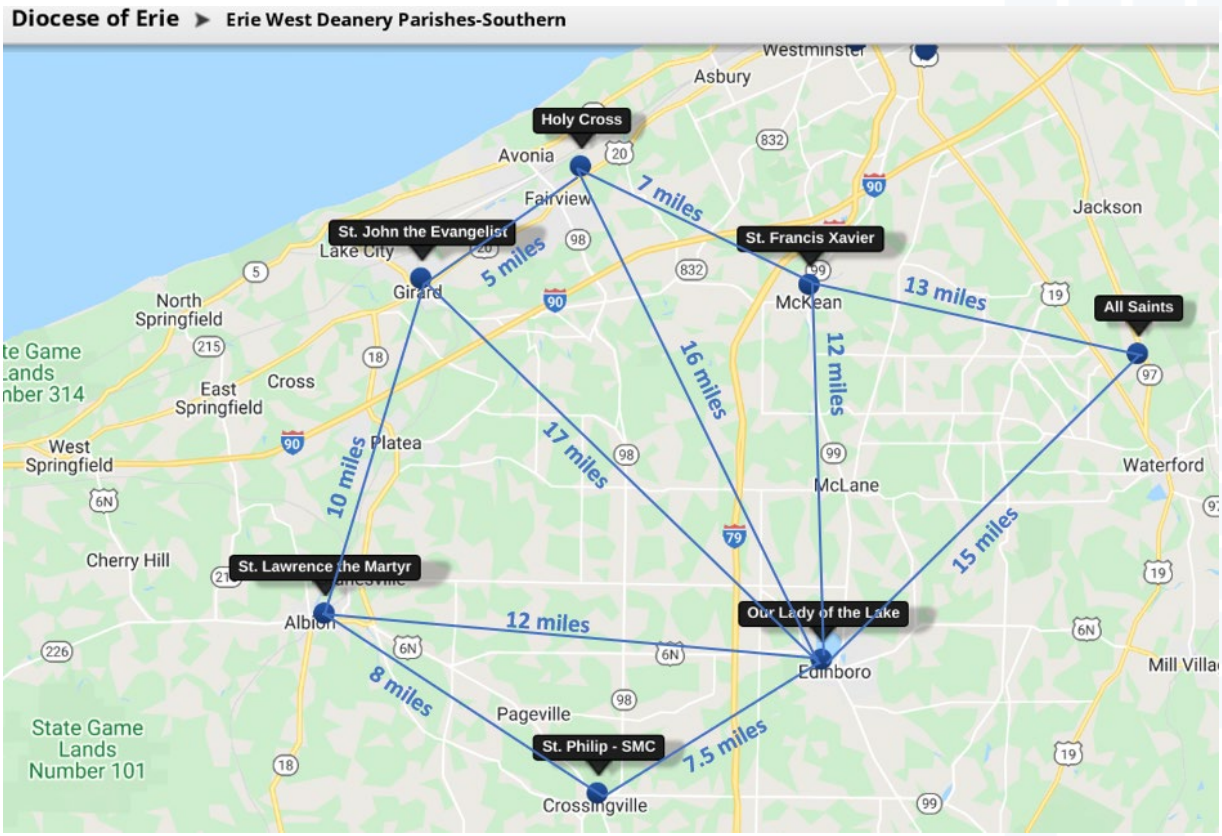
As parishes look to the future, we are reminded that we never do anything alone. Jesus promised that he "will be with us always."

I. DEANERY PARISH DATA

The boundaries used for the demographic studies are shown below. The boundaries are those used to define the Erie West Deanery. This section also includes a map of the parishes in the deanery along with the distances between parishes and a parish profile for each parish community which includes information on membership, reception of sacraments, Mass attendance, and enrollments in schools of religion.



Map of Erie West Deanery Parishes



Erie West Deanery Parish Profiles

Figure 1a
All Saints, Waterford

Parish data	14-15	15-16	16-17	17-18	18-19	19-20	20-21	Change 14-15 to 20-21 Number	Percent
Infant Baptisms	2	0	1	2	1	0	2	0	*0%*
Youth First Communions	11	14	3	3	2	3	13	2	*18%*
Youth Confirmations	18	12	13	14	8	6	15	-3	*-17%*
Adult Confirmations	3	2	2	3	0	1	1	-2	*-67%*
Catechumens	0	2	1	3	0	1	0	0	
Number of Candidates	11	9	12	3	10	12	11	0	*0%*
Marriages	0	0	0	4	4	2	0	0	
Deaths	11	9	12	3	10	12	11	0	*0%*
Registered Catholic households	403	409	397	392	390	361	348	-55	*-14%*
Average Mass attendance	275	298	300	287	236	236	168	-107	*-39%*
K to 8 Parish School of Religion Enrollment	100	69	49	44	41	37	36	-64	*-64%*
9 to 12 Parish School of Religion Enrollment	43	50	65	60	55	50	41	-2	*-5%*
Youth RCIA Enrollment	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	

Source: Diocese of Erie

Figure 1b
Blessed Sacrament, Erie

Parish data	14-15	15-16	16-17	17-18	18-19	19-20	20-21	Change 14-15 to 20-21 Number	Percent
Infant Baptisms	28	18	22	14	25	8	14	-14	*-50%*
Youth First Communions	49	51	22	14	25	8	25	-24	*-49%*
Youth Confirmations	31	18	42	47	36	27	21	-10	*-32%*
Adult Confirmations	9	0	9	4	2	4	6	-3	*-33%*
Catechumens	16	0	0	0	0	0	2	-14	*-88%*
Number of Candidates	4	0	0	4	4	4	4	0	*0%*
Marriages	4	5	1	6	7	1	2	-2	*-50%*
Deaths	62	31	50	35	30	4	27	-35	*-56%*
Registered Catholic households	1,046	1,009	1,009	920	805	719	716	-330	*-32%*
Average Mass attendance	1,096	940	973	929	908	908	604	-492	*-45%*
K to 8 Parish School of Religion Enrollment	110	116	101	101	41	109	101	-9	*-8%*
9 to 12 Parish School of Religion Enrollment	83	48	59	59	101	70	0	-83	*-100%*
Youth RCIA Enrollment	4	0	0	0	2	0	0	-4	*-100%*

Source: Diocese of Erie

Figure 1c
Holy Cross, Fairview

Parish data	14-15	15-16	16-17	17-18	18-19	19-20	20-21	Change 14-15 to 20-21 Number	Percent
Infant Baptisms	4	6	2	5	4	3	5	1	*25%*
Youth First Communions	9	20	2	5	4	3	10	1	*11%*
Youth Confirmations	12	12	18	11	18	12	12	0	*0%*
Adult Confirmations	0	2	0	0	0	1	0	0	
Catechumens	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Number of Candidates	0	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	
Marriages	4	0	1	2	1	0	1	-3	*-75%*
Deaths	9	9	10	13	17	12	13	4	*44%*
Registered Catholic households	507	517	527	519	511	501	485	-22	*-4%*
Average Mass attendance	495	507	440	408	324	324	244	-251	*-51%*
K to 8 Parish School of Religion Enrollment	133	68	58	56	47	40	23	-110	*-83%*
9 to 12 Parish School of Religion Enrollment	43	110	120	115	51	7	63	20	*47%*
Youth RCIA Enrollment	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	

Source: Diocese of Erie

Figure 1d
Our Lady of Peace, Erie

Parish data	14-15	15-16	16-17	17-18	18-19	19-20	20-21	Change 14-15 to 20-21 Number	Percent
Infant Baptisms	50	63	48	44	36	22	27	-23	*-46%*
Youth First Communions	84	84	48	44	36	22	66	-18	*-21%*
Youth Confirmations	94	76	105	80	47	52	54	-40	*-43%*
Adult Confirmations	9	10	8	8	4	3	3	-6	*-67%*
Catechumens	2	1	0	3	1	3	1	-1	*-50%*
Number of Candidates	5	3	8	5	3	1	2	-3	*-60%*
Marriages	16	9	15	19	9	11	8	-8	*-50%*
Deaths	59	65	66	62	53	59	1	-58	*-98%*
Registered Catholic households	2,410	2,439	2,439	2,367	1,816	1,835	-555	-2,965	*-123%*
Average Mass attendance	1,870	1,650	1,449	1,374	1,374	918	-983	-2,853	*-153%*
K to 8 Parish School of Religion Enrollment	155	234	209	195	178	168	74	-81	*-52%*
9 to 12 Parish School of Religion Enrollment	291	194	187	128	123	130	150	-141	*-48%*
Youth RCIA Enrollment	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	

Source: Diocese of Erie

Figure 1e
Our Lady of the Lake, Edinboro

Parish data	14-15	15-16	16-17	17-18	18-19	19-20	20-21	Change 14-15 to 20-21 Number	Percent
Infant Baptisms	12	20	13	16	12	9	10	-2	*-17%*
Youth First Communions	14	15	13	16	12	9	14	0	*0%*
Youth Confirmations	11	10	12	11	10	9	11	0	*0%*
Adult Confirmations	5	3	7	5	0	2	3	-2	*-40%*
Catechumens	0	0	3	1	1	1	2	2	
Number of Candidates	7	3	5	4	1	1	1	-6	*-86%*
Marriages	3	8	8	7	3	4	7	4	*133%*
Deaths	16	14	13	16	10	11	1	-15	*-94%*
Registered Catholic households	627	571	572	552	543	538	-89	-716	*-114%*
Average Mass attendance	514	468	415	420	420	325	-119	-633	*-123%*
K to 8 Parish School of Religion Enrollment	100	127	117	108	75	74	71	-29	*-29%*
9 to 12 Parish School of Religion Enrollment	70	42	39	45	44	36	29	-41	*-59%*
Youth RCIA Enrollment	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	-2	*-100%*

Source: Diocese of Erie

Figure 1f
Sacred Heart of Jesus, Erie

Parish data	14-15	15-16	16-17	17-18	18-19	19-20	20-21	Change 14-15 to 20-21 Number	Percent
Infant Baptisms	4	9	8	6	7	4	4	0	*0%*
Youth First Communions	15	7	8	6	7	4	9	-6	*-40%*
Youth Confirmations	11	10	4	11	3	1	6	-5	*-45%*
Adult Confirmations	1	2	2	2	1	0	0	-1	*-100%*
Catechumens	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Number of Candidates	1	1	2	2	1	0	0	-1	*-100%*
Marriages	3	1	3	5	4	1	1	-2	*-67%*
Deaths	39	18	25	24	20	21	16	-23	*-59%*
Registered Catholic households	697	665	627	628	610	547	493	-204	*-29%*
Average Mass attendance	545	548	416	362	338	338	160	-385	*-71%*
K to 8 Parish School of Religion Enrollment	21	11	26	14	13	12	32	11	*52%*
9 to 12 Parish School of Religion Enrollment	20	17	14	15	7	6	6	-14	*-70%*
Youth RCIA Enrollment	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	

Source: Diocese of Erie

Figure 1g
St. Andrew, Erie

Parish data	14-15	15-16	16-17	17-18	18-19	19-20	20-21	Change 14-15 to 20-21 Number	Percent
Infant Baptisms	6	5	5	5	2	3	1	-5	*-83%*
Youth First Communions	5	13	5	5	2	3	4	-1	*-20%*
Youth Confirmations	6	10	12	5	3	3	3	-3	*-50%*
Adult Confirmations	0	4	4	0	0	0	0	0	
Catechumens	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Number of Candidates	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	
Marriages	5	1	8	3	6	3	2	-3	*-60%*
Deaths	24	27	22	20	15	23	10	-14	*-58%*
Registered Catholic households	471	433	387	376	348	238	323	-148	*-31%*
Average Mass attendance	345	273	245	176	175	175	96	-249	*-72%*
K to 8 Parish School of Religion Enrollment	36	58	58	58	58	45	32	-4	*-11%*
9 to 12 Parish School of Religion Enrollment	20	39	33	33	33	20	20	0	*0%*
Youth RCIA Enrollment	0	2	2	0	2	0	0	0	

Source: Diocese of Erie

Figure 1h
St. Francis Xavier, McKean

Parish data	14-15	15-16	16-17	17-18	18-19	19-20	20-21	Change 14-15 to 20-21 Number	Percent
Infant Baptisms	2	7	3	5	4	18	9	7	*350%*
Youth First Communions	14	12	3	5	4	18	14	0	*0%*
Youth Confirmations	15	22	16	7	6	18	12	-3	*-20%*
Adult Confirmations	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	
Catechumens	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	-1	*-100%*
Number of Candidates	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Marriages	2	1	1	5	2	4	0	-2	*-100%*
Deaths	16	17	10	10	14	14	14	-2	*-13%*
Registered Catholic households	562	555	555	453	459	473	473	-89	*-16%*
Average Mass attendance	386	340	335	374	408	408	338	-48	*-12%*
K to 8 Parish School of Religion Enrollment	93	103	88	81	56	85	85	-8	*-9%*
9 to 12 Parish School of Religion Enrollment	48	38	25	28	46	32	32	-16	*-33%*
Youth RCIA Enrollment	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	-1	*-100%*

Source: Diocese of Erie

Figure 1i
St. George, Erie

Parish data	14-15	15-16	16-17	17-18	18-19	19-20	20-21	Change 14-15 to 20-21 Number	Percent
Infant Baptisms	43	40	27	26	26	18	15	-28	*-65%*
Youth First Communions	59	66	27	26	26	18	45	-14	*-24%*
Youth Confirmations	50	45	64	55	39	37	42	-8	*-16%*
Adult Confirmations	12	4	12	8	6	5	5	-7	*-58%*
Catechumens	7	11	10	5	2	4	0	-7	*-100%*
Number of Candidates	14	5	2	7	6	3	3	-11	*-79%*
Marriages	11	6	9	10	9	9	11	0	*0%*
Deaths	48	45	48	48	42	55	57	9	*19%*
Registered Catholic households	2,769	2,810	1,441	1,327	1,364	1,380	1,393	-1,376	*-50%*
Average Mass attendance	1,250	1,198	1,174	1,163	1,167	1,167	668	-582	*-47%*
K to 8 Parish School of Religion Enrollment	129	158	157	110	95	90	94	-35	*-27%*
9 to 12 Parish School of Religion Enrollment	100	95	85	70	76	25	35	-65	*-65%*
Youth RCIA Enrollment	8	12	3	0	2	1	1	-7	*-88%*

Source: Diocese of Erie

Figure 1j
St. John the Evangelist, Girard

Parish data	14-15	15-16	16-17	17-18	18-19	19-20	20-21	Change 14-15 to 20-21 Number	Percent
Infant Baptisms	10	1	7	7	7	1	1	-9	*-90%*
Youth First Communions	8	7	7	7	7	1	9	1	*13%*
Youth Confirmations	15	13	11	11	11	3	5	-10	*-67%*
Adult Confirmations	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	-2	*-100%*
Catechumens	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	-3	*-100%*
Number of Candidates	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Marriages	2	2	1	1	1	0	1	-1	*-50%*
Deaths	26	21	20	20	20	14	20	-6	*-23%*
Registered Catholic households	583	335	354	354	354	300	300	-283	*-49%*
Average Mass attendance	311	298	248	269	251	251	177	-134	*-43%*
K to 8 Parish School of Religion Enrollment	73	35	70	70	70	27	27	-46	*-63%*
9 to 12 Parish School of Religion Enrollment	47	74	30	30	30	41	41	-6	*-13%*
Youth RCIA Enrollment	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	

Source: Diocese of Erie

Figure 1k
St. Joseph/Bread of Life Community, Erie

Parish data	14-15	15-16	16-17	17-18	18-19	19-20	20-21	Change 14-15 to 20-21 Number	Percent
Infant Baptisms	29	27	24	10	7	7	9	-20	*-69%*
Youth First Communions	15	13	24	10	7	7	16	1	*7%*
Youth Confirmations	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Adult Confirmations	4	5	0	0	0	0	4	0	*0%*
Catechumens	3	0	1	0	0	0	1	-2	*-67%*
Number of Candidates	1	5	5	0	0	0	3	2	*200%*
Marriages	0	7	8	9	9	3	7	7	
Deaths	17	11	16	20	18	19	22	5	*29%*
Registered Catholic households	501	458	458	428	406	388	404	-97	*-19%*
Average Mass attendance	696	686	676	679	681	681	435	-261	*-38%*
K to 8 Parish School of Religion Enrollment	88	92	93	80	74	10	117	29	*33%*
9 to 12 Parish School of Religion Enrollment	19	4	26	61	40	7	7	-12	*-63%*
Youth RCIA Enrollment	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	2	

Source: Diocese of Erie

Figure 1l
St. Jude the Apostle, Erie

Parish data	14-15	15-16	16-17	17-18	18-19	19-20	20-21	Change 14-15 to 20-21 Number	Percent
Infant Baptisms	36	26	37	30	11	16	11	-25	*-69%*
Youth First Communions	58	48	37	30	11	16	48	-10	*-17%*
Youth Confirmations	61	53	39	88	38	50	63	2	*3%*
Adult Confirmations	15	7	18	13	10	3	0	-15	*-100%*
Catechumens	7	3	13	9	10	12	4	-3	*-43%*
Number of Candidates	8	9	14	9	9	11	2	-6	*-75%*
Marriages	11	11	10	6	15	6	5	-6	*-55%*
Deaths	37	43	47	40	35	35	42	5	*14%*
Registered Catholic households	1,434	1,461	1,490	1,870	1,151	1,227	1,214	-220	*-15%*
Average Mass attendance	1,555	1,541	1,522	1,216	1,057	1,057	676	-879	*-57%*
K to 8 Parish School of Religion Enrollment	163	108	145	167	156	150	150	-13	*-8%*
9 to 12 Parish School of Religion Enrollment	106	125	59	82	72	110	103	-3	*-3%*
Youth RCIA Enrollment	2	0	2	2	9	13	2	0	*0%*

Source: Diocese of Erie

Figure 1m
St. Julia, Erie

Parish data	14-15	15-16	16-17	17-18	18-19	19-20	20-21	Change 14-15 to 20-21 Number	Percent
Infant Baptisms	2	4	0	1	1	1	1	-1	*-50%*
Youth First Communions	16	11	0	1	1	1	1	-15	*-94%*
Youth Confirmations	0	6	8	19	3	1	4	4	
Adult Confirmations	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Catechumens	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Number of Candidates	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Marriages	2	2	1	1	0	3	1	-1	*-50%*
Deaths	20	9	6	8	10	9	6	-14	*-70%*
Registered Catholic households	377	365	365	362	352	360	298	-79	*-21%*
Average Mass attendance	356	310	306	277	297	297	176	-180	*-51%*
K to 8 Parish School of Religion Enrollment	72	85	54	45	27	27	27	-45	*-63%*
9 to 12 Parish School of Religion Enrollment	25	16	20	40	0	0	13	-12	*-48%*
Youth RCIA Enrollment	0	0	0	0	0	0	0		

Source: Diocese of Erie

Figure 1n
St. Lawrence the Martyr, Albion

Parish data	14-15	15-16	16-17	17-18	18-19	19-20	20-21	Change 14-15 to 20-21 Number	Percent
Infant Baptisms	7	4	2	3	5	1	0	-7	*-100%*
Youth First Communions	4	6	2	3	5	1	0	-4	*-100%*
Youth Confirmations	4	6	6	5	8	4	1	-3	*-75%*
Adult Confirmations	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	
Catechumens	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Number of Candidates	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	-2	*-100%*
Marriages	0	0	2	8	0	0	0	0	
Deaths	5	6	14	12	5	8	5	0	*0%*
Registered Catholic households	215	206	285	251	201	182	176	-39	*-18%*
Average Mass attendance	210	258	229	152	144	144	105	-105	*-50%*
K to 8 Parish School of Religion Enrollment	23	19	19	25	14	20	17	-6	*-26%*
9 to 12 Parish School of Religion Enrollment	33	31	25	20	28	17	13	-20	*-61%*
Youth RCIA Enrollment	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	

Source: Diocese of Erie

Figure 1o
St. Paul, Erie

Parish data	14-15	15-16	16-17	17-18	18-19	19-20	20-21	Change 14-15 to 20-21 Number	Percent
Infant Baptisms	5	1	0	0	1	0	0	-5	*-100%*
Youth First Communions	0	0	8	3	5	2	0	0	
Youth Confirmations	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Adult Confirmations	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Catechumens	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Number of Candidates	0	0	33	46	49	55	16	16	
Marriages	0	0	2	1	0	4	0	0	
Deaths	18	30	33	46	49	55	16	-2	*-11%*
Registered Catholic households	240	236	212	201	200	252	193	-47	*-20%*
Average Mass attendance	174	174	174	170	158	158	140	-34	*-20%*
K to 8 Parish School of Religion Enrollment	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
9 to 12 Parish School of Religion Enrollment	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Youth RCIA Enrollment	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	

Source: Diocese of Erie

Figure 1p
St. Peter Cathedral, Erie

Parish data	14-15	15-16	16-17	17-18	18-19	19-20	20-21	Change 14-15 to 20-21 Number	Percent
Infant Baptisms	4	1	6	2	2	3	0	-4	*-100%*
Youth First Communions	15	12	11	20	11	15	4	-11	*-73%*
Youth Confirmations	23	45	60	55	41	35	3	-20	*-87%*
Adult Confirmations	3	4	3	1	5	3	0	-3	*-100%*
Catechumens	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Number of Candidates	27	22	33	31	18	28	19	-8	*-30%*
Marriages	26	7	11	6	3	2	1	-25	*-96%*
Deaths	27	22	33	31	18	28	19	-8	*-30%*
Registered Catholic households	634	643	613	638	653	662	643	9	*1%*
Average Mass attendance	545	574	639	672	705	705	461	-84	*-15%*
K to 8 Parish School of Religion Enrollment	15	0	0	0	0	0	0	-15	*-100%*
9 to 12 Parish School of Religion Enrollment	30	0	0	0	0	0	0	-30	*-100%*
Youth RCIA Enrollment	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	-1	*-100%*

Source: Diocese of Erie

Figure 1q
St. Stephen of Hungary/Iglesia De San Esteban, Erie

Parish data	14-15	15-16	16-17	17-18	18-19	19-20	20-21	Change 14-15 to 20-21 19-20	Percent
Infant Baptisms	12	7	8	8	11	11	11	-1	*-8%*
Youth First Communions	12	14	8	8	11	11	11	-1	*-8%*
Youth Confirmations	21	0	25	0	0	0	0	-21	*-100%*
Adult Confirmations	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	
Catechumens	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Number of Candidates	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Marriages	0	0	1	1	1	1	0	0	
Deaths	6	6	7	9	12	12	12	6	*100%*
Registered Catholic households	300	346	296	270	230	230	200	-100	*-33%*
Average Mass attendance	188	206	237	241	230	230	147	-41	*-22%*
K to 8 Parish School of Religion Enrollment	28	37	36	41	27	27	27	-1	
9 to 12 Parish School of Religion Enrollment	9	10	8	5	27	27	27	18	
Youth RCIA Enrollment	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	

Source: Diocese of Erie

II. CONFIGURATION AND LEADERSHIP OPTIONS

A. Configuration Options

There are models which allow for parishes to collaborate, create synergy, and share efficiencies on personnel, programs, and resources. Each model has specific applications. The implementation of a model will produce some signs of improvement. However, the most significant improvement on the parish level will happen in those ministries which the parish chooses to enhance.

1. **Merger model** – Two or more parishes are either merged with an already-existing parish or form a new parish. There can be multiple churches. One church must be designated as the parish church and the others are called secondary churches. This model is most often used when one parish can no longer be sustained by itself or when parishes are either in geographical proximity or serve the same community, town, or city.
2. **Partner model** – Two parishes share some of their resources, but they continue to exist as distinct parishes. They function in many ways like sister parishes. While they have their own parishioners, parish church, and finances, they share the same pastor, staff, and parish office. This model is used when two parishes which are both sustainable will benefit from the efficiencies which collaboration can provide.
3. **Hub/Anchor model** – Multiple parishes which surround a larger parish usually located in a town or city are served by several priests and staff from a parish office at the larger parish. Priests and staff travel between the parishes to provide ministry and parishioners from the smaller parishes travel to the larger parish for various events and celebrations. This model allows smaller parishes to experience a greater level of ministerial presence and quality. The model can also be an opportunity for priests to live in a community.
4. **Parish Family/Network model** – Parishes in proximity to each other can form their own collaborative family or network. This model is often used in larger cities as a way for parishes to share personnel, programs, and resources in order to expand ministry effectiveness or to initiate new ministries. It is a way for all parishes to focus on membership growth and ministerial quality. Assessments for common staff and programs are most often based on the use of a common percentage of parish contributions. Parishes will need to organize collaborative activity around a committee or team with representatives from each parish.

B. Leadership Options

The emerging configuration models are rooted in greater collaboration among parishes. Leadership also needs to be more collaborative, and these options provide some of the ways that are in use, and which are possible for consideration. Like the configuration model, good leadership produces better results. However, the ministry strategies are key to a more significant impact on parish data.

1. **Leadership team** – The national workshops which have been conducted under the name of "Amazing Parish" promote the creation of a leadership team for every parish. The team should consist of the pastor and other "key" leaders, usually staff. The rationale is that parishes are too multi-faceted and complex for one person to even try to do it all. The team should be no larger than five people and should meet weekly.

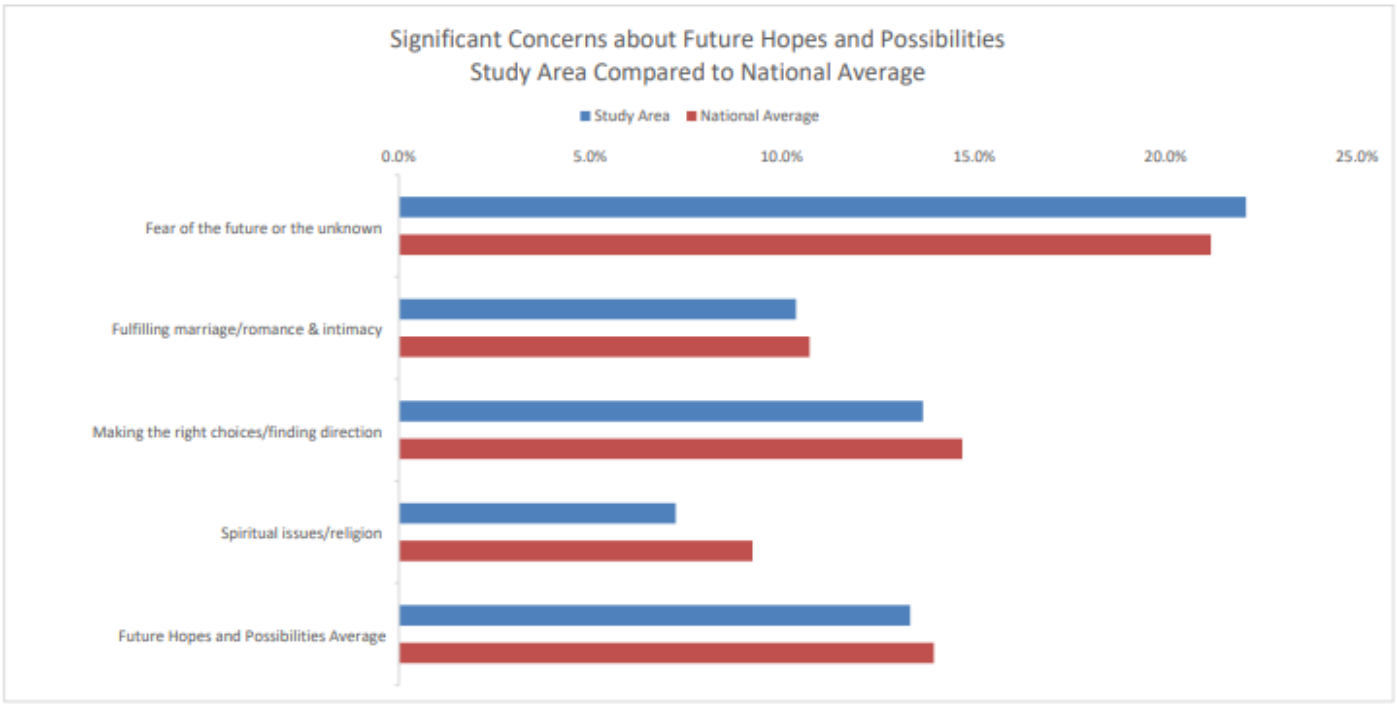
2. **Combined staff** – Parishes that are using any of the configuration models should consider the advantages of combining staff. In every area of ministry, there are ways to design all ministry positions so that every parish can benefit from having specialized ministers.
3. **Shared staff** – Some parishes may prefer to retain certain staff positions like a music minister, business manager, or maintenance person. However, there may be interest and need to look at sharing other ministry positions. This option allows for parishes to "pick and choose" the positions which will benefit them most. The key issue when sharing staff is to identify an individual who will be the supervisor. There are no best practice stories which involve a team of supervisors.
4. **Joint parish pastoral councils** – As parishes work together on mission and ministry, it is logical that the question of forming a single pastoral council should be considered. All parishes have the same mission from Jesus and the Church. Parishes have a range of possibilities in this regard, from an annual meeting to forming one council with representatives from each parish. The starting point is important, so begin at the level where most people are comfortable. The important point is that leadership must be shared on mission and ministry among the councils.

III. DEANERY AREA SURVEY INFORMATION RELATED TO MINISTRIES AND PROGRAMS

As part of the study of the deanery area, surveys have been conducted with representative area residents to determine religious beliefs, behaviors, and practices. The survey is conducted every four to five years and is the largest and most comprehensive of its kind in the United States. These surveys can be helpful in the development and design of various parish and deanery ministries. By viewing the survey results, reading the commentaries, and drawing your own conclusions, the information can serve as a "shortcut" to more effective ministry.

Figure 2
Concerns about Future Hopes and Possibilities

Concerns about Future Hopes and Possibilities						
Study Area Compared to National Average	Study Area		National Average			
	Modest Concern	Significant Concern	Modest Concern	Significant Concern	Modest Concern	Significant Concern
Fear of the future or the unknown	*49.7%*	*22.1%*	*50.5%*	*21.2%*	***98***	***104***
Fulfilling marriage/romance & intimacy	*30.2%*	*10.4%*	*31.3%*	*10.7%*	***96***	***97***
Making the right choices/finding direction	*45.5%*	*13.7%*	*45.2%*	*14.7%*	***101***	***93***
Spiritual issues/religion	*26.9%*	*7.2%*	*27.6%*	*9.2%*	***97***	***78***
Future Hopes and Possibilities Average	***38.1%***	***13.3%***	***38.7%***	***14.0%***	***98***	***96***



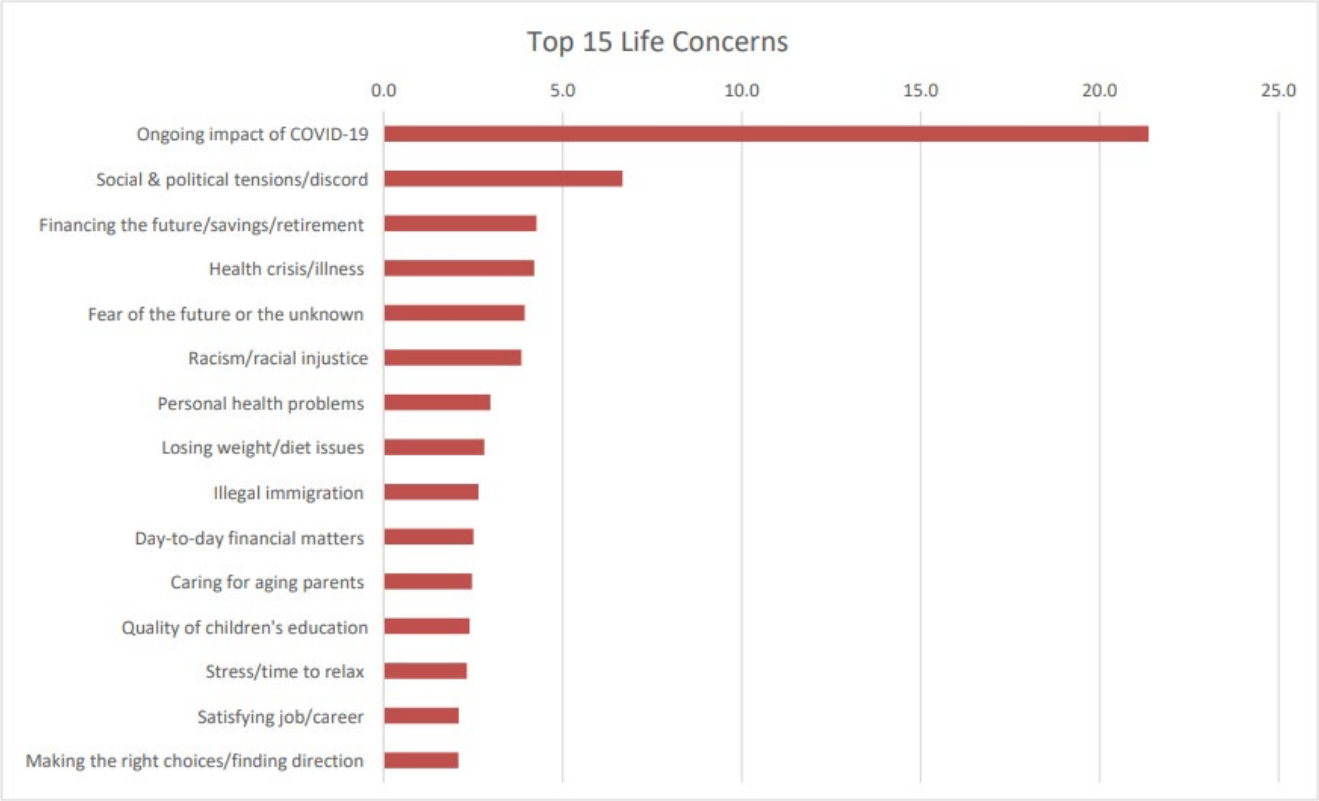
Commentary

1. People in the area are slightly less concerned than those around the country whose greatest concern in life is about the future and/or the unknown. The Church needs to be a strong beacon of hope for the future and an active actor in alleviating fears and the causes of fear in people's lives.
2. People in the country as well as in the area have less concern about spiritual issues and religion. This reveals how disconnected from daily living faith has become in most people's lives. The challenge is to help people see and then realize how all their life issues are issues of faith.

Figure 3
Top 15 Life Concerns

Priority List	Top 15 of 44 Life Concerns Ranked by greatest concerns			
	Ranking	***Concern***	***Ratio***	***Strength of Concern***
	1	Ongoing impact of COVID-19	21.4	Very Strong Concern
	2	Social & political tensions/discord	6.7	Very Strong Concern
	3	Financing the future/savings/retirement	4.3	Very Strong Concern
	4	Health crisis/illness	4.2	Very Strong Concern
	5	Fear of the future or the unknown	3.9	Very Strong Concern
	6	Racism/racial injustice	3.8	Very Strong Concern
	7	Personal health problems	3.0	Strong Concern
	8	Losing weight/diet issues	2.8	Strong Concern
	9	Illegal immigration	2.6	Strong Concern
	10	Day-to-day financial matters	2.5	Strong Concern
	11	Caring for aging parents	2.5	Strong Concern
	12	Quality of children's education	2.4	Strong Concern
	13	Stress/time to relax	2.3	Strong Concern
	14	Satisfying job/career	2.1	Strong Concern
	15	Making the right choices/finding direction	2.1	Strong Concern

Figure 3 *(continued)*
Top 15 Life Concerns



Commentary

1. These survey results illustrate the priority of concerns which area residents have currently. The top three concerns are straight from the news headlines. Money, health, family/racial concerns round out the top ten. Very personal concerns like finding time to relax, making good choices, and making time for family and friends, while important, are less so.
2. These concerns also show how important it is for the Church to be a voice and a teacher on matters of social, racial, and economic justice.

Figure 4
Reasons for Non-Participation

From Outside: Reasons for non-participation in a religious congregation or religious community

Study Area Compared to National Average

About Personal Life	Study Area	US Average	Comparative Index
Couldn't find right faith community in the area	*25.3%*	*27.5%*	***92***
Demands of raising children	*19.2%*	*17.8%*	***108***
Moved from community	*19.3%*	*21.1%*	***91***
No time/less time available	*30.1%*	*28.7%*	***105***
Average of Personal Life	***23.5%***	***23.8%***	***99***

Figure 4 *(continued)*
Reasons for Non-Participation

About Personal Faith	Study Area	US Average	Comparative Index
Don't believe in God	*29.1%*	*29.4%*	***99***
No longer believe	*29.0%*	*28.4%*	***102***
Unsure about personal beliefs	*32.2%*	*29.5%*	***109***
Wasn't relevant to my life	*47.6%*	*45.8%*	***104***
Average of About Personal Faith	***34.5%***	***33.3%***	***104***

About the Church	Study Area	US Average	Comparative Index
Boring/uninteresting	*35.4%*	*35.6%*	***99***
Conflicts in religious community	*26.0%*	*26.7%*	***97***
Didn't develop friendships	*20.7%*	*21.7%*	***95***
Didn't feel welcome	*23.3%*	*24.0%*	***97***
Didn't have desired children's/youth programs	*12.5%*	*12.5%*	***100***
Didn't have opportunity to serve/use skills	*17.9%*	*16.9%*	***106***
Disillusionment with religion	*47.3%*	*45.8%*	***103***
Don't trust organized religion	*51.1%*	*50.9%*	***100***
Don't trust religious leaders	*50.6%*	*51.5%*	***98***
Never been invited	*13.5%*	*13.5%*	***100***
Not current/old-fashioned	*31.8%*	*30.4%*	***105***
Religion too focused on money	*56.5%*	*55.5%*	***102***
Religious People too Judgmental	*51.9%*	*54.8%*	***95***
Strict/inflexible beliefs	*38.5%*	*39.0%*	***99***
Too progressive/moving away from traditional values	*21.0%*	*21.1%*	***99***
Wasn't supportive during crisis/time of need	*20.1%*	*19.8%*	***101***
Worship/music style	*20.3%*	*20.9%*	***97***
Average About the Church	***31.7%***	***31.8%***	***100***

Commentary

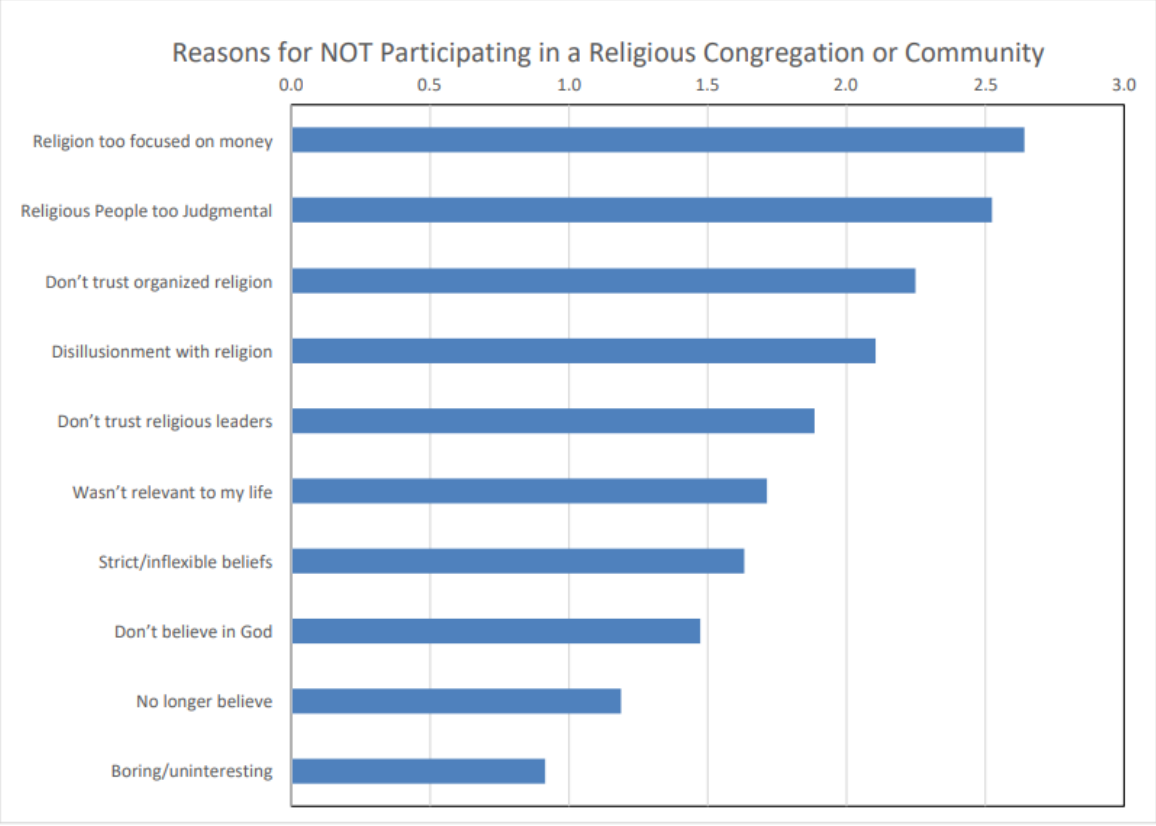
1. Figures 4 and 5 are related but focusing on figure 4 allows for some specific attention to personal life and faith. Note that many people do not participate in a church because they do not have the time or cannot find a community they want to join. Interestingly, these comments do not indicate a lack of desire or interest to belong to a community.
2. The results on personal faith are cause for reflection. Many of us grew up talking with friends about our church or denomination. Almost everyone believed in God. Today, there is a growing number of people who do not believe in God or who are unsure. Most of these responses in the West Erie area are greater than the national averages.

Figure 5
Priority List for Not Participating

Priority List

Top 10 of 25 Reasons for people outside a religious congregation or community for not participating

Ranking	*Concern*	*Ratio*	*Strength of Reason*
1	Religion too focused on money	2.6	Very Strong Reason
2	Religious People too Judgmental	2.5	Very Strong Reason
3	Don't trust organized religion	2.2	Very Strong Reason
4	Disillusionment with religion	2.1	Very Strong Reason
5	Don't trust religious leaders	1.9	Very Strong Reason
6	Wasn't relevant to my life	1.7	Somewhat Strong Reason
7	Strict/inflexible beliefs	1.6	Somewhat Strong Reason
8	Don't believe in God	1.5	Somewhat Strong Reason
9	No longer believe	1.2	Somewhat Strong Reason
10	Boring/uninteresting	0.9	Somewhat Weak Reason



Commentary

1. The top five reasons for not joining a church tell us much about how those outside our communities view us. We are seen as mainly concerned about money, judgmental, untrustworthy, and have left people disillusioned. It sounds like the way the scribes and Pharisees were viewed in Jesus' time.
2. The next set of reasons are like those we have noted before. People outside of the Church do not see its relevancy to their personal lives and see the church as strict and inflexible. Both reasons have potential for further dialogue.

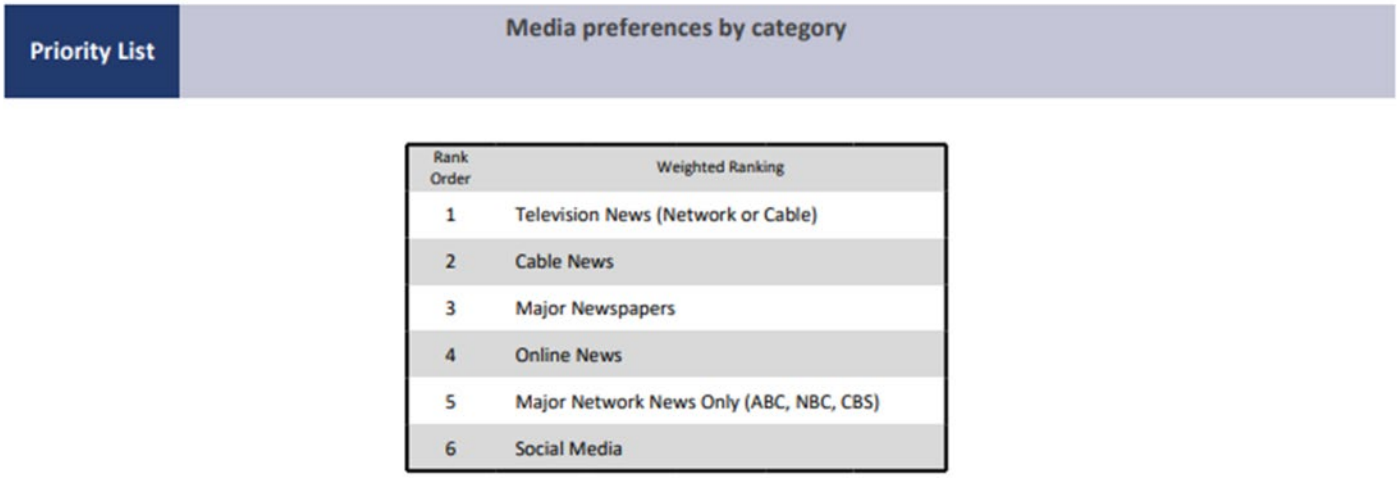
Figure 6
Priority List Program or Ministry Preferences

Priority List	Ministry or Program Recommendations Based Upon This Study Area Preferences are ranked by ratio of important to not important			
	Ranking	***Program***	***Ratio***	***Strength of Preference***
	1	Warm and friendly encounters	4.5	Very Strong Preference
	2	Quality sermons	2.1	Strong Preference
	3	Traditional worship experiences	1.6	Strong Preference
	4	Holiday programs/activities	1.6	Strong Preference
	5	Opportunities to develop personal relationships	1.5	Moderately Strong Preference
	6	Opportunities for volunteering in the community	1.3	Moderately Strong Preference
	7	Adult social activities	1.2	Moderately Strong Preference
	8	Seniors/retiree activities	1.1	Moderately Strong Preference
	9	Involvement in social causes	1.0	Moderately Strong Preference
	10	Celebration of sacraments	1.0	Moderately Strong Preference
	11	Family oriented activities	0.9	Minimal Preference
	12	Small groups (i.e., life groups, personal interest groups)	0.8	Minimal Preference
	13	Cultural programs (music, drama, art)	0.7	Minimal Preference
	14	Contemporary worship experiences	0.7	Minimal Preference
	15	Crisis support groups	0.6	Minimal Preference
	16	Social justice advocacy work	0.6	Minimal Preference
	17	Religious education for children	0.6	Minimal Preference
	18	Spiritual discussion groups	0.5	Minimal Preference
	19	Online or virtual worship experiences	0.5	Minimal Preference
	20	Bible or Scripture study/prayer groups	0.5	Minimal Preference
	21	Personal/family counseling	0.5	Minimal Preference
	22	Size of church congregation	0.4	Minimal Preference
	23	Youth social activities	0.4	Minimal Preference
	24	Addiction support groups	0.3	Minimal Preference

Commentary

1. Numbers 1 through 9 reveal the strongest ministry preferences. The highest preference is for "warm and friendly encounters." On the one hand, this question reveals that many people do not have such encounters at parishes. On the other hand, CARA (Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate) posits this as an essential characteristic of an effective parish. They describe it as "providing an overwhelming sense of welcome."
2. Other areas of preference can be grouped as liturgical. Good homilies, music, liturgical ministries, and celebrations of sacraments are also essential to CARA.
3. A third grouping of preferences is focused on opportunities to meet others and to help others. People are interested in social events and serving the community.
4. In terms of adult faith formation, there is greater interest in small groups than in other more specific kinds of formation, such as Bible study.

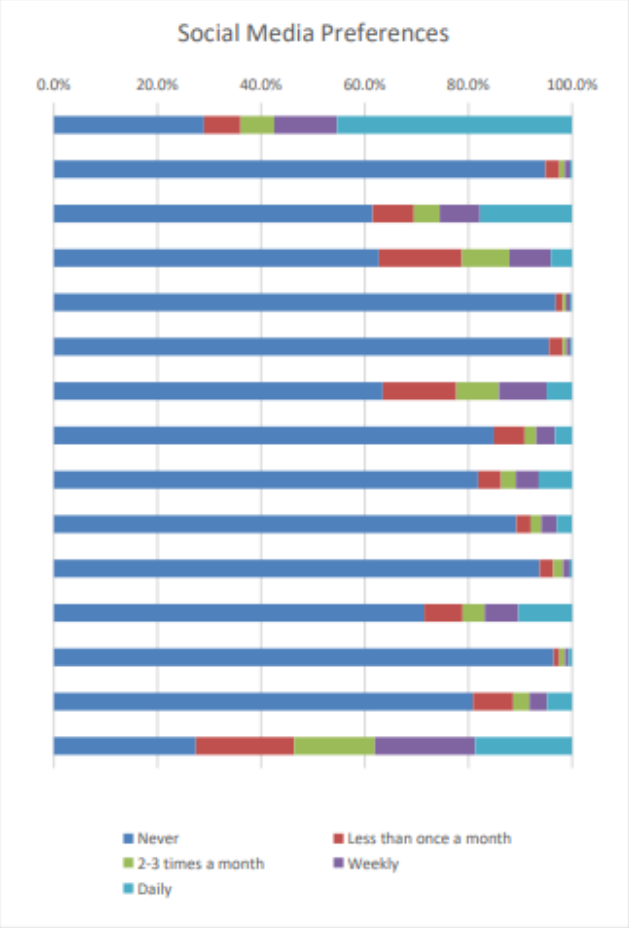
Figure 7
Priority List Information Sources and Social Media Preferences



Rank Order	Weighted Ranking
1	Television News (Network or Cable)
2	Cable News
3	Major Newspapers
4	Online News
5	Major Network News Only (ABC, NBC, CBS)
6	Social Media

Figure 7 *(continued)*
Priority List Information Sources and Social Media Preferences

Study Area Detail	Social media preferences				
	Never	Less than once a month	2-3 times a month	Weekly	Daily
Facebook	29.0%	7.1%	6.5%	12.1%	45.3%
Flickr	94.8%	2.7%	1.0%	1.0%	0.4%
Instagram	61.5%	8.0%	5.0%	7.8%	17.8%
LinkedIn	62.7%	16.0%	9.2%	8.0%	4.1%
Marco-polo	96.9%	1.3%	0.7%	0.8%	0.4%
Meetup	95.6%	2.7%	0.7%	0.8%	0.3%
Pinterest	63.5%	14.2%	8.2%	9.2%	4.9%
Reddit	84.9%	6.0%	2.2%	3.6%	3.3%
Snapchat	81.9%	4.4%	2.8%	4.4%	6.5%
Tik Tok	89.2%	2.8%	2.0%	3.0%	2.9%
Tumblr	93.7%	2.6%	1.9%	1.3%	0.5%
Twitter	71.5%	7.4%	4.3%	6.5%	10.4%
WeChat	96.4%	1.1%	1.1%	0.7%	0.7%
WhatsApp	80.9%	7.7%	3.2%	3.4%	4.8%
YouTube	27.4%	19.0%	15.6%	19.3%	18.7%



Commentary

1. The major source of news/information for most people is television, either network or cable. Newspapers and magazines are a distant third. Parishes are between two worlds right now. Older generations prefer hard-copy bulletins and mail. Younger generations will view the bulletin online and prefer an email or a text.
2. The frequency of social media use is also generational. The most popular platforms are Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram. Twitter is a distant fourth. Even the most popular platforms have at least 27.4% of area residents who never use them.

IV. MINISTRY AND PROGRAM POSSIBILITIES

The surveys can offer insight into new approaches and strategies for ministries in the parish. What follows are some possibilities for future goals which are intended to connect with demographic trends and realities to help each parish improve its parish data and, hence, its sustainability and vibrancy. Even if a parish plans to work with other parishes, it is important for each parish to individually identify its own list of ministry possibilities for use as a starting point in the conversation about collaboration.

A. Worship

1. **Increase preparation for Sunday Masses and liturgical ministries** – The greatest number of parishioners gather for Sunday Mass. Preparation and ministries must represent the best gifts the parish has to offer. The effectiveness of these efforts should be measured by Mass attendance.
2. **Create a stronger sense of welcome at all Masses** - Parishes can create this sense of welcome using greeters, where the greeters are located, outside seasonal decorations, and social opportunities after Mass. These efforts can be measured by Mass attendance.

B. Faith Formation

1. **Develop a high-quality religious education program for children from preschool through grade 6** – There are effective programs available from intergenerational ones to the traditional classroom setting. Catechesis of the Good Shepherd is notable in this age group. It is a Montessori-based, hands-on, approach to faith formation for children. Pastors from parishes around the country who use this approach have noted that students not only have a greater faith knowledge than students from classroom-based models but are more enthusiastic about the faith. The approach requires training for program leaders and catechists. The impact of this program should be seen in enrollment numbers and particularly in the retention of students. It could also impact sacramental reception numbers. Parishes tend to enroll about 75% of these students in the parish. A high-quality program could increase that percentage. 50% of those who do not continue to practice the Catholic faith leave between birth and age 18.
2. **Develop a deanery-wide approach to youth ministry for middle school and high school students** – There are effective youth ministry programs that are available for consideration. The largest programs around the country are based on Life Teen Catholic Youth Ministry program. Looking at the number of students who are enrolled in deanery youth programs, a collaborative approach may be advantageous. Participation in high school youth ministry is one of the top indicators of adult practice of the Catholic faith. The other two are attendance at a Catholic high school and a Catholic college or university. Parishes tend to reach only about 50% of the possible high school age students registered at the parish.
3. **Develop a deanery-wide approach to young adult ministry for those in the 20's and 30's age groups** - The most successful nation-wide approach for this group is "Theology on Tap." There are other approaches that can be effective as well. 25% of all Catholics who stop practicing do so between the ages of 18 and 24. Effective efforts should impact the number of baptisms, enrollments in religious education, and RCIA.

4. **Establish small faith-sharing groups** – There are many sources for materials which these groups can use. Small groups are not only a vehicle for ongoing faith formation but also build relationships between parishioners. Of all the possibilities which can be afforded to adults, this option was the strongest in the survey. The key to successful groups lies in the selection and training of small group leaders. The number of groups and participants becomes the measure of effectiveness.
5. **Conduct deanery-wide adult faith formation opportunities** – Some parishes may already have active programs for adults. Bible study and Lenten series are the most popular forms. Rather than each parish trying to develop its own programs with small numbers, parishes may choose to work together by sharing existing programs and adding others. Across the country, the most effective form of faith formation for adults is parish-based retreats which are conducted by a team of parishioners who identify a new team from those who participate in the current retreat. These retreats promote faith sharing and leadership formation. Often, retreat participants form or join small groups. The results of any of these programs can be measured by the number of participants as well as the ways that participants become engaged in the parish community.
6. **Enhance ministry for senior adults –** As can be seen in the survey of ministry preferences, senior parishioners are looking for social opportunities with other people in the parish. This can include bus outings and travel. Seniors are also interested in faith formation opportunities and serving others. Many parishes enlist the help of seniors to provide vigorous ministries to the homebound and those in nursing homes.

C. Outreach to Those in Need

1. **Identify and coordinate outreach activities to those in need on a deanery basis** – Parishes are already doing what they can to help those in the area who are in need. However, those efforts could be even more effective if parishes coordinated their activities. By working together, parishes should see more volunteers and increased financial resources.
2. **Study other outreach ministries which may be needed in the deanery –** With a coordinated effort, parishes can work with other local agencies and develop a more comprehensive way of serving those in need. Many of the most effective parish-based efforts in the country are supported by several parishes. As in the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 25, these efforts represent how the life of the just should be lived. Parishes usually measure these efforts by the number of those served.

D. Community Building and Communications

1. **Promote a discipleship-based approach to stewardship of time, talent, and treasure –** Parishes can no longer rely exclusively on a steady supply of new parishioners registering as members. More attention must be given to building up the community. New residents in the area need to be welcomed and invited. New parishioners need to be oriented to the parish and invited to engage more fully. All parishioners need to be invited to share their gifts with the parish community and others. The most used approaches to help people discern their gifts are “Called & Gifted” and “StrengthsFinder.” The average Catholic household contributes about 1.1% of gross income. Matthew Kelly states that about 7% of adults are involved in parish ministry. He further suggests that if a parish could increase that percentage by 1% per year, parishes could be transformed. These community-building efforts can be measured by the number of new parishioners, the percentage of adult members who are involved in ministries, and the number of donors.

2. **Develop a deanery approach to communications which uses old and new technologies –** The world has witnessed an explosion in the information and communications sector. For parishes, this represents a challenge. Older members are more familiar with print resources, phones, and mail. The younger generations are computer and smartphone savvy. Parishes need to develop strategies to reach both generations. It may be advantageous to develop such strategies on a collaborative basis. The developers of the strategy can also determine ways of measuring the effectiveness of their efforts, such as the number of subscribers to social media or number of "hits" on websites and pages.

E. Evangelization

1. **Strengthen RCIA and adult confirmation processes to increase the number of participants** – The number one indicator of effective evangelization efforts is the RCIA and adult confirmation. Parishes in the deanery need to increase their efforts. The potential for working together in developing the order/process may be beneficial. Efforts can be measured by the number of catechumens, candidates for reception, and adult confirmands.

2. **Establish an approach for religious education families and students which will improve retention in the programs and participation in the parish –** As indicated in the faith formation possibilities, half of the Catholics who stop practicing the faith do so between birth and age 18. Strategies can be developed to communicate more effectively with families so that retention improves. One of the greatest declines in religious education enrollments happens after First Communion. The transitions from elementary to middle school and from middle school to high school are also times for enrollments to decline. Parishes that keep in contact with families and students can maintain higher enrollments. The key measure of effectiveness is retention rates.

3. **Plan sacramental celebrations, preparation programs, and funerals as opportunities for evangelization -** Sacramental celebrations attract Catholics who may not be fully engaged in the faith as well as friends and family who may not participate in any religious community or congregation. Beginning with sacramental preparation, the focus should be on proclaiming the Good News of Christ as much as the formation of the Sacrament. Celebrations should involve using the best gifts the parish has to offer. Effective efforts can be measured in new members and in RCIA/adult confirmation participation.

4. **Establish and train teams to contact every parishioner and former parishioner to listen and invite greater involvement in the parish –** The correspondence that most parishioners receive from their parishes has to do with money. This strategy involves listening to people. It is an attempt to reach out to those in the pews, on the sidelines, and those who have left the parish. It is a variation on the parish census approach of "knocking on doors." The main difference is that all the people who are being approached have something in common – their Catholic faith. In most cases, people come and go to our parishes, and no one really cares. Think of the story of the Good Shepherd.

F. Finances and Facilities

1. **Study parish planned giving programs and the potential for establishing endowment funds –** Parishes across the country are becoming aware of two realities. One, the largest transfer of wealth in human history is happening with the baby boom generation. Two, parish contributions alone cannot support a parish long-term. The solution is to look at planned giving programs in which parishioners can remember the parish in their wills and endowment funds for buildings and ministries.

2. **Study parish facilities which may be shared for ministries as well as create efficiencies** – Christian stewardship not only involves sharing our gifts but also using the resources that we have wisely. Parishes either by themselves or in collaboration with other parishes should study how facilities are and could be used for ministry. Parishes have invested millions of dollars in their facilities and most of them are idle for much of the week.

3. **Develop an approach to sharing costs for personnel and programs by using an assessment which is based on parish contributions –** Those parishes which use one of the leadership options which involves combining or sharing staff, should develop an assessment formula. In the early decades of parish collaboration, the favored approaches involved either dividing the costs by equal percentages or assessing according to the number of participants from each community. The former approach placed more of a burden on smaller parishes. The latter approach placed the burden on parishes which engaged more participants. Business managers around the country suggest that the most equitable way of assessing parishes for shared ministries and personnel is by using the total amount of parish contributions. The percentages can be adjusted on a regular basis as well.

V. IDEAS FOR ACTION

With the knowledge that you have of the parish's current reality and the future demographics of the area, there is an opportunity for action. Parishes should consider action in the three areas of configuration, leadership, and ministry. Follow these steps:

- **First, consider the configuration options for your parish**. Is there one which makes a great deal of sense for the parish now and in the future, or will your present option serve you into the future?
- **Second, review the leadership options**. At minimum, the parish should establish a leadership team. The question is whether that is done by your parish alone or with other parishes?
- **Third, determine which ministry options would make the greatest impact** on your parish over the next several years.

Be mindful of the following helpful hints as you move toward developing your action steps.

Role of the Diocese

As in the past, the Diocese is willing to aid with any of your planning efforts. At minimum, every parish should consult with the Diocese about any plans which are being considered.

Role of the Dean

Deans can also assist with the development of the plans by setting aside time on each deanery agenda for priests to discuss developments and progress of any planning efforts.

Group Responsible for Study, Development, and Implementation

Plans do not automatically get implemented after they are studied and developed. Some groups must be charged with the responsibility to oversee these tasks and to keep all parishes in communication about the progress or lack of progress. Joint parish pastoral councils may be capable of this as well as a strategic planning group made up of representatives from the parishes. There are many possibilities for organizing an oversight group.

Task Groups

The oversight group may need to identify task groups to develop and even implement some strategies. For example, those working in faith formation areas are likely to be the best candidates to develop a strategy because of their knowledge and experience. In new areas of ministry, the group may need to identify the best candidates from each parish or become the task group for that area of ministry.

Identify 3 Goals = 100% Possibility of Implementation

Studies about plan implementation reveal that a plan with three goals has a 100% possibility of implementation. Each goal over that total decreases the percentage of successful implementation. For that reason, a planning effort should not include more than three goals in any area of ministry. It is far more prudent for parishes to be successful in their initial efforts than to undertake many initiatives and not complete them. Successful collaborative efforts create energy and enthusiasm for further initiatives.