



Prayer - Planning - Possibilities



Prayer Services for Parish Restructuring
(including all stand-alone parishes)



PRAYER SERVICES FOR THE PARISH RESTRUCTURING PROCESS INCLUDING ALL STAND-ALONE PARISHES, SEPTEMBER 2016

Prayer is the center and the lifeblood of Christian life offered in response to our every joy and sorrow. The parish restructuring process is no exception. Here is an opportunity to invite parishioners more deeply into the restructuring process. The pastoral planning prayer was woven into our gatherings from the beginning. Every parish was asked to pray it. This package extends our prayer resources to give voice to the varied experiences of parishioners whether they are partnering, merging or remaining as a stand-alone parish.

These prayer services

- **RESPOND TO NEEDS:** Parishioners may react in a variety of ways to the restructuring announcement. As they anticipate a new reality, parishioners may experience strong emotions. Communal prayer can provide an environment to express and process feelings of anxiety, fear and denial. Additional services can offer a path toward building hope, trust and acceptance of an uncertain future while honoring and revering a shared past.
- **OFFER RELEVANT PRAYERS:** The prayer services in this packet were prepared by the Diocesan Liturgical Commission, comprised of ordained and laity who represent all corners of the diocese. Working with the Office of Worship to assist the bishop and parish leadership in the spiritual care of the people of the Diocese of Erie, the commission has envisioned a variety of parish responses to restructuring and has prepared relevant prayers.
- **ARE FLEXIBLE** and may be used in many ways. Here's how:
First, *identify your need or goal* — Choose the service(s) that you think will work best for your community now and throughout the transition process. **Second, *look for opportunities*** — Parish groups may have varying needs and may be available at differing times. Ministry groups, committee meetings, small Christian communities can gather to pray. The entire parish community might gather. **Third, *discern who leads*** — To provide the greatest flexibility, services are designed to be led by a priest, deacon, or experienced lay leader. The pastor may not always be available. Prayer should happen anyway. **Fourth, *prepare carefully*** — Services are designed in a simple two-page, 8 ½" X 11" format. They can be printed easily and used immediately. Options for readings and music are noted. Contact the Office of Worship for a Microsoft Publisher or Word version, if you wish to modify the service further to better suit your needs. **Finally, *engage the senses*** — Prayer is more than words. Whether you gather in church or in a meeting room, establish a reflective mood and environment. Light a candle; enthrone a Bible; prepare a vase of flowers. Use music—even unaccompanied—to set the mood and draw people together. Leave sufficient time for silence, especially during the period of reflection. A time of sharing among individuals, small groups or entire communities, is also a valuable component.

For assistance, contact the Office of Worship at 814-824-1270.

The prayer services are as follows:

1. **Praying Through Disbelief, Anxiety and Hurt** (April 2016)
2. **A Prayer Service for Healing**
3. **Prayer in Time of Transition**
4. **Prayer for Hope and Trust in God's Faithfulness**
5. **Honoring our Traditions, People and Treasures**
6. **Prayer of Praise and Thanksgiving to God**
7. **Looking Forward with Hope--- (Partnering/Merging Parishes)**
8. **Looking to the Future with Hope--- (Stand-Alone Parishes)**



Praying Through Disbelief, Anxiety and Hurt (April, 2016)

GREETING

We have gathered here this *morning/day/evening*, to place our future in God's hands.

As we pray through our uncertainty, our disbelief, our anger, or our hurt...all of our deeply felt emotions...let us remember that God has called us by name and desires to give us a future full of hope.

And so, let us pray...

O God, come to my assistance. ***R/. Lord, make haste to help me.***

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.

R/. As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

SONG: Healer of Our Every Ill (Haugen/GIA) [*or* Though the Mountains May Fall (Schutte/OCP)]

Psalm 46 (*please sit*)

Assembly: *alternating sides*

Side I God is for us a refuge and strength, an ever-present help in time of distress:
So we shall not fear though the earth should rock, though the mountains quake
to the heart of the sea; even though its waters rage and foam,
even though the mountains be shaken by its tumult.

ALL The Lord of hosts is with us: The God of Jacob is our stronghold.

Side II Come and behold the works of the Lord,
the awesome deeds he has done on the earth.
He puts an end to wars over all the earth; the bow he breaks, the spear he snaps,
the shields he burns with fire: "Be still and know that I am God,
exalted over all the earth."

ALL The Lord of hosts is with us: The God of Jacob is our stronghold.

SCRIPTURE (*1Corinthians 2:1a, 3-5, 7-11*)

A reading from the first letter of Saint Paul to the Corinthians:

When I came to you, brothers and sisters, proclaiming the mystery of God,
I came to you in weakness and fear and much trembling, and my message and my
proclamation were not with persuasive words of wisdom,
but with a demonstration of spirit and power, so that your faith might rest not on
human wisdom but on the power of God.

For we speak God's wisdom, mysterious and hidden, which God predetermined
before the ages for our glory.

None of the rulers of this age knew; for if they had known it, they would not have crucified
the Lord of glory.

But, as it is written: "What eye has not seen, and ear has not heard,
and what has not entered the human heart,
what God has prepared for those who love him,"

--these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit.

For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God.
For what human being knows what is truly human
Except the human spirit that is within?

Similarly, no one knows what is truly God's
except the Spirit of God.

The Word of the Lord. ***R/. Thanks be to God.***

REFLECTION

Let us reflect in silence on the psalm and Scripture we have heard today.
After a time, consider these questions:

What are your thoughts about the changes facing our parish and its people?

Consider how you would complete this sentence:
Concerning the changes faced by this parish, "I feel..."

After taking this time to reflect on your feelings, if you wish, share with the group or the person next to you. If sharing as a large group, sing/pray a refrain or antiphon after every few statements. Try to focus on your feelings and emotions, rather than actions.

SUNG/SPOKEN RESPONSE: Healer of Our Every Ill (Haugen/GIA)
[or choose an alternative from your hymnal]

THE LORD'S PRAYER *(please stand)*

So often we cannot find the right words, so now we turn to words we know by heart, the words our Savior taught us:

R/. Our Father...

CLOSING PRAYER

O God,
you hear our inmost thoughts
and know the needs of our hearts.
In the midst of complex emotions,
we turn to you in prayer.

Hear us, O God, in our uncertainty and doubt,
in our fear and in our anger.
If anger rises up,
help us to rely on you.

Guide us with the wisdom to see
new paths of possibility
and the vision to move forward.
Give us the strength to be unafraid
of what is new.

We ask this through Christ our Lord.

R/. Amen.

BLESSING

(Lead by a priest or deacon)

May the Lord bless you all,
the Father,
and the Son +
and the Holy Spirit.

R/. Amen.

(Lead by a layperson)

May the Lord bless us,
protect us from evil
and bring us to the joy
of everlasting life.

Let us conclude our prayer with a sign of peace.
All exchange a sign of peace.



A Prayer Service for Healing

SONG: Open My Eyes (Manibussan/OCP)
[or Gather Your People (Hurd/OCP) Lead Me, Guide Me (GIA), Be Thou My Vision (SLANE)]

Leader: May the grace and hope of Jesus Christ be with you.

All: **And with your spirit.**

Leader: Welcome. It is good that we come together in our common trust of our God in heaven. We gather today, not out of desperation, as if, "Well, nothing has worked so far, so let's pray to God for a miracle." No. God has been part of this journey all along. We are here to pray because God hears and answers prayer. Praying for healing is part of that. Praying for God's daily strength, peace, and blessing is also part of that.

We come here in hope, which as we read in Hebrews 6:19, is "an anchor for the soul, firm and secure." Even when actions do not bring about a desired result, we still have hope. Our hope is not in human abilities or promises. Our hope is in God.

SCRIPTURE (*Ecclesiastes 3:1-8*) (*please sit*)

A reading from the book of Ecclesiastes

There is an appointed time for everything,
and a time for every affair under the heavens.
A time to be born, and a time to die;
a time to plant, and a time to uproot the plant.
A time to kill, and a time to heal;
a time to tear down, and a time to build.
A time to weep, and a time to laugh;
a time to mourn, and a time to dance.
A time to scatter stones, and a time to gather them;
a time to embrace, and a time to be far from embraces.
A time to seek, and a time to lose;
a time to keep and a time to cast away.
A time to rend, and a time to sew;
a time to be silent, and a time to speak.
A time to love, and a time to hate;
a time of war, and a time of peace.

The Word of the Lord.

R/. Thanks be to God.

PSALM 25: Remember Your Love (Ducote/OCP) [*or Ps. 16: Center of My Life (Inwood/OCP), Ps. 91: Be With Me, Lord (Haugen/GIA)*]

GOSPEL: Luke 10:29-37 (The Good Samaritan) [*or Matthew 13:10-17*]

REFLECTION *Ask someone to read the attached poem "One Morning." Leave a substantial time of silence. Afterwards, answer these questions alone, or as a group:*

- What in your life needs healing?
- What in your church or parish needs to be healed?

INTERCESSIONS *(please sit)*

Leader: We bring our prayer requests to our loving Father,
as children in need of a home.
We long to ask for strength to open our eyes, our ears,
and our hearts to the needs of the people of our diocese,
and especially to the people in our local community.

Reader: Our response is, "Hear us, O Lord."
That we may be agents of healing in a time of pain,
willing to consider the needs of others beyond our own, we pray ...

R/. Hear us, O Lord.

That priests may receive the support they need to carry out their mission
to teach, govern, and make holy, we pray ...

R/. Hear us, O Lord.

That children may learn from their elders that change does not mean death,
but rather the breath of life that brings about growth and transformation,
we pray...

R/. Hear us, O Lord.

That we may open our eyes to the presence of God
in each person we encounter along this journey, we pray ...

R/. Hear us, O Lord.

That we may open our ears to the message of hope ever before us,
and the whisper of the Spirit at work in our midst, we pray ...

R/. Hear us, O Lord.

That we may open our hearts to feel gratitude for what we have had
and anticipation for what lies before us, we pray ...

R/. Hear us, O Lord.

Leader: God of mercy,
we plead for your gentle touch on our lives in this time of change.
Help us in our words and actions to honor those who have gone before us,
those who helped build your kingdom here in our community.
Let us embody their faith and perseverance
as we broaden our reach to the greater world around us.
We ask this through Christ, our Lord,

All: Amen.

THE LORD'S PRAYER

Leader: Let us pray with hope, as Jesus taught us to pray: "**Our Father...**"

BLESSING

Leader: May God bless us with his mercy, strengthen us with his love,
and enable us to walk in the peace of Christ.

All: Amen.

SIGN OF PEACE

Leader: Let us offer each other a sign of peace.

One Morning

One morning
we will wake up
and forget to build
that wall we've been building,
the one between us
the one we've been building
for years, perhaps
out of some sense
of right and boundary,
perhaps out of habit.

One morning
we will wake up
and let our empty hands
hang empty at our sides.
Perhaps they will rise,
as empty things
sometimes do
when blown
by the wind.

Perhaps they simply
will not remember
how to grasp, how to rage.

We will wake up
that morning
and we will have
misplaced all our theories
about why and how
and who did what
to whom, we will have mislaid
all our timelines
of when and plans of what
and we will not scramble
to write the plans and theories anew.

On that morning,
not much else
will have changed.

Whatever is blooming
will still be in bloom.

Whatever is wilting
will wilt. There will be fields
to plow and trains
to load and children
to feed and work to do.

And in every moment,
in every action, we will
feel the urge to say thank you,
we will follow the urge to bow.





Prayer in Time of Transition

SONG: Shepherd Me, O God (Vs. 1-3) [or *Come to the Water (Foley/OCP)*, *Sing a New Church (NETTLETON)*, *Blest Be the Lord (Schutte/OCP)*]

All: In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Leader: Let the morning bring me word of your unfailing love, for I have put my trust in you. Show me the way I should go, for to you I entrust my life. (Psalm 143: 8)

All: Let the morning bring me word of your unfailing love, for I have put my trust in you. Show me the way I should go, for to you I entrust my life.

Leader: Lord, we your people are facing change here in (name of parish or the Erie Diocese). Our human hearts tremble with anger, with grief, with the angst of uncertainty. But like the sheep of the pasture, our lives are ever in your care, Lord. Remind us always of your unfailing love, your steadfast presence, through any kind of transition. That is all we really need and all we truly ask through your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord.

All: Amen.

SCRIPTURE *John 14:1-7 [or John 10: 11-18 (The Good Shepherd)] (please sit)*

Reader: A reading from the holy Gospel according to John:

“Do not let your hearts be troubled. You have faith in God; have faith also in me. In my Father’s house there are many dwelling places. If there were not, would I have told you that I am going to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back again and take you to myself, so that where I am you also may be. Where I am going you know the way.”

Thomas said to him, “Master, we do not know where you are going; how can we know the way?” “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you know me, then you will also know my Father.”

The Gospel of the Lord.

R/. Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ

REFLECTION

If time allows, the attached reflection may be read, followed by a time of silence and then the questions. The reflection text consists of two parts which may be read individually (top to bottom,) or alternating from left to right.

- Consider how this transition is like other life changes: college or military service, marriage, loss of a parent.
- Consider how this transition is like other changes in the community: a new pastor, the creation of a new church. What helps you manage those transitions?
- What might help in this situation – for the community or for you?

SUNG/SPOKEN RESPONSE: Increase our Faith (Haas/GIA) [or Center of My Life (Inwood/OCP)]

INTERCESSIONS *(Please stand)*

(Ask individual participants to read invocations.)

Leader: Filled with faith, energized by the power of God's love, and united by the mission to proclaim the Good News, we pray for the needs of the Church.

R/. God of mercy, hear our prayer *(recited or sung) God of Mercy, Hear Our Prayer, Hurd/OCP)*

Reader: For Bishop Persico and all those prayerfully guiding this process to unite our parishes and strengthen the People of God in the Erie Diocese, that they may be blessed with discerning hearts, pastoral wisdom and deep humility in their efforts, we pray ... **R/.**

For the lay men and women who serve our parishes, that the richness, diversity, and gifts of each person will be honored and employed, we pray ... **R/.**

For those struggling with the prospect of change, that they may see through their difficulty to the possibility of renewal, not as a threat to what has been, but as an invitation to what can be, we pray ... **R/.**

For those who fear the loss of their Catholic identity, that they may be inspired to greater involvement in extending the Church's firm foundation in new and unexpected ways, we pray ... **R/.**

For each of us who make up the Church of the Diocese of Erie, that we may be empowered in this time of transition to share our voices in honest, constructive and respectful ways and to listen with open hearts and minds, we pray ... **R/.**

For those parishes facing immediate changes, especially _____
(church names), that we may be sources of support, compassion and encouragement in this time of transition, we pray ... **R/.**

Leader: Loving God, you give us more than we can ever imagine or ask for, even when we do not readily recognize your presence. Help us to be genuine in our self-reflection, tireless in our commitment, patient in our discernment, loving in our communion, imaginative about our future, and daring in our faith. We pray all these things through Christ Our Lord.

All: Amen.

THE LORD'S PRAYER

Leader: Let us pray as our Savior taught us: *Our Father...*

CLOSING PRAYER

All: We are your people, Lord, the flock you have called. Accept us, even in our weakness, our brokenness, our need to know, to manage, to save ourselves. Now in new and uncomfortable surrender, we hand over to you our planning for the next seasons of our lives. Show us the way through these transitions - of age and stage, of place and of past experiences, of finances and health, of ministries and communities. Shepherd us beyond our wants, beyond our fears. And guide us to pastures, to dwelling places, rich and verdant beyond our imagination.

BLESSING

Leader: *(making the sign of the cross)* May the love of God embrace us, the obedience of Christ empty us, and the will of the Spirit embolden us as we journey together to the kingdom. Amen.

SONG: Shepherd Me, O God (Vs. 4-5) *[for other appropriate song]*

Prayer in Time of Uncertainty

God of all knowing,

Things are moving so fast,
everything I hold dear is changing,
disappearing,
being set aside.

We live in a time of short-term memory
and instant gratification.

I know the church is bigger
than the bricks and mortar and beloved statues
of my own house of worship.

But this is my house.
It is the place my faith was shaped.
It is the keeper of my memories.

It is the table of communion and community.
It is the circle where our stories are told again
and again. The stories of our ancestors in faith
...

The ones who met God on mountains and in
deserts.

Who lived in exile.

Who left their boats and families.

Who gathered in rented rooms
and at the shores of the sea.

All done in faith, believed yet unseen,
committed but not understood.

They too lived amid uncertainty.

They too felt fear and anger and wondered
whether they were forgotten, abandoned.

And yet they persevered over centuries, eons.

We are called to persevere, too.

If we are truly Christian, then our mission is not
about place, but people.

Like our ancestors,
we may need to be church in new ways ...

gathered on mountainsides or at seashores ...

or at the very least, in houses not our own.

We may need to open our arms and our hearts
...

to welcome new people into our community,
to embrace the gifts and perspectives
they will bring.

We may need to open the doors of community
wherever that may be.

Prayer in Time of Hope

God of all creation,

Things are moving, changing.
Old ways are being re-examined,
set aside, to make room for new ways
of being church.

It is as you said,
“See I am making all things new.”

It feels like this change
has been a long time coming.

The church is bigger than bricks and mortar.
But it doesn't always seem that way. In many of
our churches, more time —and money —
is spent on facilities than on formation.

This is my church, the place my faith was shaped,
the keeper of memories.

But, if I am honest, memories are not enough
to hold me or others if we don't all feel connected
to the community or the communion.

Something has to be done. The paint is peeling,
the pews are empty. Fewer people are coming for
communion or community.

Everyone seems to agree that something
must be done, but no one
wants that something to arrive at their doorstep.

It is painful to watch, painful to experience —
especially for many whose roots go deep,
who want God and church to stay put.

But God will not be kept in a box. Or in a church.
God is bigger. Faith is bigger.
We, the church, must be bigger.

Big enough to change in order to survive,
to adapt in order to grow stronger. Big enough to
dare ourselves to create community in a new
way, to embrace others beyond our walls.

I have heard that catholic — small c — means
universal.

Maybe this is the time we embrace
what it means to be Catholic and catholic.

Maybe this is the time
to open our hearts,
open our minds,
open the doors of community,
wherever that may be.

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Prayer For Hope and Trust in God's Faithfulness

SONG: Be Not Afraid, (Dufford/OCP) [*or Though the Mountains May Fall (Schutte/OCP), Remember Your Love (Ducote and Daigle), You Are Near (Foley/OCP)*]

OPENING PRAYER

Leader: In times of change and stress, God's love is constant and consoling.
Even when we feel abandoned, God loves us.
The promise of eternal life is invisible, yet we believe.
We gather together to celebrate God's faithfulness to us
and to seek ways to show our faithfulness to God.
Hear us, O God, as we unite ourselves to you.
Increase in us our faithfulness.

SCRIPTURE (*Hebrews 11:1-2, 8-19*) (*please stand*)

Notes to the reader from LTP's Workbook for Lectors, Gospel Readers, and Proclaimers of the Word 2016: "The author speaks of faith that stands firm despite many trials, including the trial of God's seeming silence... Faith enabled them to 'see' with their mind's eye and with their hearts what God had promised but was not yet." Please read slowly so the allusions are clear to the listeners. Emphasize the refrain "by Faith."

A reading from Paul's letter to the Hebrews:

Brothers and sisters: Faith is the realization of what is hoped for and evidence of things not seen. Because of it the ancients were well attested.

By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance; he went out, not knowing where he was to go.

By faith he sojourned in the promised land as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs of the same promise; for he was looking forward to the city with foundations whose architect and maker is God.

By faith he received power to generate, even though he was past the normal age – and Sarah herself was sterile – for he thought that the one who had made the promise was trustworthy.

So it was that there came forth from one man, himself as good as dead, descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and countless as the sands on the seashore.

All these died in faith. They did not receive what had been promised but saw it and greeted it from afar and acknowledged themselves to be strangers and aliens on earth, for those who speak thus show that they are seeking a homeland.

If they had been thinking of the land from which they had come, they would have had opportunity to return. But now they desire a better homeland, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.

By faith Abraham, when put to the test, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was ready to offer his only son, of whom it was said, "Through Isaac, descendants shall bear your name." He reasoned that God was able to raise even from the dead, and he received Isaac back as a symbol.

The Word of the Lord.

R/. Thanks be to God.

REFLECTION

In this reading, we witness Abraham's faithfulness and his belief that God would fulfill his promises of countless descendants and the city of God. Hebrews 11:6 says: "But without faith it is impossible to please him, for anyone who approaches God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him."

Consider these questions in silence. Then discuss and share in small groups, or with the whole group. (10-15 mins)

- Q. Which of God's promises are most important to you?
(Name God's promises first. Then answer the second question for each promise.)
- Q. What does each promise require of you?

SONG: City of God (Schutte/OCP *for Lord of All Hopefulness (SLANE), or another appropriate song*)

INTERCESSIONS *(please stand)*

Leader: In hope and trust, we bring our needs to the Lord.

Reader: That those who shape your church may be guided by faith, wisdom and hope, we pray to the Lord...**R/**.

That the hearts and mouths of the faithful might be opened to participate fully in worshipping you, we pray to the Lord...**R/**.

That we may be thankful for the faithfulness God has shown to his people, we pray to the Lord...**R/**.

That we may grow in the strength to believe in the fulfillment of God's promises, we pray to the Lord...**R/**.

That we may believe God loves us always and that we are worthy of God's love, we pray to the Lord...**R/**.

Leader: Loving God, you gave Isaac back to Abraham, but sacrificed your Son for us. Help us to live each day sacrificing for others. We ask this through Christ our Lord.

All: Amen.

CLOSING PRAYER

Leader: Faithful God,
we dream because you have given us vision, faith, hope and love.
Without you, our dreams are worthless and our hopes empty.
Sustain us with your love and renew us with your grace.
We are men and women of faith and depend totally on you. Amen.

BLESSING

(Lead by a priest or deacon)

May the Lord bless you all,
the Father,
and the Son +
and the Holy Spirit.

(Lead by a layperson)

May the Lord bless us,
protect us from evil
and bring us to the joy
of everlasting life.

R/. Amen.

SONG: We Walk By Faith (Haugen/GIA) *for Lord of the Dance (Shaker Melody), In Every Age (Whitaker/OCP), O God, Our Help in Ages Past (ST. ANNE)]*



Honoring Our Traditions, People and Treasures

Significant art work, statues, historic plaques, etc. may be honored with candles or flowers.

INTRODUCTION

Leader: Brothers and sisters, we gather here to recall all that we have been to each other as a parish community and all that Christ has been *through us* to the world beyond our parish boundaries. In this building, surrounded by many of the same people gathered here now, we have shed tears of joy and sorrow, shared in the rites and sacraments of the church and borne together the name, "People of God," as _____ Parish. We reflect upon all that God, our Father, has done for us and all that God will continue to do as we entrust our future to him. Let us now stand and sing together.

SONG: One Spirit, One Church (Kiel/OCP) [*or O God, You Search Me, (Farrell/OCP), In Every Age (Whitaker/OCP)*]

PRAYER

Leader: Loving God, we rejoice in having been chosen to be the bearers of light, your Word, your love and your life. We rely on you to guide us on our journey. Send us your Holy Spirit, the spirit of wisdom, understanding and fortitude, to light our way. Send us your compassion, so that as one community we can unleash your power among us. We make our prayer through your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.

All: Amen.

SCRIPTURE *Hebrews 12:1-3 (A cloud of witnesses), [or 2Corinthians 5:17-20] (please sit)*

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us rid ourselves of every burden and sin that clings to us and persevere in running the race that lies before us while keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus, the leader and perfecter of faith. For the sake of the joy that lay before him he endured the cross, despising its shame, and has taken his seat at the right of the throne of God. Consider how he endured such opposition from sinners, in order that you may not grow weary and lose heart.

The Word of the Lord.

R/. Thanks be to God.

REFLECTION

(You may wish to ask individual parishioners [for instance, a parish elder, a newer parishioner, someone ministered to by the parish, clergy or religious with a long history in the parish] to prepare brief reflections in advance. If that is not possible, continue as follows.)

Take some time to reflect on our parish and its history and consider the questions below. After a while, you may wish to share your thoughts with those around you or with the entire group. [10-15 mins]

- What is most important to you about our parish history and tradition?
- How does our history point us toward the future? (How did the founders of the parish look to the future?)
- What elements of our community life should be preserved and revered to guide the next generation? (important festivals or gatherings, revered sacred items, etc.)
- In keeping with our Christian responsibility to spread the Gospel of Christ, how might we honor our past while looking toward building the church of the future?

Leader: Gracious God, may the people and events of the past that we bring with us into this new chapter of our Christian story be both a comfort and inspiration as we walk forward in faith. We pray through your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.

All: Amen.

CLOSING PRAYER *(please stand)*

All: O God of glory and majesty
– of peace and compassion –
of infinite and life-giving love;
You are good!
For untold years you have blessed this church.
We praise and thank you
for the countless women, men and children through the years
whose faith, vision, and sacrifice
have helped to build this house of prayer,
this dwelling place of God, this church:

- A church where the dignity of each person is respected, where one can feel at home, a church of freedom that welcomes without judging, that forgives without condemning, a church of mercy.
- A church that listens before it speaks, that admits its mistakes and learns from them, a church of wisdom.
- A church where daring to do something new is stronger than the habit of doing what has been done before, a church of possibility.
- A church that reaches out to care for the least among us, the poor, the marginalized, and the forgotten, a church of justice.
- A church where the faithful gather as seekers of God, where all are nourished by Word and sacraments, a church of healing.

Rooted in your Spirit, may we face our future with the same hope and faith and love as first envisioned by our founding priests and families as we commit ourselves to a new witness of service and sacrifice.

We pray through Christ, our Lord.

Amen.

BLESSING

(Lead by a priest or deacon)

May the Lord bless you all,
In the name of the Father,
and the Son +
And the Holy Spirit.

(Lead by a layperson)

May the Lord bless us,
protect us from evil
and bring us to the joy
of everlasting life.

R/. Amen.

SONG: How Can I keep From Singing (ENDLESS SONG) *[or O God, Our Help in Ages Past (ST. ANNE), Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow (OLD HUNDREDTH)]*



Prayer of Praise and Thanksgiving to God

SONG (optional):

For the Beauty of the Earth (DIX) [or All Creatures of Our God and King
(LAAST UNS ERFREUEN), Glory and Praise to Our God (Dan Schutte),
We Gather Together (KREMSER)]

GREETING

Leader: In the name of the Father + and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. **R/. Amen.**
We have gathered on this day to give thanks and praise to Almighty God for the many blessings bestowed on this community. We have come far in this pastoral planning process ... and now we step into the future with courage and hope. We praise the God who brings us healing and salvation, who always provides for his people, and who leads us through uncertainty to a place of peace and trust. Thankful to the God who gives us all good things. Let us pray:

OPENING PRAYER

Leader: O God, whose Son promised to all those gathered in his name that he would be there in their midst, grant, we pray, that we may be aware of his presence among us and, in truth and charity, experience in our hearts an abundance of grace, mercy and peace. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. **R/. Amen.**
(*RM: For a Spiritual or Pastoral Gathering*)

SCRIPTURE (Sir 50:22-24) (please sit)

A Reading from the Book of Sirach: And now, bless the God of all, who has done wondrous things on earth; who fosters people's growth from their mother's womb, and fashions them according to his will! May he grant you joy of heart and may peace abide among you; may his goodness toward us endure in Israel to deliver us in our days.

The Word of the Lord.

R/. Thanks be to God.

PSALM 33 [or Psalm 23: The Lord is My Shepherd, Psalm 145: I Will Praise Your Name) (may be sung or recited)]

R/. Lord, let your mercy be on us, as we place our trust in you.

Exult, you just, in the LORD; praise from the upright is fitting.

Give thanks to the LORD on the harp; with the ten-stringed lyre chant his praises. **R/.**

Upright is the word of the LORD, and all his works are trustworthy.

He loves justice and right; of the kindness of the LORD the earth is full. **R/.**

See, the eyes of the LORD are upon those who fear him,

upon those who hope for his kindness, to deliver them from death and preserve them in spite of famine. **R/.**

GOSPEL (Luke 12:22-34) (include bracketed text for long form)

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Luke: Jesus said to his disciples, "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life and what you will eat, or about your body and what you will wear. For life is more than food and the body more than clothing. Notice the ravens: they do not sow or reap; they have neither storehouse nor barn, yet God feeds them. How much more important are you than birds!

{Can any of you by worrying add a moment to your life-span? If even the smallest things are beyond your control, why are you anxious about the rest? Notice how the flowers grow. They do not toil or spin. But I tell you, not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of them. If God so clothes the grass in the field that grows today and is thrown into the oven tomorrow, will he not much more provide for you, O you of little faith? As for you, do not seek what you are to eat and what you are to drink, and do not worry anymore. All the nations of the world seek for these things, and your Father knows that you need them. Instead, seek his kingdom, and these other things will be given you besides.}

Do not be afraid any longer, little flock, for your Father is pleased to give you the kingdom. {Sell your belongings and give alms. Provide money bags for yourselves that do not wear out, an inexhaustible treasure in heaven that no thief can reach nor moth destroy.} For where your treasure is, there also will your heart be.

The Gospel of the Lord.

R/. Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

REFLECTION

Take some time to consider one of the questions below and then discuss in small groups; (10-15 minutes)

Throughout the pastoral planning process, I am most grateful for...

As we move toward the future, I am most hopeful for/about...

INTERCESSIONS

Leader: God has blessed us, the church, in abundance. With faith and trust, let us bring our prayers before the one who gives us all we need.

Reader: For the church of God throughout the world. May it be healed of all division and proclaim God's Word with one heart and one voice. We pray to the Lord.

R/. Lord, hear our prayer.

For our local diocese. May we be strengthened in the bonds that unite us as God's church through our efforts of revitalization. We pray to the Lord.

R/. Lord, hear our prayer.

For the *(merging or partnering)* parish(es) of _____. May we be fashioned into a community that promotes the fullness of life for its members and for all peoples. We pray to the Lord. **R/. Lord, hear our prayer.**

For all of us, gathered to give thanks to God. May we recognize the gifts we have received from the Spirit and use them freely for the good of our parish and for all. We pray to the Lord. **R/. Lord, hear our prayer.**

Leader: Good and gracious God, we give you thanks and place our trust in you. Hear our prayers, guide us in the time of change, and give us the strength to persevere so that one day we may share everlasting life with you. We ask this through Christ our Lord.
R./ Amen.

THE LORD'S PRAYER

Leader: At the Savior's command and formed by divine teaching, we dare to say:
R/. Our Father...

PRAYER AND BLESSING

Leader: God of mercy and love, we give you praise and thanksgiving for all your gifts and blessings. We look to you alone with trust and confidence that you will transform all of our dreams and aspirations into a zealous desire for the gifts of the Spirit. Send us forth to do your will, so that we might be a sign of your Spirit present in the world. We ask this through Jesus Christ our Lord.

R/. Amen. (Milwaukee, Prayers from *God's Mysterious Wisdom*, adapted.)

Leader: May the Lord bless us, protect us from all harm, and lead us to everlasting life.
R/. Amen.

Leader: As we go forth, let us share with one another a sign of God's peace.

SONG (Opt.) God's Blessing Sends Us Forth (ST. ELIZABETH) [*or Praise God From Whom All Blessings Flow (OLD HUNDRETH), Joyful, Joyful We Adore You (HYMN TO JOY), Holy God, We Praise Thy Name (GROSSER GOTT)*]



Looking Forward With Hope *(for Partnering/Merging Parishes)*

INTRODUCTION *(All sit)*

Leader: As we gather today to pray, we gather as church, the People of God, members of the Body of Christ. We remember that the church is one, both human and divine.

In the pastoral plan for the Diocese of Erie, we are considered a (partnered or a parish that will merge into a stand-alone) parish. But no parish or church truly stands alone. Under the leadership of Bishop Persico, parishes have been called to work with one another, to collaborate, so that together, we may be the hands and feet of Christ in this diocese. The words of St. Teresa of Avila guide us: *Christ has no body now on earth but yours; no hands but yours; no feet but yours.*

As we implement the pastoral plan, we look to the future with hope. We pray to grow in holiness and in our ability to evangelize and minister to those around us, especially the poor, the sick and the marginalized. We pray for faith, hope and charity as we continue our spiritual walk with the Lord. Let us begin by standing and singing together.

SONG: One Spirit, One Church (Kiel/OCP) [*for Lord of All Hopefulness (SLANE), You Are Near (Schutte/OCP) In Every Age (Whitaker/OCP)*]

OPENING PRAYER *All stand*

Leader: God, loving Father, in the midst of confusion and change, keep us centered in you. When we are not confident of what is asked of us, keep us calm. When the voices around us say "This won't work," help us to trust in you. Give us the humility to embrace our own moments of doubt, so that we do not add to the confusion. Help us to trust only in you. For with you all things are accomplished; for you live and reign forever and ever.

All: Amen.

SCRIPTURE *(2 Corinthians 5:17-20) All sit*

A reading from the 2nd letter of St. Paul to the Corinthians:

So whoever is in Christ is a new creation: the old things have passed away; behold, new things have come. And all this is from God, who has reconciled us to himself through Christ and given us the ministry of reconciliation, namely, God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting their trespasses against them and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. So we are ambassadors for Christ, as if God were appealing through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.

The Word of the Lord.

R/. Thanks be to God.

REFLECTION

Take some time to consider the questions below and then discuss in small groups; (10-15 minutes)

How does the call to be partnered or to merge help us to be more deeply united as Christians?

How could this change make us stronger and help us to spread the Good News of Jesus Christ?

How can we honor our past and yet move forward while staying centered on Christ?

How do we work together with other parishes and support one another as members of the Diocese of Erie?

INTERCESSIONS *All stand*

Leader: We are a pilgrim people embarking on a journey to unknown places.
We need guidance and blessing and ask our God to hear us in our moment of need.

Reader: Our response will be: Lord, hear our prayer.

For hearts to be stilled and for faith that will not be shaken (Psalm 46), we pray... **R/.**

For troubled hearts, that we may learn to savor how good the Lord is (Psalm 35),
we pray... **R/.**

For trust and patience, to know that all who call upon the Lord will be answered and
delivered from distress (Psalm 91), we pray... **R/.**

For courage and guidance when we walk through the dark valleys in life (Psalm 23),
we pray... **R/.**

For the members of our churches of _____ and _____,
that we honor our history while building new traditions, we pray... **R/.**

For the faith and trust to honor our past, but to release it so that we might begin
to build a future community of faith, we pray.... **R/.**

THE LORD'S PRAYER

Leader: Let us pray as our Savior taught us: *Our Father...*

CLOSING PRAYER

Leader: Compassionate Father, grant us visions of truth, graces to persevere, and integrity in
purpose and action as we strive to be good stewards. It is through us and what we do
and are, that others come to know you. Teach us to bring peace and healing to our
world. Help us to use our gifts for the building up of your church and hasten the coming
of your kingdom; through Christ our Lord. Amen.

BLESSING

(Lead by a priest or deacon)

May the Lord bless you all,
the Father,
and the Son +
and the Holy Spirit.

(Lead by a layperson)

May the Lord bless us,
protect us from evil
and bring us to the joy
of everlasting life.

R/. Amen.

DISMISSAL

Leader: Go in peace, to love and serve the Lord.

SONG: How Can I keep From Singing (ENDLESS SONG) [*for You Are Mine (Haas/GIA)*]



Looking Forward with Hope *(for Stand-Alone Parishes)*

INTRODUCTION *(All sit)*

Leader: As we gather today to pray, we gather as church, the People of God, members of the Body of Christ. We remember that the church is one, both human and divine.

In the pastoral plan for the Diocese of Erie, we are considered a stand-alone parish. But no parish or church truly stands alone. Under the leadership of Bishop Persico, parishes have been called to work with one another, to collaborate so that together, we may be the hands and feet of Christ in this diocese. The words of St. Teresa of Avila guide us: *Christ has no body now on earth but yours; no hands but yours; no feet but yours.*

As we implement the pastoral plan, we look to the future with hope. We pray to grow in holiness and in our ability to evangelize and minister to those around us, especially the poor, the sick and the marginalized. We pray for faith, hope and charity as we continue our spiritual walk with the Lord. Let us begin by standing and singing together.

SONG: Prayer of St. Francis (Temple/OCP) [*for Eye Has Not Seen (Haugen/GIA), In Every Age (Whitaker/OCP), One Spirit, One Church, OCP (Kevin Kiel)*]

OPENING PRAYER *Remain standing*

Leader: God of mercy and love, we come before you with prayers of praise and thanksgiving, ever grateful for all your gifts and blessings. We look to you with total confidence. Stir in us a desire for the gifts of the Spirit. May we be ever vigilant for the day of your coming and serve our brothers and sisters in need after the example of your Son who lives and reigns forever and ever.

All: **Amen.**

READING *(1Corinthians 2:6-13) All sit*

A reading from the first letter of St. Paul to the Corinthians:

Yet we do speak a wisdom to those who are mature, but not a wisdom of this age, nor of the rulers of this age who are passing away. Rather, we speak God's wisdom, mysterious, hidden, which God predetermined before the ages for our glory, and which none of the rulers of this age knew; for if they had known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But as it is written:

“What eye has not seen, and ear has not heard, and what has not entered the human heart, what God has prepared for those who love him,” this God has revealed to us through the Spirit.

For the Spirit scrutinizes everything, even the depths of God. Among human beings, who knows what pertains to a person except the spirit of the person that is within? Similarly, no one knows what pertains to God except the Spirit of God. We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit that is from God, so that we may understand the things freely given us by God. And we speak about them not with words taught by human wisdom, but with words taught by the Spirit, describing spiritual realities in spiritual terms.

The Word of the Lord.

R/. Thanks be to God.

REFLECTION

Take some time to consider some of the questions below and then discuss in small groups; (10-15 minutes)

What values of this parish are most important to you?

How do we discern the action of the Spirit among us and continuing to build the kingdom of God?

What should this parish look like now and in the next decade?

How can we collaborate more effectively with our neighboring parishes to achieve that vision?

INTERCESSIONS *(All stand)*

Leader: We are a pilgrim people in need of guidance and blessing.
Let us voice our needs before our God...

Reader: Our response is Lord, hear our prayer.

For gratitude and thanks that God's love endures forever (Ps 118), we pray...**R/**.

For steadfastness that wisdom will not slip from our sight
and that God's advice and counsel will stay in view (Proverbs 3), we pray...**R/**.

For a yearning heart that cries out, "Come seek God's face" (Ps 27), we pray...**R/**.

For a deep communion with the Jesus that his help be with us always
and that we may not withdraw from him (Psalm 80), we pray...**R/**.

For all Catholics, that the Holy Spirit may guide us to experience a renewal
of faith, hope and charity, we pray...**R/**.

THE LORD'S PRAYER

Leader: Let us pray as our Savior taught us: *Our Father...*

CLOSING PRAYER

Leader: Compassionate Father, enkindle in our hearts the fire of your Holy Spirit.
May that same Spirit renew us with energy and hope.
Charge our hearts with the fire of passionate love,
so that we may be for one another a sign of your presence in the world;
through Christ our Lord.

All: Amen

BLESSING

(Lead by a priest or deacon):

May the Lord bless you all,
the Father,
and the Son +
and the Holy Spirit.

(Lead by a layperson):

May the Lord bless us,
protect us from evil
and bring us to the joy
of everlasting life.

All: Amen

DISMISSAL

Leader: Go in peace, to love and serve the Lord.

SONG: How Can I keep From Singing (ENDLESS SONG) [*or You Are Mine (Haas/GIA)*]