



ARCHDIOCESE OF HARTFORD
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OFFICE OF
THE ARCHBISHOP

February 21, 2015

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Greetings to everyone for a blessed and fruitful Lent. I have been happy to be your Archbishop for more than a year now, and I would like to share with you some thoughts on the blessings and challenges we face as an Archdiocese looking to the future. I do so in light of an announcement I would like to make about an important new initiative: the inauguration of a process to create and implement an Archdiocesan Pastoral Plan for the purpose of repositioning the Archdiocese, its parishes, schools and institutions, in order to ensure a spiritually rich and vibrant future.

First, let's take a look at the "why," then the "what and when" of an Archdiocesan Pastoral Plan.

Why?

Our Archdiocese is blessed with many faithful Catholics who make the light of Christ shine in the world by striving every day to live a life of faith, hope and love. Living this way fulfills the mission that each of us received at our Baptism.

Pope Francis says that every Catholic is a "missionary disciple." Why "missionary"? Because especially today we know how many people no longer practice their faith; how many even reject religion and belief in God; how many people today are suffering for lack of a meaning and purpose in life that only Christ can give. The following Archdiocesan Mission Statement, recently adopted, summarizes why we are here and what we are about:

In union with the whole Church, the faithful of the Archdiocese of Hartford have a mission by Baptism, to be living signs of communion with God, and to be his instruments for the redemption of the world by bringing to it the light of faith and the joy of the Gospel. Nourished by God's Word and by the sacraments, especially the Eucharist, we are called to live holy lives and to bring others into our shared communion with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Living by these words presents both opportunities and challenges. If our mission is ultimately God's work—and it is—then we have no reason to be afraid or discouraged, any more than the Apostles, once they received the gift of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. They acted with boldness and confidence, and so should we. At the Millennium Pope St. John Paul the Great challenged us with the words of Jesus to his weary apostle-fishermen who had caught nothing: "Go out to the deep water!" And now in his exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis tells us, "I dream of a missionary option, that is, a missionary impulse capable of transforming everything."

Rising to this challenge, however, can also be a test of our "comfort zones"—whether individually or as an Archdiocese. Pope Francis tells us that the transformation of which he dreams means that "the Church's customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures" need to be "suitably channeled for the evangelization of today's world rather than for her self-preservation" (*EG*, 27), and that "pastoral ministry in

a missionary key seeks to abandon the complacent attitude that says: 'we have always done it this way'" (EG, 33).

Over the last fifty years we in the Archdiocese have experienced profound changes that are cultural and social, religious and spiritual, economic and political. These changes have affected the allegiance and participation of those who are baptized Catholic, including their Mass attendance, financial support and attendance at our schools. There is a decline in the number of priests and religious sisters and brothers. The cost and legal requirements of operating parishes, schools, ministries and institutions, especially as facilities grow older, has become increasingly challenging and complex.

What?

In response to the challenges and opportunities that the Church faces today, I have established an Archdiocesan Office of Pastoral Planning, the purpose of which is "to serve the parishes of the Archdiocese of Hartford by working collaboratively with parish leaders to promote spiritual vitality, organizational efficacy and financial solvency."

There are two things to note here. First, pastoral planning is meant to be consultative and collaborative at every level, especially the local level. And second, it is not just about personnel, finances, and buildings, although all three will undoubtedly be affected by the outcome. The primary goal is to carry out the Church's spiritual mission in the most vital and effective way.

When?

As a first step, the Archdiocese is nearing the completion of a major study of what can be called the "central service offices" of the Archdiocese, that is, all the offices, agencies and ministries that are identified as acting in the name of the Archdiocese. During the past year an evaluation has been made, and recommendations are forthcoming, as to the activities of these Archdiocesan entities and their effectiveness in meeting the needs of the clergy and people of the Archdiocese in accomplishing our mission.

As for the Archdiocese as a whole, it is anticipated that the pastoral planning process will unfold over the next three to five years.

Within the next three months an on-line survey will be conducted among the 236,000 registered households of the Archdiocese, together with focus group meetings, interviews and questionnaires. Your participation in the consultation process will be greatly appreciated.

Lent is a time of thoughtful self-examination, for the purpose of being renewed and strengthened in faith, hope and love. At this point in our history, and confident that the Lord is with His Church always, "even to the end of time," let us strive, as a united Archdiocesan family of faith, to discern carefully, prayerfully, and wisely the challenges and opportunities that present themselves to us as "missionary disciples" in today's world. May the Lord bless our efforts to reposition the Archdiocese, its parishes, schools and institutions, in order to ensure the future of our mission, for the glory of God and the salvation of souls.

Sincerely yours in Christ,



Most Reverend Leonard P. Blair
Archbishop of Hartford