



Archdiocese of Hartford  
Pastoral Planning  
The Chancery  
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## FAQs ABOUT THE PASTORAL PLANNING PROCESS

### **What are the basics of the pastoral plan?**

As of June 29, 2017, there will be 127 parishes in the Archdiocese of Hartford, instead of the current 212. 68 parishes will remain as they are; 144 parishes will be involved in mergers resulting in 59 new parishes. The mergers will involve unions of two to six parishes. 186 church buildings will remain open. 26 church buildings will close, inasmuch as regularly scheduled Masses will no longer be held in them.

### **What is the Office of Pastoral Planning?**

The Office of Pastoral Planning of the Archdiocese of Hartford (AOH) was created in July of 2014 to assess the vitality of all of the entities that make up the AOH, including parishes, schools, ministries, properties, and Catholic cemeteries. Pastoral planning is an ongoing part of church life, but the realities of today require a more focused and strategic effort. The office assumed the lead role in developing, communicating and implementing strategic pastoral plans for the present and future good of the church in New Haven, Hartford, and Litchfield Counties. Pastoral Planning is an aspect of “discipleship,” and “good stewardship” that are part of every Catholic’s obligation. To date, lay women and men, consecrated religious, and our clergy—both retired and active—under the leadership of Archbishop Leonard Blair, have all been involved in pastoral planning. In addition to the Presbyteral Council of priests, a 26 member Archdiocesan Pastoral Council, made up principally of laity and religious appointed by the Archbishop and representing church life across the Archdiocese, was established to offer input on ways to position the Archdiocese to meet today’s needs and challenges, as well as those of future generations.

### **What is the purpose of pastoral planning?**

Pope Francis has urged dioceses throughout the world to “review and renew our parishes..., to bring them nearer to people, to make them environments of living communion and participation, and to make them completely mission-oriented.” (*Evangelii Gaudium*-28) This challenge is at the heart of the Archdiocesan pastoral planning process, with the goal of positioning the Archdiocese for a more viable and sustainable future for our parishes; better pastoral care and spiritual well-being for people and priests alike; and a revitalized sense of mission on the part of everyone to be a more active and welcoming community of faith in keeping with what Pope Francis calls “missionary discipleship.” The comprehensive assessment includes an extensive review of all parishes within the archdiocese, their present situation and challenges, while simultaneously anticipating conditions likely to be confronted in the future. The Office of Pastoral Planning retained the expert services of a consultant company to collect data and gather pertinent information.

### **How will the pastoral planning process bring the faithful closer to a communion with God?**

With the consolidation of parishes, faith communities can come together to share their resources—demographic, spiritual, historical, cultural and financial—to build a stronger and more sustainable community of faith, one that is not characterized by diminishment from what it used to be, but one marked by a vision for the future. The restructuring of parishes is meant to strengthen the Church’s mission by generating new enthusiasm and greater resources to foster the spiritual and liturgical life of a community, as well as its merciful outreach to what Pope Francis calls the “spiritual, moral and material destitution” of so many in the world today. The purpose of pastoral planning is not only about ensuring a more sustainable future for today’s parishioners, it’s also about a future in the church for today’s children and a new generation of young Catholics who believe and practice their faith, and who hear and respond generously to God’s call, whether in marriage and family life, or as priests and religious sisters or brothers.



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#### **Why was this comprehensive evaluation of parishes necessary?**

Among the factors that contributed to the need for reorganization are the following:

- shifts in demographics, economic conditions, and urban and suburban development;
- in the last 50 years, Sunday Mass attendance in the Archdiocese has declined from 395,000 to 123,500, a decline of nearly 70%; this is matched by a decline in baptisms and church weddings;
- as is generally the case in the United States, not only fewer church weddings, but also fewer ordinations to the priesthood; since 1965, the total number of active priests in the Archdiocese has dropped from 535 to 186, a decrease of 65%;
- financial sustainability—a number of parishes are finding it increasingly difficult to maintain aging buildings with fewer active parishioners and fewer financial resources to meet their obligations.

#### **How were priests assigned to newly-formed parishes?**

At the direction of Archbishop Leonard Blair, the Office for the Vicar for Clergy, in consultation with the Priests' Personnel Board, recommended to the Archbishop a list of new assignments for a significant number of priests in light of the new configuration of parishes. The recommendations, which the Archbishop subjected to further consultation before implementing, were based on a priest's experience and talents, with a view to what will best serve parishioners in a given community.

#### **Were parishes and the laity engaged in the pastoral planning process?**

Yes, over the course of the last two years, pastors were asked to review their parish circumstances with their parish councils and laity groups and come up with proposals on how to best handle their challenges. This occurred in tandem as the Office of the Pastoral Planning provided parishes with data and offered guidance.

#### **What's the difference between a church and a parish?**

Simply stated, a parish is a community of people, constituted under the authority of a priest/pastor legitimately appointed by the diocesan bishop. In Connecticut, a parish is also recognized as a civil legal entity. A church is simply the building used by the parish for worship. Sometimes a parish may make use of two or more church buildings.

#### **Will names be changing?**

Archbishop Leonard Blair has assigned a name to each of the newly-created parishes. In April, he asked people to participate in the "Saints for Tomorrow" survey, which was published on the official website of pastoral planning, [StewardsforTomorrow.org](http://StewardsforTomorrow.org). Almost 1,000 people responded with potential names for newly formed parishes. A church building always retains the name by which it was dedicated, even if it is now part of a newly formed parish with a different name that embraces all the church buildings that are now part of it.

#### **What does it mean when a church is closed?**

As a result of pastoral planning, 26 church buildings are closing. The remainder will be reconfigured by the merging of two or more parishes into one parish with one or more church buildings, the continued use of which will be subject to local determination over time. The fact that a parish is closing does not necessarily mean that its church building will



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be totally closed. It means that regularly scheduled Masses will no longer be celebrated there. As the pastoral process continues, new uses for buildings will be considered.

#### **What happens to buildings that are vacated?**

Decisions about buildings will be made on a case-by-case basis. Ultimately, pastoral planning is intended to bolster discipleship and spiritual vitality - i.e., it's about people, not buildings. That said, there are several practical things that can be done. New uses for buildings - e.g., ministry centers, pastoral offices, housing, etc. will be explored. If there are no alternative purposes, selling the buildings will be considered.

#### **Where will the money from the sale of a church building go?**

The general rule is that money follows the people. For example, in a merger – the combining of two separate parishes into one – the money from both parishes is combined and follows the people, according to the specifications of Canon law.

#### **What can be done in the future?**

Staying active in your parish and contributing generously of your “time, talent and treasure” to make it a true center of worship, service and witness to the community is the best thing anyone can do for their parish. Prayer is also essential. Jesus himself said: “*Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them*” (Mt 18:20). Archbishop Blair asked that every Pastoral Planning meeting start with a half hour of prayer, in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament whenever possible. For a copy of the Pastoral Planning prayer, visit: [StewardsforTomorrow.org](http://StewardsforTomorrow.org).

#### **Will pastoral planning continue?**

Yes, pastoral planning is an ongoing effort with the goal of fulfilling the Church's mission in the best way possible. The Office of Pastoral Planning will continue to collaborate with all of the archdiocesan ministries, including the Office of Education, Evangelization and Catechesis (OEEC), the Office of Property and Assets, and the Catholic Cemeteries Association (CCA).

Regarding schools, recently the OEEC announced two reconfigurations of parochial schools.

St. Stephen School and St. Rita School in Hamden will merge for the upcoming academic year with the merged school to be located in the current St. Rita School. This will create one strong Catholic elementary school in Hamden. As announced this weekend, these two Hamden parishes will be merging as of June 29<sup>th</sup> to form the Parish of Divine Mercy.

Five parishes in the City in Meriden will be reconfigured as of June 29<sup>th</sup> into the Parish of Our Lady Queen of Angels. Earlier this spring, the pastor of St. Joseph Parish which is part of this reconfiguration announced the closing of St. Joseph School due to a combination of financial and enrollment issues. Families from St. Joseph School have been invited to join families of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel School which is in close proximity. Our Lady of Mt. Carmel Parish is also a part of the parish reconfiguration and this will create one excellent Catholic elementary school in Meriden.

As in parish mergers, the reconfiguration of schools involves collaboration and respectful dialogue which honors the past and plans for a vibrant future. As the parish changes evolve, Catholic elementary schools will continue to be studied in regard to enrollment, financial viability, academic excellence and vitality. We anticipate more reconfiguration of schools in the next two to three years.



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**How were developments regarding the pastoral planning process communicated to the public?**

The AOH communicated updates and will continue to do so in a variety of ways: through the pastoral planning website: [StewardsforTomorrow.org](http://StewardsforTomorrow.org); the archdiocesan website: [ArchdioceseofHartford.org](http://ArchdioceseofHartford.org) and Facebook page; special newsletters; press releases; parish bulletin and pulpit announcements; the Catholic Transcript Magazine; WJMJ Radio, the archdiocesan radio station; numerous meetings with priests and parish groups; a personal video message from the Archbishop as well as many personal remarks made by the Archbishop at a variety of archdiocesan-wide receptions, namely the Archbishop's Annual Appeal. This past weekend (5/6 & 5/7), a letter from the Archbishop was read at every parish, and official Canonical Decrees were posted in every church. In addition, a monthly Pastoral Planning podcast has recently been launched to keep the public informed of pastoral planning updates.

**Where do I get more information?**

The best resource for information about pastoral planning is its website at: [StewardsforTomorrow.org](http://StewardsforTomorrow.org) or call the Office of Pastoral Planning at: 860-541-6491.