

Father's Notes

September 22, 2024

Last week, our parish staffs (St. Thomas and St. Philomena) met with folks from the archdiocese, to check in and discuss how the reconfiguring of the parishes in our archdiocese (Partners in the Gospel) is going so far. Partners, this long-term plan, was first presented to the faithful back in January 2022, and information resources soon followed.

Because I don't know how it was presented to you, I want to use a few of these Father's Notes to explain (or at least perhaps to explain in a new way) some of the basic considerations in this endeavor.

So, What's driving this in the first place? As explained in the resources the Archdiocese provided, there are few factors. First, there is the reality that so much of the population density within our Archdiocese has shifted since the time that most of the Catholic infrastructure was built. I would guess that most of our parishes were built in the 1950's or thereabouts. Since then, so much of the population has moved into other areas, more recently developed. This means that we now have some areas with perhaps an overabundance of parishes, while others arguably have not enough. The hope is that we can adapt to our current needs.

Second, currently there are fewer practicing Catholics than there were in the past, thus also presenting the need to reassess how our Mass schedules, distribution of priests and other resources (as well as asking, how we can better evangelize).

Third, it has become increasingly difficult to staff our parishes. Sometimes I hear my brother priests speak of a staff position at their parish that has been open for months. The hope is that by creating more integration among parishes, it can help with gaps in staffing.

Finally, the shortage of priests. While this is not the only reason for the strategic planning endeavor, I believe it's the one that demands we act now. Every year, as priests retire, die or any other anomaly, our number of priests is reduced by 5 or 6, perhaps on average. On average, in the same year, we're ordaining 2 or 3 new priests. Over the span of years, this compounds to create a widening gap that results in the inability to provide priests for our parishes.

Thankfully, we've been supported by a handful of priests from other parts of the world. In the meantime, they've helped bridge the gap. But even with their support, it's unsustainable in our current state.

The shortage of religious vocations—for women and for men—is a bigger, more overarching problem, not just a strategic planning issue. I believe it's a reflection of a culture that lacks faith. Please pray for this spiritual crisis. More to come on Partners in the Gospel.



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