



October 1, 2022
(Memorial of St. Thérèse of Lisieux)

An Initial Outline of the Diocese of Madison's Bold Response and Solution to Our Current Reality

With the recent release of the Diocese of Madison's *Current Reality Report* there are 8 principal takeaways:

- The total population across the Diocese is growing.
- We are losing Catholic people, especially our younger people; and we are aging.
- Fewer and fewer people are attending Mass.
- Significantly fewer people are receiving Sacraments.
- Faith Formation enrollment is in a free fall, while School enrollment is holding relatively steady.
- We have significantly fewer priests than in the past, but we project to be relatively stable into the future.
- People who give donate about 2% of their income; with fewer older people giving more these days.
- At present, we are facing financial challenges impacting our mission and our employees.

To summarize: the *Current Reality Report* reveals with great clarity that we face significant challenges, which require a significant and bold solution – especially if we are going to better fulfill the Lord Jesus' universal mandate to “go make disciples” and hand on the faith that we have received and treasure to our children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren.

Given the 8 takeaways mentioned above we must humbly recognize that the status quo isn't sustainable. Although we're profoundly grateful for the diligent efforts of many faithful and dedicated people over the decades, so much of what we've been doing in recent years hasn't been working and many of our inherited structures, institutions, and ways of doing things inhibit rather than serve our mission and the needs of people today. So, rather than “doubling down” on once effective but now failing strategies and models from a bygone era, it is time for us to courageously “cast into the deep” by letting go of what we've known (as difficult as it may be), so that with God's help we might reimagine and realign our resources, structures, and parishes for the sake of evangelization, discipleship, and mission.

To that end, as the next step of the *Into the Deep* strategic planning process, we are working on reimagining and developing a new diocesan-wide model of how our parishes are organized and operate. We hope and believe that by joining forces and coming together in new ways we will be better positioned to more fruitfully and effectively: 1) follow Jesus; 2) reclaim Sunday; 3) evangelize others; 4) engage youth; 5) equip leaders; and 6) serve neighbors across the entire diocese both now and into the future.

An initial outline or sketch of this new model is as follows:

- Our current 102 parishes (and their 135 churches + school buildings, rectories, other buildings, etc.) will be reorganized/reconfigured into approximately 30 “pastorates” or groupings of parishes – each under the leadership of a single Pastor and other priests collaborating with him and serving as Parochial Vicars (or priests in residence, if retired).
 - *Note: The number “~30” is driven by our data and projects to provide for a stable and sustainable model into the future.*
 - *Note: public feedback will be sought about these proposed groupings sometime in November, after which the model will be refined.*
- After a period of public feedback and refinement, these ~30 pastorates/groupings of parishes will be finalized and approved by Bishop Hying sometime in January or February (2023). Parishes will officially start working together as pastorates in July (2023).

- Starting in July (2023) and over the course of a year or so the parishes within each of the ~30 pastorates will merge into a single canonical parish (which is like a marriage where previously separate entities become one with a shared life together), giving us ~30 parishes with 135 churches + school buildings, rectories, other buildings, etc. by sometime in 2024.
 - *Note: how this will affect our Catholic schools is still to be determined. Presently, the focus of initial modeling has been on developing a draft of the ~30 pastorates. Once school-related questions about how to strengthen Catholic education within the diocese come into play appropriate stakeholders will be consulted.*
- Following these mergers and the formation of ~30 new canonical parishes, each will have to prayerfully and prudently discern at the local level which of their church buildings and/or other facilities are needed and/or helpful in their proclaiming and living out the Gospel and the mission of the Church.
- If it is determined at a particular parish (i.e., by the pastor in consultation with his parish leadership and after considering available options) that one or more of their buildings would be a grave burden and should no longer be used (without causing harm to the good of souls), then they will receive guidance from the diocese about how to properly close/sell the respective building(s). Following church law, any money received from the sale of a building will remain locally with the parish to be used at their discretion and in the service of evangelization, ministry, and mission.
 - *Note: despite what people often think, the diocese does not receive this money, but it remains at the parish for local needs.*

Overall, then, this new model (which is still being developed and which will be refined following a public feedback period over the next few months) is about reorganizing and realigning our parishes and other resources so that all of us in the Diocese of Madison are better positioned to “go make disciples” and contribute to the building up of God’s kingdom. Furthermore, we are embarking upon this bold journey together with gratitude for the past but with an eye towards the present and the future. But above all, we are looking towards Heaven – our true homeland and the source of all spiritual grace!

*St. Thérèse of Lisieux, Patroness of the Missions, pray for us!
Our Lady, Mother of the Church, pray for us!*

Visit our website, www.intothedeepmadison.org,
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