

## Frequently asked questions regarding the Rooted in Christ Pastoral Plan process

### **General**

#### **What is the Rooted in Christ pastoral planning process? Why is the Diocese of Grand Rapids undertaking this process?**

In 2024, we had one priestly ordination. In 2025, seven pastors were either granted senior priest status or reassigned outside the Diocese of Grand Rapids, and there were no priestly ordinations. The trend of retirements outpacing ordinations is expected to continue over the next decade. Given this reality, the priests of the diocese urged Bishop Walkowiak to take a hard look at what is required for the well-being of our parish communities and priests.

#### **We have 20 men in seminary formation, yet you say we don't have enough priests. Can you please explain?**

We are edified to have more than 20 men in seminary formation. Yet, they are still discerning God's will and whether they are being called to the priesthood. The path to becoming a priest takes many years. Each man in seminary formation has between 4-8 years of schooling in addition to, hopefully, a two-year assignment as a parochial vicar before he is assigned his own parish.

Please continue to pray for these men as they discern their vocation and for an increase in vocations.

#### **Who is leading this process?**

The diocese is working with Meitler from Wisconsin. Meitler is a Catholic consulting firm that has supported similar efforts in dioceses across the country. They are familiar with our diocese due to their previous work here.

#### **What is the timeline for this process?**

The process began in the summer of 2024. The final plan will be promulgated on June 29, 2025. Each required action item in the plan has a timeline that accounts for local factors.

#### **Where should our evangelization efforts be focused?**

Slightly more than one-quarter of all residents in the 11 counties of the diocese self-identify as

Catholic. However, on average, parishes only register between one-fourth and one-third of all the Catholics in the area.

In addition, the percentage of all residents who do not participate in any religious congregation or community is about 60%. These numbers suggest that most parishes in the diocese have the potential for membership growth. Realizing this potential for growth depends on parishes carrying out the ministry of Jesus with greater vibrancy, attracting and engaging Catholics who are not registering in parishes, and expanding evangelization and outreach initiatives.

### **Required actions of the plan**

#### **Why are parishes being merged, clustered, or closed as part of this planning process?**

In 2024, we celebrated one priestly ordination. In 2025, seven pastors were either granted senior priest status or reassigned outside the Diocese of Grand Rapids, and there are no priestly ordinations. This trend of retirements outpacing ordinations is expected to continue over the next decade. We are grateful to our pastors who have generously taken on the responsibility of shepherding two or three parish communities, but this is not a sustainable long-term model of parish administration. We must make the administrative burdens and sacramental responsibilities more manageable, which requires reducing the footprint of our physical structures within the diocese.

#### **How does merging and clustering church buildings make the Church in West Michigan stronger?**

Our priests have continued to step forward in faith and obedience, taking on the task of shepherding more parish communities as their numbers have decreased. We must reduce administrative burdens so pastors can encourage their parish communities to embrace their mission. Additionally, these actions will strengthen our stewardship of personnel, material and financial resources to better serve God's people.

#### **How was the decision made on which parishes to merge or cluster?**

Each parish submitted relevant sacramental, Mass attendance and registration numbers, and financial information as the first part of this process. Meitler took the self-submitted data and added in local demographic data – census numbers, religious affiliation studies, and population forecasts. Meitler also toured each parish and school to look at campus needs and speak to pastors and parish leaders to add further context to the data. This information was used to create draft recommendations that were reviewed and edited by a diocesan leadership team, clergy, and laity from each parish.

**My parish is merging with another one, but I'm not comfortable attending the new parish. What are my options?**

Parishioners are encouraged to join the new parish. They may also elect to join any other parish in the diocese. A searchable database of parishes in the diocese is available at:

[GRdiocese.org/parishes/](http://GRdiocese.org/parishes/).

**My family is planning a baptism, wedding, funeral, or other liturgical celebration at a parish scheduled for merging or clustering. What happens now?**

We understand the importance of being able to celebrate these key moments in our lives of faith at specific churches. Because it will take time to implement the approved changes, some celebrations will need to take place at the newly merged parish while others may not be impacted. Pastors and parish staff will work with each family on an individual basis.

**Does a merger or cluster mean my church is closing and being sold?**

In most cases, in a cluster, all former individual parishes remain open as a worship site with at least one Sunday Mass celebrated at each location. The Mass schedule is determined by the pastor/canonical administrator.

In a merger, there is a possibility that individual churches may stay open as a worship site or they may be sold. The pastor and parish councils will study the needs of the community.

**I am a member of a parish that is merging. What happens to my weekly contributions?**

The resources of the merged parish will transfer to the new parish.