



DIOCESE OF SUPERIOR



# MAINTENANCE TO MISSION PASTORAL PLAN

*Recalibrating our Structure to Move on Mission*

2025

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## DIOCESE OF SUPERIOR

### OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

Dear friends in Christ:

Greetings! On the Feast of Pentecost 2023 I published *As the Father Has Sent Me, So I Send You*, a Pastoral Letter on Evangelization. Since that date I have been pleased to see many varied efforts at the diocese and in the parishes fruitfully implementing it. People are coming together for discipleship, finding ways to reach out to fallen-away friends and neighbors, drawing before the Lord in the Holy Eucharist--and bringing others with them! This awakening is promising, but it is just a beginning.

Centuries ago, great missionary evangelists like Bishop Frederic Baraga, Father Rene Menard and Jesuit priests from Canada traversed this region with a burning desire to bring souls to the saving love of Jesus Christ. They were courageous, open to what God had in store for them, willing to take great risks, and, above all, devout in their faith.

The decades passed and Catholic Christianity became well-established. Sadly, a sense of comfort settled in with that establishment, and we became complacent and lost that apostolic zeal.

In my pastoral letter I noted that I have often heard people around the diocese reminisce: *"I remember our parish back in its heyday. There were children everywhere and some of us had to stand out on the front lawn during Mass in the summer because the church itself was stuffed full. The parish dinners, the Christmas concerts, Holy Days...everyone was there and there was so much energy!"*

I went on to write, *"We yearn for those 'good old days' when the churches were full on Sunday mornings and they seemed to always be bustling with activity."* I concluded by asking the question, *"We find ourselves wondering, 'what happened?'"*

This is not a difficult question to answer: people have left the practice of the faith. Much has been written about why this has happened. In a nutshell, though our churches were at the time full, that missionary zeal was being set aside, and our parishes were focused on maintaining something that they believed would last forever. As we know, it did not last. While Christianity will always endure, Christendom—the era where the culture was infused with Christian views—has ended

We also need to acknowledge that in the Diocese of Superior we have a compounding problem. Many people have not only left the practice of the faith, but they have also left our communities. In many areas of our diocese, towns that were once bustling with activity are now nearly ghost towns. Main streets have given way to *Dollar Generals*, *Walmarts*, or simply closed down. Schools and school districts have closed or merged. Libraries have shut their doors. Thriving businesses have moved away, become obsolete, or downsized through mechanization.

These happenings, however, do not preclude us from having a flourishing Church in the Diocese of Superior or from having churches “*full on Sunday mornings*” or “*bustling with activities*.” In fact, some parishes are already moving from maintenance to mission and are seeing the fruits of their efforts. I will echo once more what I have written: “*As a diocese, and indeed as a Church around the world, we are at a turning point. We live in such a time that God in His Providence seems to have offered us a choice: we can either continue to watch the decline of the Church or we can take up our mission anew with faith, courage and passion.*”

When it was announced in 2024 that the Diocese of Superior would be issuing a new pastoral plan in 2025, many feared it would set in motion the closing of their churches and the re-clustering of the few that would remain open. We are seeing this happen in other dioceses throughout our country.

Admittedly, it would have been easy for the committee tasked with producing this plan to recommend such ideas. The committee could have taken the thirty-five parishes that did not have a baptism last year and simply announced, “they need to be closed,” or declared that the twenty-seven parishes with fewer than fifty family units or households, “should be immediately closed.”

I don’t believe that is necessary. I believe in you! I believe in us! In particular, I believe that we are ready to do what Pope St. John Paul II called for when he declared, “The moment has come to commit all of the Church’s energies to a new evangelization.”

Based on the diocesan wide information gathered from the deanery meetings of December 2023 and March 2024, the input and study of parish/cluster data, the current use of priest personnel, and prayer and reflection, it has been determined that most of our clusters are still appropriate. Therefore, this diocesan plan is not calling for the closure of any parish at this time. There are only a few clusters that will see an immediate re-alignment. Nevertheless, the gift of this plan is that it will clarify the criteria according to which such changes may someday need to be made.

It is time for a great spiritual awakening to take place in the Diocese of Superior. An awakening that has already begun but needs to receive a greater prioritization among our clergy, people, parishes, schedules, and structures. I look forward to seeing a return to the Apostolic zeal that is deeply desired.

Yours in Christ,

  
Most Rev. James P. Powers  
Bishop

## INTRODUCTION

The parish in many ways is the “rock” of people’s faith. The parish is not a school district, library, or simply a business. It is in a parish where people are baptized, experience the forgiveness of their sins, receive the precious Body and Blood of our Lord, are filled with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in Confirmation, are joined in Holy Matrimony, are anointed when they are ill, and are laid to rest upon their earthly death. A parish is also where children and adults are instructed in the faith, countless hours are offered as volunteers, dinners are shared with neighbors and friends, food is distributed to those in need, hope is offered to the grieving, and families put down roots. We love our parishes and want them to thrive and grow. However, as we focus on the mission of the Church, changes need to be made.

A parish is defined by The Code of Canon Law as “a certain community of the Christian faithful stably constituted in a particular church, whose pastoral care is entrusted to a pastor as its proper pastor under the authority of the diocesan bishop” (c. 515).

An important word to reflect on in the above definition is “stable.” There are many ways to define or understand what being a “stable parish” means. One might first look at the stability of the parish’s membership, finances, physical plants, etc. One must also look at stability in terms of alignment to mission. In light of Bishop Powers’ Pastoral Letter on Evangelization, a stable parish in the Diocese of Superior must be dedicated to moving from maintenance to mission.

This pastoral plan has been prepared to give direction to our diocese and parishes in this regard. It sets forth six pillars that are not intended to teach about the mission of evangelization but instead are meant to set us on the journey of becoming the Church, diocese, people, and parishes the Holy Spirit intends us to be. These pillars are:

- I. A Church on Mission
- II. A People on Mission
- III. Diocesan Governance for the Sake of Mission
- IV. Parish Governance for the Sake of Mission
- V. The Inevitability of Change
- VI. Opportunities for Change

The diocese and every parish/cluster are asked to reflect on these six pillars and to write and maintain a parish pastoral plan for transformation. This plan calls for parish leadership to evaluate the governance, mission, and direction of the parish once or more per year.

From these discussions, the parish and/or cluster leadership will set particular goals for the upcoming year and the next three to five years. These goals will ensure that all aspects and work of the parish are focused on shoring up governance structures and moving forward on mission. To help implement this plan, the Diocese is creating the Office of Parish Transformation, which will work with parishes to set goals, provide accountability, and offer direction.

The four questions we will want to ask continually are:

- 1. Where are we now?
- 2. Where do we need to go?

3. How do we get there?
4. How will we know if we are succeeding?

The first question, “Where are we now?” affords us the vital first step of honest, self-assessment. Having read the pastoral letter and the pastoral plan, what is our current condition? What is in line with the Church’s teaching, discipline, governance, and mission? What is not? Unless we start here with humility and integrity, then we cannot move forward fruitfully.

The second question, “Where do we need to go?” invites us to articulate our aspirations and goals rooted in the mission of the Church. This involves discerning the specific needs of the community, fostering spiritual growth, and enhancing the parish’s role as a beacon of hope and faith in the local area. It encourages a collective vision that aligns with the call to evangelization, as emphasized by the Church’s teachings on the importance of the parish as a center for worship, community, and outreach.

The third question, “How do we get there?” focuses on the practical steps and strategies necessary to achieve the parish’s goals. This includes identifying resources, fostering collaboration among parishioners, and engaging in ongoing evangelization, formation, and catechesis. Changing culture is difficult and requires intentionality, tenacity, and perseverance. The parish must embrace a spirit of mission, ensuring that all members—clergy, laity, and religious—are actively involved in the life of the Church and its outreach efforts. This collaborative approach is essential for nurturing a vibrant community that reflects the diversity of its members and their unique charisms.

Finally, the question, “How will we know if we are succeeding?” emphasizes the importance of evaluation and reflection. Success can be measured by numerical growth and by many other factors. These include the spiritual vitality of the community, the depth of faith among its members, and the effectiveness of its outreach efforts. This requires ongoing assessment of the parish’s activities, engagement with the sacraments, and the impact of its mission on the lives of individuals and families. By establishing clear indicators of success, the parish can remain focused on its mission and continually be transformed to meet the needs of its community.

Together, the following pillars and these guiding questions provide a framework for the parish plan, guiding the community toward a deeper engagement with its faith and a more profound commitment to living out the Gospel in the world.

## **PILLAR I: A CHURCH ON MISSION**

What is the mission of the Church? To make disciples.

*“Then Jesus approached and said to them, ‘All power in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age’” (Mt 28:18-20).*

This is the “Great Commission,” the final instruction Christ gave to his disciples before He ascended to the Father’s right hand. This commission is given by our Lord to the Church, to every diocese, to every parish, and to each and every Catholic.

As a diocesan Church, we have the great blessing of clarity on this mission thanks to Bishop Powers’ 2023 Pastoral Letter on Evangelization. Citing the teaching of recent popes, Bishop Powers puts it most succinctly: “The Church exists to evangelize.”

By extension we can say that everything that the Church does ought to be ordered toward that most fundamental end: drawing every soul in our geographical boundaries into ever-deeper relationship with God the Father, through His only begotten Son, Our Lord Jesus Christ.

Bishop Powers illustrates this mission using three circles which represent a person who goes from (1) having no relationship with God, to (2) having a limited relationship with God, to (3) striving to place God at the very center of his life. Bishop Powers characterized the principal shortcoming of the Church in recent decades as “settling for second-circle Catholicism.”

The antidote for that ‘settling’ is heeding the Lord’s invitation to conversion and mission. Bishop Powers writes: “When by God’s grace we allow ourselves to be transformed, we cannot help but become witnesses and seek opportunities to spread the good news of the freedom, joy, peace and hope we have encountered.”

Parishes play a vital role in fostering and accompanying the people in this conversion. To seek a life of committed discipleship, the faithful need ready access to sacramental graces, especially the Holy Eucharist and Reconciliation, as well as deepening formation, community and prayer. Accordingly, the Diocese of Superior’s vision is that parishes become hubs of authentic Catholic community—anchored in sacramental worship—where disciples gather to be equipped to live on mission for the Lord in our quickly and radically secularizing world.

That mission will get lived out in as many different ways as there are individuals that say ‘yes’ to it. Nevertheless, recurring hallmarks will be:

- Lives of ever-deepening conversion
- Frequent reception of the Sacraments of the Holy Eucharist and Penance
- Growth in virtue
- Desire to be utilized by the Lord for the mission of evangelization
- Committed stewardship of one’s time, talent, and treasure
- Care for the poor, vulnerable, and marginalized

In recent years, parishes have been asked to study the Bishop’s Pastoral Letter, the Parish Discipleship Pathways guide, and other key resources to begin a process of lasting cultural change, moving their local communities from maintenance to mission.

See:

- [Pastoral Letter on Evangelization](#)
- [Parish Discipleship Pathways](#)
- Appendix A: Maintenance to Mission Expectations
- Appendix B: Stewardship as an Expression of Discipleship

## PILLAR II: A PEOPLE ON MISSION

Within the Church, *all* of the baptized are called to live out the Church's mission described above. In doing so, the faithful follow the Lord into what are called particular vocations: priesthood, marriage, consecrated life, consecrated single life, etc. There is no hierarchy of value to these callings. Indeed, each is vital for the Church to effectively be herself and accomplish her mission.

In a diocese, the bishop plays a unique role as the successor to the Apostles to whom Christ entrusted the leadership of the Church. He is the chief shepherd entrusted with the responsibility of teaching, governing, and sanctifying the people.

Together with the bishop, the priests of the diocese act in the person of Christ, the head of the Church. They live this priesthood out, like Christ did by living for the Bride. As Venerable Fulton J. Sheen put it, "A priest is not his own." He belongs to the Church and his life is given for her. He exists for the salvation of the people. The priest primarily takes on the roles of feeding, forming, equipping, and shepherding the laity to carry out this mission.

Deacons, empowered by the grace of Holy Orders too, live out a unique vocation to service within the Church. While assisting the bishop and priests, a deacon makes a gift of his life to the parish in accordance with his unique gifts and the particular needs of the community.

Those called to consecrated life fulfill their vocation by living out the charisms of prayer, service, and mission unique to their religious communities. In particular, women religious serve as living icons of the Church's eternal destiny as the Bride of Christ summoned to the wedding feast of the Lamb.

The baptized laity, who comprise the great majority of the Church, are called to actively live out the Church's mission in the world. In Mark 16:15, Jesus says, "Go into the whole world and proclaim the gospel to every creature." Some lay people serve the Church's mission in various roles within the parish, such as, catechists, teachers, evangelists, speakers, etc. Others may assist in the parish's governance on councils and as parish staff members. But the *vast majority* are called to live their mission out amidst the secular world.

Historically, the laity's role in the Church's mission was often marginalized. In earlier generations, most Catholics would have ascribed the tasks of the Church's mission to "the priests and nuns", with the sense being that lay people were called to support the Church, have children, and see to the temporal affairs of society. These are goods that the laity are of course called to, but the laity must also take up the call to actively share the Gospel message in their everyday lives through their actions and words and by integrating their faith into their work, family and community—acting as living witnesses of Christ.

It is primarily through the laity that the Church's task of being salt, light, and leaven to the secular world is carried out. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* says that when the laity take up the work of evangelization there is a "peculiar efficacy because it is accomplished in the ordinary circumstances of the world" (CCC 905).



The foundational teaching of the universal call to holiness, emphasized by the Second Vatican Council and by all of the popes since, acknowledges and proclaims: all baptized are called to be saints who spend their lives helping make saints in their spheres of influence.

For clarity on administrative roles in the parish, see:

- Appendix C: Leadership Roles of the Parish

## **PILLAR III: DIOCESAN GOVERNANCE FOR THE SAKE OF MISSION**

To carry out the mission described above, the Church relies upon a governance structure to provide for the administrative needs of its various institutions. The parameters for this structure are determined by canon law and diocesan policy.

The phrase “maintenance to mission” does not intend to imply that maintenance is *per se* inferior to mission, let alone that maintenance is somehow inherently negative. Rather, the phrase is intended to be a call to move beyond simply maintaining those structures as if they were in and of themselves the mission. While maintenance without mission becomes inflexible, lifeless and fruitless, mission without the structure of healthy governance can become directionless or chaotic.

Therefore, this pastoral plan will provide an overview of the requirements for maintenance as a means of shoring up governance for the sake of mission.

If the diocese at large is going to experience a transformative renewal, it must start with the bishop—with his leadership, his guidance and his example. Therefore, this third pillar will detail the governance structure and the diocese’s commitments to utilize it as effectively for mission as possible.

Every diocese is required to have a finance council. The finance council is a diocesan body mandated by The Code of Canon Law (c. 492-494) that is charged with preparing the annual diocesan budget and annually reviewing diocesan expenses and revenues. A financial administrator is appointed by the bishop, to administer the goods of the diocese in accordance with the plan of the finance council and to make those payments from diocesan funds which the bishop or his delegates have lawfully authorized.

The presbyteral council and council of consultors are councils of priests from a diocese. They are the principal consultative bodies mandated by The Code of Canon Law (c. 495-502) to advise the bishop in matters of pastoral governance. It consists of bishops and priests serving the diocese. More specifically, the presbyteral council:

1. Aids the bishop in the governance of the diocese according to the norm of law so that the pastoral welfare of the people of God entrusted to the bishop may be promoted as effectively as possible with the collaboration of the priests.
2. Provides a forum for the full and free discussion of all issues of pastoral concern in the diocese.
3. Searches for and proposes ways and means for effective pastoral ministry.
4. Is representative of all the priests of the diocese.
5. Provides consultation to the bishop.

The diocesan pastoral council is a group of lay faithful, representing each deanery, who investigates, under the authority of the diocesan bishop, all those things which pertain to pastoral works, to deliberate them and to propose practical conclusions about them. This council is intended to be an effective channel of communication between the faithful and the diocesan bishop so as to foster pastoral activity at both levels.

In every diocese, there is a curia (chancery staff) which consists of chief officials who help the bishop govern the diocese. This curia includes the vicar general, judicial vicar, chancellor, a finance officer, and any other chancery personnel the bishop chooses.

With the implementation of this plan the bishop and his diocesan leadership will evaluate the mission and direction of the diocese, once per year. This consultation will include each of the three councils—finance, presbyteral, and pastoral—in reviewing the mission statement, in discussing if the works of these councils are focused on mission, and in making advisory decisions to move our diocese forward on mission.

From these discussions, the bishop will meet with his staff to set particular goals for the upcoming year and the next five years. These goals will be the accountability measures to ensure that all offices and works of the curia are attuned to mission as much as possible.

The diocese will make an initial evaluation of its curia staff and programs from the perspective of being mission driven during the first year of the pastoral plan. This evaluation will assess how effectively the curia staff that works with parishes assists them in pursuing their work, being particularly attentive to any ways the diocese is imposing burdensome tasks that prevent parishes from pursuing mission. It will also analyze whether diocesan offices are effectively evolving with the needs of the growing number of the faithful experiencing transformative conversion. Along with goal setting, these offices, responsibilities, and duties will be reviewed and evaluated on mission.

With respect to Diocesan Governance:

1. Where are we now?
2. Where do we need to go?
3. How do we get there?
4. How will we know if we are succeeding?

## **PILLAR IV: PARISH GOVERNANCE FOR THE SAKE OF MISSION**

The diocesan church lives out its mission primarily in the local context of its parishes. The Diocese of Superior's vision is that parishes become hubs of authentic Catholic community—anchored in sacramental worship—where disciples gather to be equipped to live on mission. This means that all aspects of the parish or cluster must ultimately lend themselves to evangelization and missionary discipleship as discussed in Pillar I.

As discussed in Pillar III, maintenance aspects of parish life are necessary and good. They provide the foundation upon which a healthy institution ordered for mission can be built.

To ensure that maintenance of the parishes holds steady and does not overshadow the true purpose of the parish, these maintenance requirements must be fulfilled. The following are the essential aspects of parish governance in the Diocese of Superior:

1. Each individual parish is governed by both The Code of Canon Law and Wisconsin Corporate Law (187.19). Each parish will continue to hold tax exempt status as a 501(c)(3) corporation and will maintain their legal identity on official correspondence and advertising (i.e. website, letterhead).
2. Each parish corporation must have two lay trustees for the corporate board and conduct an annual meeting. These lay trustees must not be employees of the parish and must be familiar with the corporate articles and by-laws.
3. The Code of Canon Law requires that each parish has a finance council, while diocesan policy mandates that each parish has a parish council. All parish finance council and parish pastoral council members must be familiar with the articles and by-laws of the councils found in diocesan policies.
4. At the direction of the pastor, the parish finance councils and pastoral councils must be convened, with a quorum, no less than four times per year/quarterly.
5. Each parish or cluster is required to have a Parish Evangelization Team (PET) to specifically address evangelization. This team should meet monthly or at least quarterly for prayer and formation. Its goal is to help the pastor integrate evangelization and missionary discipleship into everything the parish does.
6. The corporate board, finance council, and parish council members may *not* meet without the pastor, parish life coordinator, or parish director, unless the pastor/PLC/PD has been called away for an emergency situation after establishing a meeting date and has given permission to proceed with the meeting.” Discussion can take place at such meetings, but no voting will take place. The chairperson will inform the pastor of discussion recommendations at the earliest time possible following a rare meeting without the pastor present.
7. Parochial vicars and sacramental ministers should attend all parish finance and pastoral council meetings. They may participate in the discussions but do not have a vote.
8. Permanent deacons play a special role in the life of a parish they serve. They are called first to serve the diocesan bishop, and so are appointed by him to serve a particular parish or cluster. It is there that they work in harmony with clergy, staff, and volunteers. Working with the pastor, deacons serve in their appropriate roles at Mass, administer the sacraments they by their ordination may administer, and provide leadership to a variety of ministries.
9. For those parishes with a cemetery, there must be a cemetery committee, which is a committee of the corporate board and as such is also governed by canon law and Wisconsin state law (15.405(3m)).

10. In accordance with canon law and for a holy and vibrant celebration of the Mass, the Mass schedule for a parish or cluster must allow for a priest to celebrate no more than four Masses for the Sunday obligation of the people. This does not include funerals, weddings, or other ritual Masses that a priest may celebrate. Any exception must be approved by the bishop.
11. The parish will work within their cluster and with neighboring parishes/clusters to collaborate on setting the number of Masses and Mass times so that there is ample opportunity in the geographic area for holy, welcoming, and impactful liturgies with enough competent lay ministers to fill the various liturgical responsibilities well.
12. The Mass schedule should allow the priest to be available to parishioners before or after Mass or preferably both.
13. Respecting the health and vitality needed by priests to effectively minister, parish schedules need to respect a priest's ability to take time off that allows for vacation days, retreat opportunities, and continuing education experiences. Further, parishioners need to realize that many priests have responsibilities beyond the parish. These include serving on diocesan committees and offices, serving at diocesan events, and assisting at other parishes with tasks, such as, helping with the Sacrament of Reconciliation during Lent and Advent.
14. In clusters of parishes, the pastor or parochial administrator will reside at a rectory within the geographical boundaries of one of the parishes in the cluster. Parishes that do not have a resident pastor or parochial administrator will be led by a priest who is appointed pastor or parochial administrator and serves multiple parishes.
15. The parish or cluster will have a religious education program and/or school that brings all parishioners—children, youth, parents, grandparents—to discipleship. Schools offer a unique opportunity for parishes, but they can also pose significant challenges. As a diocese we are committed to maintaining the presence of Catholic schools in those communities that are able to support this ministry. Other parishes are called to support Catholic education in time, talent, and treasure.
16. The parish or cluster will provide or utilize diocesan or other retreats and training for teachers and catechists to grow in their personal relationship with Christ.
17. The parish or cluster will prioritize activities that are about being on mission with ongoing formation opportunities for parishioners of all ages, outreach to “fallen away” members of the community, and engagement with the unchurched. In particular, parishes need to make increased efforts at continuing formation after the reception of sacraments.
18. The parish or cluster will employ or obtain competent volunteer, business, financial, catechetical, evangelization, and formation personnel, to work alongside the pastor and guide the maintenance so the pastor can focus on the pastoral and sacramental life of the parish.
19. Clusters will be collaborative in maintaining a single main office for conducting church business. Other parish offices may be maintained for the purpose of fostering regular activities

and a presence in the local church community.

20. Technology is an indispensable tool for fostering moral and spiritual growth within the Catholic faith. Parish communities should harness the power of digital communication to expand their reach and mission. Parishes or clusters should have well-designed websites and active social media platforms.
21. Each parish must submit to the diocese a financial budget that supports the parish's efforts to evangelize and its priority of celebrating the Eucharist. Therefore, parish budgets will naturally then include appropriate funding for evangelization efforts.
22. Parish data submitted to the diocese (Official Catholic Directory, Mass counts, SAQ, and other reports) *must* be accurate. Both the parish pastoral and finance councils, along with the committee or team that addresses evangelization, must review this information annually. In particular, the parish must accurately record Mass attendance at least monthly or more frequently.
23. A parish or cluster is to annually submit to the diocese three to five goals that reflect its commitment to being mission focused. The goals should address the parish's plans to enhance Catholic identity, to guide the parish to be more Eucharistic focused, to direct evangelization efforts, and to help the parish move toward a more collaborative leadership, calling forth the gifts, skills, and expertise of the laity.

As laid out in the Introduction, this plan calls for parish leadership to evaluate the governance, mission, and direction of the parish once or more per year. From these discussions, the parish and/or cluster leadership will set particular goals for the upcoming year and the next three to five years. The diocesan Office of Parish Transformation will work with parishes to set goals and provide accountability and direction.

With respect to Parish Governance:

1. Where are we now?
2. Where do we need to go?
3. How do we get there?
4. How will we know if we are succeeding?

See:

- Appendix D: Diocesan Data Graphs for your Parish Have Been Provided

## **PILLAR V: THE INEVITABILITY OF CHANGE**

Change is inevitable. Change is to be expected, not feared.

In their exemplification for new members, the Knights of Columbus speak of their first core value as being "unity." They demonstrate this by giving the inductees a string. They invite the new members to break the string, which they all do easily. But then they are shown a rope made by braiding together many

strings. This rope cannot be broken. This is a good image for us as a diocese. There is no place for individual strings. If we are not committed to this idea, smaller parishes will find themselves floundering, and the increased demands placed on our larger parishes will make them unsustainable. United we stand, divided we fall.

We can share this example from the Knights of Columbus exemplification only because the Knights have changed. What was once a closely guarded and secretive ceremony is now open to family and friends of new Knights. The Knights embraced change and have charted a healthier path forward.

Every single parish in the Diocese of Superior will experience change in the foreseeable future. Clusters may change. Mass times may change. Programs, festivals, and other gatherings that our parishes once supported, may not be what is needed in a parish that is mission focused. One example is St. Anthony Parish in Superior. When confronted with the challenge of their cluster taking on additional parishes and some Mass times needing to be eliminated, St. Anthony sacrificed for the good of the cluster and embraced having just one Sunday Mass. This allowed them to remain open and supported the good of their cluster.

The Diocese of Superior is committed to responding with passion and joy to the Lord's Great Commission. Our parishes play a vital role in that. What the future holds for our parishes is yet to be determined. Change is hard, but on this side of eternity, it is also inevitable.

See:

- Appendix E: Evangelization and Missionary Discipleship Principles.

## **PILLAR VI: OPPORTUNITIES FOR CHANGE**

The difficult reality is that sometimes change means that the need for a parish goes away. The governance requirements for every parish are the same, regardless of the number of families enrolled. The criteria in this document provide the necessary guidelines for discerning that reality. When it becomes clear that the elements of a stable parish are no longer there, there are options to consider. As has been stated, we do not want to close any parishes. However, local circumstances may necessitate that a parish close or change its status.

To reiterate, a parish is defined by canon law: "a certain community of the Christian faithful stably constituted in a particular church, whose pastoral care is entrusted to a pastor ... under the authority of the diocesan bishop" (c. 515). If after careful evaluation local parish leadership, trustees, and both the parish pastoral and parish finance councils decide that their parish is no longer "stably constituted" based on the parameters in this document, they must discuss the evaluation with their parishioners. If the conclusion is that the parish is no longer stable and vibrant, it is the responsibility of the pastor to recommend to the bishop how the local faithful can best receive pastoral care. If struggling parishes cannot recover, the diocese will assist them to prayerfully discern how they will cluster, merge, or close.

In some places this process may come as a relief. In others it may create a significant pastoral challenge. Through the creation of the Office of Parish Transformation, the Diocese of Superior is committed to walking with local communities to assist them and to provide guidance, accompaniment and resolve.

For a parish that is no longer stable and vibrant as determined by the local leadership (see the list in Pillar IV), there are three options, or a combination of the three options, to recommend to the bishop and the corporate board:

1. The pastor can request that the bishop suppress the parish and close the church building(s).

The suppression of a parish involves formal actions. The parishioners will be directed toward neighboring parishes and provisions will be made for the temporal goods (furnishings, etc.) of the closed church. Neighboring parishes will be guided to help welcome the new parishioners and integrate them into parish activities. Special care will be taken in the case of holy relics.

Sacramental records would be transferred to a different parish. If the parish has a cemetery, the responsibility and funds for perpetual care will be transferred to the parish where the sacramental records were transferred to. Assets (financial and physical) and liabilities would be transferred to the diocese, and the bishop, receiving guidance from the presbyteral and diocesan finance councils and keeping in line with canon and civil law, would determine how the assets and liabilities would be allocated or redistributed.

2. The pastor can request that the bishop consider merging the parish with another parish. The Diocese of Superior has successfully experienced this in:

- Rhinelander, where the two separate parishes in the city, St. Joseph and St. Mary, were both suppressed, and a new parish—Nativity of our Lord—was established on the site and in the buildings of the former St. Mary parish. The St. Joseph properties were eventually sold, with the proceeds going to the new Nativity parish.
- Woodruff-Minocqua-Lake Tomahawk, where all three parishes were suppressed, the properties were sold, and a new parish was erected with a new church building built at the current Holy Family (Woodruff) location.

In the case of merging parishes, individual parishes will be suppressed to erect (establish) a new parish. All furnishings, assets, and liabilities will stay with the newly formed parish. The leadership of the newly formed parish will determine in consultation with the bishop, the presbyteral council, and the parishioners of the newly formed parish whether the buildings will be closed, sold, or if one of the buildings will remain as the church.

3. The pastor can request that the bishop consider designating the parish as an oratory, which is commonly referred to as a mission.

According to canon law, an oratory is a sacred space for divine worship that cannot be used for secular or profane purposes (c. 1223-1229).

An oratory would lose its parish status, but will be maintained as a legal incorporated entity with its corporate board of directors. The oratory will no longer have weekly scheduled Masses or faith formation programs. A church that is designated as an oratory would be assigned to a neighboring sponsoring parish, probably within its current cluster. Similar to the suppression of a parish, the members of the newly designated oratory will be encouraged to register with and become active parishioners of the sponsoring parish.

Working with the corporate board, the pastoral leader and trustees will establish an oratory society. This society will need to be active and able to be responsible for supporting the oratory financially, including property and liability insurance, and with appropriate building and grounds maintenance. The oratory society and corporate board will fulfill the requirements of its civil law corporation status.

With a documented plan for the above, the bishop may decree that the oratory be used for special occasions, such as, Mass and events on the patron saint feast day, Sacraments of Baptism and Holy Matrimony, funerals, and Eucharistic Adoration. Mass may be scheduled during the summer months if the oratory is located in a busy tourist area and other occasions if approved by the bishop.

The oratory would not be assigned a Catholic Services Appeal (CSA) goal. The oratory society will annually submit their data to the Official Catholic Directory, their SAQ, and an annual budget pursuant to the corporate by-laws.

Diocesan staff will be assigned to assist a parish to work through any of these processes once a parish determines they need to move in this direction.

## CONCLUSION

As the Diocesan Planning Committee worked to prepare this plan for the Diocese of Superior, two things became evident. In working with our Bishop Powers, we saw the confidence he has for our diocese. He truly believes we can regain the missionary zeal present in the apostles and the early missionaries who first brought the Catholic faith to northern Wisconsin. He believes this is possible in the growing parishes of St. Croix County in the southwestern part of our diocese and in the small rural parishes that dot our diocese throughout the north woods. As a result, he insisted, and all on the planning committee that worked on this plan agree, this plan would not be primarily about closing parishes.

We are realistic and know some parishes, no matter what efforts they make, are in a geographic area where there is simply not a population to support them any longer. We trust these parishes will see that they will need to accept the changes God is calling them to make for their own good, for the good of the people they serve, and for the greater good of the Diocese of Superior. This is being missionary in the truest sense, that is, having a willingness to accept God's call and to say "yes." They will decide whether closing, merging, or becoming an oratory is where the Holy Spirit is leading them. We also trust the neighboring parishes will, with the help of diocesan personnel, do everything needed to welcome those whose parishes undergo these changes.

We also came to an understanding that in order for us to regain the missionary zeal that Bishop Powers believes is in us and that he outlined in his pastoral letter issued on the Feast of Pentecost 2023, our diocese and every parish needs to take three important steps:

1. We need to shore up operations. This means making sure that we are adhering to canon law, civil law, and diocesan policies; letting go of programs and events not supportive for being mission



focused; and being efficient and resourceful with what will be a part of the life of our diocese and parishes in the future.

2. We need our diocese and parishes to prioritize and employ accurate data collection and record-keeping to help us remain accountable, realistic, and able to make sound decisions.
3. We need our diocese and parishes to set goals that will assist us in being centered on the Eucharist, evangelistic in our work, missionary in our zeal, and supportive of clergy, religious, and laity bringing forth their gifts for the building up of the Church in the Diocese of Superior.

We realize that what we have outlined in this plan will require additional work on behalf of many. We also believe that if we accept and embrace what is outlined in this plan, then the Diocese of Superior will become a place where we can more fully *engage in* the work of evangelization laid out by St. Pope Paul VI, St. Pope John Paul II, Pope Benedict, Pope Francis, and Bishop Powers in his pastoral letter. The words of Scripture, the writings of these great Popes, and Bishop Powers' wisdom and challenges contained in his pastoral letter are the real plan for our diocese. This pastoral plan is meant to lay the groundwork so we can experience a new apostolic age.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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- Peggy Schoenfuss, Chancellor and Superintendent of Catholic Schools
- Dan Blank, Director of Administrative Services
- Christopher Hurtubise, Director of Evangelization and Missionary Discipleship
- Christine Newkirk, Director of Ecclesial Ministries and Diocesan Consultation
- Steve Tarnowski, Director of Stewardship and Development

## APPENDICES

### A. Maintenance to Mission Expectations

Parishes should be:

- Reading and studying Bishop Powers' [Pastoral Letter](#) on Evangelization (study guide included in link).
- Establishing Parish/Cluster Evangelization Teams to shepherd the process.
- Studying and reflecting on mission, discipleship, conversion and evangelization as described in Bishops' pastoral letter and in the resources mentioned below.
- Implementing [Parish Discipleship Pathways](#) through pre-evangelization, evangelization, discipleship and apostolate efforts such as:
  - Welcoming and directing guests through hospitality ministers.
  - Equipping parishioners to do organic hospitality ministry.
  - Proclaiming the Kerygma during Mass, Catholic school programs, religious education classes, youth ministry events, sacramental preparation, parish missions, and parish retreats.
  - Utilizing evangelization tools like Alpha, Discovering Christ, etc.
  - [Planning Fruitful Events](#).
- Reviewing past virtual [Vision Formation Gatherings](#) and attending future Vision Formation Gatherings.
  - Our New Apostolic Moment
  - The Mission of the Parish
  - The Unique Role of the Priest
  - The Kerygma
  - The Primacy of Prayer
  - The Parish Evangelization Team
  - Parish Evangelization Teams
  - Pastoral Letter on Evangelization
  - Missionary Discipleship
  - Authentic Friendship and Christian Community
  - Making Marriage Prep Missional
- Discussing what change could happen in your parish or cluster using [Approaches for Realizing Positive Change and Transformation](#).
- Supporting clergy and parish/cluster leadership in attending their [Cenacles](#) (i.e. small groups).
- Initiating small group discussions on moving from maintenance to mission for laity in the parishes.
- [Evangelization Resources](#)

Video Introduction to Evangelization Parish Discipleship Pathway Booklet Fruitful Event Planning Evangelizing Disciples Checklist Recommended Programs Parish Mission Apostolate	Pastoral Letter Study Guide Pastoral Letter Hispanic Translation Appreciative Inquiry Planning Booklet Cenacles Parish Evangelization Team Workshops
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## B. Stewardship: An Expression of Discipleship

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' powerful pastoral letter *Stewardship: A Disciple's Response* outlines a profound understanding of Christian stewardship and invites all Catholics to embrace a life of generous discipleship.

**The Steward's Heart in Christ:** A Christian steward, the bishops explained, is one who:

- Receives God's gifts with gratitude
- Cherishes and tends to God's gifts responsibly
- Shares God's gifts in love and justice
- Returns God's gifts with increase

At the heart of stewardship lies the recognition that God is the ultimate owner of all things. As stewards, we are called to place our gifts at the service of one another.

**Discipleship and Stewardship:** Stewardship is not merely a set of practices or a financial obligation; it is an integral part of the disciple's journey. As disciples of Christ, we are called to:

- Follow Jesus wholeheartedly, no matter the cost
- Embrace conversion and undergo a life-transforming encounter with God
- Commit ourselves fully to God's will

Stewardship is a tangible expression of this discipleship. By living as stewards, we demonstrate our love for God and our neighbor, and we participate in God's ongoing work of creation and redemption.

**Stewardship of Creation:** The Bible teaches us that God entrusted the earth to human care. As stewards of creation, we are called to:

- Appreciate the beauty and wonder of God's creation
- Protect and preserve the environment
- Respect human life and work to promote its flourishing
- Develop the world through noble human endeavors

**Stewardship of Vocation:** Each person is called to a unique vocation. Through work, we contribute to the building up of God's Kingdom, a sacred act. As stewards of our vocations, we are called to:

- Discover our God-given talents and gifts
- Use our talents to serve others
- Find fulfillment in our work

**Stewardship of the Church:** The Church, as the Body of Christ, is also entrusted to our care. As stewards of the Church, we are called to:

- Participate actively in the life of the Church
- Support the Church's mission through prayer, time, and financial contributions
- Share the Good News with others

**Overcoming Obstacles:** As the Catholic Church moves from maintenance to mission, it can be demanding but rewarding to live as faithful stewards. By developing a deeper relationship with God and by seeking the support of our faith community, we can overcome the obstacles we are sure to encounter. As we strive to live as faithful disciples and stewards, we can be confident that God will work all things together for our good.

## **C. Leadership Roles of the Parish**

The priests of the diocese form the presbyterate, which shares responsibility for the diocesan Church with the bishop. In the past several years the Diocese of Superior has been blessed with the presence of many international priests. Canon Law requires every parish to have a pastor. Under a supervising pastor, the bishop may appoint a parochial administrator. This is normally the case in a priest's first administrative assignment or for a priest not incardinated into the diocese.

A pastor or parochial administrator may be assisted by another priest known as a parochial vicar or an associate pastor. A parochial vicar is typically a newly ordained or an international priest and who will generally be assigned to the larger parishes or parishes with schools.

If the bishop determines that there is a shortage of priests who are qualified to serve as pastors, canon law affords the bishop the right to appoint a deacon or lay person to care for the faithful. This care includes the areas of teaching, sanctifying, and administration, as well as, other pastoral responsibilities not specifically reserved for a priest (c. 517, §2; 528-537). In the Diocese of Superior, those appointed by the bishop to serve in this role are called either the parish life coordinator (if the individual is a permanent deacon) or the parish director (if the individual is a lay woman or man). In these cases, the bishop would appoint a priest as the sacramental minister to facilitate the fulfillment of sacramental life within the parish or cluster. Additionally, the bishop will assign a priest—usually the dean, who is a priest responsible in assisting the bishop with the oversight on a portion of the diocese—as the official supervising pastor.

As an ordained minister, a deacon is called to serve the bishop, his pastor, and the people of God by employing the gifts that have been granted him by the Holy Spirit. The deacon's presence at the altar during the liturgy and as he goes about his daily life is a visual presence of Christ the servant. His purpose is to serve primarily in the parish where he lives and worships; however, the bishop may assign him to serve in other parishes or as needed. In the Diocese of Superior, deacons serve without receiving payment.

Typically, a deacon supports his family through secular employment outside the parish, but there is also the possibility that a deacon can be employed by the parish in roles, such as, religious education director or parish life coordinator. The deacon works hand in hand with the priest to accomplish the goals a parish sets for itself.

Parishes, under the mandate of Wisconsin state law (§187.01 and §187.19), are further served by two lay trustees who complete the corporate board, which additionally consists of the bishop, the diocesan vicar general, and a pastor or parochial administrator. These lay trustees must not be employees of the parish. This board has several responsibilities outlined in the corporation by-laws for the parish.

A parish pastoral council and a parish finance council (comprised of lay parishioners) are called to be missionary focused and charged with promoting the mission and vision of the parish. By means of consultation and dialogue, the parish pastoral council discerns the presence and activity of the Holy Spirit in the whole parish. The parish finance council provides consultation to the pastor so that he may act prudently in the administration of the parish in accordance with the requirements of canon 537.

The parish pastoral council should see to the Parish Evangelization Teams, Spiritual Life and Liturgy/Worship, Catholic Christian Education and Formation, Human Concerns and Services, Administration and Maintenance Services (Buildings and Grounds), and Vocations of the parish.

Those who work within the parish are called to be those living witnesses of faith for others. Business administrators, secretaries, catechetical leaders, principals, teachers, catechists, small group leaders, prayer leaders, Mass readers, ushers, Eucharistic ministers, etc., are all to impart the faith with truth, beauty and love. Roles of the laity within a parish have specific duties with canonical or corporate restrictions. It is important that all laity work cooperatively with each other and with the local leadership.

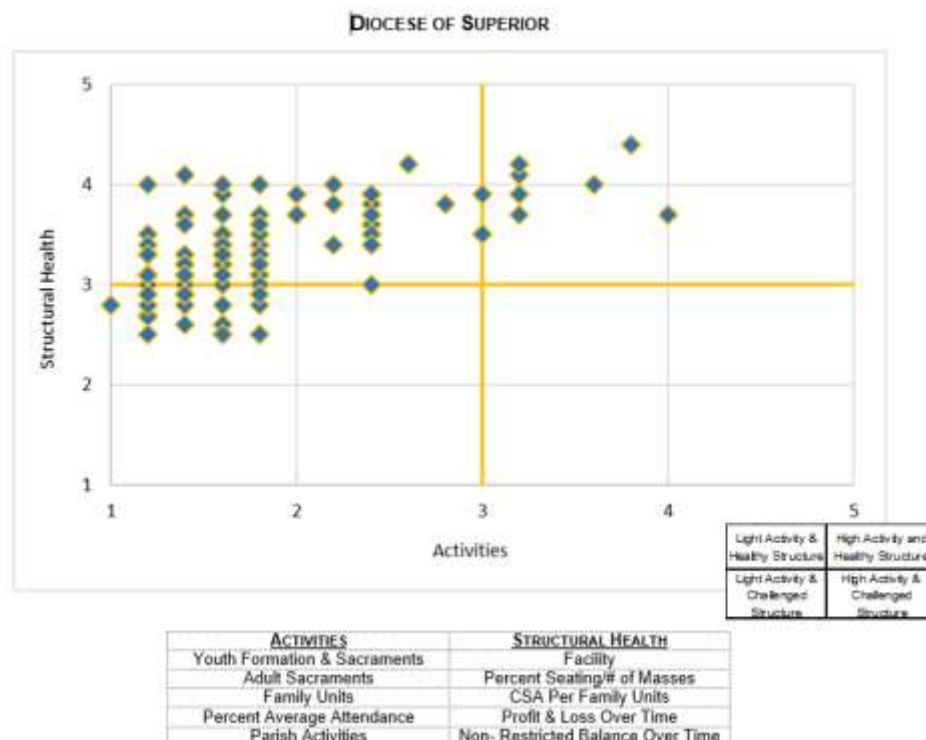
## D. Diocesan Data Graphs for your Parish

### Parish Evangelization Teams will benefit from using the data.

Individual parish Data graphs help us to determine where our focus should be. The goal is to be a parish on mission for evangelization. Is all the data that the diocese gives to the parishes and clusters the only data a parish or cluster should look at? Absolutely not. If the parishes and clusters identify other data they would like to use to evaluate their effectiveness on mission, then that is just as important. Parishes and clusters can survey parishioners and find out what the needs are in order to focus ministry on addressing those needs, instead of what has always been done. This data will help you and your councils measure evangelization efforts.

If evangelization is working, then there will eventually be more people engaging in parish life, receiving the sacraments (especially the Eucharist and Reconciliation), and attending adoration of the Most Blessed Sacrament. Questions to consider: Would it be effective to teach what the Mass is or to share about the holiness and specific gift of receiving Christ in the Eucharist?

If numbers decrease, then it is important for the parish and cluster to understand why. Is the population changing in your area? Does programming need to look different? If youth numbers are decreasing or if they are non-existent, should there be more focus on adult ministry, family-based, bereavement, OCIA, etc. What evangelization needs to happen?



## E. Evangelization and Missionary Discipleship Principles

Bishop's Pastoral Letter on Evangelization referred to Fr. John Ricardo's book *Rescued*, which explores the following four concepts:

**CREATED**—The same God who created the universe created you. He sees you. He knows you. He loves you. There is an infinite value in every human life, including yours.

**CAPTURED**—Sin and death are real. There is an enemy: the devil that wields tremendous power. The power of Satan is not equal to God's power.

**RESCUED**—From the moment of the Fall of Adam and Eve, God has been working to win us back. In the person of Jesus Christ, God has gloriously completed that work.

**RESPONSE**—The battle is won and Christ is victorious! Salvation is ours if we will have it. We can ignore His saving work, or we can surrender to Jesus in a life of discipleship.

Using the above concepts, our commitment in the Diocese of Superior is to evangelize and make disciples. There are ten habits of Missionary Discipleship.

<b>Ten Habits of Discipleship</b>	<b>Disciple</b>	<b>Missionary Disciple</b>
Relationship	Has a personal relationship with Jesus Christ	Introduces others to their best friend, Jesus Christ
Prayer	Makes time for prayer every day	Helps others pray
Commitment	Has a commitment to Jesus, the Church, and the Kingdom	Guides others to make commitment to Jesus, the Church, and the Kingdom
Worship	Attends Mass at least once a week and more frequently	Invites and welcomes others to mass and to the Sacramental life of the Church
Study	Cultivates the habit of continual learning, particularly of the Scriptures and other spiritual writings	Introduces others to the great treasury of spiritual writings of the Church, especially the Scriptures
Openness	Is open and responsive to where the Holy Spirit is leading him or her and others	Helps others become more open to the Holy Spirit
Participates	Joyfully participates in the sacramental and communal life of the Church	Walks with others intentionally in faith and helps them discern where the Lord is calling them to participate
Shares	Shares personal gifts, time, and treasure with the Lord, his Church, and others	Helps others in word and deed to be generous stewards of the gifts given to us
Evangelizes	As a leader, evangelizes the world through Word, witness, works of mercy, and compassion	Provides inspiration, support, and formation for others in how to share the Good News
Serves	Serves others in the name of Jesus Christ	Guides others in the name of Jesus Christ

Stanz, Julianne. *Start with Jesus: How Everyday Disciples Will Renew the Church*. Chicago, Loyola Press, 2019. Page 36.