

# **Strengthening Our Parishes as Primary Communities of Faith**

## **A Proposal**

### **Developing the Vision for a Pastoral Plan – *Disciples in Mission***

The Archdiocesan Pastoral Planning Commission has been asked by Cardinal Seán to offer its recommendations on a pastoral plan. For the past ten months, the Commission has been working on a pastoral planning document, entitled *Disciples in Mission*, which proposes a vision for our Archdiocese that flows directly from the mission that Jesus Christ has given to his Church. The principal thrust of the current draft of this pastoral plan is to form stronger Christian disciples by strengthening our identity as a Christ-centered, mission-minded, welcoming and evangelizing Eucharistic community of faith.

This challenging vision will be accomplished through five “Mission Initiatives,” specific actions that arise out of the strategic priorities established by Cardinal Seán. These initiatives are: (1) Becoming a Church that More Readily and Actively Welcomes Every Man, Woman and Child to Conversion of Life in Christ Jesus; (2) Strengthening our Parishes as Primary Communities of Faith; (3) Growing the Church through Evangelization; (4) Developing Excellence in Faith Formation for Catholics of All Ages; and (5) Re-energizing Pastoral Leadership.

A Pastoral Plan is a series of steps that will be taken by the leaders and the faithful of the Archdiocese of Boston to help our Church to fulfill our Gospel mission and to serve Christ more effectively. *Disciples in Mission* is a map to guide the decisions we make for meeting our responsibilities as disciples of the Lord at this time in our history; it is planning for the pastoral and spiritual needs of the Catholic faithful for the foreseeable future. It is also a call, a summons to refocus our attention and to move from a mindset of “maintenance” to one of “mission.”

This paper has been prepared to assist an extensive consultation of the Catholic faithful in the Archdiocese – the clergy, the religious and the laity – regarding the second Mission Initiative of *Disciples in Mission*, “Strengthening our Parishes as Primary Communities of Faith.” Specifically, it introduces a concrete proposal to strengthen our parishes as welcoming, nourishing, thriving and evangelizing Eucharistic communities. After Cardinal Seán has heard the faithful and the consultative bodies in our parishes and Archdiocese on this proposal and adjusted it in light of the consultation, he will implement it gradually and in phases.

### **A New Structure for Mission: The Pastoral Service Team**

The proposal is to create a new structure called a *Pastoral Service Team* (PST) to provide pastoral services to our parishes. The Pastoral Service Team is a group of priests, deacons, pastoral associates, lay ecclesial ministers, parish pastoral and finance councils who provide pastoral services to multiple parishes, which partner with one another to exercise more fully the mission of Evangelization. As opposed to a plan for merging parishes and closing church buildings, this plan adopts an approach that strengthens and enlivens our current parishes. By creating these teams, improved pastoral services can be provided to parishes without altering the parishes themselves.

The members of each PST work together under the leadership of one pastor, serving and ministering to multiple parishes in a particular area. The PSTs have two primary goals: 1)

42 meeting the specific pastoral and spiritual needs of Catholics in each parish that the PST serves  
43 in order to strengthen their communion in Christ, and 2) drawing these parishes into a tighter  
44 and more effective bond for the work of the New Evangelization and the realization of the  
45 Archdiocese's pastoral plan.

#### 46 **Reasons for the New Structure**

47 This proposed new structure does not involve changing the parishes themselves. Rather, it  
48 focuses on the means by which pastoral services are provided in and to our parishes. The  
49 parishes of the Archdiocese are Eucharistic communities of God's faithful people, entrusted with  
50 carrying out the mission given to the Church by Jesus Christ. PSTs are the means by which  
51 services are provided for each community to fulfill the Gospel mission.

52 The present way in which pastoral services are structured in the Archdiocese of Boston is not  
53 healthy and it cannot be sustained much longer. Priests are being stretched too thinly; pastoral  
54 associates and religious educators are not being replaced in sufficient numbers; permanent  
55 deacons are unevenly deployed; and we face a growing number of parishes (40%) unable to  
56 pay their bills, even as the cost for services in our parishes continues to climb.

57 In such an environment, the majority of our parishes have adopted a "maintenance model"  
58 rather than an "engagement model." *Disciples in Mission* envisions and fosters active and  
59 committed participation in the mission of the Church. By improving pastoral services and  
60 reducing the costs for providing these services, every parish can better use its resources and  
61 talents for the sake of living and spreading the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

62 It is very clear that these goals cannot and will not be reached in the vast majority of our  
63 parishes according to the current model. Our resources are severely restricted both with  
64 respect to personnel and to finances. It is in the face of these challenges that the proposed new  
65 structure of a Pastoral Service Team is introduced.

66 By means of a team approach, each PST will be able to offer a full range of pastoral services,  
67 something that is beyond the reach of a large percentage of our parishes under the present  
68 system. By providing pastoral services in this new way, our parishes can be revitalized as faith  
69 communities, thus witnessing to, in an even greater degree, the Catholic commitment to and  
70 culture of communion in Christ and mission to the world.

#### 71 **Further Elaboration on the Pastoral Service Team**

72 As noted above, the introduction of a PST for multiple parishes is a realignment of the way in  
73 which services are rendered; it is not an alteration of our individual parishes. The Catholic  
74 faithful will continue to be members of their own parish and each parish will retain responsibility  
75 for its own assets and liabilities, including the Church and the other buildings it owns.

76 PSTs will enable each parish to determine how best to use their resources through a culture of  
77 partnering and collaboration. With the increased possibilities that are available through  
78 "economies of scale" and greater collaboration, better pastoral services and more effective  
79 ministry can be provided within the parishes and for the mission of Evangelization.

80 The precise grouping of parishes to be served by a PST will be determined using the criteria  
81 and principles that are articulated in the accompanying Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs).  
82 Each grouping will be known as a "Pastoral Collaborative."

83 **The Development of Local Pastoral Plans**

84 A key element in the introduction of the new PST structure for serving the parishes is the  
85 expectation that the parishes of each pastoral collaborative will come together under the  
86 guidance of a PST to develop a local Pastoral Plan for Mission. Each Pastoral Plan should be  
87 designed to ensure the identity of each parish, while at the same time encouraging and leading  
88 parishes to work together in their pastoral collaboratives for our common mission of  
89 Evangelization and for the benefit of all.

90 The local pastoral plans are means for demonstrating how our parishes will actually build up  
91 their communities as strong and vital Eucharistic centers of faith. The plans are a dynamic  
92 means for ensuring that *Disciples in Mission* strengthens the communion and mission of each  
93 individual parish in a given area. In order to achieve the goals identified in the local plan, each  
94 parish will be engaged in identifying specific ways within its pastoral collaborative to address the  
95 present and future needs of the Gospel mission of the Church in their area.

96 There are 290 parishes in the Archdiocese of Boston. Within these parishes are worship sites,  
97 Catholic schools, rectories, parish centers, convents and buildings that each plan will evaluate  
98 and address. Over time resources can be made available for mission by, for example, reducing  
99 duplication and redundancy or by combining programs that are similar and insufficiently  
100 attended. By using the model of local pastoral planning, the best usage of buildings and of  
101 pastoral programs will be something determined locally, by a pastor working together with a  
102 team and with the parishioners.

103 The local plans will encourage a spirit of cooperation and of common discernment, seeking first  
104 the good of the people in a pastoral collaborative. Each Pastoral Plan will take the strategic  
105 priorities of the Archbishop of Boston and make them their own. Under the leadership of our  
106 bishops and pastors, our local communities will determine how best to utilize and apportion their  
107 resources, schedules, property and facilities. They will develop a plan that reflects the needs of  
108 the Church's mission for their collaborative, based upon the resources that are available to each  
109 parish.

110 **Summary**

111 *Disciples in Mission* seeks to accomplish the goal that each parish community in the  
112 Archdiocese of Boston be strengthened and enabled to participate in the communion and  
113 mission of the Church as fully as they are able.

114 In summary, the proposal put forward for consultation is that:

- 115       ▪ The Archdiocese of Boston will create approximately 125 Pastoral Service Teams.  
116       The precise nature and number of PSTs will be determined as a result of an  
117       extensive study of and consultation with our parishes.
- 118       ▪ All 290 of our parishes will be served by one of these PSTs.
- 119       ▪ In each local area, the Pastoral Service Team, in dialogue and discernment with their  
120       parishes, will develop a Pastoral Plan for how best to utilize and apportion their  
121       resources, property and facilities to strengthen the parishes as Eucharistic  
122       communities rooted in Jesus Christ and to advance the Gospel mission of the  
123       Church.