



April 10, 2023

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

May the peace and joy of the risen Christ be with us during the Easter season.

I am writing to let you know I am preparing a pastoral letter to the clergy, women and men religious and lay faithful of the diocese. My hope is to give you a fuller understanding of our ongoing efforts in pastoral planning. I have a significant amount of information to share with you. While the entire letter will be published on our planning website at www.eriecd.org/planning.html, I am hopeful that by sharing portions of it as a series, people will be able to absorb the details more easily.

We are, always have been and always will be a missionary church. We are called not only to care for the souls of the churched, but also to invite others into the community Christ established on earth. My goal in beginning another more formal round of pastoral planning for parishes, is to create communities that are vibrant and dynamic, and in a position to extend a sense of welcome and belonging to all. Our planning website includes a good explanation of what I mean when I talk about vibrancy in a parish.

As the data we commissioned in 2015 predicted, our realities have changed significantly in the past eight years. The number of practicing Catholics in our diocese has declined steeply, as has the number of active priests available to serve in parishes. In fact, while the population in the 13 counties of our diocese has dropped by about seven percent since 1990, the number of Catholics who attend Mass on Sunday has dropped by 78 percent. I understand the pandemic hastened some of this decline. But that does not change our situation.

I have begun making visits to each region of the diocese and will continue to do so in the coming months. The needs in each area are different, and I plan to tailor information in my letters. But one message for all is that we must think of ourselves as a diocese, mindful of the needs of all of our sisters and brothers, as we lay out a sustainable plan for the future.

Our geography includes everything from mid-sized and small urban cities connected by four-lane highways to very small hamlets accessible only by winding, two-lane roads. In some areas, it is possible to walk between churches. In others, there may

be 30 miles between churches. Decisions about the future need to be made with the big picture in mind. What needs to happen in order to care for all of the people in our diocese?

I invite you to visit our planning website as one way to remain informed. A bulletin announcement with the link has been made available, but we've created a prominent banner on the diocesan homepage as well. Just search for Diocese of Erie online.

I look forward to sharing more with you in the coming weeks, but until that time, I ask you to please join me in keeping the needs of the Diocese of Erie, its people and its clergy, in your prayers.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

+Lawrence T. Persico

The Most Reverend Lawrence T. Persico, JCL
Bishop of Erie