



August 19, 2023

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

In my first two letters to you on the subject of pastoral planning for parishes in Erie County, I gave you the 30,000-foot view to help you understand that we are just one of thirteen counties in the diocese. Planning in each county affects what is possible in the others.

In this final letter before we begin planning in earnest for the parishes of Erie County, I'd like to give you an overview of the steps that will occur in the coming months.

My letters have been an important first step in the process. If you would like to review them as a whole, you can find them on the microsite we've created for pastoral planning, available through a link on our diocesan homepage at www.eriercd.org.

Based upon the considerable amount of data and feedback pastors and parish leaders already have provided, we have developed a preliminary plan for Erie County. We will follow the same process we did in 2016:

- Having been vetted by the Priest Council, the preliminary plan will be presented to pastors and parish leaders at a gathering on August 29.
- They will be asked to bring the preliminary plan back to their parish communities so that for approximately one month, parishioners can consider the proposal and offer feedback that can be submitted either online or as a hard copy.
- We also will ask for an official response from each pastor, formulated with his leadership team.

- Then, using the feedback provided, the data we have, surveys and parish responses, we will make any necessary adjustments before presenting a final plan to the Priest Council for approval in November. This may require a second meeting to finalize.
- Once approved, pastors and parish leaders will come together in the spring to receive the final plan as well as materials for sharing it with parishioners and moving toward implementation, ideally by summer.

I know I have shared a great deal of information with a lot of moving parts and a lot of unknowns in my letters to you over the last three months.

At a meeting in the Oil City area this spring, one gentleman stood up and expressed his sense that this is not all doom and gloom. He said we need to look at it as an opportunity for creativity and collaboration. How can we best respond to the situation we are in? How can we use this moment to grow and to create vibrant and welcoming places of worship where we are growing in our relationship with Christ, his church and with each other? We must think of everyone in the 13 counties of this diocese and respond with charity and generosity.

I ask that you bring this moment to prayer and that you continue to pray for more vocations to the priesthood, diaconate and consecrated life.

We can have every confidence and hope in the future if we truly trust, discern and bring the Holy Spirit into the process. I look forward to working with the parishes of Erie County in a collaborative spirit, knowing we are doing what needs to be done to live out our mission and create parish communities that are vibrant, life-giving places of worship where people find encouragement and hope as they grow in their relationship with Christ, his church and each other.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

+Lawrence T. Persico

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