

## **Frequently Asked Questions:**

Also see: <https://www.dioceseoflansing.org/realign-resources-for-mission>

### **1. What is the Realign Resources for Mission process?**

In the Fall of 2019, Bishop Earl Boyea established a new 14-member committee to review how the resources of the Diocese of Lansing can be best used to better evangelize the 1.8 million people who live within the bounds of the diocese.

“This Committee for the Realign of Resources for Mission in our diocese was really established in order to plan for the future. Where are we going? How are we going to evangelize in our area?” said Bishop Boyea upon the committee’s launch.

“How are we going to strengthen the faith of those who are members of the household of faith? How are we going to try to win back those who have wandered away? And how do we bring in new members to the Church? How do we make Jesus Christ more present in our 10-county diocese?”

Bishop Boyea’s decision to establish the committee was informed by a range of statistical evidence which shows decline across the diocese over the past few decades including an increasingly unsustainable drop in the number of priests. Hence, the status quo is no longer an option.

The membership of the committee includes priests, deacons, and lay men and women from across the diocese who were nominated by the presbyterate and diocesan staff. Overseeing the process is Father Mathias Thelen, the Pastor of Saint Patrick’s in Brighton, who was asked by the bishop to chair the committee.

In his commissioning letter to the members of the committee, Bishop Boyea encouraged the committee to be “bold and innovative in exploring ideas for renewal and growth” and urged them to “envision a diocese with parishes that are fully alive communities of missionary disciples, with a vibrant sacramental life, where everyone can encounter Jesus Christ, most especially in the Eucharist.”

## **2. How has the committee gone about its work so far?**

Primarily they have prayed, discussed and discerned. The discernment has been informed by an incredible amount of data which they have gathered over the past year. They have:

- Analyzed five years of parish data such as financial, sacramental, demographic statistics using MapDash for Faith Communities while the consulting firm, Veracruz, have helped to analyze our Catholic schools.
- Surveyed over 20,000 parishioners via the Disciple Maker Index; over 400 key parish figures via Key Parish Leader survey; and 71 clergy via the Called for More Priest Preferences and Passions Survey.
- Consulted with other many dioceses around the country and beyond who are engaged in restructuring.
- Interviewed many experts specializing in Church renewal and growth: Catholic Leadership Institute; Amazing Parish; Divine Renovation; Acts XXIX.
- And now they are conducting parish visits across the diocese in order to explain the Realign Resources for Mission vision and to elicit feedback from parishioners in each locality.

### **3. So, this is all about managing decline?**

No. While demography and decline are the pretext to restructure, both Bishop Boyea and the Realign Resources for Mission Committee would propose that is not our core problem. Our core problem is, too often, being insufficiently on mission. What is more, they have found that mere structural change will not be enough to get parishes more on mission. Instead, a change in parish culture is required. Cultural change, though, is hard and requires sustained and effective leadership by a pastor working collaboratively with others.

The data has also found that too many priests and parishioners are currently not thriving. Too often, disciples are not being made while priests are tired and isolated. Hence, structures should serve our mission, not the other way around even though we can all be tempted to conserve structures that are no longer fit-for-mission.

Managing decline would mean we've accepted that our current trajectory is unchanging and that there is no hope for growth in the future. This is certainly not the case! We have a founded hope that real growth is possible if we're willing to follow the promptings of the Holy Spirit in this new springtime of the Church.

This process of pastoral planning is not primarily about simply observing trends, but being aware of them so we can disrupt them and bring about a change in direction. For instance, our total number of priests is on a downward trajectory, but rather than simply continuing on this trajectory we can choose to put an emphasis on priestly vocations, seminary formation, and creating cultures of discipleship so that this trend can be reversed.

### **4. How would you describe our mission?**

The mission given to us by Jesus Christ is "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," (Matthew

28:19). In the Diocese of Lansing, this distils into a mission statement which tells us we exist to “form communities of missionary disciples who go and announce the Gospel of Jesus Christ”.

Why does this matter? Well, as Bishop Boyea says: “In the person of Jesus Christ, we introduce our family and friends to the deepest happiness, meaning and peace that this life can offer. We also help them get to Heaven in the next. Our earthly existence has no greater purpose.”

#### **5. Why are these Parish Visits happening now so far into the process?**

The Realign Resources for Mission Committee has been meeting since the fall of 2019 and had set up parish meetings at every parish which were scheduled to happen in April of 2020. Because of COVID those meetings were not able to be held. These meetings are being held now because the committee truly does value your insight, input, and ideas.

#### **6. What’s the vision for moving forward?**

Having done all of this, the Committee and Bishop Boyea have come to the fourfold conclusion that a healthy parish in the Diocese of Lansing:

- I. **Is led by priests who are striving for health and holiness:** This includes priests living in community, even if not in the same rectory; Multiple priests serving one parish together; a pastor who has the charism of leadership and has a parish leadership team; while other priests operate out of their particular charisms and gifts too.
- II. **Equips and empowers parish staff;** This would see parishes hiring the best and most competent people; every defined critical ministry and role in a parish having a

competent leader; parishes having sufficient staff to fulfill the mission; and those staff are paid competitively.

- III. **Makes and forms missionary disciples:** This would see parishes provide a much greater access to the sacraments and devotions than at present; Sacred Worship that is prayerful, reverent, beautiful and powerful; a discipleship process that moves people to spiritual maturity; and a strong commitment to Catholic education.
- IV. **Seeks the lost and serves the poor:** This fourth principle would see parishes have designated processes to evangelize their local community; they would prioritize spiritual and corporal works of mercy in those communities; they would be recognizable in their local community as salt, light, and leaven; and they would offer shallow entry points for unbelievers to encounter Jesus Christ.

#### 7. **So, if priests live in community, will my parish have a resident priest?**

As we look at new models we've discerned that it would be best for priests to live in community. This may include priests living in the same rectory at the same worship site, but it may mean priests serving in the same parish, working at different worship sites, and committing to communal life together (prayer, meals, etc.). It will depend on the parish and the priests' preferences.

#### 8. **Are we going to lose our priest?**

It is certainly possible that priests will be moved from their current assignment. Priests will be asked what their preferences are regarding parish assignments. We believe we have many amazing priests in the Diocese and want to put them in positions where they can flourish and the faithful can flourish with them.

**9. Will my local church close?**

The most evident solution to this realignment is that current parishes will be merged into larger parish structures but, crucially, that does not necessarily mean that your local church will close. Under these new parish structures, it is very possible that the parish would maintain multiple worship sites in order to accommodate parishioners and better evangelize through access to the sacraments.

**10. Will I have to drive far in order to get to Sunday Mass or parish events?**

The Realign Resources for Mission Committee will seek to ensure that nobody in the Diocese of Lansing is more than a 20-minute drive from a Catholic church. That's the ambition.

**11. If my parish is merged, what happens to our assets such as money in the bank? Does that go to the diocese?**

Assets and money from a parish follow the people. The Diocese does not take assets and money from a merged or closed parish.

**12. At the end of the day, what difference would I notice from being a parishioner in one of these new parishes?**

The goal of this realignment is to enable parishes to become a dynamic Catholic community that informs and inspires you to grow in personal holiness and enables you to fulfill your mission as a Christian disciple and, ultimately, to get to heaven. At the end of the day our goal is that you would be reinvigorated with hope, growing in your faith, and ready to give in love alongside a whole community of missionary disciples.

**13. When will all of this go into effect?**

The Committee will submit its recommendations to Bishop Boyea in April 2021. The Bishop will then decide which option best fits the mission and work out a timescale for implementation in consultation with others. So, no, there's not a timescale yet.

**14. Will we have a say on the final plans for our area?**

Yes. This initial parish meeting is primarily to talk about the Realign Resources for Mission vision and to offer the opportunity for the Committee to receive your feedback to incorporate into concrete proposals. The Committee will then return with those specific plans and seek further input at some point early next year. So, yes, you will have a say on final plans.

**15. What if I don't like the final proposal?**

The Realign Resources for Mission Committee fully shares many people's attachment to our present parishes which, for many of us, have sustained our families in the Catholic faith over many generations. However, they are also operating under the assumption that the people of the Diocese of Lansing are first and foremost members of the Body of Christ. Each of those members belongs to a specific parish, but that is secondary to their allegiance to Christ and His Church. As we move forward with any realignment we know that you are an integral part of the Body of Christ and desire to incorporate your specific gifts and talents into the mission of the Diocese. This may require sacrificing a connection to a specific parish, building, or structure.

**16. Who are the members of the Realign Resources for Mission Committee?**

The 14 members are: Tom Maloney, Superintendent of Catholic Schools, Diocese of Lansing; George Landolt, Chief Finance Officer, Diocese of Lansing; Stephen Nowaczewski, Saint

Joseph, Ypsilanti; Father Steve Mattson, Pastor, Church of the Resurrection, Lansing;  
Deacon Devon Wolfe, Saint Mary Magdalen, Brighton; Father Bob Bacik, Pastor, Saint  
Isidore, Laingsburg and Holy Family, Ovid; Pete Burak, Christ the King Parish, Ann Arbor;  
Teresa Witt, Saint Robert, Flushing; Father Jim Rolph, Chaplain, Powers High School, Flint;  
Abby Walls, Saint Mary, Pinckney; Father Mathias Thelen (Chair), Pastor, St Patrick, Brighton;  
Deborah Amato, Chief of Staff, Diocese of Lansing; Father Chas Canoy, Pastor, Saint John  
the Evangelist, Jackson; David Kerr, Director of Communications, Diocese of Lansing.