



Catholic Diocese of Sioux Falls

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Statement Concerning Pastoral Planning Following Clergy Days The Most Reverend Paul J. Swain

Every year the priests and deacons in our diocese come together for Clergy Days. It is a time for prayer, rest, fraternity, continuing education and diocesan business. I took the opportunity at Clergy Days this past week to consult with the clergy about the Planning Process which we began last year. Information on the Planning Process has been published in the *Bishops Bulletin* and is available on the diocesan webpage, including our Prayer for Pastoral Planning.

Our goals in planning are to assure that the sacraments are available regularly to all in the diocese, that solid faith formation is available to all, and that Catholics can come together in vibrant and viable parishes, while preserving the physical and spiritual well-being of priests. This is both a challenge and an opportunity. To do so will require change affecting all parishes in some way and the diocese as a whole. This change can lead to an even more unified and faith-filled Catholic presence in east river South Dakota.

We must face the realities of our time and plan for the future with hope. So I reviewed the demographic shifts taking place and the numbers of priests available for parish work both now and in the future. I also shared with the clergy a proposed vision for the future refined after regional meetings around the diocese. Also presented were several proposed ways of dealing with the practical realities to which we must respond. We had an open and candid discussion about strengths and weaknesses as well as the benefits and concerns about what was presented.

I am grateful for the honest and very helpful advice offered by our priests and deacons. I take their thoughts seriously and will reflect on and pray about them. It will certainly lead to some adjustments in the draft plans currently being studied.

There has been much speculation about how this proposed plan will affect individual parishes. This is understandable. I have asked the priests and deacons to allow me to present to you the details of any proposed plan and how we will seek your thoughts and reactions. Therefore, in the near future I will address all Catholics in our diocese in a pastoral letter and hold a number of area meetings to discuss and respond to questions about where we go from here. The process is being designed to assure that all can learn about what is being considered and why, and have the opportunity to comment and make suggestions before final decisions are made.

In the meantime let us pray for patience and charity. Let us pray also for our priests and deacons, and for increased vocations. May the Holy Spirit guide us and the Blessed Mother watch over us.