



CATHOLIC  
DIOCESE OF  
JEFFERSON CITY

*Serving Central  
and Northern  
Missouri*

# Diocesan Pastoral Plan Year Two Assessment

As the Diocese of Jefferson City enters the final year of “A Steward’s Journey: Our Call to Greater Communion,” the second year has been a time of change for all our parishes in the diocese. For many parishioners, being re-introduced to the stewardship way of life has enabled them to grow in their faith, although some have been challenged by the spirituality of stewardship, especially in regard to fund-raising.

The second year of the diocesan pastoral plan emphasized the transition of the diocese into a deeper commitment to the stewardship way of life: five of the eight components addressed during the second year relate to stewardship. Other components focused on lay leadership formation and works of mercy and charity.

## Stewardship renewal

The director and associate director of the Stewardship Office, Father Stephen Jones and Patricia Lutz, have led a major effort in implementing these components. As of Dec. 1, 2022, they estimate approximately 3,000 have attended presentations in 75 parishes, and Father Jones has preached at weekend liturgies in 58 parishes and missions. The remaining parishes will receive a weekend preaching visit from a deacon, and presentations in the remaining parishes will be finished by mid-January.

This work has resulted in 28 parishes that have transitioned into the stewardship renewal model as of July 1, 2022. The remaining 65 parishes and missions are in active preparation for their transition and will begin living the renewed stewardship model on July 1, 2023.

There are 49 parish stewardship councils. Many are in the initial training stage. A diocesan Stewardship Council has been formed, with two representatives from each of the five deaneries.

## Provide formation of lay ministry leaders in the parishes to empower works of charity and mercy

In addition to the formation of parish stewardship councils, parishes have also been able to utilize Chancery personnel in the formation and training of parish pastoral councils, parish finance councils and other leadership roles. The diocesan director of youth ministry has engaged parish personnel in a regular opportunity to meet and share resources and has created a strategic plan to upgrade the quality of the summer youth programs offered by the diocese. Parish personnel engaged in marriage preparation have received training on the new diocesan program, which includes four components and is available in English and Spanish.

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## **Develop a network of Catholic Charities Ambassadors, allowing parishes resources to provide for unmet needs within their parish territory**

Coordinating with the diocesan offices, Catholic Charities of Central and Northern Missouri has launched an opportunity for parishioners to serve as liaisons between Catholic Charities and their parish. The program will begin with deacons, who often serve as the primary point of contact for charitable efforts in their parish but looks to expand to other parishioners in the future. Furthermore, 15 parishes have received \$99,033 in distributions from the Catholic Charities parish charity and mercy grants.

## **Support parishes in their efforts to foster personal experiences of mercy, based on their assessments**

This component of the diocesan pastoral plan has not received significant attention, due in part to staffing changes at the Chancery. The ongoing universal Synod on Synodality may provide some insights in how our parishes could become more hospitable and welcoming to those seeking mercy, as well as the recently begun Shaping Our Future Together deanery planning process.

## **Improve communications for personal engagement in parishes by using unified digital information and communication systems**

The diocesan communication structure is gaining ground, despite a slight setback in 2022, in that there was not a fulltime person dedicated to serving the parish website network for the first six months. There are 45 parishes actively using the system.

As parishes convert to the complete stewardship model and discover the diocesan communication system is an effective means of gathering parishioners' time and talent information, there is an increased interest by parish staff and ministry leaders to record parishioners' tithing in the system. This requires parish staff to utilize not only the website functionality, but also two other modules provided by Blackbaud: the Raiser's Edge database software and the Merchant Services online financial processing (for credit card and direct debit, or ACH payment).

## **Updates/reviews of parish pastoral plan**

While parishes are moving deeper into the stewardship way of life, many are also focusing on their parish pastoral plan. Some of the highlights from updates and reviews received in the Chancery include:

- Parishes are recognizing the need to hire competent lay personnel, most notably in the areas of volunteer coordination and youth ministry.
- Some are experiencing weak implementation. This could be due to the lack of defining what implementation looks like. As an example, one implementation

strategy offered was to “use the soup kitchen and Lenten fish fries as an opportunity to evangelize.” When an action lacks clarity, it is difficult to define or even celebrate progress. Others recognize there is an ongoing need for deeper commitment from parishioners, even as they acknowledge families (especially those with children at home) have greater demands on their time.

- Other parish reviews explained that the parish is limited due to the sheer number of parishioners available. Like many other rural dioceses, the Diocese of Jefferson City has a preponderance of smaller parishes. Only 11 parishes have more than 800 registered households, and 82% of the parishes have less than 43% of the diocese’s total parish households.

The effort to launch programs and services by smaller parishes is daunting for many. Some are finding success in collaborative efforts with other parishes, and with ministerial alliances in their communities and counties. (This is a point of action for the third year of the diocesan pastoral plan.)

- Some parishes are building on the rural nature of their communities. One example is St. Peter in Marshall, which donated nearly 2,000 pounds of fresh produce from its community garden to the Marshall Food Pantry in 2022.
- Others are recognizing the need to increase engagement of Spanish-speaking parishioners and finding ways to welcome Catholics from a larger region, as smaller parishes determine the value in collaborating more closely for liturgies, faith formation and charity work.

These insights must be understood against the larger context of engagement. Since 2017, the number of registered households has declined steadily; there are three percent fewer registered households at the end of 2021 than in 2017.

In a report compiled by the vicar general, at the end of 2021 only ten parishes had returned to pre-pandemic numbers for Mass attendance. This continues a long-term decline in participation in the sacraments, including the Sunday Mass. Younger Catholics especially are underrepresented, mirroring a trend in the United States not just in the Catholic Church, but across all faiths. One polling agency reported that in the last decade, the percentage of millennials who claim no religious affiliation grew from 27% to 40%.

Despite these trends, there continues to be a longing expressed by many people for the ability to become more engaged with their parish. One very compelling example of this is the results of a survey sent to the women of the diocese in May and June 2022.

There were 605 individual responses, representing individuals from 75 parishes throughout the diocese. The overall theme, represented in responses to a variety of questions, could be described as “a yearning for space.” Comments reflected feeling lost, yearning for connections with other women, laments of searching for groups to connect with, and a desire to find a space of support and acceptance. There were some participants who felt they are very well connected to their parish who expressed

a desire to connect and help others, but they were not the majority. More often survey asked how they could get involved, if there a place for them in the diocese, how they could find authentic connections or a good space to foster fellowship, etc.

Based on discussions with the Diocesan Pastoral Council, Bishop McKnight has determined the need to add a component to the third year of the Diocesan Pastoral Plan: "Identify a coalition of parishes in each deanery to promote best practices in Women's Ministry."

Other components of year three are receiving attention and action. They are:

- Implement diocesan-wide Catholic Stewardship Renewal
- Ongoing consultation of laity regarding opportunities for better collaboration of clergy, lay ecclesial ministers and other resources to strengthen parish life, which is the focus of the Shaping Our Future Together deanery planning process
- Network with neighboring parishes and/or not-for-profits within the wider area to ensure all unmet needs are met