

The Need to Rightsize and Reshape the Diocese of Buffalo



May 28, 2024

Context

The diocese faces multiple critical challenges:

- Financial strain due to Chapter 11
- A significant Priest shortage
- Excess property maintenance
- Declining Mass attendance
- Average parish congregation
 - *Approx. 60% is over 66 years of age*
 - *Only 9-12% younger members.*



Consolidation of Parishes

The recommendations that are coming at the vicariate meetings project the following:

2024 total parish = 160

34% reduction in parishes

2024 total worship sites = 196

Projected total parishes = 106

38% reduction in worship sites

Projected worship sites = 121



Key Insight Categories Analyzed

Parish Demographics

Where does this data come from?

Financial Contributions

- Year end sacramental reports submitted to the Diocese

Sacramental Participation

- Year end financial reports submitted to the Diocese

Vicariate / Regional Variations

Urban

- Poverty, public transportation, age, limited resources and staff

Suburban

- Availability of retired clergy, staffing and resources, proximity

Rural

- Poverty, mileage, limited resources and staff

Where does this data come from?

- Census data
- Demographic data
- Mapping data



Parish Demographics – *Snapshots*

- Out of 160 Parishes,
 - **49%** report a *decline* in Registered Households
 - **39%** report an *increase*.
 - **12%** reported that they remained the **same**.
- Similarly, **53%** of parishes report a *decline* in Contributing Households,
... indicating **decreasing** engagement.



Registered vs. Contributing Households

- **Registered Households** tells us basic info
 - Family registered with a parish for some reason – receiving a sacrament, moved into parish
 - Registered households are not indicators of participation
- **Contributing Households**
 - Indicate parish *activity through support*
 - Indicate *engaged* parishioners on varied levels
 - Gives completely different picture of a parish's engagement
 - Difference between Registered Households vs Contributing Households gives a *litmus test of how well parishes engage families in the mission of the church*



Parish A Example

- Registered Households 5,647
- Contributing Households 868
- **15.4% Engagement Rate**
- This tells us the parish has *poor engagement of their parishioners*.
 - People register for sacramental participation and then walk away from the parish until the next sacrament is needed.
- Parish *does not update their census data*, poor record keeping management



Parish B Example

- Registered Households 1,137
- Contributing Households 1,120
- **98.5% Engagement Rate**
 - Tells us there is *high engagement of parishioners in this parish.*
 - *Retention* of parishioners is *very good.*
 - *Accurate record keeping* for good data and real picture of parish activity.



Example

the lower %'s indicate *less* correlation between R-Hs & C-Hs

Notice the geographical tendencies

Vicariate	Family	(%) Contributing Households / Registered Households
Buffalo	20	50%
	23	53%
Genesee-Wyoming	6	71%
	14	62%
Niagara Orleans	10	71%
	35	62%
Northern Erie	16	53%
	19	47%
Southern Erie	7	38%
	9	51%
Southern Tier East	1	75%
	24	73%
Southern Tier West	3	64%
	5	73%



Financial Contributions – *Snapshots*

39% of parishes have ***less than 50%*** of Registered Households contributing

33% of parishes show a ***declining*** contribution level.

59% of parishes report a ***negative*** Net Operating Balance trend.



Baptismal Participation

Sacramental activities show concerning trends:

- 52% of parishes celebrate an average of *less than one* Baptism/month
- 59% of parishes currently experiencing a *steady decline in Baptisms*.



Vicariate Variations

Snapshots



Buffalo Vicariate - *Snapshots*

- 68.8% of Registered Households *declining*
- 65.6% of Contributing Households are *declining*.
- 75% of parishes have *declining Contributions*
- 47% report a *negative* Net Operating Balance



Southern Erie & Northern Erie Vicariates - *Snapshots*

- Both report high ***declines*** in contributing households
 - ***(72.4% and 72% respectively)***
- Both have a significant number of parishes ***(75.9% and 76%)***
 - With ***less than monthly Baptisms.***



Southern Tier East and West - *Snapshots*

- Notably, **0%** of parishes in these regions report a ***decline*** in Registered or Contributing Households.
- However, they do show ***substantial operational challenges*** with a high percentage of parishes having ***negative*** Net Balances (***63% and 71%***).





What does this mean for us?

- Family and Parish Consolidation:
 - Merge Families and Parishes with significant unsustainable declines by optimizing all resource use to re-establish and maintain vibrant communities.
- Property:
 - Reduce inventory of underutilized properties to fund financial obligations and reduce week-to-week maintenance costs.



Mission vs. Maintenance

- Our parishes are so focused on survival with diminishment all around, *mission has been sacrificed for maintenance.*



Mission vs. Maintenance

Engagement Efforts:

- *Immediate* development of highly targeted efforts to solidify, secure and increase the engagement of the current younger congregation (*i.e. Alpha, Christ Life, Welcome, Divine Renovation, Rebuilt, Acts XXIX*)
- This will *improve and safeguard* requisite financial contributions.



Mission vs. Maintenance

Support for Priests:

- Implement initiatives to *enhance the presbyteral culture*, including support for current clergy and promoting future vocations.



Immediate Next Steps



- Vicariate meetings will take place between **June 3 – 14**; recommendations will be shared at your vicariate meetings.
- All clergy and Family Leadership teams (Trustees) *are invited to attend*
- Recommendations from Diocese will be *shared at Vicariate Meeting* on mergers and closures



Immediate Next Steps



- After the Vicariate Meeting – families will have a chance to review recommendations and either sign off that they agree with recommendations or submit a counter proposal to consider **by July 15**.
- If a counterproposal is offered, a meeting **between July 15 – August 23** will be setup with Renewal team to present proposal and approval of a plan.



Finalized Announcements

Projected to happen by September 1

