

Pastorate planning focuses on mission priorities

**By Christopher Guntz
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When Archbishop William E. Lori issued his first pastoral letter, “A Light Brightly Visible,” on Pentecost 2015, he challenged the Archdiocese of Baltimore to make evangelization the foundation for ministry and encouraged Catholics to become missionary disciples who could bring others to know Christ.

Parish planning in the archdiocese works within that framework. As parishes have been formed into “pastorates” - one or more parishes under the leadership of a single pastor and leadership team - they focus on the six mission priorities the archbishop laid out in his pastoral: liturgy, welcome, encounter, accompaniment, sending and mission support.

Over the past 18 months, nine pilot pastorates and eight Phase IA pastorates have taken Archbishop Lori’s pastoral letter and Pope Francis’ words in “Evangelii Gaudium” (“The Joy of the Gospel”) to heart, considering what it means to be a pastorate that is “suitably channeled for the evangelization of today’s world rather than for her self-preservation” (EG, 27) and rethinking the “goals, structures, style and methods of evangelization in their respective communities” (EG, 33), according to an update issued by the archdiocesan Office of Pastoral Planning.

“Every pastorate can address significant issues that could become obstacles for the planning process,” the planning updates says. “These could be issues of faith and formation, as well as issues related to buildings, finances, leadership or staffing.” In

addition to the planning office, the departments of Management Services and Human Resources at the Catholic Center can provide support to pastorates facing such concerns.

The pastorate planning process is not intended to lead always to the consolidation of parishes or the closure of churches, although some of the pastorates may ultimately choose to petition the archbishop for such permission if it supports evangelization through better liturgies and facilities use.

For example, in the pilot pastorate of St. Brigid, St. Casimir and St. Elizabeth of Hungary, the pastorate team and archdiocesan planning team completed an initial review of conditions in the pastorate. The pastorate team and the pastor, Conventual Franciscan Father Dennis Grumsey, determined the need to reduce from three to two worship sites. Bishop Denis J. Madden celebrated the final Mass at St. Brigid in Canton Feb. 2.

“Declining numbers led to the final liturgy,” said Father Grumsey, who became pastor of St. Brigid in spring 2017, when it was combined with St. Casimir in Canton and St. Elizabeth of Hungary in Highlandtown in the pilot phase of the Archdiocese of Baltimore’s pastorate plan.

Three-tenths of a mile and O’Donnell Square separate St. Brigid and St. Casimir. One weekend in January, attendance for St. Brigid’s 4 p.m. Saturday vigil, its only liturgy, was 40 adults.

A combined pastoral council with representatives from each of the three parishes has begun meeting and has five three-hour meetings scheduled, with Julie St. Croix from the Office of Pastoral Planning assisting with the process.

Another Urban Vicariate pilot pastorate – St. Anthony of Padua, Gardenville; Most Precious Blood, Baltimore; and St. Dominic, Hamilton – has crafted a vision for a

Year of Engagement in the pastorate, focused around intentional moments of discipleship.

The pastorate has also consolidated the office and administrative functions into one office at St. Anthony of Padua and combined the finance committees to augment and support a combined pastoral council. It also adopted a new name “The Epiphany Pastorate of St. Anthony, St. Dominic and Most Precious Blood” to signify unity in a diverse immigrant community.

In Anne Arundel County, Our Lady of the Chesapeake, Lake Shore, and St. Jane Frances de Chantal, Pasadena, have been formed but not yet activated as a pastorate.* Father Stephen Hook, pastor, said the two parish staffs recently came together for the first time to get the ball rolling.

“The parishes are different in their ecclesiastic approaches and practices,” he said. “There is little uniformity in religious education, confirmation prep or liturgy.”

He doesn’t see any insurmountable issues in eventually combining programs within the pastorate, although there are currently no joint programs.

“The idea of beginning to open lines of communication is so important. Because it’s so new, obviously, people are afraid of the unknown,” Father Hook said.

In Howard County, Father Erik Arnold shepherded Our Lady of Perpetual Help through the beginning of the process as a single-parish pastorate. He will be transferred July 1 to St. John the Evangelist in Severna Park, another single-parish pastorate.

He said one of the great dangers in the pastorate plan is thinking this doesn’t apply to single parishes. “A single parish could sit on the sideline, but as Archbishop Lori has told us, we have to look at all of this in the context of evangelization. How do we

remain faithful to the mission?”

Although 17 pastorates have been activated so far, others have been designated for eventual cooperation and still more have been formed, that is, their ultimate configuration (as identified in the Be Missionary Disciples Archdiocesan Plan, issued in 2017) is reached, usually through the appointment of a single pastor.

The Office of Pastoral Planning provides support and facilitation to the pastorates that have been activated and encourages staff and parishioners of pastorates awaiting activation to prepare by “offering opportunities to continue formation on missionary discipleship and the core mission priorities in order to lay a good foundation for pastorate planning.”

For more information, visit bemissionarydisciples.org.

** Updated May 22, 2019, 11:40 a.m., to correctly reflect the status of the pastorate for Our Lady of the Chesapeake and St. Jane Frances de Chantal.*