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DIOCESE ANNOUNCES THREE YEAR PARISH REORGANIZATION PLAN

January 23, 2011—Toledo, OH—A three year parish reorganization plan that will affect 13 parishes throughout the diocese this year and potentially 20 parishes in years 2012 and 2013 is set to begin on July 1, 2011.

Jason Shanks, leader of the Evangelization and Parish Life Secretariat and director of the Office of Pastoral Planning, said the majority of the reorganization involves twinning parishes or clustering them in a way that one priest is assigned to more than one parish. Assignments of parish managers and pastoral leaders are also included in the new plan.

Shanks added that in addition to fewer priests, parish financial viability, mass attendance, population trends, location, facility size, cultural diversity and how a parish could remain intact and stable were considered in the reorganization. Using a combination of projections from the 2005 diocesan *Faith and Futures* study, the number of expected retirements, clergy health and other factors, the estimates of six fewer priests in 2011 and a total shortage of 12 priests by 2013 are accurate. “We need to reorganize ourselves to have 12 fewer priests and maintain a community life with a sacramental presence” Shanks said.

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Bishop Leonard Blair, who in 2005 acted on a plan that had been in preparation for several years under Bishop Hoffman says about the three year plan, “the determination of ‘what and when’ depend chiefly on the number of priests retiring and the number of priests ordained-as well as unanticipated illnesses and the unanticipated arrival of priests.”

According to Shanks, the decisions on the parish reorganization plan came from a consultative process that started in September 2010. The Pastoral Planning office presented deaneries (regions of the diocese) with recommendations and asked for feedback and other ideas. “Many of the final plans-in fact more than half, were suggested by people in the deaneries”, Shanks says. The reorganization plan was then submitted to the Bishop’s Cabinet for consultation, and after making final decisions Bishop Blair personally met with all of the pastors affected this year on January 18, and the Office of Pastoral Planning notified all those pastors affected in 2012 and 2013. Parishioners of all parishes in the multi year plan were notified at Masses on January 22 and 23. The January 23 issue of the *Catholic Chronicle*, its website, and the diocesan website were also used to notify the people of the diocese.

Despite the current situation of fewer priests, Bishop Blair writes in his letters to the parishes, “I am happy to report that we are currently blessed with twenty-two seminarians, and I am confident that with your encouragement and prayers vocations to the priesthood will grow in our diocese.”

The Diocese of Toledo, established April 15, 1910 encompasses 8222 square miles in a mixture of urban and rural areas that spans 19 counties across Northwest Ohio, serving 322,523 Catholics in 127 parishes. The diocese includes Allen, Crawford, Defiance, Erie, Fulton, Hancock, Henry, Huron, Lucas, Ottawa, Paulding, Putnam, Richland, Sandusky, Seneca, and Van Wert, Williams, Wood and Wyandot counties.

