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90% of parishes will remain

Archdiocese of Saint Paul and Minneapolis Announces Strategic Plan

Saint Paul, MN, October 16, 2010 -- Worshippers at all Masses this weekend are learning about the Archdiocese of Saint Paul and Minneapolis' Strategic Plan that shapes the vision for the future of the local Church and restructures parishes to foster a more vibrant faith community. The plan is intended to ensure the Church's continued vitality for the 800,000 Catholics in the 12 county area it serves. The Strategic Plan is the result of 20 months of study and consultation, that includes the input of thousands of people from across the Archdiocese -- pastors and other clergy, parish and Catholic school leaders and staff, parishioners and Catholic school families. A 16 member Strategic Planning Task Force comprised of clergy, religious, and lay members was charged with gathering and analyzing this input as well as demographic and other data and formulating recommendations to the Archbishop.

The Strategic Plan calls for 21 parishes to be merged into 14 receiving parishes. The net effect of the changes, after implementation of all the announced mergers, is a total of 192 remaining parishes compared to the current number of 213 parishes. Decisions regarding buildings and other property of the merging parishes will be made by local leaders in consultation with the Archbishop and Presbyteral Council, a representative body of priests. There is an appeals process for parish mergers, which is described at <http://planning.archspm.org/> as well as in the printed materials distributed at all parishes this weekend.

In addition, 33 parishes will join together in new cluster configurations, in which one pastor leads two or more parishes. (25% of parishes within the Archdiocese already share a pastor.)

Finally, 25 parishes are identified for structured collaboration, meaning that in the coming year they will have focused discussions about how to improve collaboration on programming and staffing.

Catholic schools within the Archdiocese were also a major area of study and evaluation by the task force. This evaluation continues under the Strategic Plan with the assistance of a national consulting group. The consultants will evaluate the information gathered by the task force in light of best practices and solutions which have achieved success nationally.

Under the plan, all Catholic Schools will engage in ongoing evaluation of sustainability. Those schools determined to have questionable sustainability potential will be given a period of time to develop a realistic improvement plan. Ultimately, pastors, principals and other local leaders will decide whether a given school is sustainable. The Archdiocese will provide special support to certain schools because they are a presence of the Church in a key geographic area or because they serve the poor by providing the opportunity of a Catholic education. The Archdiocese's historic commitment to disadvantaged children will continue.

Among the basic principles that Archbishop John C. Nienstedt established at the outset of the planning process was a stipulation that special concern be given in the planning process for "the poor, the

marginalized, and the immigrant.” Nienstedt also directed that “full worship and sacramental ministry be available to every Catholic in all geographic areas of the Archdiocese. “

“This Strategic Plan has been developed with great care and study, with prayerful contemplation, and with enormous participation by and consultation with people from across the Archdiocese,” Nienstedt said. “Its goal has been to foster a revitalized and sustainable local Church that is responsive to the pastoral needs of all our brothers and sisters in Christ now and in the future.”

Archbishop Nienstedt acknowledges that the changes may be challenging for some people to embrace. “Please know of my personal concern and prayers for members of this local Church who will eventually suffer the loss of a beloved parish home, or parish and for Catholic school employees who are worried about losing their jobs and others deeply impacted by these changes.” The Archbishop added, “I am hopeful that upon reflection everyone in the Archdiocese will see the long-range benefits that these changes will bring and I respectfully ask for your acceptance and understanding.”

Forces driving the strategic restructuring announced today include: changing demographics; the concentration of too many parish churches and school buildings in close proximity in certain neighborhoods; the age and condition of some buildings; the number of clergy available to meet existing and future parish pastoral needs. The shrinking of the school age population is also a challenge for Catholic schools; one public schools also face. Similar factors to those facing the Archdiocese have led many other dioceses as well as public institutions to restructure in recent years.

Pastors, lay leaders, and parishioners at affected parishes will begin meeting this month to find out more about how the changes under the plan will affect them. However, no structural changes will be implemented until early next year. Changes will roll out over the following months and years. The changes will not all happen at the same time. Archdiocesan staff will assist parishes during this transition period.

The Archdiocese’s Offices of Schools staff will provide direction and assistance to individual schools undergoing sustainability review. All schools will continue to operate through the current school year.

EDITOR’S NOTE: A full copy of the reorganization document announced today can be found on the Archdiocese’s web site: planning.archspm.org. You will also find questions and answers and other information on the website.

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