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DIOCESE OF ERIE

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8.29.23

Diocese unveils preliminary plan for parish restructuring in Erie County

At a meeting held for pastors and leaders of parishes in Erie County Aug. 29, the Most Rev. Lawrence T. Persico, bishop of Erie, released the long-awaited preliminary plan for parish restructuring in Erie County. The initiative is part of the Catholic diocese's commitment to ongoing planning, responding to a number of factors including the significant drop in Mass attendance as well as population, and the decreasing number of clergy available to staff parishes.

"We are doing what we need to do," Bishop Persico said, "not necessarily what we would like to do. But as we take on another formal round of parish restructuring, our goal is to create parish communities that are vibrant, life-giving places of worship, places where people find encouragement and hope as they grow in their relationship with Christ, his church and each other."

Emphasizing the fact that the plan is a preliminary plan, Bishop Persico asked those present to bring it back to their parishes for consideration and discussion. All parishioners are invited to fill out a survey offering feedback on the plan, including constructive ways to improve it if they have concerns.

The bishop also laid out a timeline for implementing the plan. Responses, including an official response from each parish, are due September 29. After

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reviewing the feedback and incorporating changes to improve it, Bishop Persico will bring the first draft of the final plan to the Priest Council, made up of elected and appointed priests from across the diocese. Following church law, the council, which will meet in late November, will weigh in on the plan.

Bishop Persico said it is possible the Priest Council may want to refine the plan further, and so, allowing for time to give the proper attention to the Advent and Christmas seasons, he plans to review it with members again in early 2024.

In light of three letters from the bishop that were read at parishes in Erie County this summer — an effort to educate and prepare Catholics for the plan — Bishop Persico acknowledged some parishioners would like to see things move forward sooner.

“I am hopeful the preliminary plan will give people a good sense of what the future may hold,” he said. “I am far more interested in doing things thoughtfully and correctly than I am in doing them quickly.” Given the complexities involved with merging and partnering parishes, including restructuring finances, evaluating buildings, changing clergy assignments and more, Bishop Persico said he expects to announce the final plan for parishes in Erie County in April of 2024, with implementation scheduled for mid-summer 2024.

The preliminary plan for the parishes in Erie County, as well as a pastoral letter about planning and copies of the three letters that were read in Erie County parishes this summer, all can be found at www.ErieRCD.org/planning.html. The same site includes a link to the online survey parishioners can use to offer their feedback.

The Diocese of Erie also will announce final plans for restructuring parishes in the Bradford, Clearfield and Oil City regions this fall.

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