

# 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*

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

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

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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*

