

Diocese of Steubenville 75th Anniversary and 2020 Pastoral Plan Preparation

*This is the day the Lord has made;
let us rejoice and be glad in it. (Psalm 118:24)*

Diocesan 7th Anniversary

On the 21st day of October in 1944, the Venerable Pope Pius XII established the Diocese of Steubenville. On both Friday October 18th and Friday October 25th we will celebrate the opening of the Diocesan 75th Anniversary with the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass at St. Peter Church in Steubenville and the Basilica of St. Mary of the Assumption in Marietta, respectively.

May we recall that the establishment of the Diocese of Steubenville cannot be reduced to the redefinition of 1944 diocesan boundaries between Steubenville, Columbus, and Youngstown. The universal Church is not a passing accident in human history. The Church is exponentially more than a gathering of same-faith individuals. In fact, our local Church is part of a larger reality that the Catholic Church is a necessary divine initiative, intended by Jesus Christ himself for humanity's salvation. We are part of God's divine plan of salvation.

Over the course of the year we will have a number of occasions that will celebrate the anniversary, from services to pilgrimages. It is my hope you will be able to partake in one, many, or all of the anniversary events.

Pastoral Plan Preparation

In 2017 an *ad hoc* committee of laypeople, religious, and clergy provided assistance in the determination of pressing diocesan needs. This was further strengthened by a survey shared with diocesan households in which a remarkable 23% responded to the questionnaire. The following are the four priorities articulated in these initiatives.

- ***Reach out more effectively to our youth and young adults.*** We do this by enabling our younger brothers and sisters to remain involved or to become more active in their faith. We do this by assisting the young to deepen their encounter with the Lord or to assist them on their return to active participation.

- ***Strengthen our Catholic schools and religious education programs.*** We do this by taking inventory of what we do have and then evaluate the strengths and the weaknesses. The goal of a school should go beyond solvency, or the ability to remain open, but to ensure that the graduates live and share the joy of the Catholic faith.

- ***Assist our clergy.*** The survey participants shared an overwhelming love for our clergy. The responders also recognized that the clergy cannot “go it alone” and need collaborators in service from parishioners. This will require more than training. We will need more people to step forward into leadership and supporting roles.

- ***Provide additional formation to the parish community.*** Ongoing faith formation for young, as well as the not-so-young, is vital to the spiritual growth of any community of faith. A growth in numbers provides a parish with additional resources, but a decline in numbers does not exempt a parish from deepening its encounter with Jesus Christ.

While work and time has been invested at varying degrees to the above goals, it has become obvious a new pastoral plan should be envisioned all the while employing the above four priorities. The Diocesan Pastoral Plan of 2009 was the result of extensive consultation throughout our diocese, it seems to me the 2020 plan can utilize this plan as a “starting point” or “springboard” in the application of our pastoral trajectory.

This being said, deanery pastoral teams will be established representing the four deaneries in our diocese. In order to have proper lay representation in this endeavor, each pastor in the diocese will be asked to have one layperson accompany him to the deanery pastoral plan meetings. I encourage our pastors and the parish councils to evaluate extensively the parish needs and parish outreach. This includes the number of Masses each weekday and weekend our priests celebrate in the diocese. Monthly deanery meetings of the pastoral teams will assist in the determination how modifications to the 2009 may or may not be employed. A monthly diocesan pastoral plan meeting will be conducted and it is my hope the proper technology can be utilized *all* may attend each meeting, personally or electronically.

To not place an “end date” on this initiative invites delay and the 2020 Pastoral Plan becomes the “2025” Plan. That would be a disservice to all. While it may seem somewhat ambitious, I believe we can have the necessary recommendations ready by the Easter Season of 2020. Furthermore, implementation of such recommendations may not be required immediately, but the crucial pastoral provisions will have been publically stated so that all are familiar with the objectives and goals.

May God bless you and your family as we embark into our Diocesan 75th Anniversary celebrating our Lord’s enduring love and compassion.