



Communities of the Christian Faithful
A Pastoral Letter on Parish Life in the Diocese of Fargo



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**Feast of St. James the Greater
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Reference Documents

AA - *Apostolicam Actuositatem*. Vatican II Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity. (November 18, 1965).

CCC - *Catechism of the Catholic Church- 2nd Edition*. Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference, 1997.

CD - *Christus Dominus*. Vatican II Decree Concerning the Pastoral Office of Bishops in the Church. (October 28, 1965).

CIC - *Code of Canon Law*. Washington, DC: Canon Law Society of America, 1983.

SC - *Sacrosanctum Concilium*. Vatican II Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy. (December 4, 1963).

Vatican II documents may be accessed at:

http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/index.htm

One hardcopy source for Vatican II documents is *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents, New Revised Edition* edited by Austin Flannery, OP, copyright 1992, Costello Publishing Company, Inc., Northport, NY.

The *Code of Canon Law* may be accessed at:

<http://www.intratext.com/X/ENG0017.htm>

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* may be accessed at:

<http://www.usccb.org/catechism/text/>

I. Introduction

1. My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, one of the great joys of my life as the Bishop of Fargo during this past year has been the opportunity to visit many of the parishes throughout the diocese. On these occasions, I have had a chance to speak with you about parish life in a rural diocese. I am impressed with your strong faith, beautiful families and hospitality. Your faith through the past generations clearly has been instrumental in building up the parishes and community life in North Dakota. At the same time, I am also impressed with the reality of the challenges of life in eastern North Dakota and the realism of you, the faithful, in facing those difficulties. In particular, I have heard concerns from both clergy and laity about parish life and the need to examine our parishes. Both the Diocesan Pastoral Council, an advisory group of laity and priests, and the deans, priests who oversee the nine regions of the diocese, have supported the idea that we enter into a year-long period of prayer, study and reflection on our parish structures. I, as your bishop, have decided, for the good of the diocese, to move ahead with this project.
2. Parishes in the Diocese of Fargo strive to meet the needs of the faithful for sacraments, for education in faith and for a communal life of prayer. Our rural parishes served more populous communities in the past. Our parents, grandparents and great-grandparents made, and continue to make, very real sacrifices to build and maintain our beautiful rural churches. These churches were established every few miles, so that people could travel by horse or sled to get to Mass. One of our priests shared with me how, in the winter, his family would travel ten miles to Mass on a horse drawn sled. I am sure there are countless other stories like his. Our ancestors' love for and faith in the Eucharistic Liturgy was revealed in the sacrifices made to participate in Mass.
3. Yet, in recent times, declining or shifting population has made the task of proclaiming the Gospel more difficult. Our parish structures have not been modified in response to the radical demographic changes which have occurred over the past five decades. Parishes which were vibrant decades ago no longer have the population to sustain them. As each parish strives to educate both young and old in the faith, challenges have arisen with respect to providing students with a thriving educational program. At times, the financial viability of some of our parishes has been called into question as a result of our changing economic landscape. In some instances, parishes with an aging population and few younger

members are faced with the question of how to remain an active faith community with reduced human and financial resources.

4. In addition, the number of priests available to serve the many needs of our Catholic families is declining. The pastoral responsibilities we must meet include: staffing 158 parishes; serving as hospital chaplains; working as educators at Cardinal Muench Seminary; and staffing other special ministries.

Appendix I is a Priests Statistical Chart which demonstrates the challenges we will face in the future with our priest personnel. As a diocese we are dependent on priests who come to serve the faithful from outside our diocese, both from within the United States and from foreign countries, as well as religious order priests. We will have a number of priests retire over the next 10 years, which will also impact the availability of priests. We also are finding that some of our parish communities are so small that they require the presence of the priest only on weekends, for the celebration of the sacraments, and on Wednesdays for the religious education programs. Due to the changes in parish populations and the number of priests available to serve, we need to examine the distribution of our priests for the good of the laity and of the priests.

5. Once again, I am impressed with the realism of the laity and clergy in dealing with these concerns of parish life. One parish member, who realized that his parish was not going to be viable in the long term, asked me if it could be allowed to remain open into 2005. They want to celebrate their 100th anniversary, and then close as they celebrate, remembering the many years the faith has been lived in the parish.

6. In another parish, a pastor told me recently of how his servers' families drove 20 miles to serve Mass for five parishioners, and then drove back to the central parish town where they lived. While it is a noble sacrifice to celebrate liturgy in the smaller community, we cannot ask our servers, priests or others involved with the Mass to travel such a distance when so few attend.

7. Some of our parishes have not had a baptism in seven years. In others, the vast majority of parishioners are over the age of 70. One of our rural Catholic hospitals averaged 250 births a year in the 1950s, while today it averages 20 to 25 births. Another parish once had 600 plus members. Now they

have less than 50 members. When one projects those numbers out for another decade or two, one can see the radical changes which will occur in our rural areas.

8. Of course, discussions of parish life, redefinition, clustering or consolidation are not easy, even when faced with the demographic changes of the last 50 years. One 85-year-old man said to me, with a twinkle in his eye, "Bishop, why don't you leave our parish open for another five years? I will be dead by then, and it will not matter." He smiled when he said it, but also realized that the parish would eventually need to close. No member of a parish is likely to be happy that their parish will close, even if they believe it is for the best. Yet, at the same time, we know that these concerns must be addressed.

II. Purpose of Pastoral Letter

9. My hope is that this pastoral letter will encourage the freedom to struggle with the question of how to best arrange and manage parishes within the Diocese of Fargo for the good of all. I will first reflect with you on how the Church views a parish. I will then examine the experience of parish life in North Dakota. Next, I will look at the demographic changes which have occurred in our diocese. After discussing the demographic changes, I will outline a process for each parish and deanery to use for examining their parish life. Finally, I will look at the criteria for discussing various concerns in consolidation, and the matter of grief and remembrance for those times when it is necessary to close a parish or institution within the diocese.

10. The ultimate question we seek to answer is this: "What should our parish life and organization look like in order to best preach and celebrate the Gospel of Jesus Christ?" This question is important and necessary for both smaller, rural parishes and large city parishes. While demographics and economics play a part in answering the question and cannot be realistically ignored, they are not the sole or even primary criteria.

11. Each parish must examine and question its organizational effectiveness in service to the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the living out of our Catholic faith. Areas which must be reflected upon include the call to evangelize our culture in new and different ways - the New Evangelization; the need for a comprehensive program of K-12 religious education and adult faith formation; changes in our

sacramental preparation for Reconciliation, Confirmation and Eucharist which affect our educational models; the needs of the elderly; and the ongoing need for pastoral charity to many diverse groups and individuals in the parish. In order to begin this process, we need to know the Church's understanding of parish life.

III. Parish Life - Church Teaching

12. The Church's understanding of what a *parish* is may be summarized in one short sentence: "The parish exists solely for the good of souls (*Christus Dominus*, CD, 30)." This description is short, but it has many implications. If the organization, boundaries, methods and/or arrangements of any parish or grouping of parishes are not primarily concerned with the good of souls, they must be re-examined.

13. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC) echoes the *Code of Canon Law* (CIC) in defining a *parish* as a "definite community of the Christian faithful established on a stable basis within a particular Church (CIC, 515; CCC, 2179)." The first element of this definition is a "definite community of the Christian faithful." Commentaries on the *Code of Canon Law* point out that the definition, in light of the teachings of Vatican II, places emphasis on the parish as a community of the faithful in a relationship within the diocese and the universal Church. This manner of defining a parish moves the understanding more toward a community of the faithful, and away from a more structural, institutional or territorial definition of parish. Structures and institutions are necessary, of course, but again, in relation to the primary "good of souls" a parish is understood as a community of the faithful within a particular diocese.

14. The parish community is both "within a particular church," a diocese, and "within the universal Church." A fundamental insight of Vatican II is the understanding that the universal Church is made up of particular Churches, or dioceses, under the authority of bishops, successors to the apostles. Central to the teachings of Vatican II about parishes is the understanding of a parish as a specific part of one diocesan Church (*Apostolicam Actuositatem*, AA, 10; CD, 30; *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, SC, 42). Our 158 parishes belong in our Church of Fargo. Each parish exists, as a faith community, with respect to its bishop. An essential part, both of parish life and the ministry of the pastor, is to live in communion and relationship with the local Church and her bishop.

15. Finally, once a parish is understood as "for the good of souls" and as "a community of the Christian faithful" in a particular relationship to the local diocese and to the universal Church, the parish

may be examined in light of its functions. The *Catechism* lists three areas of particular importance to a parish: 1) liturgy, 2) teaching, and 3) charity. “The parish initiates the Christian people into the ordinary expression of liturgical life: it gathers them together in this celebration; it teaches Christ's saving doctrine; it practices the charity of the Lord in good works and brotherly love (CCC, 2179).” These three areas may be spoken of with various terms: liturgy, sacraments, worship, teaching, catechesis, faith formation, charity, community life, etc. These elements are at the heart of what it means to be a viable parish.

16. Parish life is more than “where two or three are gathered in the Lord's name (Matthew 18:20).” St. John Chrysostom, who lived in the 300s and is one of the Greek Fathers of the Church, writes, “You cannot pray at home as at church, where there is a great multitude, where exclamations are cried out to God as from one great heart, and where there is something more: the union of minds, the accord of souls, the bond of charity, the prayer of priests.”¹

IV. The Experience of Parish Life in North Dakota

17. St. John Chrysostom’s description of parish church life has been demonstrated in countless ways throughout the history of North Dakota and the Diocese of Fargo. Our parishes were built in response to requests from immigrants and native peoples who gathered with a circuit riding priest to celebrate Mass. The “community of the faithful” assisted families in the daily living out of their faith. Spring dinners and fall festivals, religious education programs, planting and harvesting bees, and funeral lunches brought families together and formed our towns and parishes.

18. Numerous religious communities of men and women helped to staff our parishes throughout our history. The Benedictine monks and sisters served in many of our parishes with a special outreach to the Native American population, a mission now served by the Society of Our Lady of the Most Holy Trinity. Religious women from the Sisters of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Sisters of St. Francis of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, Sisters of Mary of the Presentation, Sister Servants of Christ the King, and the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas have served in our schools, parishes and various health care facilities. Today, many of our rural towns’ medical needs are supported by the sisters. They are often the only health care facilities present. The contributions of Catholic religious orders have been

¹St. John Chrysostom, *De incomprehensibili* 3, 6: PG 48, 725.

essential to rural health care and parish life throughout our history. In addition, we continue to be blessed with the presence of the Carmelite sisters, who pray continuously for the diocese each day in quiet solitude.

19. Many organizations also helped to build our parishes. The Knights of Columbus, Altar Societies, Ladies Aids, Catholic Foresters, Catholic Daughters and Christian Mothers groups assisted with liturgy, education and charity. The faithful throughout the diocese built up their wider communities through Memorial Day observances, community Thanksgiving programs, food drives, and times of common prayer for the nation or for ecumenical growth. Parishes provided social outreach through work with Alcoholics Anonymous, Beginning Experience and Compassionate Friends.

20. Through our parishes, we came to know God's grace present in new life through Baptism and the gifts of the Holy Spirit in Confirmation. We celebrated the heavenly banquet together at Eucharist. Families were founded through the Sacrament of Marriage and assisted in times of illness through the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick. Through Reconciliation, Confession or Penance we experienced the forgiveness and healing of our Heavenly Father. Our daughters and sons discovered God's call to service through priesthood and the religious life. Our parishes passed the faith on to future generations, always eager to assist the young in their journey to "know the Lord." The charity of Christ has been practiced by countless men and women throughout their parishes and communities.

21. The stories, memories and areas of life touched by our faith are truly too numerous to recount. Each of us is aware of concrete ways that our parishes deepened our relationships with God and with the members of His Body, the Church. To bring these stories to mind is to remember the centrality of the faith to our communities' histories and to realize that our parishes will continue to bring life to our communities through the Gospel in the future.

V. Demographics of Change in North Dakota

22. The Diocese of Fargo is located in the twelve-state region of the Great Plains. In the last 50 years, the Great Plains has seen dramatic shifts of population with consequent effects on household income, school districts, declining availability of services like health care, out-migration of young people from rural areas, loss of rural businesses, etc. In addition, the globalization of the economy and the new

technologies that drive this digital age have brought serious questions to the forefront about the future of how life will be on the Great Plains. You who have lived in North Dakota for decades are more profoundly aware of these changes than I am.

23. These dramatic changes impact the viability and vitality of parish life throughout the Diocese of Fargo. The shifting demographic situation is shaping our present way of life. **Appendix II** presents an overall picture of the demographic trends for the United States and then focuses on the 30 counties that comprise the Diocese of Fargo. These data clearly show that our way of life is shifting dramatically. As a Church we must respond to meet the changing needs of our faithful people.

24. Some trends are familiar and saddening. For example, most of North Dakota's counties show significant declines in population over the past 10 years. Eleven of the 30 counties in the diocese have experienced declines of over 60% from their highest level. Seventeen counties declined at least 50% over the years. But not all counties are in decline. Rolette County increased 143%, Grand Forks County increased 237%, and Cass County increased 362% from their 1910 population levels. These shifts in population need to be adequately addressed in our future parish structures.

25. The demographics are not a question merely of numbers of persons. An examination of the data also reveals a correlation between the counties' median age and population loss; the greater the population loss, the higher the median age, the age value for which roughly half of the individuals are younger and half are older. For example, the county with the highest median age (51) experienced an overall population decrease of 65% from 1930 to 2000. This means that parishes within counties already losing population have a more difficult task both in providing faith education for the young and in reaching out to the particular needs of their aging population. We must take this into account as we discuss and plan how our parishes may best serve the faithful throughout the diocese.

VI. An Evaluation Process for Parish Life

26. After discussion with the Diocesan Pastoral Council and the deans, a process was developed for each parish to evaluate its organization during the coming year in order to assist pastoral planning for the

entire diocese. Parishes will follow a common process, outlined below. The process of evaluation will take place over a one-year period, beginning September 2003 and ending September 2004.

27. As we begin this process, we must have a common language to assist in the discussion.

Clustering will be the term used to describe any grouping of individual parishes with one or more priests assigned to the cluster. Such clusters already exist. St. Mary's Cathedral in Fargo is clustered with St. William's in Argusville. Wishek, Zeeland and Ashley form another cluster. Through the process of evaluation, current clusters will likely change and be redefined. The arrangement of such clusters is one of the areas of evaluation. **Consolidation** is when a parish closes and its parishioners become part of a different parish or parishes.

28. Essential to the process is that pastors and deans take full responsibility for a thorough examination of their respective parishes and deaneries in order to provide an accurate picture of the state of each parish in each deanery. We must take care to receive input from the parishioners, while also providing concrete recommendations for parish life ordered to "the good of souls." An outline of the evaluation process is given below:

A. **Bishop and Deans**—The Bishop will meet with the deans, who assisted in the preparation of this pastoral letter, to discuss the process for our year-long study. This meeting will help them pass the process along to each priest on the deanery level. The meeting will take place in early September 2003.

B. **Deans and their Respective Deaneries**—Each individual dean will meet with all the priests of their respective deaneries to further discuss the process and assist pastors to address pastoral planning in each parish. These meetings will take place during October and November 2003.

C. **Pastor-Parish**—Each pastor will examine the questions and criteria for parish life with the members of his parish. The discussions are intended to be with parish council members, trustees, parish employees and the faithful. The pastor is to schedule a series of public gatherings for the convenience of the faithful. Small groups of the faithful are encouraged to work with the questions posed and to provide feedback to the pastor and the parish leaders. Questions of parish clustering and boundaries should form

a portion of the discussion. Under the care of the pastor, *each parish in the diocese* will prepare a public report on the parish's life, with recommendations to be brought to the deanery level. This process will extend from November 2003 through March 2004.

D. **Deanery Pastoral Council/Diocesan Pastoral Council**—Concurrent with the discussions in each parish, the members of the Deanery Pastoral Council of each deanery will meet to discuss their parishes' progress and share ideas regarding parish organization, clustering and consolidation. The Diocesan Pastoral Council representatives, who also assisted in the development of this letter, will then be responsible to share the feedback at the Diocesan Pastoral Council meeting with the Bishop in April 2004.

E. **Deanery-Level Open Meetings**—Within each deanery, the dean will coordinate deanery-level meetings for all interested parties in order to facilitate the discussion of clustering and consolidation issues on a deanery level. The exact scheduling of such meetings will be left to the discretion of the pastors and the dean. Discussions at this level can only occur after significant progress has been made on the parish level. After these meetings conclude, the pastors will meet as a deanery as specified below.

F. **Pastor-Deanery**—After the parish and deanery meetings conclude, the pastors will meet to discuss with their dean the pastoral planning recommendations at the deanery level. Items to consider include clustering, consolidation and deanery boundaries. Under the direction of the dean, each deanery will provide a set of recommendations for the deanery, which will be brought to the Bishop by the dean along with each individual parish report. This process will be undertaken from mid-April through mid-June 2004.

G. **Bishop-Deans**—The deans will meet with the Bishop in June 2004 to make specific recommendations to him. Discussion and implementation plans will be completed by September 2004.

H. **Implementation**—Implementation of specific recommendations for parish organization, consolidation and clustering will be completed within one to five years beginning September 2004.

29. It is important, for consistency and clarity, to follow the process as outlined. Individual feedback from parishes is best discussed and summarized at the parish level. Deanery-level discussions among parishes should be discussed with the respective deans. Both pastors and deans have a grave pastoral responsibility to facilitate the discussion and assure that all who care to be involved are heard and respected. All of us must recognize that there will be divergent opinions; however, we must look at what is best for the common good of the whole diocese and for each deanery.

30. As Catholics our view of the parish is not a congregational or parochial model, in which each parish is a complete Church without reference to a greater body such as the diocese or universal Church. While we may differ with one another in the decisions made, charity and civility must guide our conversation. Pastors and individuals who wish to provide recommendations will always be referred to the appropriate level (parish/deanery) to ensure a uniform process. The intent of this process is to foster dialogue and feedback from the parish level upwards, so that necessary changes are understood and proposed through consultation of the faithful, pastors and deans.

31. This process of consultation and input from the parish level is essential, because this is where persons live their faith. At the same time, in Church law, the authority to make changes in parish structure lies solely with the diocesan bishop after proper consultation. “The same concern for souls should be the basis for determining or reconsidering the erection or suppression of parishes and any other changes of this kind which the bishop is empowered to undertake on his own authority (CD, 32).” Because of this, the final decision regarding boundaries, clustering, consolidation or other parish life plans rests with the diocesan bishop.

VII. Parish Planning - Criteria for Evaluation

32. The evaluation of parish organization, clustering or consolidation must take into account areas of liturgy, education and charity. The liturgical criteria include sufficient numbers and training for lay readers, musicians, ushers and extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion. Live music, as opposed to mechanical or computer generated music, is preferred to accompany liturgical singing.

33. In the area of education, to ensure K-12 religious education, sufficient numbers of students and catechists must be present in a parish or cluster. Since the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* (RCIA) is the normative process for becoming Christian or entering into full communion with the Catholic Church, it is important to have the resources to ensure an RCIA program in every parish or cluster of parishes. For a cluster of parishes, there should be one centrally located religious education program and RCIA program. Also crucial is the need to examine what opportunities are provided for adult education, such as Bible studies, etc.

34. The parish's works of charity are more difficult to define, but it is necessary to discuss what level of clustering is needed to most fully enable charitable organizations such as the Knights of Columbus, Altar Societies, Catholic Daughters, etc. to build up the parish community. Also essential is exploration of how to carry out Catholic social teaching through works of social justice in our communities.

35. When examining parish clusters, it is critical to ensure that the number of parishes and weekend Masses do not exceed that which is reasonably sustainable for pastors of different ages and energy levels. Within deaneries and clusters, the value of community life among priests is an additional good to be pursued. The priests and laity need to look at where the best location is for the rectory, especially if it is in a particularly isolated area. Priests need fraternity with their brother priests. It is possible for a priest to serve a cluster of parishes from a residence outside of the cluster. This is especially true if he is primarily needed for Sunday Eucharist and Wednesday religious education programs. Specific criteria for parishes that need to consider consolidation include those parishes with 30 or fewer families and those parishes within 25 miles of a neighboring parish which could accommodate increased membership.

36. Furthermore, criteria should include issues such as the distance necessary to travel to attend Sunday Mass and the economic viability of the parish. The immediate or imminent growth of industry may play a role in the discussion, as well as the age profile of the parish in question. The number of families and the outlook for growth or stability in those numbers also must play a role. Families may not be registered in two parishes at once.

37. With respect to Sunday Mass attendance, a theological and a historical note will help our discussion. First, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* reminds us that:

The Sunday Eucharist is the foundation and confirmation of all Christian practice. For this reason, the faithful are obliged to participate in the Eucharist on days of obligation, unless excused by serious reason (for example, illness, the care of infants) or dispensed by their own pastor. Those who deliberately fail in this obligation commit a grave sin (CCC, 2181).

Participation in Sunday Mass is the “foundation and confirmation” of our lives of faith.

38. On the historical side, Father Stephen Badin, known as the “Apostle of Kentucky and proto-priest of the United States,” had this rule for the fulfillment of the Sunday Mass obligation: “one need not walk farther than five miles, nor ride farther than ten miles.”² If one walked a mile in 20 minutes, this means one would walk for 1 hour and 40 minutes to participate in Sunday Mass. This gives us something to ponder in our modern age of convenience. How willing are we to drive even 30 minutes to partake in Mass?

39. A list of discussion questions to assist in parish evaluation is included as **Appendix III**. A parish planning workbook will also be provided to the pastor and deans to help them focus the discussion and planning process.

VIII. Consolidation - Specific Issues

40. In those cases where parish consolidation is the decision that best serves the faithful, several important issues must be addressed. Although the following list is not exhaustive, it does indicate some major areas that laity, pastors and deans should consider.

- Care for the elderly. Some members of consolidated or clustered parishes will be unable to attend Mass or receive the Sacraments without assistance. A plan, including resources of personnel, must be in place to meet the sacramental needs of these parishioners. This could include plans to offer ride assistance when feasible. It should also include regular visitation by clergy and laity. In particular, reception of Holy Communion on Sunday for the homebound is a priority. Hence

²J. Herman Schauinger, *Cathedrals in the Wilderness* (Milwaukee: Bruce Publishing Company, 1952), 18, 30.

each parish is to have an adequate number of trained extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion to bring Eucharist to the homebound.

- Grieving. Part of the consolidation process should include opportunities for remembrance and grieving. A way to recognize parish history through a presentation, booklet, interviews or the like may be helpful. A ritual for closing a parish will be developed to assist in recalling the blessings and mourning the loss involved in consolidation.
- New life from consolidation. While there will be grieving and real sadness in consolidation, the process is also an occasion of new life for the parish which welcomes the members of the previous parish. Whereas one specific “community of the faithful” has changed, a new community of faith is formed.
- Essential nature of rural parish life. Parish consolidation does not mean that rural life is any less important to the total life of faith in the Diocese of Fargo. Consolidation aims to maintain the strength of faith life in rural areas. It enhances the ability of rural areas to live a vital life of faith by combining resources that are currently overtaxed and thinly spread.
- Parish finances. Finances of closed parishes will become the finances of the remaining parishes, not the diocese. It is important that input of parishioners be sought regarding the methods of dividing finances among multiple parishes when the parishioners of a consolidated parish join different parishes. Stewardship of parish finances extends from the original parish into the parishes which will receive new members. It does not end with the consolidated parish itself. It is also important to recall that a past gift to a parish means the gift now belongs to the parish, not the individual donor. If not, it was not a gift.
- Fair distribution of priests. The distribution of priests among the faithful is not always equitable, and this is part of the planning discussion. For example, one priest in a larger parish in the Diocese of Fargo is responsible for 2,200 individuals, while another ministers to 175 individuals spread through a number of parishes. In addition, special ministries, such as hospital chaplaincy, are often necessary. These ministries should be accounted for in parish planning as an entire diocese.
- Community Institutions. Discussions of consolidation should evaluate other communities around the parishes involved. Groupings of school systems, health care facilities and other entities among towns are important considerations.

- Disposition of Sacred Articles. When a parish closes, care must be taken to remove all sacred articles from the buildings. Stained glass windows are to be crated and preserved so that they may be used in another church building. Liability and upkeep issues are essential when determining the final disposition of buildings during a consolidation process. After a parish is closed, a process will need to be developed to sell the property. This will need to be guided by the pastor, the trustees, the parish finance council and the diocesan finance office. The proceeds from the sale will go to the receiving parishes, not the diocese.
- Cemetery care. The best possible option for cemetery care must be explored. At times this has been arranged with the local county. In all events, we have the obligation to see that cemeteries are properly provided for and maintained. It is important that input of parishioners be sought regarding care of cemetery properties.
- Chapels. It may be determined by the Bishop that in a parish that is to be consolidated the church building will be maintained as a chapel for a determined period of time, not more than five years, to be used for funerals and weddings only. The new chapel would need to be overseen by the parish to which it was consolidated.

IX. Conclusion

41. This year-long process of parish evaluation will involve many factors and require the input of the faithful in the diocese. I understand that some of the discussion will be painful, particularly when consolidation is necessary. However, we are not alone in this. In my discussions with the Diocesan Pastoral Council, several commented that the reality of change that we face is also shared by other Christian denominations and other institutions throughout North Dakota. Also discussed was that our going through this process together as an entire diocese is a way of bearing with and supporting one another in the challenges, pain and sadness that this type of change brings about.

42. At the same time, I am convinced that each parish in the diocese will experience new life from this process. This may be in the form of new members welcomed into a parish family. The examination of our current ways of celebrating liturgy and passing on the faith will lead to a renewed vigor in every parish which undertakes the task of evaluation. Be assured of my prayers for each of you throughout the

coming year. With our participation and the assistance of the Holy Spirit, the Body of Christ in the Diocese of Fargo is sure to be strengthened for the future.

43. I want to thank all those who contributed to the content of this pastoral letter. Valuable input was provided to me by the Diocesan Pastoral Council, the deans, and other laity, religious and clergy in the Diocese of Fargo. I am grateful to you for your counsel and encouragement.

44. With confidence in God, let us call upon the assistance of those who have walked in faith before us. We remember St. James, who first built up the Church in Jerusalem and then hallowed it with his own martyrdom for Jesus Christ. Let us seek the intercession of Mary, the Mother of God and the Mother of the Church. May her prayers bring about a new birth of life in Christ throughout our parishes in the Diocese of Fargo. Finally, we recall that “our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth.” Let us seek His grace in all that we plan and do. May the Holy Spirit guide this process so that it may be fruitful and faithful to Jesus Christ and the proclamation of the Gospel for years to come. Given at the Chancery of the Diocese of Fargo on the Feast of St. James the Greater, July 25, 2003.

†Most Reverend Samuel J. Aquila, D.D.
Bishop of Fargo

Appendix I
Priests Statistical Chart
AS OF JULY 1, 2003

A priest may be classified as either incardinated into the Diocese or as an extern priest. An incardinated priest has a canonical relationship to the Diocese of Fargo and is primarily under the authority of the Bishop of Fargo. An extern priest may be incardinated into another diocese or a member of a religious order who is assisting within the Fargo Diocese.

Number of ACTIVE Priests Incardinated in the Diocese of Fargo Who Are:

Native to Diocese of Fargo:	46
From Other Locations:	
In US:	37*
Other Countries:	10**
TOTAL	93

Number of ACTIVE Extern, Non-incardinated Priests in the Diocese of Fargo Who Are:

Religious:	8
1-Benedictine Monks	1-Holy Ghost Fathers
1-Order of Preachers (Dominicans)	1-Society of Catholic Apostolate
4-Society of Our Lady of the Most Holy Trinity	
From Other Dioceses:	6
1-Ghana	5-Nigeria
TOTAL	14

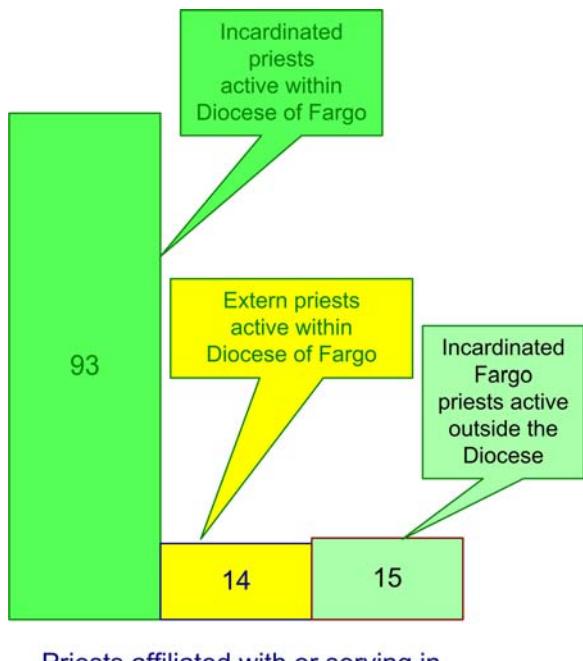
Age Groups of Active Priests Serving in the Diocese of Fargo (107):

Age Range in years	25- 35	36- 45	46- 55	56- 65	66- 75
Number	16	32	29	19	11

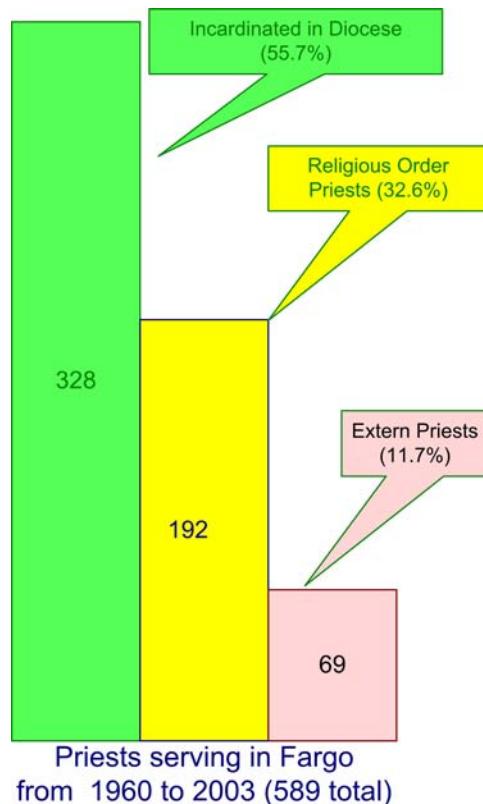
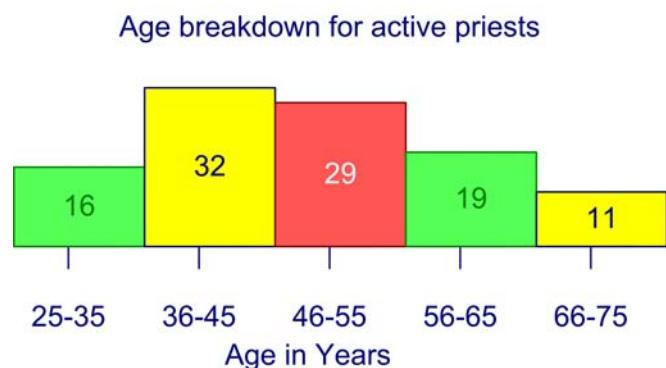
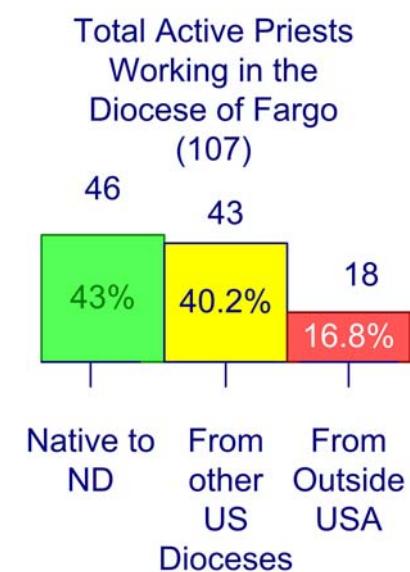
In addition to these 107 active priests, 26 retired priests live within the Diocese and assist according to their circumstances. Fifteen priests incardinated in the Diocese live and work outside of the Diocese of Fargo.***

* 1-Arkansas	1-Massachusetts	** 1-Croatia	*** 4-Military
2-California	3-Michigan	1-England	3-Rome
1-Connecticut	3-Minnesota	1-India	1-Peru
1-Florida	1-New Jersey	1-Nigeria	1-Arizona
4-Illinois	4-New York	1-Phillipines	2-California
1-Indiana	5-North Dakota	2-Poland	1-Illinois
1-Iowa	1-Ohio	1-Tanzania	1-Minneapolis
2-Kentucky	4-Wisconsin	1-Uganda	1-Missouri
2-Maryland		1-West Indies	1-Wisconsin

Priests Statistical Chart – Part II



Priests affiliated with or serving in the Diocese of Fargo

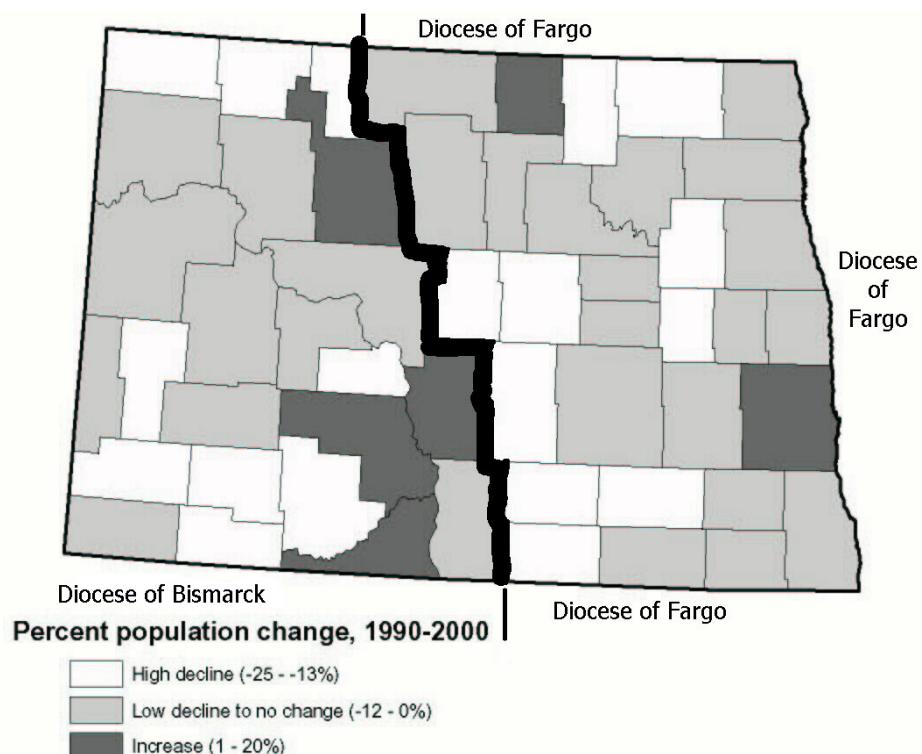


b

Appendix II

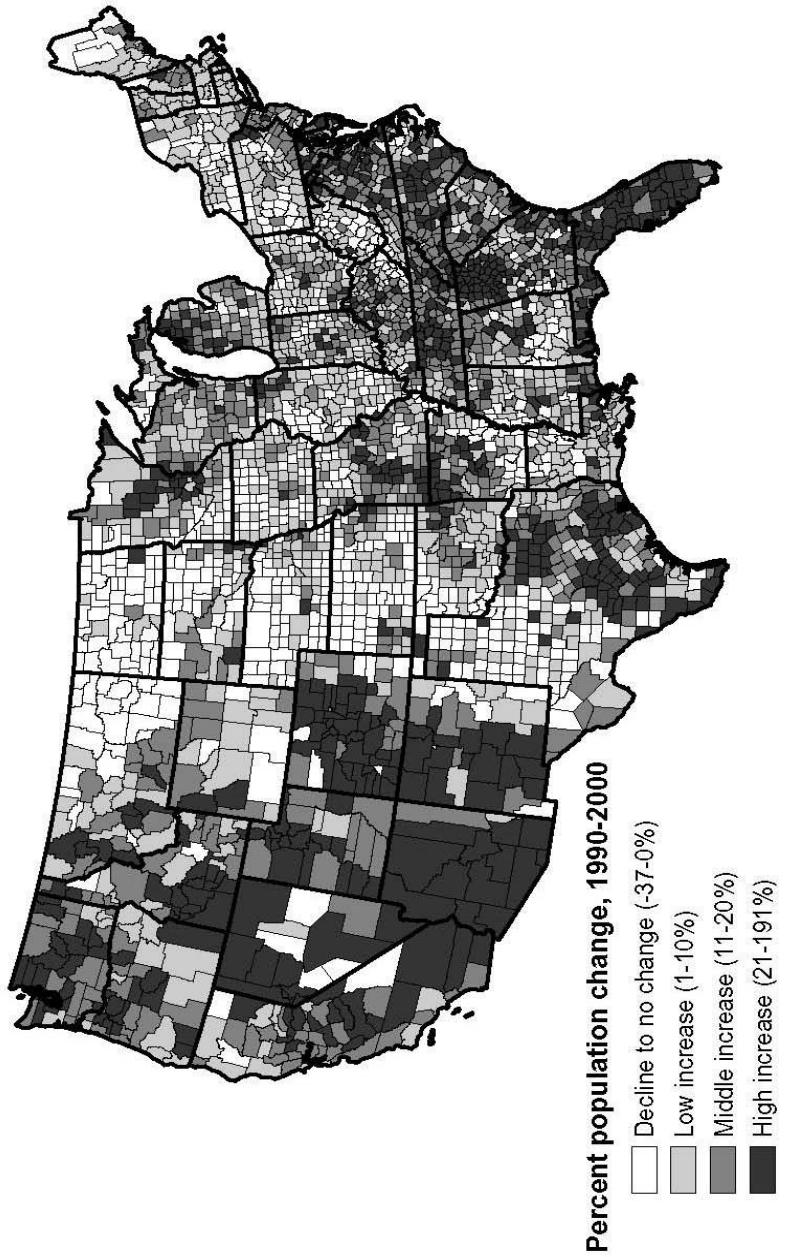
Parish Statistical Data by County

The following are data displays that outline some of the shifting demographic data shaping our present way of life. The first display includes a map of North Dakota and a map of the contiguous United States depicting population change between 1990 and 2000.



Source: US Census Bureau

Center for the Study of Rural America, FRBK



Source: US Census Bureau

Center for the Study of Rural America, FRBKC

The second display is a set of tables that provides data on the 30 counties comprising the Diocese of Fargo. These tables list data from the 2000 Census and show population change patterns by county and incorporated cities within each county, median household incomes, and median ages. The tables also list the number of Catholic households in each parish or mission within each county, along with the percentage of total diocesan Catholics found in each county. Using Barnes County as an example, the following legend describes what each set of numbers signifies.

# of Catholic households in the county or city	% of total diocesan Catholic households in the county.	Total population in each Census year listed. Brackets indicate year of highest population. Columns are 1910, Highest Year and 2000 Census.	Total and percentage change from highest level to 2000 census. If 2000 was highest, it indicates change from 1910. () indicates decrease.	Median household income for the county in 2000
COUNTY		1910	Highest	2000
802 Barnes [2.9%]	18066	18804 ['30]	11775	\$29,558
433 Valley City	4606	7843 ['70]	(7029) (37%)	
69 Oriska	---	217 ['40]	6826	
95 Sanborn	390		128	
68 Wimbleton	571		194	
56 Dazey	265	293 ['20]	237	
81 Fingal	---	324 ['30]	91	
			133	

{Tower City 252; Litchville 191; Nome 70; Kathryn 63; Rogers 61; Sibley 46; Leal 36; Pillsbury 24}

--- Means there was no data available.
* Means that the county or city has increased in population at the 2000 Census.
A blank under the **Highest** column indicates that either 1910 or 2000 is the highest year of population.

Other cities in the county without a Catholic Church and their 2000 populations

December 5, 2001

Statistical Data by County

<u>COUNTY</u>	<u>1910</u>	<u>Highest</u>	<u>2000</u>			
802 Barnes [2.9%]	18066	18804 ['30]	11775	(7029)	(37%)	\$29,558

433 Valley City	4606	7843 ['70]	6826			
69 Oriska	---	217 ['40]	128			40.6
95 Sanborn	390		194			
68 Wimbleton	571		237			
56 Dazey	265	293 ['20]	91			
81 Fingal	---	324 ['30]	133			

{Tower City 252; Litchville 191; Nome 70; Kathryn 63; Rogers 61; Sibley 46; Leal 36; Pillsbury 24}

542 Benson [1.9%]	12681	13327 ['30]	6964	(6363)	(48%)	\$21,833
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72 Leeds	682	797 ['60]	464			
71 Fort Totten			952			31.4
150 St. Michael's	---	---	---			
113 Esmond	535		159			
40 Knox	330		59			
44 Maddock	374	740 ['60]	498			
45 Minnewaukan	510	564 ['20]	318			
7 Tokio	---	---	---			
-- Crow Hill	---	---	---			

{Oberon 81; Warwick 75; Brinsmade 29; York 26}

305 Bottineau [1.1%]	17295		7149	(10146)	(59%)	\$30,156
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208 Bottineau	1331	2829 ['80]	2336			
69 Westhope	592	824 ['60]	533			43.4
28 Willow City	623		221			

{Lansford 253; Maxbass 91; Newburg 88; Souris 83; Antler 47; Kramer 44; Gardena 38; Landa 28; Overly 19}

COUNTY	1910	Highest	2000			
7544 Cass [27.2%]	33935		123138	89203	362%	\$38,871
334 Casselton*	1553		1855			
Fargo:*	14331		90599			31.3
895 - St. Mary's						
1053 - St. Anthony's						
1223 - Holy Spirit						
1520 - Nativity						
572 - Sts. Anne/Joachim						
83 - NDSU Newman						
West Fargo:*	---		14940			
591 - Blessed Sacrament						
770 - Holy Cross						
197 Wild Rice	---	---	---			
38 <i>Alice</i>	---	181 ['40]	56			
72 <i>Argusville</i> *	---		147			
44 <i>Buffalo</i>	241	268 ['20]	209			
54 <i>Hunter</i>	365	446 ['60]	326			
72 <i>Kindred</i> *	---		614			
26 <i>Page</i>	479		225			
{Horace 915; Harwood 607; Mapleton 606; Arthur 404; Frontier 273; Davenport 261; Leonard 255; Reile's Acres 254; Oxbow 248; Grandin 181; Amenia 89; Gardner 80; Briarwood 78; Prairie Rose 68; North River 65; Erie 65; Wheatland 60; Ayr 23}						
737 Cavalier [2.6%]	15639		4831	(10808)	(69%)	\$31,233
479 Langdon	1214	3923 ['70]	2101			
107 Munich	---	310 ['90]	268			45.2
31 Wales	---	235 ['60]	30			
16 Milton	410		85			
26 Mt. Carmel	---	---	---			
32 Nekoma	120	191 ['30]	51			
33 Olga	---	---	---			
13 Osnabrock	253	310 ['20]	174			
{Alsen 68; Calvin 26; Sarles 25; Calio 24; Loma 21; Hannah 20}						
335 Dickey [1.2%]	9839	10877 ['30]	5757	(5120)	(47%)	\$28,090
96 Ellendale	1389	1967 ['80]	1559			
208 Oakes	1499	2112 ['80]	1979			40.7
31 Fullerton	206		85			
{Forbes 64; Ludden 29; Monango 28}						
211 Eddy [0.7%]	4800	6493 ['20]	2757	(3736)	(58%)	\$26,181
211 New Rockford	---	2195 ['30]	1463			
{Sheyenne 318}						
43.8						

COUNTY	1910	Highest	2000			
331 Foster [1.2%]	5313	6353 ['30]	3759	(2594)	(41%)	\$30,687
292 Carrington	1217	2641 ['80]	2268			
39 <i>McHenry</i>	398		71			40.5
{ <i>Glenfield 134; Grace City 71</i> }						
4307 G. Forks [15.6%]	27888		66109	38221	237%	\$35,959
Grand Forks:*	12478		49321			
1824 - St. Michael's						29.2
459 - St. Mary's						
1328 - Holy Family						
55 - UND Newman						
115 Manvel*	---		390			
271 Larimore	1224	1714 ['60]	1433			
120 Reynolds	412		350			
135 <i>Thompson</i> *	---		1006			
{ <i>Northwood 959; Emerado 510; Gilby 243; Inkster 102; Niagara 57</i> }						
111 Griggs [0.4%]	6274	7402 ['20]	2754	(4648)	(63%)	\$28,108
73 Cooperstown	1019	1424 ['60]	1053			
38 <i>Jessie</i>	---	---	---			45.8
{ <i>Binford 201; Hannaford 181</i> }						
129 Kidder [0.4%]	5962	8031 ['30]	2753	(5278)	(66%)	\$23,779
82 Steele	500	847 ['60]	761			
34 <i>Tappen</i>	---	379 ['50]	210			
13 <i>Lake Williams</i>	---	---	---			44.5
{ <i>Tuttle 106; Pettibone 88; Dawson 75; Robinson 71</i> }						
365 LaMoure [1.3%]	10724	11564 ['20]	4701	(6863)	(59%)	\$28,985
166 Edgeley	306	992 ['60]	637			
101 Lamoure	929	1077 ['80]	944			43.3
21 Dickey	187	203 ['40]	57			
14 Marion	241	309 ['60]	146			
35 Nortonville	---	---	---			
28 Verona	235		108			
{ <i>Kulm 422; Jud 76; Berlin 35</i> }						

COUNTY	1910	Highest	2000			
304 Logan [1.1%]	6168	8089 ['30]	2308	(5781)	(71%)	\$23,910
269 Napoleon	---	1103 ['80]	857			
17 <i>Burnstad</i>	---	---	---			46.4
18 <i>Gackle</i>	---	604 ['50]	335			
{ <i>Fredonia 51</i> }						
650 McHenry [2.3%]	17637		5987	(11650)	(66%)	\$24,851
118 Anamoose	669		282			
168 Towner	691	955 ['50]	574			43.0
138 Velva	837	1330 ['60]	1049			
141 <i>Drake</i>	348	831 ['50]	322			
21 <i>Granville</i>	455		286			
64 <i>Karlsruhe</i>	---	289 ['40]	119			
{ <i>Upham 155; Deering 118; Voltaire 51; Balfour 20; Bantry 19; Kief 13; Bergen 11</i> }						
205 McIntosh [0.7%]	7351	9621 ['30]	3390	(6231)	(65%)	\$23,018
67 Wishek	432	1290 ['60]	1122			
82 Zeeland	193	489 ['40]	141			51.0
28 <i>Ashley</i>	682	1423 ['50]	882			
28 <i>Kintyre</i>	---	---	---			
{ <i>Venturia 23</i> }						
308 Nelson [1.1%]	10140	10362 ['20]	3715	(6647)	(64%)	\$25,831
79 Lakota	1023	1144 ['70]	781			
94 Michigan	449	502 ['80]	345			47.2
34 <i>Aneta</i>	654	662 ['20]	284			
31 <i>Bechyne</i>	---	---	---			
20 <i>Lomice</i>	---	---	---			
50 <i>Tolna</i>	209	291 ['60]	202			
{ <i>McVille 470; Petersburg 195; Pekin 80</i> }						
688 Pembina [2.4%]	14749	15177	8585	(6592)	(43%)	\$34,875
150 Cavalier*	652		1537			
114 Drayton	587	1095 ['70]	913			41.6
198 Walhalla	592	1471 ['70]	1057			
10 <i>Bathgate</i>	328	352 ['20]	66			
45 <i>Crystal</i>	376	429 ['50]	167			
20 <i>Leroy</i>	---	---	---			
28 <i>Neche</i>	528	615 ['50]	437			
75 <i>Pembina</i>	717	802 ['20]	642			
48 <i>St. Thomas</i>	513	660 ['60]	447			
{ <i>Mountain 133; Hamilton 73; Canton 42</i> }						
701 Pierce [2.5%]	9740		4675	(5065)	(52%)	\$26,796
54 Balta	---	263 ['40]	73			
592 Rugby	1630	2972 ['60]	2939			42.9
19 <i>Fulda</i>	---	---	---			
36 <i>Orrin</i>	---	---	---			
{ <i>Wolford 50</i> }						

COUNTY	1910	Highest	2000			
1292 Ramsey [4.7%]	15199	16252 ['30]	12066	(4186)	(26%)	\$30,355
1215 Devils Lake	5157	7782 ['90]	7222			
26 <i>Brocket</i>	186	291 ['40]	65			39.5
-- <i>Crary</i>	279	307 ['20]	149			
51 <i>Starkweather</i>	246	312 ['30]	157			
{Edmore 256; Churchs Ferry 77; Hampden 60; Lawton 42}						
368 Ransom [1.3%]	10345	11681 ['20]	5890	(5791)	(50%)	\$32,823
87 Enderlin	1540	1919 ['20]	947			
225 <i>Lisbon*</i>	1758		2292			40.7
56 <i>Sheldon</i>	358		135			
{Ft. Ransom 70; Elliott 44}						
1601 Richland [5.7%]	19659	21008 ['30]	17998	(3020)	(14%)	\$36,591
216 Hankinson	1503		1058			
242 Lidgerwood	1019	1147 ['50]	738			35.4
114 Mooreton	---	216 ['80]	204			
678 Wahpeton*	2467		8586			
112 Wyndmere	439	644 ['60]	533			
100 <i>Fairmount</i>	387	706 ['20]	406			
52 <i>Geneseo</i>	---	---	---			
87 <i>Mantador</i>	---	138 ['50]	71			
{Abercrombie 296; Walcott 189; Christine 153; Great Bend 118; Colfax 91; Dwight 75; Barney 69}						
1133 Rolette [4.1%]	9558		13674	4116	143%	\$21,831
562 Belcourt	---	---	2440			
106 Rolette	408	667 ['80]	538			28.9
155 Rolla	587	1538 ['80]	1417			
123 St. John's	424	517 ['40]	358			
187 <i>Dunseith</i>	478	1017 ['60]	739			
{Shell Valley 395; East Dunseith 219; Mylo 19}						
278 Sargent [1%]	9202	9655 ['20]	4366	(5289)	(55%)	\$36,041
74 Forman	352	629 ['80]	506			
53 <i>Cayuga</i>	175	219 ['30]	61			40.3
38 <i>Cogswell</i>	418	430 ['40]	165			
41 <i>Gwinner*</i>	---		717			
72 <i>Milnor</i>	641	716 ['80]	711			
{Rutland 220; Havana 44}						
24 Sheridan [0.08%]	8103		1710	(6393)	(79%)	\$23,067
24 McClusky	517	924 ['40]	415			
{Goodrich 163; Martin 96}						
						48.1
113 Steele [0.4%]	7616		2258	(5358)	(70%)	\$32,659
69 Hope	909		303			
44 <i>Finley</i>	516	809 ['70]	515			41.4
{Sharon 109; Luverne 44}						

COUNTY	1910	Highest	2000			
1380 Stutsman [4.9%]	18189	26100 ['30]	21908	(4192)	(16%)	\$32,213
1170 Jamestown	4358	16280 ['80]	15527			
25 Windsor	---	---	---			39.6
17 Buchanan	---	---	77			
28 Courtenay	539		63			
43 Fried	---	---	---			
43 Kensal	456		161			
33 Medina	343	564 ['50]	335			
21 Pingree	---	286 ['20]	66			

{Streeter 172; Cleveland 112; Montpelier 103; Woodworth 80; Spiritwood 72}

279 Towner [1%]	8963		2876	(6087)	(68%)	\$27,205
197 Cando	1332	1566 ['60]	1342			
60 Bisbee	446	531 ['30]	164			44.0
-- Hansboro	---	218 ['20]	8			
22 Rock Lake	194	385 ['50]	194			

{Egeland 49; Perth 13; Maza 5}

316 Traill [1.1%]	12545	12600 ['30]	8477	(4123)	(33%)	\$35,162
176 Hillsboro	1237	1600 ['80]	1563			
140 Mayville	1070	2554 ['70]	1953			39.0

{Hatton 707; Portland 604; Galesburg 157; Clifford 51}

1636 Walsh [5.9%]	19491	20747 ['40]	12389	(8358)	(40%)	\$29,847
746 Grafton	2229	5946 ['70]	4516			
206 Minto	701		657			40.9
73 Oakwood	---	---	---			
225 Park River	1008	1844 ['80]	1535			
81 Pisek	312		96			
109 Warsaw	---	---	---			
31 Ardoch	271		61			
42 Conway	184		23			
63 Lankin	341		131			
60 Veselyville	---	---	---			

{Hoople 292; Fordville 266; Edinburg 252; Adams 203; Forest River 154; Fairdale 51}

595 Wells [2.1%]	11814	13285 ['30]	5102	(8183)	(62%)	\$27,798
56 Fessenden	713	920 ['60]	625			
352 Harvey	1443	2527 ['80]	1989			45.2
75 Sykeston	276	367 ['20]	153			
29 Bremen	---	---	---			
18 Hurdsfield	---	258 ['40]	91			
65 Selz	---	---	---			

{Bowden 139; Cathay 56; Hamberg 28}

	1910	1930	1960	2000
Diocesan county general population totals	384,885	422,496	386,748	379,821
State general population totals	577,145	680,845	632,446	642,200
Diocesan percentage of state population	67%	62%	61%	59%

Appendix III

Parish Life Evaluation Questions

Parish life is fundamental to growth in our Catholic faith. It is through our celebrations of the sacraments and our formation in faith that we are nourished by God to be His leaven in our local communities and the world in which we live. As you reflect on your experience of parish life, what comes to mind as you address the following questions? From these reflections, each parish pastoral council will complete a parish vitality study. The parish vitality studies will allow us to structure and organize viable and vital parishes in the Diocese of Fargo.

Sacramental Life

What parish liturgy(ies) have been most prayerful for you?

Describe your experience (strengths and/or weaknesses) of parish sacramental preparation programs (*e.g. pre-baptism classes, reception of Reconciliation, Confirmation and Eucharist, and Marriage preparation*).

How well do your Sunday liturgies engage the “full, active and conscious” participation of all parishioners?

Do you see your life and work as a spiritual offering to God through your participation in liturgy?

Beyond the reception of the sacraments, describe your participation in the liturgical life of the parish (*e.g. – serving as a liturgy committee member, extraordinary minister of Holy Communion, lector, musician, usher or choir member, taking Communion to the sick/homebound, teaching sacramental preparation, serving as a marriage or baptism sponsoring couple*).

For what prayers or devotional services is your parish particularly noted?

Faith Formation

What has been the best faith education experience in your life?

Describe your experience (strengths and/or weaknesses) of parish Religious Education programs or Catholic schools.

What has been your greatest source of growing in the faith and coming to know your religion?

How have parents assumed their roles as the first teachers of the faith? Does your parish enable parents to assume their proper roles and responsibilities?

Does your parish have an adequate number of catechists?

Community (City, town, rural neighborhood)

Describe the community your parish serves. How vital and viable is the community as a whole?

Does your parish match with the natural boundaries of other institutions in your area? How are these service areas changing?

How does your parish contribute to the life of the community?

In light of the teaching on the common good, is there a better way to use the resources at the disposal of your parish to serve the needs of the community? Of a larger area?

What will your parish look like in five years? Ten years?

Service

What kinds of service activities are regularly incorporated into the life of your parish?

In which church-sponsored service activities have you participated? In what other kinds of service work are you involved?

Discuss how your attitude as a parish may be one of stewardship and service or one of scarcity and survival.