

# Pastoral Planning Committee

## Meeting Minutes

**Our Lady of the Sacred Heart** – West Brookfield,  
**Saint Joseph** – North Brookfield,  
**Saint John the Baptist**– East Brookfield.

**Meeting Date:** September 23, 2024  
**Location:** Our Lady of the Sacred Heart Parish Center

**Present:** Eileen Bene, Roger Dame, Tina Fitzgerald, Ed O'Malley, Rebecca Gordon, Cathy Larocca, Mike Larocca, Ron Ryel, Richard Pitou-Caron, Christie Driscoll, Joan Reidy, Liz Marcil (Diocese), Stephen Sycks (Diocese), Fr. Don Oullette, Pastor Fr. Joe Rice.

**Absent:** Brian O'Malley

The meeting started promptly at 6:30 PM with a welcome and opening prayer from Fr Rice.

### Group Prayer:

The group, led by Fr Rice, participated in a prayer exercise that involved reading the scriptures, psalm reading, as well as Intercessions and the Lord's Prayer. Liz Marcil provided context to the readings and explained how to pray via Lectio Divina.

### History of the Parishes and region:

Fr. Rice gave a brief overview of the Church in the region. He started his timeline in the in the 1600s and briefly worked through relevant events ending in the current era. He noted that by the 1960s, all four parishes were (including St Mary in Brookfield) were separate parishes.

### Purpose and Context:

Liz Marcil led a conversation regarding context, group objective, & process. The group is charged with addressing two key questions posed by Bishop McManus:

- 1) How does the Bishop manage the Diocese with the current & expected number of priests?
- 2) How does the Diocese provide for the mission in this area without placing significant burdens on each parish?

Specifically, this group is tasked with developing a plan to best serve the People of God while delivering the mission of bringing Souls to Christ in the region of the Brookfields. The Diocese has no predetermined plan, other than guiding Fr. Rice, Fr. Ouellette, and the committee in developing a strategy to fulfill the mission.

Currently, there are 87 parishes in the Diocese. There are 108 active, as in not retired, priests in the diocese. There are 67 pastors, 11 administrators, 15 associate pastors, 9 priests in special ministry and 5 senior priests who are in parishes. 20 pastors are over the age of 70 and another 14 are between 60 and 69. That means that 1/3 of the current priests will retire in the next 15 years. With 17 men in various stages of priestly formation, sustainability becomes a concern.

While not a “process”, Stephen Sycks offered four themes that will guide the meetings and group. These are Prayer, Analysis, Discernment, and Proposals.

Prayer: Pray that the Holy Spirit will be with us, guide us, and support us throughout this.

Analysis: review and understand the data, demographics, area, geography, and communities

Discernment: use the gift of wisdom to consider options, potential outcomes, and pitfalls

Proposals: Develop multiple mission delivery models for the area.

The group then had a lively and lengthy discussion regarding topics such as: Pastoral Planning overview since 2003, current vocations, examples of success, things to avoid, data discussions, demographic discussions, financial and economic realities of the parishes and communities as a whole. One very clear theme was that the communities of Brookfield, West Brookfield, East Brookfield, and North Brookfield are unique towns unto themselves. They have different school systems, shopping centers, and identities.

Liz asked the group to come to the next meeting ready to discuss two questions:

1. What do you think these communities will be like in 10 years?
2. What would you like the Church to look like in these communities in 10 years?

It was determined by all that the next meeting would start data review & discussion as a means of understanding each parish as well as the region as a whole.

The meeting closed at 8:00 pm

Fr. Rice offered a closing prayer.

Next two meetings are on Monday October 28<sup>th</sup> and Monday November 25<sup>th</sup>. Both meetings will be at Our Lady of the Sacred Heart.