

# 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:** January 27, 2025  
**Location:** Our Lady of the Sacred Heart Parish Center

**Present:** Eileen Bene, Roger Dame, Tina Fitzgerald, Ed O'Malley, Brian O'Malley, Cathy Larocca, Mike Larocca, Richard Caron, Christie Driscoll, Rebecca Gordon, Ron Ryel, Fr. Miguel Pagan, Fr. Don Ouellette, Fr. Joe Rice (Parish Administrator of all three parishes), the Diocesan representatives Elizabeth Marcil (Diocese), Stephen Sycks (Diocese), and Fr. Richard Lembo (Hardwick).

**Absent:** Joan Reidy

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

### A. Review combined profiles by parish:

Significant time was spent reviewing and updating the parish profiles.

Summary of major discussion points/edits:

- Liturgical statistics: total of 7 weekend masses with some overlapping times. This makes it very difficult for the priests to be present before or after Mass.
- Liturgical Ministries: each parish has a full complement of Eucharistic Ministers, Lectors, and Music Ministries. All three reported a need for Altar servers, especially youth altar servers.
- Social Ministries – all three parishes report active social ministries (SVdP, K.of.C, food pantries, & bereavement groups). All parishes identified a need for greater involvement from more parishioners, as they have mostly the same people running the same ministries.
- No permanent Deacons
- Demographics: All three parishes report populations growing older with less active youth and only OLSH reported younger people at Mass. All three had listed that less than 20% of parishioners who are active in various ministries are younger than age 40. The follow up topic was “ministry response” to that change. This was unanswered by all. *This topic identified as an opportunity for growth.*
- Religious Education
  - No certified professional RE staff
  - 91 total for all parishes and meet/run at OLSH. Travel & timing is an issue
  - 11 students attend Catholic Schools (estimate)
  - No adult education programs*This topic was identified as an opportunity for*
- There was a robust and detailed discussion regarding staffing. Corrections are in the revised profiles document.
  - Unmet needs – this conversation evolved from needing more maintenance staff to all three realizing the need for ministry/mission staff such as: Deacon, Religious Education Staff or Youth Ministry, Pastoral Associates, and Music Ministry.

**B. Stephen Sycks shared further updated financial information**

- Theme of “surviving not thriving”. Majority of parish expenses are in Priests and building costs with remaining funds used for mission.
- Committee members discussed using property sale proceeds to support the parishes
- The question was posed that if all parishes were financially secure, would there still be Pastoral Planning in the Brookfields. The answer was yes, as the current model is not working due to:
  - Availability of Priests to serve the area
  - Decline in Mass Attendance & members of the parish
  - Decline in Religious Education
  - Decline in weekly offertory (independent from savings)
  - Costs of maintaining properties

**C. The Diocesan Pastoral Planning Committee met with the priests of Deanery IX**

- Diocesan Representatives shared that there was a Diocesan Pastoral Planning meeting held in early January where select parishes from Deanery IX attended and explored potential options for re-alignment. Several possibilities were discussed.
- Diocesan Representatives distributed the same demographic & parish data that was given to the Pastors/Priests of the focus parishes in Deanery IX at the January meeting.
- The next steps were:
  - Deanery IX Pastors/Priests to meet to review & discuss further
  - All the parishes complete parish profiles

**D. Next Steps**

The next meeting will be held after the February 25 Diocesan Pastoral Planning meeting

Fr. Rice closed the meeting at 8:30pm with prayer.