



## OFFICE *of the* CHANCERY

**DATE:** July 10, 2025

**TO:** Diocese of Columbus Clergy

**FROM:** Very Rev. Michael Hartge, Vicar General *MH*

**RE:** Diocese of Columbus Pastoral Planning 2025 - 2026

The Diocese of Columbus has engaged the services of Catholic Leadership Institute (CLI) to assist Bishop Fernandes with the work of discerning actionable goals to more effectively address what he has identified as pastoral priorities. Those four priorities are: Vocations, Evangelization, Catholic Education and Formation, and Social Outreach. In the discernment of pastoral priorities or pastoral works, it is the bishop who brings forth these issues for consultation about practical solutions to them. This is done while allowing room for the faithful to exercise their ability to share their pastoral needs. The actionable goals for these priorities will be the fruit of consultation with the Christian faithful of the Diocese of Columbus, which will truly make this the work of the Body of Christ led by the Holy Spirit.

As part of the framework for CLI's involvement, an Envisioning Team has been assembled. This is a small team of about a dozen people, mostly laity. Their role will be to read the feedback from the period of consultation and to propose actionable goals based on that feedback. Bishop will then approve these goals, and communicate them to the Diocese.

CLI will assist us in gathering feedback about these priorities through extensive consultation by way of focus groups and individual interviews. There will be 15 focus groups of 6-8 members each consisting of: *Priests, Permanent Deacons, Young Adults, Parish Finance Council Members, Elementary School Teachers, High School Teachers, Youth, College Students, Missionaries (i.e. Focus, Damascus, SPO), Catholic Charities, Hispanics, Other representatives of Multicultural ministries, Appalachia region, Non-practicing Catholics (i.e. "nones" or fallen away), 50+ parents/empty nesters.* These groups were discerned with the help of the Envisioning Team. The individual interviews will consist of a mix of diocesan stakeholders. The focus groups and interviews will take place in September. The Envisioning Team is assisting with suggestions for participants in the focus groups to ensure we get as wide a cross section of the Diocese as possible. Additionally, the Diocese will sponsor an online survey which will be open from mid-July until mid-October. This survey will allow many more of the faithful to share their thoughts surrounding these priorities, and those responses will be incorporated into the reviewed feedback.

If you were present in the Diocese in 2021, you will remember the Disciple Maker Index (DMI) that the whole Diocese participated in during Lent 2021. The DMI will be offered again to the faithful in this coming Advent and Christmas Seasons. Readministering the DMI will give us a unique opportunity to compare where we are today with where we were about five years ago, roughly Spring 2021 – January 2026. Among other insights we hope to gain, we hope to better understand the effectiveness of the recent efforts in the work of evangelization and in accompaniment by increasing parishioners' comfortability with being able to share our Catholic faith.



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A portion of the DMI results from that survey is attached with this memo. It was a bulletin and *Catholic Times* insert distributed throughout the Diocese, and is just a small summary of some of the outcomes from 2021.

Both the engagement of CLI for this time of pastoral planning and the administration of the DMI come to the Diocese at no charge to us through a generous grant available through Catholic Leadership Institute donors to assist bishops in pastoral planning in their first years in a diocese.

The primary reason for pastoral planning is to understand how best to address pastoral issues facing a diocese. While it is not the primary reason for doing pastoral planning, an additional positive effect from a pastoral planning process will be to assist the Diocese with building a case for support for an eventual diocesan capital campaign. Coordinating those efforts through the initial step of instituting the local capital campaign moratorium, while it may initially appear to be inconvenient, will certainly be the fertile soil for assisting with the many capital needs throughout the diocese.

The Diocesan Pastoral Council (DPC) has been established and members have been appointed by Bishop Fernandes with the help of the Deans. This consultative body will be a more stable group than the Envisioning Team for pastoral planning in the future. There is some intentional overlap between the Envisioning Team and the DPC. What the DPC will be working on initially is a vision/ purpose statement which will help guide the formulation of the actionable goals for the pastoral priorities.

The formal planning process includes the assembling of the Envisioning Team, the gathering of feedback, the reading of the feedback, the distillation of the feedback into actionable goals, and the formation and communication of those goals. Those goals will be executed over a period of years to be determined. We will then transition to work with CCS Fundraising roughly a year from now. We have been in preliminary contact with CCS about building a case for support for funding whatever actionable goals may need financial support as well as capital priorities around the Diocese that are in line with this pastoral plan. Again, the great comfort we can find is that these goals will be discerned with the input of as many of the faithful in the Diocese as possible through those feedback channels described above. It will be the work of the Body of Christ in the Diocese of Columbus led comfortably by the Holy Spirit.

We've engaged in widespread consultation before with Real Presence Real Future. That work was unforgettable in many ways. It provided concrete considerations for Bishop Fernandes to consider in his first year as our Bishop. The outcomes from that plan set us up for success in embarking on this next pastoral planning initiative. It is clear that many pastors of parishes around the diocese are eagerly engaged in fruitful and long-term planning for their parishes. Likewise, this is truly important work for us to engage in on the diocesan level. I look forward to these months ahead.

May we keep this intention close to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Immaculate Heart of Mary as we pray for its success.