

Parish Vitality

a workbook

September 2011



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a workbook



*« You are a chosen race,
a royal priesthood,
a holy nation,
God's own people,
in order that you may proclaim
the mighty acts of him
who called you out of darkness
into his marvelous light. »*
1 Peter 2, 9

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Cover photo: Stained glass window at St. Ann's
Church, Elsipogtog, N.B., by Heidi Louder-Pellerin.

Ce document est également disponible en français.

A collaborative effort

Parish Viability, A Workbook, has been made possible by the collaborative effort of each member of the *Diocesan Pastoral Ministry Team* of the Archdiocese of Moncton.

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*«I believe that this is one of the important
and positive results of the Council:
the co-responsibility of the entire parish,
for the parish priest is no longer
the only one to animate everything.
Since we all form a parish together,
we must all collaborate and help
so that the parish priest is not left on his own,
mainly as a coordinator,
but truly discovers that he is a pastor
who is backed up in these common tasks
in which, together, the parish lives and is fulfilled.»
Pope Benedict XVI¹*

Introduction

Over the years, we have received a number of requests from both priests and faithful for some type of instrument that could help us take a deeper look at the health of our parishes.

Such an attempt was undertaken at the turn of the millennium when the report of diocesan restructuring was produced.² This report was based on the premise that the regrouping of parishes and increasing lay involvement would alleviate the severe clergy crisis and drop in religious practice. With hindsight, we can state that the main objectives of the report often took a back seat with structural concerns eclipsing ministry.

The underlying objectives of the process - «building disciples, or followers of Jesus Christ»³ – escaped many of us; our «rose-colored glasses» didn't allow us to «view the situation as it is but as we'd like it to be».⁴

But then, how do we view the present day situation of the church? According to Gallup's global practice leader for faith-based organizations, Albert Winseman, there are four approaches to the present day situation: some recognize the seriousness of the problem and take creative measures to

address it, some see the warning signs but don't know what to do, some see the signs and think that things will eventually get better, and some think nothing is wrong and go on about their business as usual.⁵

Each and every one of us can identify with one or more of these approaches. The question is: what are we going to do about it?

More precisely, how does my parish respond to the mission of the Church while it is preoccupied with its own survival? How does it fulfill the *priestly, prophetic, and kingly* functions of the mission? In essence, what does my parish look like today, what would I like to see it look like in the future, and what initiatives can be taken to make it happen?

To find answers to these questions, your *Diocesan Pastoral Ministry Team (DPMT)* searched high and low, wide and far for an instrument that could be of assistance. Our search revealed that such an instrument, or at least the one we would like to have, doesn't exist, or if it does, we haven't found it. What we did find in the different dioceses throughout North America are reflections on such instruments,

but nothing resembling an instrument.

So your *DPMT* decided to take up the challenge and produced the present document. It's been over a year in the making and the culmination of long discussions, reflections, and consultations. The final product is essentially 'a work in progress'.

Our focus is on the parish which is the most visible sign of the church's presence in a community. While parishes existed in some form or other in the early church, it is the *Council of Trent (1545-63)* that shaped it as it is known today.

Let us not forget that the presence of a parish in each community, both urban and rural, is threatened today by concerns about closures, the declining number of priests, religious practice, and revenues.

In light of this, what are our options? What can we do to turn the situation around or should we simply give up?

One of Canada's leading experts on religious and social trends, Reginald W. Bibby, suggests that «Canadians aren't looking for buildings. They are looking for ministry, for those things that can have a significant impact on

their lives and on the lives of their families. They are seeking answers to their spiritual needs, their personal needs and relationships... Why bother being involved if they don't get something out of it? The onus is on the shepherds.»⁶

This brings up the delicate balance necessary between ministry and the buildings needed to provide it.

On this question, two Canadian theologians hold that one need only take a look at the parish budget to see what the priorities are.⁷

An author, consultant and lecturer from the Diocese of Trenton, New Jersey, Father William Bausch, suggests that «we shouldn't melt in fear at the bad news that surrounds us. But we do need to face it. How can we speak to this generation and carry the message of Christ across the rim of the millenium if we don't have a realistic view of what we are up against?»⁸

He continues by adding that «we in parish ministry [...] don't know if we're coming or going. There's so much rapid change everywhere that we simply cannot assimilate it: technology, genetic coding, Internet, video phones, outer space, organ transplants, instant communications, faxes, cyberspace, and

all the rest. Everything is becoming unglued. The old guidelines and certainties are going.»⁹

So to put things into perspective, we aim to look at what constitutes a parish and more importantly, what constitutes a vibrant parish.

Christian communities existed long before the parish was formally instituted. Here is how the Acts of the Apostles describes life in the first communities:

«They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of the bread and prayers. Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common: they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.» Acts 2, 42-47

Nevertheless, these first communities were not without their own challenges and difficulties. A look at how they dealt with these is found in *Acts 15: The council at Jerusalem*. This passage explains that the community would gather to look at a situation and attempt to arrive at a consensus. In today's language, we would say that this is an example of 'collaborative ministry'.

What is a parish ?

The word *parish* comes from the Greek *paroikia*, meaning *neighbourhood* or *a grouping of houses*.¹⁰

While the Church's *Code of Canon Law* describes the parish essentially in terms of a «territory»¹¹, Vatican II gives it an entirely new dimension by referring to «the people of God»¹², although it doesn't address the theology of the parish.

This new dimension the Council gave to the parish leads theologian Dr. William L. Pickett to describe it as «a community of the baptized who have committed themselves to follow Jesus Christ as Redeemer. [...] When Jesus promised that he would be with us till

the end of time, he was confirming that as long as his followers were in the world, he would be there, in and through them. This is more than community. It is a communion of disciples in and with Jesus Christ, God the Father, and the Holy Spirit. Through this communion we become participants in the life and love of the Trinity. In a community we are part of a group; in communion, we enter into a mutual life at the deepest level of our being. [...] Before it is anything else, a parish is a specific embodiment of Christ. It is the Body of Christ in a particular place and at a particular time.»¹³

What is a vibrant parish ?

Winseman, whom we quoted earlier, says that «the challenge of building and revitalizing a church in trouble is daunting, but the fact remains that a church can be just about as healthy and vibrant as lay and clergy leaders want it to be. There *are* answers. (*Italics are the authors*)

«The basic problem [...] is that churches insist on ‘doing church’ – adding activities and growing through more of the usual motions – rather than

‘being church’: that is, building a congregation dedicated and energized members who are growing spiritually and, at the same time, are reaching out in concern and service to the world.

«The difference between failing churches and flourishing churches is that the latter have a high percentage of ‘engaged’ congregants.»¹⁴

The key word is *engaged congregants*. The authors of *The Changing Face of Church*, Marti R. Jewell and David A. Ramey, stress this point and enumerate three strategies for building vibrant communities:

- Calling forth the gifts of others,
- Ongoing formation and evangelization, and
- Demonstrating the relevance of faith to the lives of people.»¹⁵

These strategies lead to building «welcoming eucharistic communities»¹⁶ [that] «have vibrant liturgies, engaged staffs, significant programming, and active parishioners. »¹⁷

On the question of structure, Jewell and Ramey add that their study revealed «a wide range of parish structures to meet the unique needs of local communities».¹⁸ They describe this as «an era of experimentation within [...]

local parishes and dioceses to determine the most suitable structure».¹⁹

Interestingly enough, this *experimentation* is the buzz word just about everywhere be it in governments, education, health services, companies, organizations...

Our own archdiocese has been experimenting with the pastoral unit model and ministry team concept for more than a decade. During this period, we have observed three models of leadership that can be summed up as follows :

- Collaborative, empowering the baptismal call of the community (both ordained and laity),
- Centered on core staff (the corporate model), and
- The traditional pastor-centered model.²⁰

While working through this document, you will be able to observe which model is at work in your parish and what measures need to be taken to move on to a *collaborative model* that is more in line with Vatican II.

With this in mind, we turn to the task at hand. While it is clear that quantitative measures of the assets and activities of a parish are important, they

need to be considered of lesser importance in the scale used to measure the vitality and the life of a community.

Regardless of how much a parish has, its vitality resides in how it lives out its faith as a community: in what it is – *being* – and in what it does – *doing*.²¹ In other words, the «Church must stop focusing on institutional preservation. It must get back to the basics (particularly the basics found in the Acts of the Apostles), and rediscover what it means to *be* the church. »²²

The grid

The grid we have prepared puts the emphasis on ministry.

The first three sections—the sectors of the mission, Engagement and Pastoral Planning— follow the same pattern.

In the left hand column, you will find a series of questions to prompt your reflection. You should feel free to add your own questions to your reflection. The centre column allows you to write down the results of your reflection. And finally, the third column asks you to give a rating to your parish on a scale from 0 to 10.

At the end of each section, you will find a summary to be completed before you move on to the next section.

The reflection ends with a section on parish statistics and final considerations.

Members of the DPMT will be available to guide you through the process, although they will not intervene in your discussions. Their function will be to accompany you and see to it that the discussions remain on track.

Parishes are to submit a copy of their findings to the *Diocesan Pastoral Ministry Team*. Your report as well as those from the other parishes will become a valuable tool in planning future projects and in assessing Diocesan needs.

Donald Langis,
Diocesan Pastoral Coordinator

September, 2011

« In the fine words of the great, late Lutheran theologian, Dorothee Soelle, the only eyes God has are our eyes, the only ears God has are our ears, the only hands God has are our hands. 'Which is to say in different words the perhaps more familiar mantra,' 'pray as if everything depends on God but act as if everything depends on you'. »²³

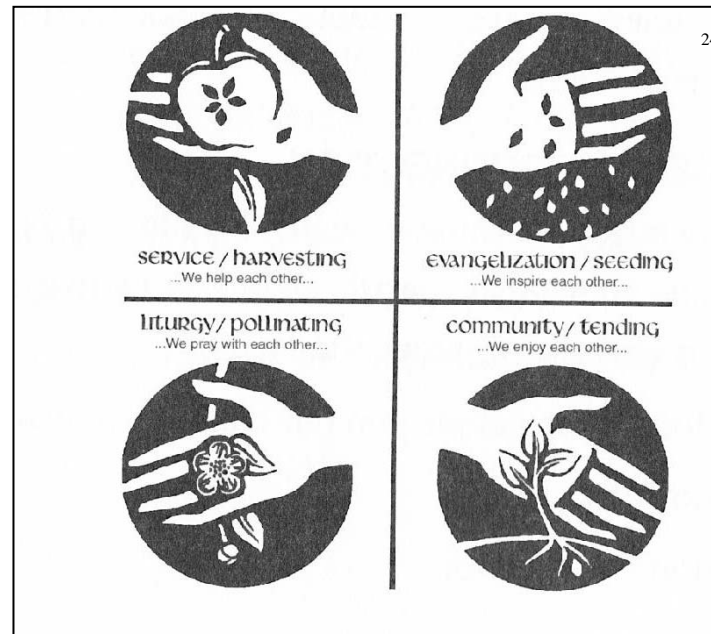
The Sectors of the Mission

*« They devoted themselves
to the apostles' teaching (Evangelization)
and fellowship (Community),
to breaking of bread and prayers (Liturgy).*

[...]

*All who believed were together
and had all things in common;
they would sell their possessions and goods
and distribute the proceeds to all,
as any had need (Service).»*

Acts 2, 42, 44-45



Children's Catechesis	Observations	Scale
<p>Does our parish offer a structured catechetical program for children?</p> <p>How is children's catechesis in our parish deepening awareness of the importance of celebration and of participating in the mission of the Church?</p> <p>How does the community engage and support children in our parish?</p>		
		0 ○
		1 ○
		2 ○
		3 ○
		4 ○
		5 ○
		6 ○
		7 ○
		8 ○
		9 ○
	10 ○	

Youth Ministry	Observations	Scale
<p>In what ways are youth a priority in our parish?</p> <p>What opportunities are there for youth to develop and celebrate their faith in our community?</p> <p>Is there a team in our parish who is an advocate for youth and youth concerns?</p> <p>How are youth encouraged to become active in the life of the community?</p>		
		0 ○
		1 ○
		2 ○
		3 ○
		4 ○
		5 ○
		6 ○
		7 ○
		8 ○
	9 ○	
	10 ○	

Liturgy	Observations	Scale
<p>Does our parish have effective and competent liturgical leadership (Priest, Liturgy Committee, Music Ministry, etc.) that enables the full, conscious and active participation of the assembly in all liturgies, all year?</p> <p>How is our parish able to provide meaningful and life-giving liturgical celebrations and offer opportunities to gather for liturgical prayer outside of Sunday Eucharist?</p> <p>How is our parish able to offer initial formation for liturgical ministers, and provide or encourage on-going formation for liturgical ministers?</p> <p>Does our parish have sufficient different ministers without need to use the same people repeatedly?</p>		

	_____	0 ○
	_____	1 ○
	_____	2 ○
	_____	3 ○
	_____	4 ○
	_____	5 ○
	_____	6 ○
	_____	7 ○
	_____	8 ○
_____	9 ○	
_____	10 ○	

Summary

1. Having completed this section on the sectors of the mission, we now invite you to transfer your assessment to the appropriate lines :

1. Adult faith education _____

2. Children’s catechesis _____

3. Youth ministry _____

4. Liturgy _____

5. Justice and solidarity _____

6. Community life _____

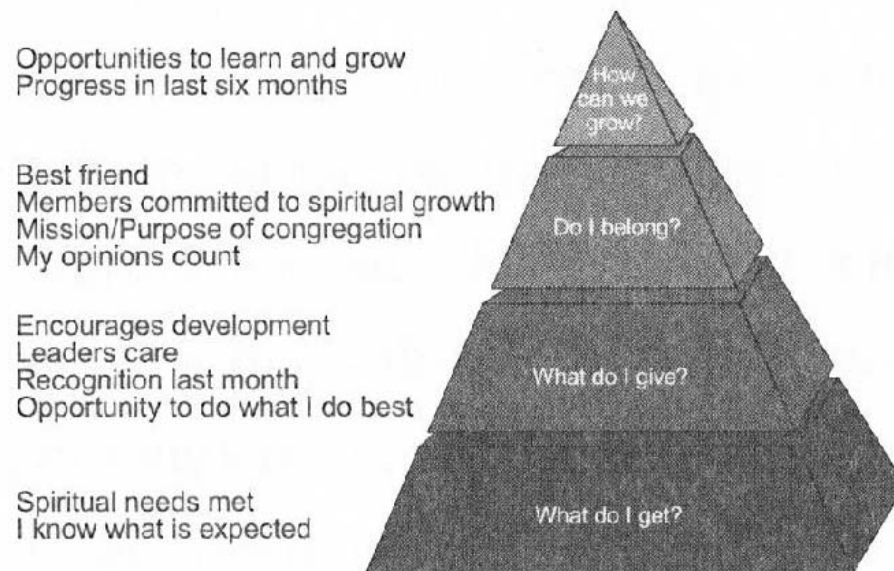
2. What do our conclusions of this reflection on the 6 sectors of the mission tell us ?

3. What needs to be done to complete the 6 sectors of the mission ?

*« Baptism is entry into a missioned community,
and just as people who join a rugby club will
presumably do so to play rugby,
so people who join the church do so in order to
participate in the mission of the church.
The church is not just there for its members;
in fact, it is more properly there for what its
members can do for those
who are not its members. »²⁵*

Engagement

The Congregational Engagement Pyramid



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CONGREGATIONAL ENGAGEMENT: WHAT DO I GET?

- As a member of my congregation/parish, I know what is expected of me.
- In my congregation/parish, my spiritual needs are met.

CONGREGATIONAL ENGAGEMENT: WHAT DO I GIVE?

- In my congregation/parish, I regularly have the opportunity to do what I do best.
- In the last month, I have received recognition or praise from someone in my congregation/parish.
- The spiritual leaders in my congregation/parish seem to care about me as a person.
- There is someone in my congregation/parish who encourages my spiritual development.

CONGREGATIONAL ENGAGEMENT: DO I BELONG?

- As a member of my congregation/parish, my opinions seem to count.
- The mission or purpose of my congregation/parish makes me feel my participation is important.
- The other members of my congregation/parish are committed to spiritual growth.
- Aside from family members, I have a best friend in my congregation/parish.

CONGREGATIONAL ENGAGEMENT: HOW CAN WE GROW?

- In the last six months, someone in my congregation/parish has talked to me about the progress of my spiritual growth.
- In my congregation/parish, I have opportunities to learn and grow.

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Leadership	Observations	Scale
<p>Shared leadership, i.e. collaborative ministry, brings us to recognize the other person's gifts in our commitment towards the fulfillment of the mission.³⁰</p> <p>How are the pastoral concerns of the parish assessed, evaluated, and responded to by the PMT?³¹</p> <p>Are decisions made by consensus after a process of discernment, study, and discussion?</p> <p>Do parish leaders participate in regular formation that is consistent with the diocesan, national and universal church teachings?</p> <p>How do parish leaders delegate responsibility for implementing pastoral activities?</p> <p>Is the work of the parish staff and members of the pastoral ministry team regularly evaluated? By whom?</p> <p>Is there a renewal process for the pastoral leaders or do the same persons remain in place?</p>	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	<p>0 ○</p> <p>1 ○</p> <p>2 ○</p> <p>3 ○</p> <p>4 ○</p> <p>5 ○</p> <p>6 ○</p> <p>7 ○</p> <p>8 ○</p> <p>9 ○</p> <p>10 ○</p>

Outreach	Observations	Scale
<p>What initiatives does our parish have in place to reach those who are engaged and disengaged?</p> <p>What outreach ministries in our church push people out of the comfort zones to make a real difference in the lives of people?³²</p> <p>What are the ministries that require hands-on, face-to-face engagement so that we may come to know the needs of our people?³³</p> <p>How has a mission initiative or outreach ministry changed our church?³⁴</p> <p>What church outreach programs have made the greatest impact on the lives of the people in our community who are not a part of our church?³⁵</p> <p>How do you suppose our congregation is perceived by those in the community who have the least power – the poor, the unemployed, the stranger, the hungry, the homeless, the abused, the addicted, the immigrant, the victim of abuse?³⁶</p>	_____	

	_____	0 ○
	_____	1 ○
	_____	2 ○
	_____	3 ○
	_____	4 ○
	_____	5 ○
	_____	6 ○
	_____	7 ○
_____	8 ○	
_____	9 ○	
_____	10 ○	

Summary

1. Having completed this section on engagement, we invite you to transfer your assessment to the appropriate lines:

- | | | | |
|----------------|-------|-----------------------|-------|
| 1. Stewardship | _____ | 2. Leadership | _____ |
| 3. Outreach | _____ | 4. Cultural diversity | _____ |

2. What do the conclusions of our reflection on engagement tell us ?

3. What needs to be done to complete our engagement as members of a Christian community?

*« Pastoral planning is
the process of praying
and thinking together
about the actions of the Body of Christ
in a particular time and place. »³⁷*

Pastoral Planning

Mission Statement	Observations	Scale
<p>Each parish has its own identity within the larger context of the mission of the Church.</p> <p>What makes us unique?</p> <p>What do we have in common with the other parishes in our pastoral unit?</p> <p>Have we taken the time to reflect on 'who we are' as a parish? Did we write it down? Are we going to?</p>		
		0 ○
		1 ○
		2 ○
		3 ○
		4 ○
		5 ○
		6 ○
		7 ○
		8 ○
		9 ○
	10 ○	

Vision Statement	Observations	Scale
<p>Have we reflected on the future of our parish?</p> <p>What kind of parish do we want to build?</p> <p>What are our dreams on the future of the parish?</p>		
		0 ○
		1 ○
		2 ○
		3 ○
		4 ○
		5 ○
		6 ○
		7 ○
		8 ○
		9 ○
	10 ○	

Objectives	Observations	Scale
<p>Having decided where we want to go (vision), we have to decide how we're going to get there.</p> <p>If we decide to go to on a trip, we probably need a map to reach our destination; we also need to decide if we're going to break up the journey.</p> <p>Remember we can't do everything at the same time. We need to focus and make choices.</p> <p>Identify your short and long term objectives.</p>	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	<p>0 ○</p> <p>1 ○</p> <p>2 ○</p> <p>3 ○</p> <p>4 ○</p> <p>5 ○</p> <p>6 ○</p> <p>7 ○</p> <p>8 ○</p> <p>9 ○</p> <p>10 ○</p>

Summary

1. Having completed this section on pastoral planning, we invite you to transfer your assessment to the appropriate lines:

1. Mission statement _____ 2. Vision statement _____ 3. Objectives _____

2. What do the conclusions of our reflection on pastoral planning tell us ?

3. What needs to be done to improve our pastoral planning?

*« We are an incarnational church.
We believe that God became a human being,
fully and completely.
God faced all the issues of human life
just as we do and just as faith communities do.
We need food, shelter, pastoral care, art, beauty,
programs of service, liturgy, and education.
All these require communities
that have financial, human, and physical resources
in order to fulfill their destiny as disciples of Jesus Christ.
While these things can never be
the bottom line for a faith community,
it is necessary that these resources be sufficient
for the accomplishment of the mission of the community. »³⁸*

Statistics

Parish Statistics							
1. Weekend Masses							
Church Seating Capacity		Number of masses		Average Participation – 1st mass			
Average Participation – 2 nd mass		Average Participation - 3rd mass		Average Participation – 4th mass			
2. The Sacraments (per year)							
No. of baptisms		No. of confirmations		No. of marriages		No. of funerals	
3. Number of Registered households							
4. Breakdown by age group							
< 34		35 to 64		> 65			
5. Number of people requesting services other than registered parishioners.							
Catechesis		Baptisms					
Marriages		Funerals					
Other : specify							

Approximate statistics on the area served							
No. of households		Mean Income		Unemployment Level			
Breakdown by age group							
< 19		20-34		35-49		50-64	> 65
Educational Attainment							
None		High School		College		University	
Household Characteristics							
Legally married		Common Law		Separated		Divorced	
Single parents		Single		Widowed			

Material/Human Resources of the parish					
Net Income		Expenses		Difference	
Operating Expenses		Maintenance Expenses		Reserve	
Salaries (excluding pastoral ministry)					
Salaries – pastoral ministry					
Adult Faith Education		Children’s Catechesis		Youth Ministry	
Liturgy		Justice and Solidarity		Community Life	
Budget – Expenses – Pastoral ministry					
Adult Faith Education		Children’s Catechesis		Youth Ministry	
Liturgy		Justice and Solidarity		Community Life	
Other ministries (explain)					

Buildings – Financial Commitments			
	Short term	Mid term	Long term
Church			
Rectory			
Hall			
Other buildings (explain)			
Major repairs or construction projects foreseen (explain)			

*«Addressing new challenges with old answers
does not work.
In fact, many of our challenges are produced
by overusing old assumptions, practices, and behaviors.
[...]
The old ways may feel comfortable and safe.
They permit us to be satisfyingly active.
But they allow us to avoid change.»³⁹*

Final Considerations

(Answer by basing yourself on your deanery.)

1. If we were to start anew to build the diocese of Moncton, where would we build our churches to get the maximum utilisation of our physical, human and financial resources and thus serve as best as possible our christian community in our deanery?

2. Having completed the parish vitality assessment, and considering the diminishing religious practice and consequently, of our income, which of the actual church buildings in our deanery do we need to realize the mission?

3. How does this affect our parish?

4. Where do we go from here?

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39. Rendle, Gilbert R., *Leading Change in the Congregation*, The Alban Institute, Inc., 1998, p. 141
40. Bausch, William J., *The Parish of the Next Millenium*, Twenty-Third Publications, Mystic, CT., 2000, p. 276

« We are the church.
 Together we are the church;
 the pastors are not the church;
 the religious men and women in our midst,
 who serve with such self-dedication and sacrifice and love,
 they are not the church,
 but all of us together constitute the church.
 What I want you to understand
 from my point of view
 is that planning is not driven by an obsessive fear
 that we have too few priests. We don't have as many as we used to.
 But the church today isn't the same as it was 50 years ago.
 Look around.
 1400 people didn't gather together 50 years ago to plan the future of this archdiocese.
 It didn't work that way.
 There's vibrancy, there's life here.
 There's no turning back.
 So let me tell you,
 you are not here because there is a shortage of priests.
 You are here because this is the way the church ought to operate.
 And if even there were four priests to every parish in this archdiocese,
 I hope to God that we would still be together today. »⁴⁰

Cardinal Bernard Law