

Diocese of Buffalo

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Office of Renewal and Development

Dear Parish Leaders,

I have received several questions and comments that it is not clear why the Renewal is needed now, and that the fullness of what the Renewal entails is not clear. This is a summary of both and I hope this helps explain some things further. Please feel free to use any/all of the information with your parishes and staffs, on your website and/or in your bulletin.

In August of 2020, then Administrator, Bishop Scharfenberger saw the need for the Diocese of Buffalo to plan for moving forward from many factors that were all impacting the Diocese and parish life within the Diocese itself. The Road to Renewal is a way for our Diocese to respond to several things:

1. **The abuse crisis in the church, the attorney general lawsuit** – how do we bring healing to those who have been abused and marginalized, as well as bring transparency and accountability to the church and her leadership.
2. **Bankruptcy** – with the financial challenges facing the Diocese, how do we ensure a continuation of the mission of the church with a renewed sense of fiscal responsibility.
3. **Declining resources and viability of parishes:** Parishes have seen a decline in resources and people over the past few years that has been exacerbated by the COVID pandemic. Parishes need to respond now for their viability in the future.
4. **Priestly planning for the future** – with the declining number of priests in the Diocese of Buffalo, a strategic planning process to meet the needs of the parishes in our diocese with the priestly talent pool is extremely important.

The Road to Renewal therefore is focusing on the following pillars:

1. **Spirituality:** For any renewal to take place it needs to begin with Jesus. Jesus constantly calls all of us to renew our commitment to Him, and that message needs to be central to our Diocesan Renewal. On August 29, 2021 at 3 pm, our Diocese will kickoff -this next phase of the Renewal with a Mass at Our Lady of Fatima Shrine in Lewiston in which parish representatives will be commissioned to be renewal advocates in their parishes. Any and all are welcome to join.
2. **Catholic Education:** Our Catholic schools and Faith Formation programs need reimagining to embrace the needs of our children and help them receive a firm foundation for the future. A vitality and viability index for Catholic schools that includes an evaluation of the Catholicity of our schools is being developed. The faith formation programs need to include the entire family and educating all people on their journey of faith.
3. **Priestly Life and Ministry:** Our Priests need love and support. A retreat for all priests is being developed to acknowledge the difficult path that priests are walking as well as fostering a spirit of healing. The Renewal also needs to assess the talents and skills that our priests bring to our Diocese and work on development opportunities for priests to continue to grow and develop their priestly skills to lead our parishes and Diocese into the future.

4. **The Catholic Center:** The leadership of our Diocese and the departments that assist the operations and functioning of parishes needs renewal in how they can provide the best services possible to help our Diocese flourish. This will call for additional training and formation for them as they work to empower the church, parish leaders, and the people of God throughout our Diocese.
5. **Family of Parishes:** Our parishes have an opportunity to collaborate and work together, supporting one another in building up the church. Parishes across the Diocese are experiencing diminished resources available to keep our parishes strong and vibrant. The Family of Parishes model brings together parishes in a geographic proximity that will work together, sharing resources, personnel and priests to make our parishes stronger. When parishes bring their best together, and work together, greater efficiencies can be realized. The Family of Parishes model also responds to the declining number of priests in our Diocese by creating families where priestly ministry is shared and more responsibility of the day to day operations of the parish can be carried by lay leaders

As a reminder, we are currently in the collaborative phase of the Renewal, in which our parish leadership is discussing this family structure and deciding if the proposed families are the best fit. There will be an opportunity for all parishes to make suggestions and potentially change their family if they deem necessary. It is important to note that ALL parishes in the Diocese will be a part of a family of parishes model, because all of us have something to offer one another. The Family of Parishes model will take the 160 parishes in our Diocese and group them into 36 families.

As we move forward, please pray for the work of the Renewal. You can always find the most up to date information at www.roadtorenewal.org.

Please note that meetings with DRE's and the Renewal are scheduled for Tuesday, August 3 and will be held via zoom. If your DRE did not receive this invitation, please email Eileen Warner at ewarner@buffalodiocese.org. A parish business manager Renewal meeting is being scheduled and a date will be shared by Friday.

Thank you for all that you do for the people of God, and my hope is that you are taking time for yourselves to renew and refresh during these summer months.

Keep smiling 😊

Rev. Bryan Zielenieski

Vicar for Renewal and Development