

TRENDS IMPACTING PASTORAL & PERSONNEL PLANNING IN THE DIOCESE OF LONDON

September 15, 2011

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ,

Last fall, the diocese commissioned a report that would present data, projections and analysis on the future availability of parish priests, on Sunday Mass attendance, and on demographic, sacramental, financial and other personnel data. Mr. Fred Galloway, a planning consultant who assisted us in the past, prepared the report. The brief synopsis below will give you an overview of the report's findings in a format which I hope is easy to read and understand. The full 65-page report is available online at www.dol.ca.

The report provides current trends and projections which speak to changes in society and the ways people live out their faith in everyday life. I found this report hard to read. Many of us are saddened by the losses our Church has experienced in our own lifetime. I think it is important to emphasize, then, that the report should not be a source of discouragement for us. It is a tool that gives us solid data which can help us understand the rapid changes we have witnessed.

Our people are aware of the pressing realities that our Church is facing. When I do pastoral visits, they have spoken to me about the challenges they face and the need to make changes, so that our diocese can move forward with renewed hope.

They know that it is well within our reach to make these changes.



Most Rev. Ronald P. Fabbro, CSB
Bishop of London

Our Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI, refers to the challenges that our Church is facing in the context of the new evangelization, that is, our mission to bring the Gospel to our world, to bear witness, by our words and actions, to Jesus' love for us. The period of spiritual renewal which our diocese has begun, and programs such as Arise Together in Christ, will better prepare us for this mission and enable us to address the work before us.

What we need to do now is study the report carefully. Through prayerful discernment, we will be able to develop sound pastoral strategies for the future. All of us – clergy and laity, young and old – need to be working together. In the weeks ahead, I will be turning to you and seeking your input and support. It is in this spirit, that I ask you to read the synopsis that follows.

TRENDS IN CANADIAN SOCIETY...

Population

Canada is experiencing an aging population driven by the "Boomer" generation (about a third of all Canadians). Rural population is decreasing in some areas up to 2% a year as the population ages and younger people leave for post-secondary education and/or employment and farm consolidation continues. The birth rate in Canada has declined to the point that natural population replacement is not achievable. Canada requires 250,000 to 300,000 new immigrants each year to sustain our population. Historically, new immigrants mostly came from northern and eastern Europe. Today, immigrants are arriving

from Africa, South America and the Middle and Far East, primarily non-Catholic areas except for South America.

Technology

Technology growth involves communications, operations, delivery techniques, accountability, and many other areas. Social media have become increasingly important. Many people under 35 years of age do not read newspapers or use landline telephones. They rely on the internet using social networks such as Facebook, Twitter, and apps to receive information and to communicate. Organizations that fail to respond to these trends will be

increasingly marginalized by younger generations who, as they age, will become the dominant population group.

Globalization

For young people especially, the whole world is accessible, and their view of the world extends well beyond their local communities. This much broader perspective impacts their values, perception of what is important and understanding of where and how they belong.

People's Connection with the Church

Another emerging trend is the reduced affinity people have with traditional

institutions, suppliers and others. This is particularly evident among younger generations. This decline in institutional affinity impacts most Christian churches given perceptions of reduced relevancy, new forms of communication, education, changing societal values and globalization. For many people, spirituality is seen and

practiced quite separately from traditional church structures. The sexual abuse of children by priests has also led to a loss of trust in the moral authority of the Church.

Volunteerism

Volunteerism has long been a cornerstone for services provided by parishes. In

recent years, many people have less time and willingness to volunteer on a long-term basis, given the hectic and fragmented nature of modern life. Across Canadian society, increased scrutiny, expectations and police checks associated with volunteering impact people's willingness to get involved.

TRENDS IN THE DIOCESE OF LONDON...

Sacramental, Mass Attendance, Finance & Other Trends

For more than 30 years, data has been collected regarding Sacraments. For the past three years, average weekend Mass attendance counts have been taken at all parishes.

The Sacramental data shows constantly declining levels of participation. For most Sacraments, this began most evidently after 1993. Some, but not all, of the reductions involve pre-school and school-age Sacraments (Baptism, First Communion and Confirmation) which can be associated with declining birth rates and student populations in Catholic schools, particularly in rural areas. Numbers of marriages show the most significant decline. Also funerals in churches have declined 18% from 1975 to 2010, though burials in larger Catholic cemeteries increased 200% for the same period.

Sunday Mass attendance is lower as well. The reduction across the diocese over the past three years was approximately 3.5%, ranging from a slight increase in the Ingersoll area to a 6% decline in Essex County. Catholics represent about a third of the general population in southwestern

Ontario. Based on approximately 450,000 Catholics living in the Diocese of London, average weekend Mass attendance is around 14%. There are 120 parishes and Catholic communities in the diocese in 2010 compared to 171 in 1975. This reduction primarily results from parish reorganization over the last ten years.

Regarding parish finances, since 1994 the Sunday offertory revenues have increased 15.9%, which is slightly less than cumulative inflation over the same period. Almost all of this growth occurred before 2001.

Priests Available for Parish Ministry

Parish priest availability has also been examined. Projections were first completed in 1991. We now have new projections based on significantly more data regarding age, retirement and other factors.

In 1991, there were 178 priests available for parish ministry in the Diocese of London. Currently 100 priests serve in parishes. Taking into account retirements, sabbaticals, new religious and international priests, and ordinations forecasted at about 1.7 diocesan priests per year, by 2025 there will be 73 parish

priests, nearly half of whom would be priests from outside North America.

Deacons Availability

The number of permanent deacons in the diocese has increased from two in 1995 to 38 in 2011. By 2021, 72 permanent deacons are projected to be available.

Lay Ecclesial Ministers

The number of Lay Ecclesial Ministers has increased from nine to 78 individuals since 1980. Their average age is 50 and nearly 80% are female.

Parish Support Staff

Since 1995, the Parish support staff have increased from 462 to 513 individuals.

Catholic School Student Projections

Six Catholic school boards serve within the diocese: Windsor-Essex, St. Clair, London, Huron-Perth and Conseil Scolaire Ecoles des District des Ecoles catholique du Sud-Ouest. As well, a small portion of Brant Haldimand Norfolk Catholic District School Board lies in the diocese. The total Catholic school student population for the five main boards in 2008-09 was 68,081. This is forecasted to decrease by approximately 10% by 2013-14.

ANALYSIS...

From a strategic perspective, at least two analytical outcomes emerge:

If current trends and strategies continue, by 2025 there will be just one priest for every two or three parishes, and the average age of these priests would be older. The implications of these trends on how parishes are organized, led and supported in the future will need to be assessed.

Less people are Catholic, and less people who self-identify as Catholic practice their faith by participating in the Sacraments. This downward trend in our diocese is influenced by a wide range of factors, including declining birth rates, changing multicultural populations, societal influences, loss of religious affinity, and changing faith practices etc. All of these factors must be taken into account in our pastoral and personnel planning.

See the next page to read about how we are moving forward.

MOVING FORWARD

The above synopsis provides a brief glimpse of the wealth of information contained in the report. It is apparent that we cannot continue operating as we are now. We must make strategic changes that will best position our diocese for the future. We must start to plan for these changes immediately.

As I stated above, all of us need to be engaged in developing these strategic plans. In the months ahead, I will be seeking input from our people, especially our diocesan leaders. The following meetings have already been scheduled:

- October 2011: I will meet with the Episcopal Vicars and Directors, Deanery Chairs, Rector of St. Peter's Seminary, Director of the Institute for Catholic Formation and diocesan leaders to design the process and time line for consultation and next steps.
- November 2011: I will meet with all priests, deacons and lay ecclesial ministers.
- Spring 2012: There will be various opportunities for input by the people of the diocese.

We have already begun to develop a personnel plan for priests, deacons and lay ecclesial ministers. This plan will address short-term, pressing needs, while holding a longer-term vision of how the diocese will provide for and support competent servant leaders who will respond faithfully and effectively to emerging pastoral needs in the future.

It is my hope that we can begin to enact changes in June 2012.

I am interested in your thoughts about the report and our plans. I invite you to send me an e-mail or letter, or to contact me through the different social media, including Facebook, Twitter and YouTube.

The challenges before us are huge. We need to be courageous in addressing them, so that we can more effectively carry on the mission of evangelization which Jesus has entrusted to us. It is my prayer that each of us will personally encounter him in our daily lives. The experience of meeting him and of opening our hearts to him enables us to “embrace a future full of hope,” the central theme of our Diocesan Pastoral Plan.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

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*This is a synopsis of the Pastoral and Personnel Planning Statistical Projections & Analysis Report,
prepared in September 2011 by F.J. Galloway Associates Inc.
The full report is available at www.dol.ca.*