



Catholic Parishes in Partnership

St. Bonaventure, Raeville | St. Boniface, Elgin | St. John the Baptist, Deloit
St. John the Baptist, Petersburg | St. Peter de Alcántara, Ewing | St. Theresa, Clearwater

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May 5, 2022

Dear Parishioners:

I promised an update on the Archdiocese pastoral planning initiative called **Journey of Faith** in the bulletin this weekend. Our parish website <https://cppnebraska.org/planning> and the Archdiocese <https://journeyoffaith.org> website have information and resources to keep you informed along the way. Shortly, we will begin meeting with parish leaders from all eight parishes of our future family of parishes. In about two years' time, St. Francis of Assisi in Neligh and Our Lady of Mount Carmel in Tilden will also be served by our clergy team of two.

This goal of this letter is to make sure you are aware of the realities/facts that are facing us in the Church and why this planning is so necessary and critical now. I understand that none of us like making changes or going through transitions, but what we are doing is necessary.

In this letter I would like to address three of these critical realities:

1. The decrease in mass attendance
2. The decrease in priests
3. The population shift and decrease in our rural population

As the Archbishop's earlier letter indicated, Mass attendance in our Archdiocese has decreased by 42% since 2003. We are not immune from this decreased Mass attendance. On a typical Sunday we are missing about 880 of our registered parishioners across the eight churches from Sunday Mass.

As of today, we have 105 active priests serving in our Archdiocese. By 2032, we will be down to 84 active priests. This is due to the number of priests that will become eligible to retire at age 70, which is not offset by the number of seminarians we have had over the last 30 years. Additionally, we have the reality that priests unexpectedly get sick or even die. The future projection of 84 active priests in 10 years does assume that we will on average ordain 2 new priests a year.

Lastly, we have seen a dramatic population shift from rural areas in Nebraska to the urban centers in Nebraska. Rural Nebraska today has a lower population than it did in 1890. The peak of the rural population was around 1927. Whereas urban areas have seen dramatic growth in population. From 2000-2020, our counties experienced double digit decreases in population:

- Antelope County went from 7,452 in 2000 to 6,295 in 2020 (A 16.5% decrease)
- Boone County went from 6,259 in 2000 to 5,379 in 2020 (A 14% decrease)
- Holt County went from 11,551 in 2000 to 10,127 in 2020 (A 12.3% decrease)

I understand that this may seem challenging and even scary, but I would also encourage you to see that we are choosing how we can support the next generation and the generation after that in living their faith. We are not throwing away our heritage and our history. Instead, we are looking at how we can support the growth of faith---the most precious thing that we have---in our families and in our friends. We are not custodians of a museum, but we live and breathe from the faith and tradition that we have been given.

Remember the words of Jesus, "I am the Way and the Truth and the Life." (John 14:16) and embrace the challenge of our Holy Father Pope Francis, "I dream of a... missionary impulse capable of transforming everything, so that the Church's customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures can be suitably channeled for the evangelization of today's world rather than for her self-preservation." (*The Joy of the Gospel* - 2013)

We are all called to be disciples. We are specifically called to be missionary disciples. Our baptism calls us to go forth and live our life of faith by encountering Jesus and by helping others to experience Jesus, by growing in our Catholic faith and by helping others to grow in their Catholic faith, by loving God with all our heart, mind, soul and strength. If we focus on living our faith in our lives, our families, and our communities, God transforms and renews what we offer to him.

Whether we call this a journey or a process, we are in this together. Be sure to check out Fr. Vogel's videos on <https://cppnebraska.org/planning> and the resources on the Archdiocese website <https://journeyoffaith.org>.

With kindest regards and best wishes, I am,

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Fr. John M. Norman". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Rev. John M. Norman, **Pastor**