



OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

DIocese of YOUNGSTOWN

May 31, 2019

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

It has been two months since the regional pastoral planning initiative was announced. During that time, there have been many meetings to gather feedback on the proposed regions and how they might work to serve you, the faithful of the diocese. During the season of Lent, our priests and parish leaders met by county to give initial feedback on the plan. Now, during the Easter season, our priests and parish leaders are meeting with parish pastoral and finance councils for the same purpose. These discussions are focused on ensuring that the parishes proposed for each region are the best fit for collaboration. In addition, there are on-going conversations on models of ministry and administration that can work within a region, current collaborative efforts, and strengths and challenges of our parishes.

Last Thursday, the Priests' Council met to discuss this feedback and the next steps in the process. Next week, the Diocesan Pastoral Council will meet with a similar agenda. (The Priests' Council is comprised of priests; the pastoral council is comprised of lay people). The councils will make recommendations to me about important questions such as setting the regions, a timeline for implementation, and a process to continue to involve clergy and laity in decision making.

Soon I will make further announcements about how this plan will unfold. In the meantime, I want to share some thoughts on our planning. First, the goal of regionalization is to revitalize the Church in Northeastern Ohio, not merely to have parishes work together to continue what has been done in the past. The downward trend of Catholic affiliation and participation in dioceses across the nation clearly shows the need for a renewal. St. John Paul II called for a New Evangelization, new in its "ardor, methods, and expression" ("Address to Latin American Bishops," 9 cited in "Disciples Called to Witness," 6). Therefore, collaboration cannot merely be about combining programs or inviting neighboring parishioners to "our" parish events and ministries. Collaboration involves coming together in a spirit of prayer, offering our gifts to one another and strengthening our resolve to work on our challenges through shared sacrifice. Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI echoed St. John Paul II and expanded upon the New Evangelization, stating that it "is new, not in content but rather in its inner thrust; new in its methods that correspond to the times; and new because it is necessary to proclaim the Gospel to those who have already heard it" ("Disciples Called to Witness," 6). That is our goal. Nothing less.

144 West Wood Street • Youngstown, Ohio 44503
(330) 744-8451 • Fax: (330) 742-6448 • Email: gmurry@youngstowndiocese.org

Second, the reports from meetings of parish pastoral and finance councils show several struggles that most parishes have in common. Many of these revolve around a need to focus on youth and young adults and outreach to inactive Catholics and those who have no faith. Pope Francis reminds us of the universal call to go forth and share the Good News of the Gospel. By virtue of our baptism, each of us is a missionary disciple. The pope writes: “In our day Jesus’ command to ‘go and make disciples’ echoes in the changing scenarios and ever new challenges to the Church’s mission of evangelization, and all of us are called to take part in this new missionary ‘going forth’” (“Joy of the Gospel,” 20). Our task is to engage each member of the body of Christ to discern and use his or her gifts to build up the Church and reach out to those in our families, among our friends, and in our circle of acquaintances. Then our evangelization will be “full of fervor, joy, generosity, courage, boundless love and attraction” (“Joy of the Gospel,” 261).

These are words and ideas, but just as the apostles of the early Church, we can turn them into action. Through the grace of God, the words of the Gospel changed the known world during the first centuries of the Church. We can do the same here in the Diocese of Youngstown.

As we look forward to the celebration of Pentecost and the close of the celebrations for the 75th anniversary of the Diocese, let us call upon the Spirit of God to guide, strengthen, and unify us. Look for addition updates on the pastoral planning process here in the Exponent, on the diocesan website, and in your parish bulletin. Please be assured of my prayers for you and please continue to pray for me that I may make the best decisions for our diocese so that we always may remain on the path to eternal life.

Yours sincerely in our Lord,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "G. Murry SJ". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "G" and a distinct "SJ" at the end.

Most Reverend George V. Murry, SJ
Bishop of Youngstown