

Blessed Sacrament Parishioner Feedback

Parish Realignment: Consolidated Questions, Concerns, and Suggestions

1. Transparency, Trust, and Communication

- **Greater transparency:** How will the diocese provide greater transparency throughout the realignment process and across the diocese? Given existing distrust of diocesan leadership, what steps will be taken to build trust?
- **Financial transparency:** Can all financial figures clearly identify restricted and unrestricted funds? Reporting potential savings without explaining restrictions on funds may be misleading.
- **Meeting documentation:** Can all parish meetings related to realignment be recorded, preferably on video or at least audio, so decision-makers can accurately hear and consider parishioner feedback?
- **Parishioner input:** How will the diocese ensure that parishioners' questions, concerns, and suggestions are meaningfully considered before decisions are made?

2. Realignment Models and the Decision-Making Process

- **Meaningful local involvement:** Why does it appear that models are being developed before parishioners and local parishes have had sufficient input? How will the diocese ensure that the process is collaborative rather than predetermined?
- **Priest involvement:** Is it fair to ask priests to consider or implement realignment models in which they have had little or no input?
- **Access to proposed models:** Can parishioners learn what the proposed realignment models might include? Will the model for this parish or region be released before the November parish meeting so people have adequate time to review it and prepare thoughtful feedback?
- **Lessons from other dioceses:** Can the consultants identify other dioceses that have undertaken a similar realignment process and explain what worked, what did not, and whether the desired results were achieved?

3. Demographics and Defining Parish Communities

- **Accuracy of demographic data:** The demographic numbers presented were so large that they distracted from the rest of the presentation. If those figures are

inaccurate or misleading, how can parishioners have confidence in the other numbers?

- **Appropriate geographic boundaries:** Are demographic studies based on a five-mile radius appropriate for every parish? For Blessed Sacrament, the city of Holyoke may be a more realistic service area than a radius that includes surrounding communities.
- **Local identity and cultural differences:** Holyoke has a distinct identity and should not automatically be grouped with communities such as South Hadley and Granby. Would Chicopee or Westfield be more appropriate partners to consider? How will the diocese account for differences in income, racial composition, culture, and community identity?
- **Broader regional planning:** Should realignment consider resources and potential partnerships beyond the immediate area, including other dioceses and communities across the state?

4. Financial Sustainability and Sharing Resources

- **Parish cash flow:** Are parish collections sufficient to cover operating expenses? How will the diocese evaluate each parish's ongoing financial sustainability, rather than focusing only on potential savings?
- **Sharing facilities:** Can neighboring parishes share underused buildings and facilities, such as parish halls, rather than each parish having to maintain its own?
- **Financial assistance across dioceses:** Could dioceses in more prosperous parts of Massachusetts provide financial assistance or other resources to dioceses facing greater financial challenges?

5. Priests, Religious Vocations, and Staffing

- **Encouraging vocations:** What is the diocese doing to encourage vocations to the priesthood and religious life? Where is the pipeline—the equivalent of a farm team—to identify, encourage, and prepare future priests and religious?
- **Recruiting priests:** Could the diocese recruit more priests from other countries to address the shortage? If cultural differences are a concern, how are other dioceses successfully integrating international priests?
- **Sharing clergy:** Could other Massachusetts dioceses help by sharing priests or providing other clergy resources?

6. Evangelization, Parish Growth, and Community Engagement

- **Diocesan evangelization strategy:** What is the diocese's plan for evangelization? What resources, training, and practical support will be provided to parishes, and what best practices have proven successful?
- **Learning from other faith communities:** How are other Christian churches and faith traditions attracting people and building vibrant communities? What can Catholic parishes learn from their approaches?
- **Identifying growing communities:** Which areas of the diocese are experiencing an increase in new parishioners, and what can other parishes learn from them?
- **Renewal programs:** What renewal programs could help parishes reconnect with existing members, strengthen relationships, and bring people together across a city or community?
- **Community-wide events:** Could parishes sponsor or participate in events that attract larger crowds and create opportunities for connection, such as rodeos, racing events, or other local gatherings?

7. Welcoming Families and Building Parish Community

- **Reaching young families:** How can parishes better reach and welcome young families? Families who make the effort to attend would appreciate opportunities to connect with other families in similar circumstances.
- **Supporting parents:** Are parishes asking young families what they need? Could they offer practical support, such as occasional respite childcare, family activities, or other services that help parents participate in parish life?
- **Welcoming at the doors:** Could parishioners serve as ushers or greeters, arrive earlier, and welcome people at the front entrance so visitors and returning parishioners feel noticed and included?
- **Greater involvement of women:** How can women be more involved in parish life, leadership, ministry, and decision-making?

8. Additional Questions to Explore

- **Comparing faith communities:** Is the decline in religious participation primarily a Catholic issue, or are other faith traditions experiencing similar challenges? What can we learn from the differences?

- **Building connections across communities:** How can parishes strengthen relationships among people who identify strongly with their own city or town but may not identify with a larger regional grouping?
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Key Takeaway

Parishioners are asking for a realignment process that is transparent, collaborative, financially responsible, and grounded in the actual communities each parish serves. They want meaningful input before models are finalized, realistic demographic and financial information, a credible plan for addressing clergy shortages, and practical strategies to welcome families, strengthen parish life, and support evangelization.

The central concern is not simply how parishes should be reorganized, but how the diocese can build trust and create vibrant, sustainable faith communities for the future.

Suggested priorities for the KPL meeting

If you need to focus the discussion because time is limited, I would prioritize these five questions:

- **Transparency and trust:** How will the diocese demonstrate that parishioner input can genuinely change the proposed models?
- **Demographic accuracy:** How will the diocese ensure that the data reflects the real community each parish serves, particularly in Holyoke?
- **Financial clarity:** Will the diocese provide complete financial information, including restricted funds, operating expenses, and cash flow?
- **Clergy and evangelization:** What concrete plans and resources will address priest shortages, encourage vocations, and bring new people into parish life?
- **Advance review and feedback:** Will parishioners receive the proposed models early enough to study them and provide meaningful feedback before decisions are finalized?