



BEACONS *of* LIGHT

Parish Vitality Report

FALL 2023

FROM ARCHBISHOP SCHNURR

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Much has transpired since we introduced Beacons of Light in June 2021. Together, we have studied population and parish trends, organized parishes into Families, and launched a significant pastoral planning process that will strengthen our archdiocese to live out Christ's great commission of evangelization into the future. This Parish Vitality Report provides a snapshot of progress since Families of Parishes were implemented in July 2022. Please read this report in its entirety. You will find within it glimpses of the new life envisioned in Beacons of Light.

I am especially grateful to our priests, deacons, lay staff and parishioner leaders who are finding new ways to lead and serve in this time. This report highlights the significant progress made during Phase 1 of Beacons of Light in most of our Families of Parishes: Family Leadership Teams are being formed, competent and qualified staff are coming together and parish councils are becoming unified. Parish leaders, both clergy and laity, will be instrumental as Families take the next steps in this process to identify vision, build Family culture and create plans for a more vital community of evangelization centered on the Eucharist.

When we announced Beacons of Light in 2021, I noted that, if we are to be the Church as Christ intends, we must understand that "status quo" can have no place in our vocabulary. We must always ask ourselves, "What in God's plan must we do next?" This is the challenge for all of us now and will continue to be. Beacons of Light is not simply a process of reorganization of our parishes in response to changing demographics, diminished religious practice and fewer priests. **Beacons of Light is a process of pastoral planning to best arrange all the resources of the archdiocese to proclaim the Gospel and make disciples in this particular time and place.** Its goal, therefore, is greater life in our parishes to live Christ's evangelizing mission. This is a call, a responsibility, for each person. I urge you to pray for the continued success of Beacons of Light and to participate fully in the life of your Family of Parishes. It takes all of us working together to bring the Gospel to life in the Archdiocese of Cincinnati.

As we celebrate together the good things God has done in our archdiocese these past several months, let us also ask for the intercession of Mary, Mother of the Church and our Mother, that our Lord continue to bless us with his presence and his love.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Most Reverend Dennis M. Schnurr

Archbishop of Cincinnati



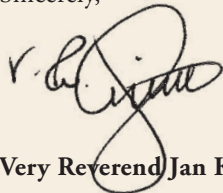
**Most Reverend
Dennis M. Schnurr**
Archbishop of Cincinnati

Introduction

This Parish Vitality Report marks the first full year of implementation of Beacons of Light. While it offers an assessment of our progress toward the phases, principles and parameters of Beacons, the intent of this report is to convey more than this. This Parish Vitality Report highlights many things we may celebrate as Families of Parishes progress through Phase 1 of Beacons. The report also acknowledges the challenges we face as we strive to build Families that are vital communities of living faith and missionary outreach.

I hope you will read this report with great interest, deepening your understanding of the goals of Beacons of Light and progress Families of Parishes are making toward them. Please take a few moments to respond to the survey at the end of this report so that we may grow together, radiating Christ in our time and place.

Sincerely,



Very Reverend Jan Kevin Schmidt
Director, Department of Pastoral Vitality



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Director, Department of Pastoral Vitality

**READ THE
FULL REPORT AT**
catholicaoc.org/pvr



Building Blocks for Parish Vitality

Beacons of Light is designed with building blocks to enhance pastoral life in the Archdiocese of Cincinnati.



PHASES

Sequential areas of focus; the phases are not tied to calendar years.



PRINCIPLES

Foundational elements that contribute to the vision and mission of Beacons of Light.



PARAMETERS

Common expectations for all Families of Parishes; what every Family must or must not do.



MILESTONES

Markers for each principle that determine when a Family has completed a phase.



Learn More About **BEACONS of LIGHT**
beaconsaoc.org

A First-Year Snapshot

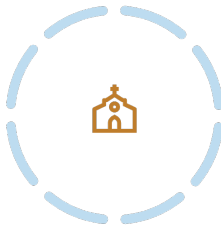
From the very start, Beacons of Light has been informed by data, providing objective insights into the demographics of the archdiocese, population trends in cities, towns and regions, and parish sacramental and giving trends over time. This Parish Vitality Report draws on the data previously collected and relies heavily on the Annual Planning Reports pastors submitted in July 2023. This report includes insights from the archdiocesan deans and Beacons liaisons, providing a progress report on the Beacons process in the first year of implementation. Updated Mass attendance and sacramental and parish financial giving data will be collected in regular annual fall reporting. This data

will be analyzed and shared in early 2024. Based on financial reporting from the end of fiscal year 2021-2022 (as of June 30, 2022), most Families of Parishes are financially healthy. Some specific parishes face financial concerns, including undetermined deferred maintenance and other liabilities.

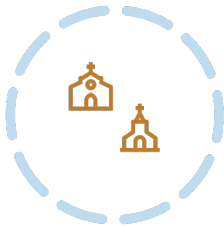
Thirty-four Families participated in the Disciple Maker Index (DMI) survey in 2023 and are using the results of the DMI as they create pastoral plans. In the future, the DMI and other data will be reliable indicators of the overall health and growth of our Families of Parishes; leaders will be able to see the effect of new programs or processes and will make adjustments to further reach the vision established for their Families.

Families of Parishes

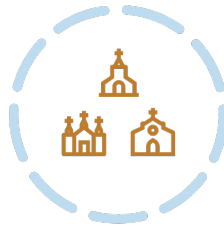
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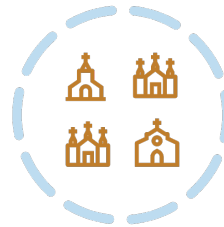
8 Families
have 1 parish



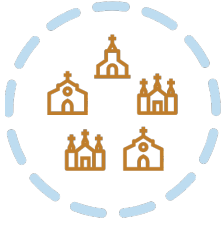
10 Families
have 2 parishes



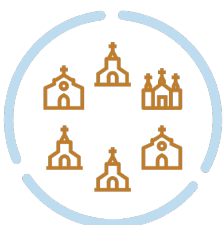
9 Families
have 3 parishes



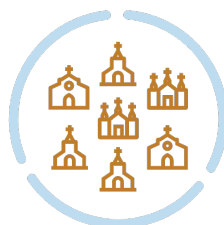
10 Families
have 4 parishes



13 Families
have 5 parishes



3 Families
have 6 parishes



3 Families
have 7 parishes



1 Family
has 8 parishes

Registered households in Families range from a low of 150 to a high of 6,035.



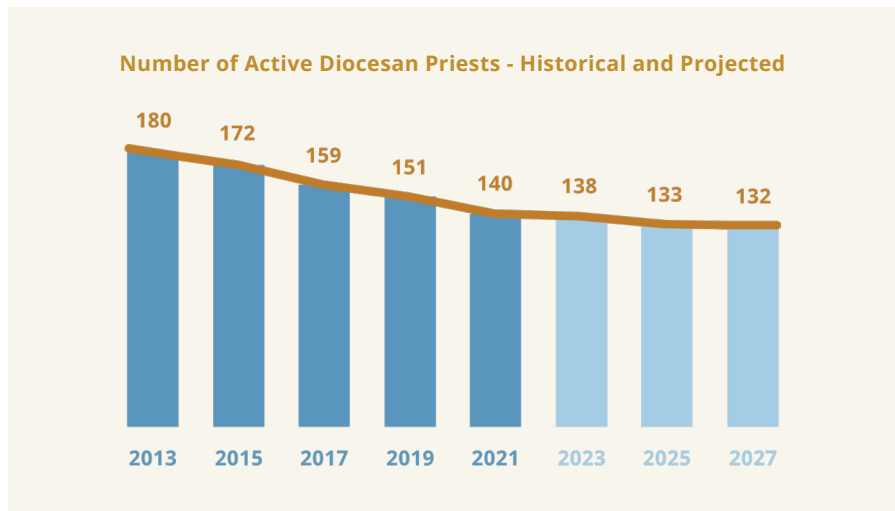
150
Households



6035
Households

Priests Now and Into the Future

Most Families of Parishes are now served by more than one active priest, and many priests moved as the process was implemented in July 2022. The early weeks of implementation of the Families of Parishes included time for priests to settle into new residences and begin to minister together, something rare in the past three or more decades since priests have typically lived and served without the companionship or support of other priests in their parishes.



-22

With expected decline in diocesan (-8) and religious order priests (-14) over the next five years, the number of priests serving Families of Parishes will decrease by 22.

50%

In the coming five years, up to half of the Families of Parishes will have one less parochial vicar compared to their current staffing levels.

25%

The positive news is that the decline in active diocesan priests has slowed. The age cohorts of active priests have begun to equalize, yet more than one in four active priests will be eligible to retire in the next five years.

10

Ten Families have religious order priests; the remaining Families are led by diocesan priests.

Catholic Schools

Catholic education is an integral part of many Families of Parishes' missions. The 110 schools within the Archdiocese of Cincinnati radiate Christ by forming students to be disciples. The Catholic Schools office has spent the past year taking a deeper dive into the current realities regarding the schools within the Families of Parishes and supporting pastors in various areas.

As Families of Parishes enter the visioning phase of Beacons of Light, the Catholic Schools office continues to assist in this endeavor. It is vital that Catholic education remains a part of Families' missions, therefore, the office hired a pastoral planning support specialist to assist pastors and principals in the pastoral planning process — as it relates to Catholic schools. As each school is unique, with varying strengths, opportunities and challenges, the Catholic Schools office is partnering with the leadership of each Family of Parishes to ensure that Catholic education remains an essential part of the archdiocese's evangelizing mission.

Collaboration has been key to the success of our Family of Parishes. We have regular combined staff meetings and had a joint staff retreat day; our parish councils have come together to meet as one, and we have formed a 60-member committee to develop our Family vision. We have come together in prayer celebrating the installation of our clergy and most recently our naming celebration with combined choirs and liturgical ministers.

— **Nick Wilker**, Director of Worship
Christ our Light Family of Parishes



Progress on the Pastoral Planning Pathway

In the Annual Planning Reports, pastors indicated progress toward the milestones of Phase 1 and the parameters associated with each guiding principle. While most Families have not completed Phase 1 of all six principles, **81 percent** of Families are leading (ahead of what might be expected at this stage of the process) or on track (progressing steadily through Phase 1). For a process as complex as Beacons, it is encouraging to know that most Families of Parishes are taking significant steps on the Pastoral Planning Pathway. Only a handful of Families are facing serious challenges (many of which can be overcome), some of which are external, beyond the control of the pastor and his team.

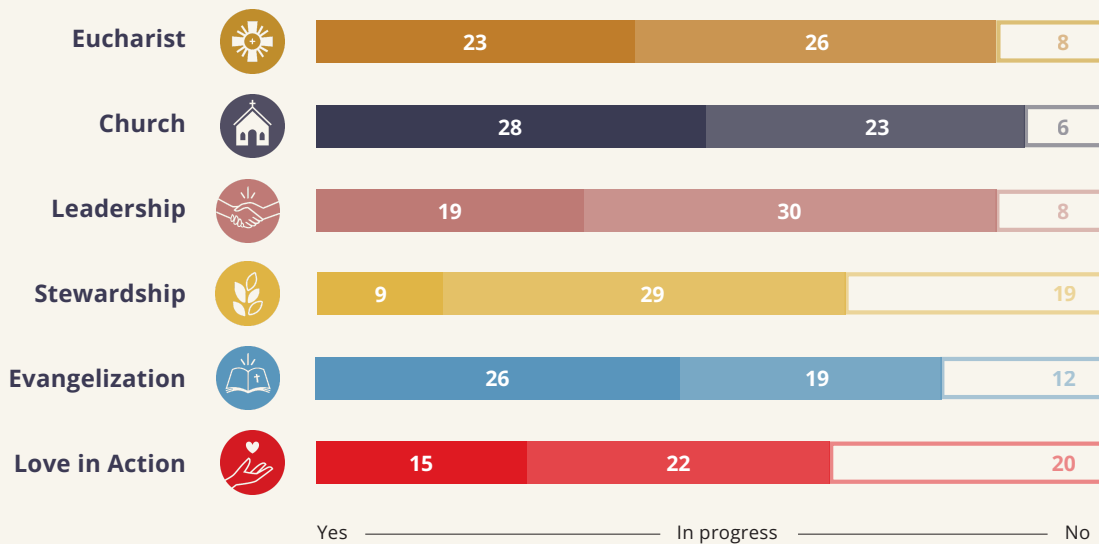


81%

of Families are on track or leading

Many pastors noted that the expectation of an Annual Planning Report due by July 1, 2023, was helpful and, in some cases, motivating; the report makes clear the progress being made, challenges and obstacles to be faced and steps Families have yet to take. This annual reporting is a new and decisive element for pastors and Family leaders, providing the foundation for enhanced parish health and measurable growth in the future.

Milestone Progress by Family



Our communications team produced a beautiful 8-page report to highlight the progress our 3 parishes have made in the first year of the Beacons' process. They were able to weave through the report the principles of Beacons of Light which provided another opportunity to educate our parishioners. The report was mailed to the families of each parish, as well as our 3 school families.

— **Cathy Magness**, Beacons' Pathway Leader, Kettering Catholic Community





Phase 1: Leadership

Beacons of Light Phase 1 is focused on leadership, recognizing that to enact change (particularly significant change such as that envisioned in Beacons), faithful, competent and qualified leaders are essential. Pastors have taken time to get to know their staff and to become familiar with the existing leadership structures in their parishes. Now, 15 months into the process, many Families have or are getting leaders in place in key areas of parish life.

Sixty-four percent of pastors have formed (in part or in whole) their **Family Leadership Teams**, a small group of key staff who share leadership with the pastor in a specific area of ministry, such as worship, administration or evangelization, and supervise other staff. This has reduced the number of direct reports for most pastors, simplifying their administrative duties.

Pastors are also beginning to **unify their staffs**, so that rather than serving one parish, many staff members now coordinate ministry for their Family of Parishes. Whereas in the past, a person might have been responsible for faith formation from “womb to tomb,” now, staff members might oversee one segment of the population and collaborate with others to provide innovative and responsive ministry throughout the Family. It is important to note that many staffs have retained

all or most of the staff of the parishes that comprise the Family. Some change in staff has occurred, in part due to a change in roles or responsibilities, in part due to attrition and movement of staff to new ministerial positions. Some pastors report difficulty in identifying qualified and competent staff, even after extensive searches in their regions, especially in rural areas.

Some Families have begun to form a **unified Family Pastoral Council**. The council is sometimes composed of all the parish pastoral councils within the Family. At other times, the council is made up of representatives of the parish councils or a new council is being formed to discern the future for the Family while parish pastoral councils continue to serve for the time being.

Forty-one pastors have a Beacons liaison, an experienced individual with leadership background, desire to serve the Church and the ability to offer timely coaching and support. The Families that have a liaison are more likely to be progressing well at this stage, which is a testimony to the benefit of liaisons' support for pastors and their teams.

Forty-four Families now have a Pathway Lead, a staff member who is designated by the pastor to receive Beacons of Light communication and ensure the Family is maintaining attention to the many details and tasks of the process.

Joining Together in Community

The Annual Planning Reports submitted by Families of Parishes pastors noted striking examples of people coming together, the dedication of staff and the commitment of parishioner leaders in seeking opportunities to become united as a community of faith:

- Family holy day or holiday Masses
- Family Holy Week and/or Easter Vigil celebrations
- Combined RCIA, religious education, young adult ministry
- Family dinners, picnics, social gatherings
- Shared ministry to hospitalized, homebound, bereaved
- Shared service, outreach, St. Vincent De Paul, pro-life
- Unifying ministries, councils
- Family retreats, Lenten missions, series
- Increased attention and ministry to and with ethnic groups

Some pastors and their teams report enhanced Hispanic ministry, noting that the growth in their Families can be directly attributed to the increasing number of Hispanic Catholics in their Families. Families with Hispanic evangelization welcome, accompany and equip Hispanic Catholics to become fully invested and integrated into the life of the Church.

A few Families include in their missions centralized ministry to and with African Americans in an intentional effort to assist the local church in ministering to the various peoples and cultures that make up the Church of Cincinnati. They do so in recognition of the rich history, spirituality and gifts African Americans continue to share in the Church's mission to encounter Christ in one another.

What's in a Name?

While it was not a Phase 1 milestone to do so, many Families of Parishes have adopted a Family name. In some Families, the name will carry over when the parishes of the Family have formally unified. In others, a name has been adopted for the next few years, with a new parish name to be prayerfully discerned as the parishes are formally coming together. Some Families have made a conscious decision not to adopt a name yet, desiring more time to bring people together in other ways before doing so. It is important to remember that Families will progress through steps such as this in a time and manner appropriate for them.

Even Necessary Change Can Be Difficult

The implementation of Families of Parishes and the change that is inherent in Beacons of Light is a necessary response to the current reality of the Archdiocese of Cincinnati. While necessary, such change is not always easy. The Annual Planning Reports note common challenges for many or most of the Families of Parishes, along with some obstacles that are particular to one Family or their local regions. It is important to acknowledge these challenges, especially because each of us has the ability and responsibility to address and overcome the obstacles on our path to becoming vital communities of discipleship.



✦ TIES TO THE PARISH ARE STRONGER THAN TO THE FAMILY

Church documents and statistical studies all point to the important role the faith community plays in our lives as followers of Jesus. When we are deeply rooted in our parish, we are more likely to live and grow as disciples, become involved in parish ministries and give our time, talents, and treasure as good stewards. It is understandable that those who have been engaged in their parishes might be challenged to broaden their perspective to the Family of Parishes, and yet it is necessary that we do so. Most pastors of multi-parish Families noted that parochialism — the identification of people with their parishes to the exclusion of the other parishes in the Family — is an obstacle for future vitality, unity and growth.

✦ IT IS DIFFICULT TO COME TOGETHER WHEN WE LIVE SO FAR APART

No two Families of Parishes are exactly alike. Even within a local region, Families are composed of parishes that may be geographically close or dispersed, culturally similar or with differing liturgical sensibilities or ethnic composition. Pastors of parishes that are geographically spread over many miles note the challenges of bringing staff or ministries together. Some are finding natural patterns of movement that lead to the potential for some centralization of offices or programs while maintaining presence in all the parishes within the Family at this time.

✦ APPRECIATING THE PAST WHILE POINTING TOWARD THE FUTURE

Some people are challenged to move beyond longstanding ambivalence or rivalry with a neighboring parish, now part of their Family of Parishes. Members of smaller parishes fear they will lose their sense of history or identity as they are asked to come together with a neighboring, larger parish. It must be noted that it is not the intent of Beacons of Light that any parish loses the qualities that make a community special. Especially in more rural areas in the archdiocese, people explain that the parish and church building are central to the life of their local communities. As Families move through the Beacons process, especially in Phase 2 (which is focused on vision) and Phase 3 (which is focused on culture), such concerns will be addressed and opportunities for unity will be explored.

✦ ADOPTING WIDER PERSPECTIVES

Some pastors noted that people are tied not only to “their” parishes but also to a specific Mass time — either out of habit or because this is where they know people or feel comfortable. While such ties are understandable, all are challenged to widen their views and connections (in prayer, social gatherings and ministry) so that, over time, the Family will be unified as a community of faith.

LOOK AHEAD:

Pastoral Councils, Phase 2 and More

It has been gratifying to read the Annual Planning Reports from each Family and to talk with deans, pastors and parish leaders about the tremendous progress made in this first year of Beacons of Light. The Center for Parish Vitality is committed to continuing to provide resources and support for pastors and parish leaders to make even more progress on the Pastoral Planning Pathway during Year 2.

In addition to the many resources available on the Pathway platform (updated regularly), we have some specific tools and events which we hope will support parish leaders going forward:

- Formation for parish pastoral council members on their role, especially in Beacons of Light.
- Resources for Phases 2 & 3 of pastoral planning to help leaders create a vision for their Family of Parishes and begin shaping the culture of their Family for more parish vitality.
- More Families will take the Disciple Maker Index this winter.
- Continued support for pastors and other Family leaders by Beacons liaisons, Pathway Leads, Catholic Leadership institute, and the Center for Parish Vitality.

Thanks to everyone who continues to work tirelessly to support our parish leaders in the Beacons of Light process. Together, we can bring about renewed vitality in our Families of Parishes, and — with God's help — build faith communities which will truly radiate the love of Christ as beacons of light!



Jeremy Helmes
Director, Center for Parish Vitality

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J Helmes'.

Jeremy Helmes
Director, Center for Parish Vitality



**CENTER FOR
PARISH VITALITY**

vitality@catholicaoc.org | 513.263.6692

Take the Survey

The Parish Vitality Report highlights progress and challenges in the first year of Beacons of Light. Share your experience in your Family of Parishes by responding to the Parish Vitality Survey.

catholicaoc.org/vitality-survey



View the Full Parish Vitality Report at catholicaoc.org/pvr