



18-Month Progress Report Spring 2024

What this Progress Report Is

This progress report is provided to key archdiocesan leaders at the 18-month point of Beacons of Light. The report includes indicators of parish vitality using objective data and progress toward the goals of the project based on information submitted by pastors in March 2024.

The progress reports recently submitted by each Family of Parishes focused on increasing conformity with the 31 parameters of Beacons of Light as well as summary comments through which pastors noted significant progress, challenges, and areas in need of attention or support in the coming months. Objective data for this report also includes October Sunday Mass counts, sacramental counts reported in the Kennedy Directory, and parish church utilization percentages.

This 18-month report serves to highlight for archdiocesan leadership the progress made by and challenges faced by Families of Parishes as a new annual reporting schedule is established. A full Parish Vitality Report will be published in Winter 2025 (following the Year 2 Annual Report due from each Family by Oct 1) with annual updates from that point forward.

Beacons of Light

Beacons of Light is a process of pastoral planning to best arrange all the resources of the archdiocese so as to better proclaim the Gospel and make disciples in this particular time and place. Throughout the process, priests, deacons, staff, and parishioner leaders will progress through the phases of Beacons of Light, ensuring attention to the six guiding principles and the 31 parameters that provide a framework for significant change as Families of Parishes move to become unified evangelizing communities of faith.

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.

An Important Note About Data Trends

As in much of the midwestern and northeastern dioceses of the United States, there has been a downward trend in most measures of parish vitality over the last ten years, including Sunday Mass attendance, registered households, and reception of the sacraments of marriage and baptism. It is thus noteworthy that there was a 4.5% increase from 2022 to 2023 in Sunday Mass attendance, even though this increase does not yet offset the decline of previous years. Likewise, there is a small increase in adult baptisms and receptions into full communion, but much more robust growth is needed to bring the fullness of evangelization to life in the parishes of the Archdiocese of Cincinnati.


Families of Parishes Progress Reports

Throughout this report, progress toward conformity to the 31 parameters of Beacons of Light is highlighted. It is important to note that the numbers reflect the self-report of pastors and their leadership teams. In a few instances, the numbers have been updated based upon objective data such as Mass counts or church capacity and utilization. Where discrepancies have been noted, because of conflicting information given by Family leaders, pastors have been contacted for clarity of understanding and with offers of support as they continue to strive for conformity in the future.

The 6 Guiding Principles and 31 Parameters: Pastor Report Highlights, and Future Needs

The six principles of Beacons of Light provide a framework for pastoral planning that will lead to more mission-focused, vital parish life in the future. The 31 parameters are the common expectations, the essential norms, to which every Family must adhere.

Three general parameters lay the foundation for building vital, evangelizing parishes for the future. The progress reports submitted by Families of Parishes indicate that most are appropriately moving toward conformity with the general parameters.

 GENERAL Parameters			
Is the Family of Parishes in conformity?		Yes	No
1.	Families of Parishes must follow canon law, civil law, all universal and particular Church law, and archdiocesan policies.	53	4
2.	Families of Parishes must develop a pastoral plan for parish vitality, submitted at least annually, reviewed by the dean, to be approved by the archbishop in conformity with the parameters of the Pastoral Planning Pathway according to the published timeline.	43	14
3.	By September 1, 2022, every Family of Parishes must form a Planning Team, led by the pastor, to coordinate pastoral planning geared toward the unification of the Family by June 30, 2027.	42	15



EUCHARIST

The Mass is the source and summit of the whole Christian life. Accordingly, the Eucharist is the essential moment for building up and strengthening the parish community, along with the sacraments and other celebrations of the paschal mystery – the passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

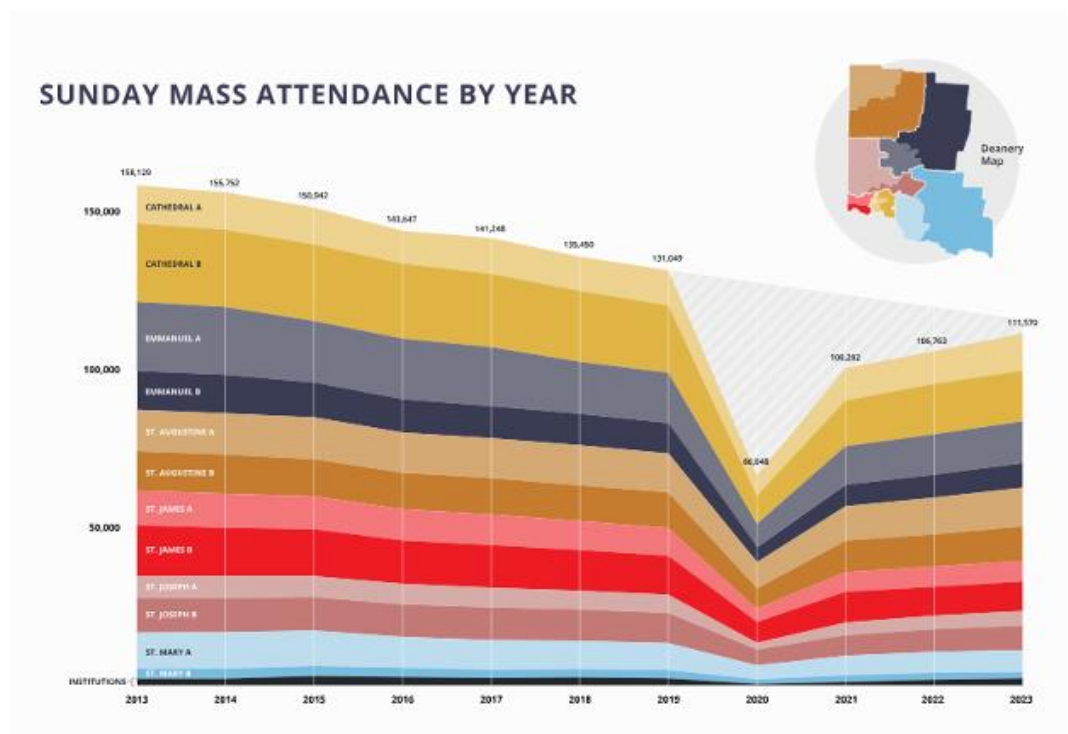
The progress reports give evidence of incremental shifts in parish life that will lead to fuller churches and more profound celebrations of the Eucharist and sacraments in the future. Comments in the report note some of the challenges and considerations as Families work toward adherence to the parameters:

- Lack of lay liturgical ministers willing to serve has especially impacted restoring distribution of Precious Blood.
- Multiple reasons cited to have Sunday Masses at less than 50% capacity:
 - Desire to provide weekend Masses at every church in a Family.
 - One pastor noted: “To bring ourselves up with this parameter we would need to drop 80% of our Masses, which would be disastrous pastorally.”
 - One pastor noted “Not able to accomplish this without serious opposition from parishioners.”
 - Desire to provide an anticipated Mass on Saturday.
 - Need to provide multiple languages at a given church or for Hispanics at other Families.
 - Another pastor noted: “Some of our Masses are above 50%, but some are still not. It's better than it was when we began Beacons, but we don't see the need to cut any more Masses at this time.”
 - Positively, many Families have combined their RCIA programs and celebrations of the Rites of Initiation.

EUCHARIST Parameters		Yes	No
4	The regular Mass schedule for a Family of Parishes may not assume more than two Masses per day per priest.	31	26
5	A regularly scheduled Mass for the Sunday precept must have annual average attendance of at least 50% of the church capacity.	14	43
6	The regular Mass schedule must provide the opportunity for priests to spiritually prepare for and be present to the community after Mass.	51	6
7	There must be a sufficient number of trained and formed liturgical ministers to serve as readers, servers, EMsHC, music ministers, et al. for liturgical celebrations.	45	12
8	Sacramental formation must be provided.	52	5

Mass Attendance

Sunday Mass attendance increased 4.5% from October 2022 to October 2023. This continues a rebound in participation since the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic but the downward trajectory of the last decade remains on trend.



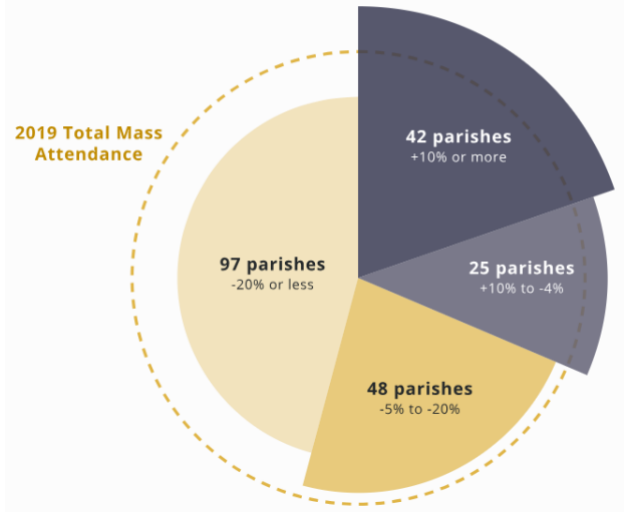
Mass Attendance and Church Utilization

The data acquired from the 2023 October count demonstrates a positive trend in Sunday Mass attendance. In tandem with fewer Masses and scheduling changes, we saw church building utilization increase, moving us closer to our target of 50%.



MASS ATTENDANCE COMPARED TO 2019

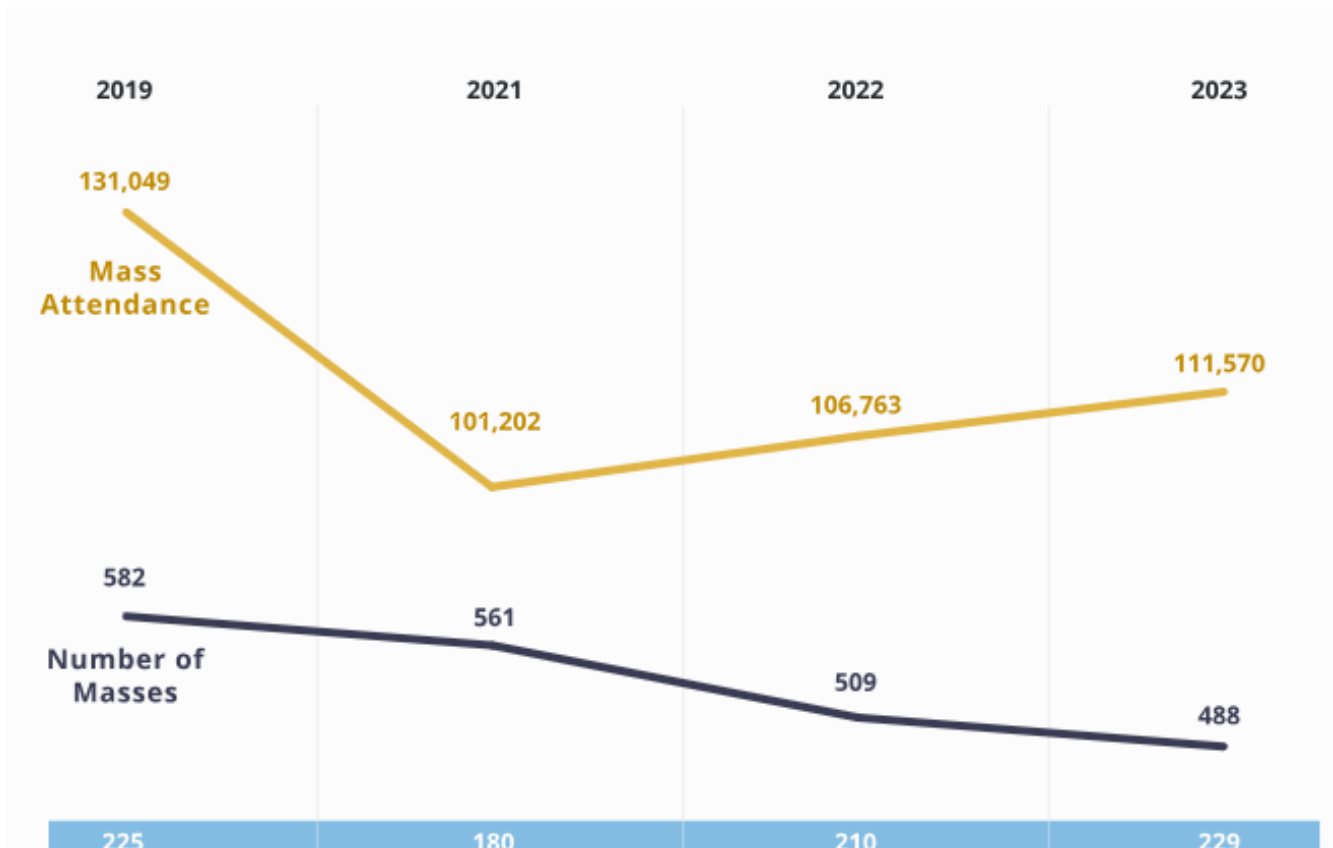
Percentage above or below 2019 counts



Additional [Mass Count](#) Information



Sunday Mass Attendance vs Numbers of Masses Offered






CHURCH

Each of us is called to actively participate as a member of a parish, the universal Church and our local Church, led by our archbishop. Parishes continually deepen the bonds of communion with other parishes.

Comments mostly focused on parameter #10, which calls for Families to collaborate with other Families within the deanery to provide coordinated pastoral ministry:

- Many pastors indicated their dean is not yet facilitating collaboration within the deanery.
 - “We are doing what we can, our dean has not shown tremendous leadership in this area as of yet.”
 - “This is a great idea. Who is supposed to take charge and keep track of these items? And take on the workload of coordinating all of this?”
 - “We NEED direction on schools.”
 - Several cited too focused at their own parish to collaborate right now.
- Some collaboration with supporting high schools or a Young Adult Minister

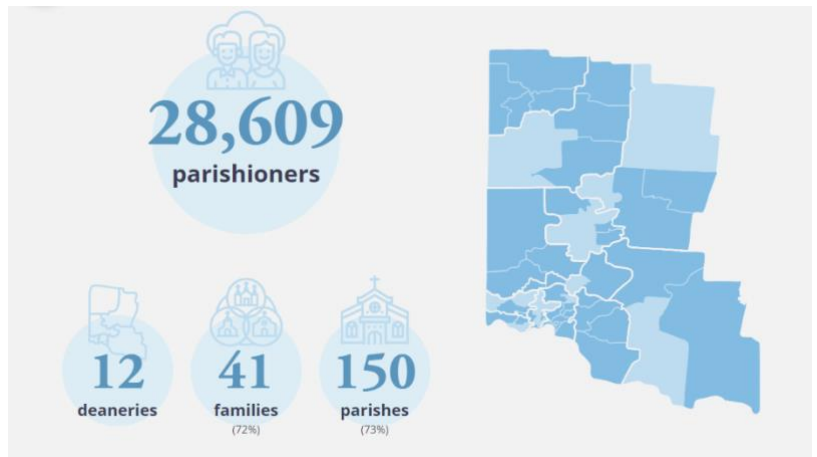
 CHURCH Parameters			
Is the Family of Parishes in conformity?		Yes	No
9	In pastoral planning and parish life, every Family of Parishes will adhere to the spirit and norms of the Vatican Instruction: “The pastoral conversion of the parish community in the evangelizing mission of the Church.” (2020)	43	14
10	Families collaborate with other Families within the deanery to provide coordinated pastoral ministry (e.g. hospitals, care facilities, young adult evangelization, high schools, jails, etc.)	34	23

48 Families of Parishes have adopted a name for their Family.

[Family Names](#)

DiscipleMaker Index

With an additional cohort of Families of Parishes completing the DiscipleMaker Index in early 2024, most Families now have up-to-date insights from their parishioners regarding spirituality, formation, and the likelihood that parishioners will recommend their parish to others. [More on the DiscipleMaker Index.](#)






LEADERSHIP

Pastors, in collaboration with parochial vicars, deacons, and lay ministers, according to their proper roles and charisms, share responsibility for pastoral leadership. The spiritual, physical, and mental health and ongoing support of ordained and lay leaders is vital for Families of Parishes.

With the Beacons of Light Phase 1 focus on Leadership, significant progress has been made in this principle area and the associated parameters.

- Most have established Family Pastoral Councils
- Collaborating Finance Councils: Most have not combined their finance councils but rely on their Dir of Admin/Finance person to meet with all and coordinate.
- Staff: Several cited too much work for the number of staff they can afford. Others have defined a cadence of training meetings as part of their regular communication schedule. Others cited a fair amount of turnover in staff.

 LEADERSHIP Parameters			
Is the Family of Parishes in conformity?			
		Yes	No
11	Every Family of Parishes will have a unified Pastoral Council, with other relevant and necessary consultative groups for specific areas of parish life.	43	14
12	The Finance Councils of each parish within the Family will work together to appropriately plan for and monitor the finances of the Family of Parishes.	34	23
13	Competent and qualified staff are necessary to serve the Family of Parishes, especially in the areas of worship, evangelization (including love in action), and administration. As is possible, staff will be unified to serve the entire Family.	44	13
14	Priests must have a regularly scheduled day off and must be able to take all annual vacation and retreats.	47	10
15	Priests, deacons, staff and other lay leaders will participate in ongoing spiritual formation and training for leadership.	47	10

- Several pastors asked for formation help for their staff. i.e. "We need high quality retreat resources offered for our lay staff and leaders especially geared toward leadership, communication, and spiritual formation locally."
- Increasing conformity in the parameter regarding regular day off, vacation, and retreat for priests; strategies and best practices will be helpful to strengthen ongoing practice in the future.
- Formation: Most clergy is getting regular formation. Less so for lay staff.

Pastors have informed the Center for Parish Vitality of staff who have been designated as directors in the key positions noted in Parameter #13 as well as having formed a Family Leadership Team:

85% of Families have a Family Leadership Team
 16 Directors of Worship
 25 Directors of Evangelization
 8 Directors of Administration



STEWARDSHIP

Families of Parishes are communities of grateful disciples. Recognizing God’s gifts, they use their talents, skills and resources to build up the Church and live as Christ’s Body in the world.

STEWARDSHIP Parameters			
Is the Family of Parishes in conformity?			
	Yes	No	
16	Every Family of Parishes will form people to embrace stewardship as a way of life.	36	21
17	Every Family of Parishes will actively promote vocational discernment.	49	8

18 pastors remarked that Stewardship has not been addressed yet and named Stewardship as a priority for the coming year. 8 Families of Parishes participated in the first cohort of Grateful Disciples leadership formation process.

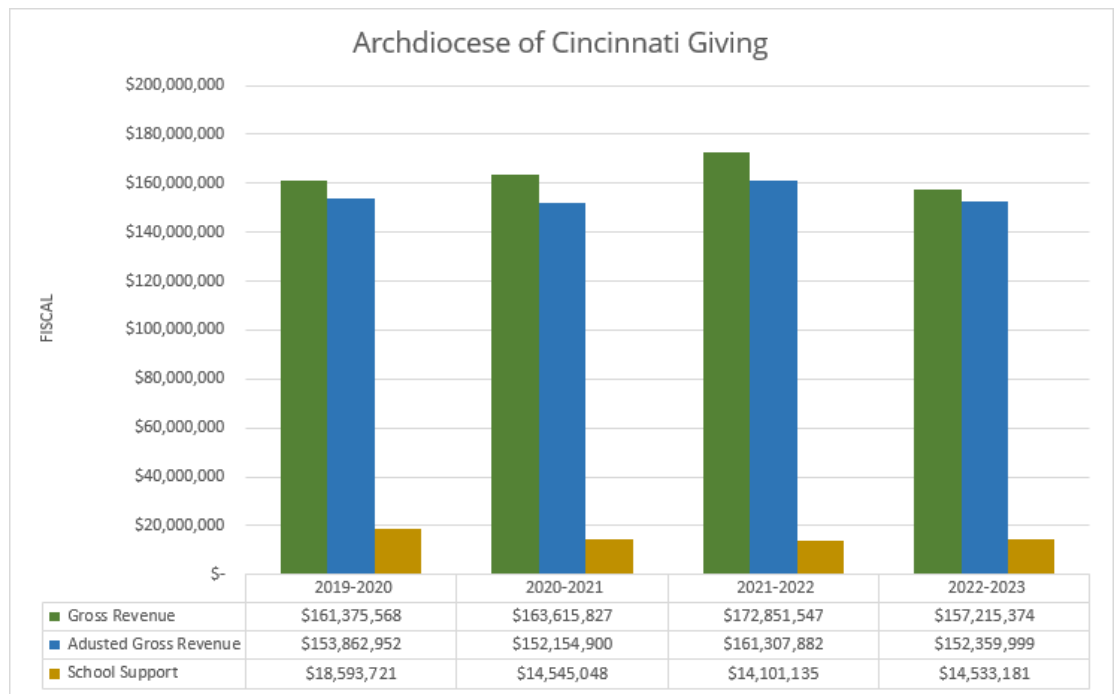
While stewardship is a spirituality of gratitude and grateful response, comments highlight a focus primarily on financial giving in some Families of Parishes. Comments highlight activity, progress, and focus on:

- The Catholic Ministries Appeal and parish support,
- Understanding giving trends, reconciling prior inaccurate financial reporting
- Hiring stewardship director and/or forming core team
- Need for more intentional stewardship formation
- Increasing participation and outreach activities
- Vocations prayer, poster in high-traffic areas
- Youth group, child faith formation, Catholic school
- Seminarians at parish
- Adoration, rosaries, vocations club, committees, articles in bulletin

Financial Giving

Giving between 2020 and 2022 saw growth in gross revenue. In 2023 there was a significant decline of 9% which brought us to the lowest amount since COVID, perhaps a reflection of economic pressures on households.

In the 2022-23 year many unfulfilled capital projects and other revenue-related initiatives were undertaken (post-Covid).






EVANGELIZATION

As centers of missionary outreach, Families of Parishes find new ways to foster discipleship among all the baptized. Schools, parishes, and indeed the domestic church itself are centers of this essential work.

- **25** Families of Parishes have hired anew or promoted from within a Director of Evangelization.
- **7** additional Families of Parishes indicate that they are actively planning to hire a Director of Evangelization.
- A few Families of Parishes have indicated that they will never be able to afford to hire a Director of Evangelization.
- **10** Families of Parishes have created an Evangelization Team.

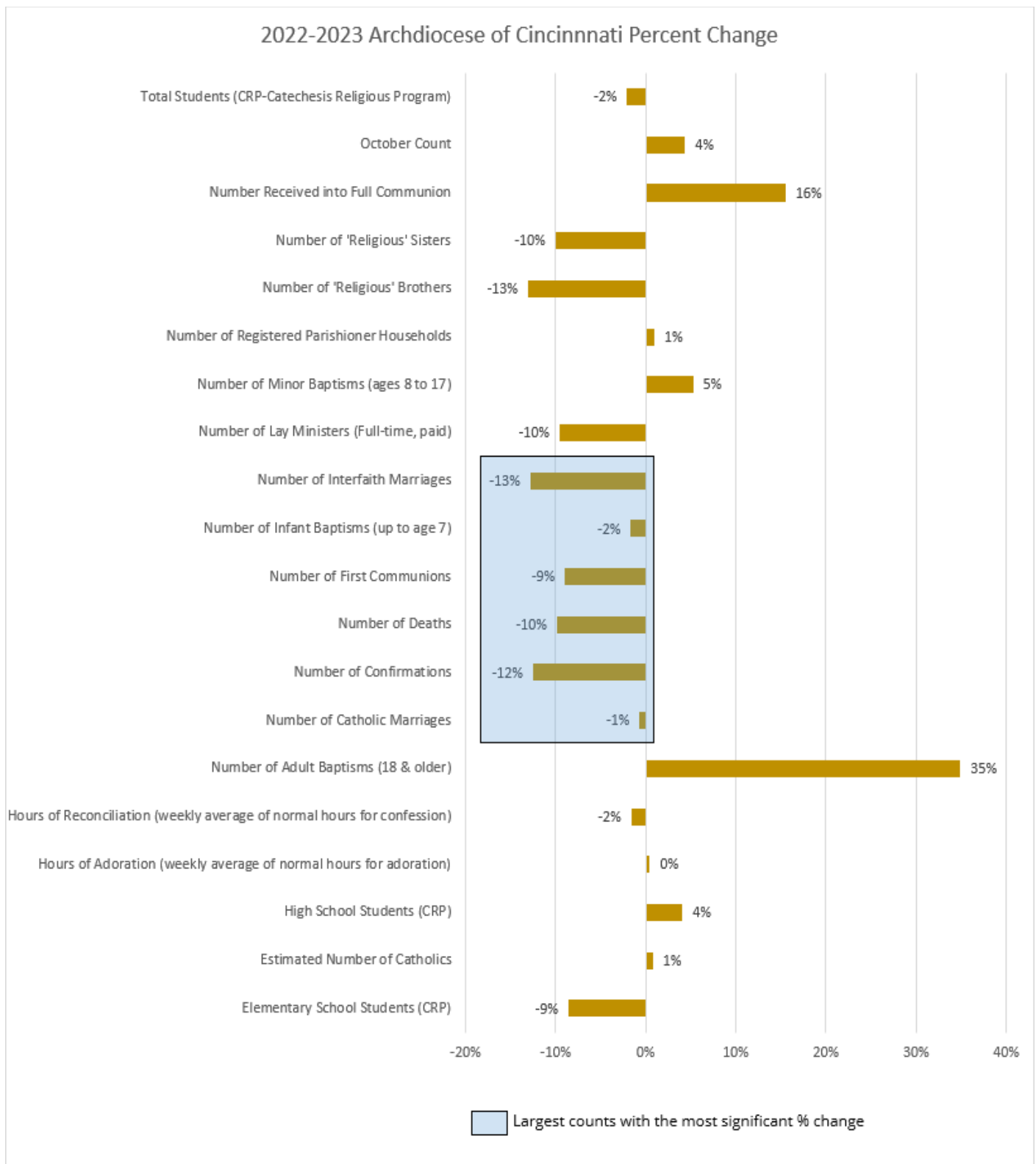
 EVANGELIZATION Parameters			
Is the Family of Parishes in conformity?		Yes	No
18	Every Family of Parishes will create and implement a plan that ministers to all persons in every season of life and every stage in the process of evangelization.	35	22
19	Every Family of Parishes will have an Evangelization Team, overseen by the pastor and led by competent and qualified staff.	35	22

These teams vary in composition. Some involve the Director of Evangelization and other evangelization staff members (this is preferred). The other involves volunteer parishioners.

- There may be some confusion among parish leaders about what an Evangelization Team is. The Team is a means to configure your ministry staff so that they all report to the Director of Evangelization, and work together to envision, plan, and implement a comprehensive plan for evangelization.
- There is much evangelization and catechesis activity still being coordinated in individual parishes. Families of Parishes have yet to develop a comprehensive plan for the entire Family of Parishes. This is to be expected, as planning will not happen until Phase 4 of Beacons of Light.
- There are a few shining examples of Families of Parishes that have hired quality Directors of Evangelization who sit on a Family Leadership Team, who have other ministry staff under the Director as an Evangelization Team, and who are starting to show new energy and growth in mission. These Families of Parishes will be spotlighted as the innovators in Beacons of Light that should inspire others.

Sacramental Data

While a slight increase in adult baptisms and receptions into full communion are noteworthy, particularly among Hispanics, it is important to note that these increases do not offset declines in infant baptisms nor concerns over the recent decrease in Catholic marriages.






LOVE IN ACTION

Families of Parishes will be communities of charity and justice, serving those most in need and working to change systems that oppress and marginalize.


Individual parishes continue to do good Love in Action work, mainly charity-based, with little advancement in organizing Love in Action in a more coordinated way in Families of Parishes. Families as of yet have not viewed this as a priority and therefore – beyond completing an initial Love in Action inventory – have not made significant progress on this principle.

- Few Love in Action coordinators have been designated; few leadership retreats held.
- Reliance on St. Vincent DePaul Society as a means for charity and outreach.
- Some Love in Action team creation, several with sole focus on Respect Life.
- Encouraging revitalization and prioritization of elder services in some Families.
- Increased outreach and efforts for Hispanic ministry.
- Need increased communication, including clarity regarding Catholic position on immigration.
- Need Love in Action leadership in Families of Parishes and for Families to prioritize for this principle.

 LOVE IN ACTION Parameters			
Is the Family of Parishes in conformity?			
		Yes	No
20	Every Family of Parishes must offer support to their communities through the spiritual and corporal works of mercy and promote a culture of life, charity, and justice.	49	8
21	Every Family of Parishes will incorporate principles of Catholic Social Teaching into faith formation efforts for youth and adults.	51	6
22	Every Family of Parishes will promote intercultural competence and facilitate the participation of all people in the life of the Church.	49	8

ADMINISTRATION

The six guiding principles address areas largely related to teaching and sanctifying. The Administration parameters are focused on the governance of Families of Parishes. Families are largely in conformity with these parameters since they reflect longstanding archdiocesan policy.


 ADMINISTRATION Parameters			
Is the Family of Parishes in conformity?		Yes	No
23	The parish/school financial ID# cannot be changed unless a new parish is formed or a parish formally changes its name.	56	1
24	Each parish must maintain their own financial and sacramental records until parish territories are merged.	57	0
25	Families of Parishes must be fiscally accountable	56	1
26	Parishes within each Family must work together to have an agreed upon and signed shared expense agreement annually when planning the yearly fiscal budget.	52	5
27	Each parish/school must follow all policies within the Temporal Affairs Handbook.	57	0
28	Every Family of Parishes must follow relevant civil law and archdiocesan policies for information (record) retention and location.	57	0
29	Every Family of Parishes must work with the Pastoral Center Department of Human Resources to review staffing models.	54	3
30	Each school must follow the approved School Change Process when making structural changes or closure decisions.	55	2

COMMUNICATIONS

Effective communication is necessary to share the Good News within the Family of Parishes and throughout the Archdiocese of Cincinnati.

The only required parameter is that all Families utilize Gabriel, the official parish database software and many parishes are not in conformity on this parameter. (The top number indicates how many Families report using Gabriel in the March 2024 progress report, the “CPV” number indicates how many are reported by the Finance Dept.)

Many Families of Parishes have embraced the suggestion that a communications professional be employed to oversee the communications work for the Family of Parishes. This has led to more professional and more effective communications from Family leaders to parishioners.

 COMMUNICATION Parameters			
Is the Family of Parishes in conformity?			
		Yes	No
31	Every Family of Parishes will utilize the archdiocese-provided census database for managing parishioner contact information and sacramental records.	55 CPV: 26	2 CPV: 31

It will be important for pastors and parish leaders to effectively communicate with the faithful throughout the phases of pastoral planning, especially about the vision for their Family (phase 2), the culture change that needs to happen for the vision to be realized (phase 3), and the planning that will be taking place within the Family (phase 4). The Dept of Communication and the Center for Parish Vitality will be working together during spring and summer 2024 to resource and support parish communicators for this work.



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