

**Parishioner Feedback on the Draft Recommendation
November 2024**

What was your initial reaction to this recommendation, i.e. how did you feel about it?

1. I support the recommendation 100%.
2. Troubling but a sign of the times and happy to see it addressed up front. I sent a few comments to Fr Bill based on reading the materials before watching the live stream [incorporated into the responses to question 2]. Short of changes to the priesthood we will be cratering and changes need to be made.
3. I forgot to add this to my earlier response. There is a Church in the Baltimore archdiocese, Church of the Nativity. They've had significant growth and may be a model to consider. Perhaps it would make sense to have some dialog with them.
4. The recommendation presents as having been well researched, succinctly yet thoroughly explaining the reasons for the creation of the task force and noting the realities that we face in our area of the diocese. It was beneficial to state from the outset that the task force was not created to recommend the closure of any existing parishes, but rather to strengthen Catholic life in Hilton-Greece-Charlotte by fostering vigorous and collaborative opportunities for faith formation, reverent liturgies, and social gatherings. The recommended/proposed clustering scenarios are common sense, based primarily upon geography and distance between parishes. Other than the understandable anxiety that arises when parishes are discussed, I can't see anybody having any real fears with the proposal.
5. 1) Grateful for realistic view and assessment of potential needs and proposed outcomes 2) Sad for the long-term cultural change affecting our generations which has been the trend since my own youth 3) Confident we can respond to reality as needed.
6. I feel the recommendations are well thought out and logical. Reading the report before the meeting I did not understand why there were 3 possibilities, so I appreciated the explanation that came during the Q&A during the afternoon session I attended.
7. It was well thought out and I appreciated the approach that the team took in gathering the information and the suggestions made.
8. The recommendation is, unfortunately, necessary. I appreciate the time and effort that the Task Force has put into the process. What bothers me the most is that so few parishioners care enough about their future that they couldn't invest a couple hours into listening to what the committee is suggesting. Attendance was very sparse, as was the meeting in October. This is proof positive that one of the most important tasks moving forward is evangelizing and growing our churches as well as encouraging vocations to the priesthood and religious life, as well as involving the laity.
9. I was fine with the recommendation. I was at session one and had to leave at the 90 minute mark due to another commitment. So the recommendation really hadn't been discussed but I read it in the handout and was fine with it.
10. I felt it was a very reasonable and logical plan. I know a lot of thought and planning went into the recommendation. I also strongly agree that the term "COMMUNITY" (for > 1 parish under 1 pastor) is much easier to digest than "CLUSTER". As a side note, due to my hearing problems, decided to stream it on tv and had difficulty hearing any of the questions asked! Would highly recommend that the facilitator repeat the question asked before answering so we would all be on the same page.
11. Applause to the team that worked so diligently on this report. Very thorough report but even though what was being reviewed was not about parishes' financial situations the clustering plan doesn't hold as much clout without it. I feel the bishop will take each parish's financials and Mass attendance into consideration when making his decisions. Having a school should make a difference to the number of children receiving the

sacraments and those school/parishes have a higher uptick but it appears that it may be more based on parish age demographics. Consideration of a parish's survival will also be based on families participating in activities and ministries surrounding their parish.

12. I could see that a great deal of planning and effort went into the report. I do believe that the Bishop will take under consideration the report's recommendations if and when he has to make a future decision on our area's parishes. I felt the report and the way it was disseminated was exemplary. Also of note: in the afternoon presentation at St. Charles Fr. Firpo started the panel with his story of the closing of Holy Name and incorporating it into St. Charles. He superbly took a "worst case scenario" and turned it into a blessing. It helped alleviate our fears. God works in wondrous ways!
13. My initial reaction is that there seemed to be very little analysis of the data and charts provided for the 7 parish locations. There did not seem to be an effort made to identify root cause(s) for the decline in parishioner attendance, when I think you could surface these by simply holding conversations with people. They will tell you. The report references the initiatives that have been kicked off, but no reference made to their effectiveness. If the answer is it's too soon to see results-state that, along with why you think these efforts should continue. I could not find any reference to the years of work on Pastoral Planning led by Bill Pickett, along with the data and trends identified 25+ years ago. In summary what I saw in the Report was: References to Data/Charts, Initiatives Undertaken by the Task Force, Recommendations for Clustering without much reasoning on WHY you are seeing this happen. We are in the midst of resolving the DOR pedophile litigation, with no reference to how that has impacted what our Parishes are seeing and feeling? I'm sure there are reasons for not referencing this, but do you really believe this has not had an impact? How do I feel about the report? Not exactly uplifting. Certainly no one is shocked that we have declined in attendance, that our priests are older, that our average age of our parishioners is increasing.
14. I was encouraged with the information given.
15. What was your reaction to this recommendation? It is difficult to understand what the specific recommendation is. My best guess is that it has to do with something about the clustering of the seven parishes and that the clusters/parish communities would be:
 - a. Our Mother of Sorrows, Holy Cross and St. Charles Borromeo
 - b. St. Lawrence and St. John the Evangelist, and
 - c. St. Mark's and St. Leo the GreatIf this is the case, it seems to be a good mix. I believe to make a more informed response, the boundaries of the parishes, the number attending masses, and the other factors that are being considered and possibly even attending a Mass at all of the seven churches. When at the meeting my thought was that St. Charles Borromeo would cluster better with St. Lawrence and St. John the Evangelist because of the school at St. Lawrence. The OMOS and Holy Cross cluster has a school in the mix and I believe that that is an additional responsibility of the Pastor.
16. I thought it was a very good proposal. We would all like to think that our individual parishes will go on forever, however, it behooves us to face reality and be prepared for the future. It is clear that a great deal of thought has been involved in the recommendations. Clustering makes the most sense. In addition, I have greatly appreciated the collaboration in adding resources to our bulletin regarding events at the other parishes. During Lent, I was able to go to confession at St. Mark's when I couldn't make the times at my parish. I was also able to donate several pairs of new shoes to St. Charles and feel as though I was doing something really positive. That sharing should really continue. I appreciate all your efforts.
17. The work of the task force is appreciated, and the geographical groupings make sense. However, the issues of finances, attendance, and maintaining the buildings were not addressed. These issues are important and should be considered before any changes

- are made. If the priest shortage is expected to be critical, then I don't see how some parish closures can be avoided.
18. These recommendations are not surprising. It is inevitable that changes need to be made.
 19. I reviewed all of the documents in advance of the Nov 20th Task Force meeting and appreciated the extent of work that has been developed and refined.
 20. Years ago we were told you were to attend the church in your area, We chose to go where our children attended Catholic school and we felt welcome and the music ministry is fantastic. After 50 years at St. Charles, we are positive we made the correct decision.
 21. I like the term "community" over cluster and what it represents. I like that this proposal was a bottom-up (parishes) vs. top-down (bishop/diocese). I like everyone is looking beyond the parish logistics. They are considering how to grow the church, how to make it relevant to all, how to make it self sufficient, growing the faith perspective, etc.
 22. It seemed logical for what it covered.
 23. I think it makes sense to consolidate as needed. There are fewer people going to mass (in person or otherwise) and I don't see that changing in the future. I think it might make the most sense to figure out why people have stopped going to mass and find ways to bring people back. The feel at church (of being a family, a real community) isn't the same for me as it was even 15-20 years ago. I realize the church operates as a business and not a family, but people (especially younger people) are searching for somewhere to belong, be a part of and parish events, activities tend to bring people together. Other religions do a better job of that, and that could be a draw away from the Catholic Church. Some of the reasons people have stopped going are probably related to two issues that can't really be resolved - the way women seem to be viewed within the church and the legal issues/abuse. Both of those have probably drawn some people away as well.
 24. Seems good, but states what we have been hearing for many years now. Nothing new. We need to be honest and open regarding the inevitable (closing of facilities and parishes). I do like that we're trying to be more inclusive and collaborative between the parishes. Is there a way to be more inclusive of older adults who may not have access/ability to use computers? Everything sends you to a website.
 25. I feel the recommendations are a positive step toward preserving what we have and hopefully growing to a more vibrant, faith-filled future.
 26. Not pleased, but understand it has to be done. Keep Father Peter at St. John's always who is loved by everyone and doesn't need to go somewhere else where they don't know he is that good. He is most ambitious priest ever.
 27. This makes very good sense to me. I like getting the sheet which overviews the different services being offered throughout the quadrant at holiday time. I appreciate knowing when the masses for holy days are throughout the six parishes so I can find one if I cannot make it to St. Lawrence when masses are scheduled. I think being prepared for possible changes is very wise.
 28. It was very eye opening to look at the numbers and information you put together. I can't think of anything the task force didn't think of. Consolidation is a reality that must be faced.
 29. Let's not replace the word "cluster churches" with community of churches. "Community churches" are Protestant. I hated the name "The Cathedral Community"— was so glad it is now "Sacred Heart Cathedral" once again. I was a member of St. Charles for several years and was "elated" when they finally hung the large crucifix on the wall. But the crucifix must be placed above the tabernacle. Please get rid of the crowns hanging above the tabernacle! The crucifix with body of Christ is central to our faith. Crowns mean nothing.

30. I am very appreciative of the pastors, staffs, councils, finance and task force and all the efforts and time they spent preparing the DRAFT for the Bishop. Thank you. 😊
31. 😊 – proactive. 😊 – transparency.
32. It feels a bit “high level,” lacking some actionable items. I understand that evangelization and fostering vocations are important, but both are hard to actually achieve tangible results (yes, seeing more men entering the priesthood would be tangible). But that is such a personal choice. It’s truly hard to influence on a broad level. I thank you all for your hard work and respect you all for your commitments.
33. This was a great idea and I definitely feel that these pastoral leaders came up with such amazing clarity. Their ideas are very easy to understand, and the leaders appear to have our interests at the goals. Thank you for all the hard work.

What additions or changes would you make to the draft recommendation?

1. None.
2. I read the recommendation from the task force. It was very apparent that a lot of time was spent discussing the issues the local church faces. As a parishioner I appreciate the effort made to craft these recommendations. With the shortage of priests has using Communion services instead of Masses been considered? It’s clearly not an alternative to the Mass but given the shortage of priests it may help alleviate the workload. It’s my understanding that Canon Law allows it during the week but not on Sundays and there is a prescribed format to use. I may be mistaken but I thought I also read that a qualified lay person can lead the service in the absence of a deacon. That leads to my second thought. The local Church used to be the center of the community. Back in the days when there were more priests and pastors were with their parishes for a longer period and there every day. Without a growth in vocations those days are sadly in the past. I know finances are tough, but I wonder if now isn’t the time to look to implement the pastoral administrator role or something like that. The person would certainly be an asset to the pastor (or deacon) and parish community. Assigned to one (or maybe two or three parishes), that would allow for more office hours and use of parish facilities to help increase daily activity in the local church to make them more of a hub of life. That person would get to know the community very well and be a bridge between the pastor and the parishioners when the pastor isn't available. Should vocations continue to decline that person is already entrenched and it’s not a foreign concept to grasp when the role expands in the future as per the recommendations. As I said initially, I do appreciate the prayer, effort and thought that went into the task force work. Please thank them for us.
3. I don't see the need for any substantial changes. It's pretty clear-cut, crafted to lay out the issue unemotionally and to propose legitimate and reasonable recommendations for parish leadership if and when a triggering event occurs.
4. None at the present moment
5. I would like to see the recommendation to the Bishop expanded to include 2 action items. 1) That the diocesan census results be utilized, if possible, geographic distribution of households when clustering parishes. Distances between church campuses is important but the distribution of households may lead to a different conclusion. Although I admit some of that may have been accomplished with the consideration of school zoning and shopping experience of parishioners. 2) I also would like to see a recommendation at the diocesan level and a plan at the 7-parish level to look at clustering beyond the Diocese of Rochester, especially in areas that have seen growth in the Catholic Church. Shortly after Easter this year I visited family in Richmond VA. At the church I attended, there were 18 baptisms that weekend and the priest mentioned there had been 29 people who were brought into the church at the Easter Vigil. Looking at the bulletin there is 1 priest, 3 deacons, and a list of lay leaders (staff???) that exceeded 1 whole column of the bulletin.

Frankly, I would love to worship there weekly! It will take many years to turn around the priest shortfall. I would like the diocese to invest more in lay leadership - paid and unpaid.

6. My recommendation that I tried to convey at the evening meeting is a Lessons Learned approach to document the things that went well / could have gone better when HC / OMOS became a community (cluster). Father Coffas referenced many in his comments. This would help any future / potential clusters have a let's say a map of what they might consider to do or not to do. Examples: Mass schedules stayed current, 1 Pastoral Council, Rotating Holy Thursday / Thanksgiving masses, 2 St. Joseph tables were put into place after trying to combine into 1 and getting some negative comments on the 1 table, working together in welcoming opportunities, 2 food pantries. These are just a few examples of what our community has experienced. At first they were not embraced but after a period time of growing the community both parishes have moved to that direction when required. Personally, in my opinion you can combine in some situations/ ministries but some need to stay within their respected parish and their legacy. By creating a list of Lessons learned it can help any future cluster parishes understand what they might run into as pitfalls and give them a road map to work within. I would be happy to help document these Lessons learned and or participate. Thank you many blessings.
7. The draft is a good one. I think it generally covers all the bases. I think as time passes it should be subject to change as needed. One suggestion I would make is to return to pre-COVID norms in our parishes. COVID did a great deal of harm to the church and after 3 years it's time to move forward. Why are we not offering the Most Precious Blood at Communion and having parishioners bring up the gifts? I have heard that most areas have resumed that practice. Also, on Holy Days, if there are 2 Masses offered, why are they both in the morning/noon hours? Working people should have the ability to attend a Mass also. Have one in the morning and one in the early evening after-work hours.
8. None.
9. What can we do or are doing to help the priests out now? Combining Faith Formation, Youth Ministries, knowledge of services being offered. I realize all the parishes already do much of this, but maybe the report needs to indicate that. The following are just my suggestions that don't necessarily need to be included in the report. Are we looking at Mass times at each parish? Changing times or having less Masses. I also realize that less Masses = less contributions in the baskets but less stress on priests is also important. Should there be a look at prepping lay ministers or deacons for becoming Pastoral Administrators in our cluster. Trust that there are capable parishioners with talents that can contribute to the health of a parish. I feel that when women were excluded from giving homilies and other "tasks" done for their churches a huge amount of demoralizing took place. Subservient mentality at its finest. Is this a 'Living Proposal'? Meaning can it be adapted or refined at maybe some benchmark dates? Maybe relooked at in 6 months or after the bishop gives his recommendation. Education from the pulpit about certain facets that may affect parishioners and be helpful to priests i.e. Receiving the Sacrament of the Sick is recorded in church records. This may be helpful for families so that when making those "I need a priest for my mother now" phone calls, they can be reassured that their relative already received the sacrament. Thank you to everyone that worked on this proposal. I was involved with several mergers, and they are not for the faint of heart.
10. Even though it may not be within the scope of the report, I feel that additional information about the future possibilities of cooperative work among the parishes and within a parish would be helpful. Think of it as "where the rubber meets the road" recommendations.
11. None.
12. To start, I might change where the parish open meetings are held to a space where the attendees and speakers are closer and where the sound system is clearer. My wife and I were sitting close to front, which we chose so we could hear clearly. The sound in that area of the St. Charles was garbled and it was difficult to hear what was being said. After about

an hour or so I needed to use the rest room and after doing so, I stood in different parts of the church where the sound was much clearer. I did mention this to Fr. John who said he would look into it as he wants the parishioners to be able to hear his Homily. A smaller venue might still be worth considering. I believe too that a few questions were raised asking: 1) What is it that would make the church better? and, 2) What would help both parishes to continue to work together? I am sure that those are questions that are continually on the minds of the Bishop and all of the Pastors. I thought that Fr. Miller's statement that "Christianity today is different". In today's social climate getting young people involved certainly is no easy task. I applaud the Pastor's and Deacon's and Ministries in what they have been doing to involve the younger people. It appears that the churches are in contact with each other in the programs they hold. Perhaps an ideation get together involving a representative from each of the churches to explore what is being done, what seems to be working, what isn't and other things in more detail could be helpful.

13. I don't have any ideas for additions or changes. However, I recently spoke to a younger person who had fallen away from the Catholic church. She currently attends Our Father's House (non-denominational) and talked extensively about what she gets out of attending services there. My understanding is that services are geared towards younger people, and they are very well attended. Perhaps a "field trip" to a service might inform us as to anything that might be included in our masses as a draw. She said attending there felt less solemn and more joyful. Also, when I first moved to Greece, I received nice invitations via the mail to join Hope Lutheran. Maybe we could somehow target new residents with flyers/invitations to join a Catholic parish.
14. Expand on the role and possibility of more pastoral leaders assigned to parishes to assist the priests.
15. I understand the group needed to choose a parameter to determine which churches might be linked together. However, with basing it on proximity, I have concerns regarding the St. Charles/Holy Cross/Mother of Sorrows configuration. I think it would be too much for one priest to serve as pastor to such a large community while trying to maintain three physical sites. I know that it is not your task to suggest the closing of parishes but as a parishioner I would prefer to belong to one new community.
16. I understand the rationale for 'distance between Parishes' as the primary driver for clustering options, but strongly believe that 'existing clusters' should be even a greater driver. With respect to the 'loss of one Pastoral leadership positions' scenario, I believe that 'Possibility C' would create even more longer term challenges than the shorter term impacts of one or more reassignments. To cluster St. Charles - one of the larger parishes amongst the seven - into an already existing cluster of larger parishes would create a significant burden on the Pastoral Leaders covering those parishes. I would encourage serious re-evaluation of the 'Possibility C' recommendation. Thank you for your consideration.
17. The things left out were the financial health, cma contributions and property condition of the parishes. I feel that these two factors will have a lot of weight on any decision to combine or close any church. I realize that the diocese already has this information from their budget program. Some properties would be easier to sell than others. Parishes that have everything combined in one building should be easier to sell, versus a parish that has 3 or 4 buildings. It is only a matter of time before one or more of our priests will be asked to go to other locations because of staff shortages in other parts of the diocese.
18. Nothing to add beyond what is mentioned above.
19. It was good to hear about youth activities in answer to a question at the evening presentation. It would be good to include plans for youth groups and education in the future as well. Over the years, it seemed that parish youth groups and boy scout troops have just gone away. There hasn't been a Scout Sunday in a long time. I remember much more involvement of youth in the past, but the Church apparently lowered their priorities and lost or shut down most of it. The report mentioned attracting and involving young people. I hope

that means seriously investing in and regaining youth programs in ways that will work in the clusters. Good organization and communication, with parents as well as the youth, will be critical. Youth are the future.

20. 1) I would look into the reasons people have stopped coming to mass, and/or stopped participating. Perhaps a subcommittee to look into this. 2) Consider space - churches that are larger could be more accommodating - ie: if parishioners from another parish need to be absorbed due to a closing. I know that we aren't yet talking about closing churches but that is probably in the not too distant future and we should be objective when considering space/condition of the buildings, etc. So maybe not talking about closing but being objective and listing out things like condition of each building, how many each church can hold comfortably for mass, what needed projects are for each parish (new roof needed for example). These two may not be needed in the draft recommendation but just to consider going forward.
21. two minor points: page 1, paragraph after bullets, first sentence seems incomplete. Better finish may be: work on these areas. pages 5-6, chart should be together so it's more readable.
22. This is probably beyond the scope of this proposal, but I maintain that allowing a married clergy and women to be ordained deacons would solve the shortage of clerics and yield a more energetic, vibrant church which in turn would attract more young people.
23. Keep all churches open, because there is about to be the biggest revival the world has ever seen. Listen to the prophets. They are all saying the same word from God. Our churches are going to be overflowing.
24. I would put churches that are very close together to consolidate into one church: 1) keep Holy Cross and Mother of Sorrows into one church at Holy Cross, 2) keep St. John's and St. Charles into one at St. John's, keep St. Lawrence separate or close altogether, keep St. Mark's separate [no mention of St. Leo's].
25. We should try to increase our events for children and young people. With so few Catholic grade schools now, it is significant that all parishes find ways to include and encourage children/young people to be part of mass and the life of the Catholic community here. This will take planning and creativity because we know that the culture we live in does not encourage life in the church. This must be a priority if our churches will continue to survive and thrive.
26. The grouping of the OCIA candidates this year was a terrific and beneficial idea.
27. To be attracted to coming to church people need first to be attracted to Our Lord and Our Lady. How often do our 7 churches offer Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament—weekly at least? And you must provide encouragement and teaching the congregation of the magnificence of sitting in quiet contemplation before the Blessed Sacrament and PLEASE PROVIDE A TIME FOR WORKING PEOPLE to come to ADORATION AFTER WORK, 6, 7 pm. All the years I worked I could never participate in adoration, Benediction services during the day. Fortunately, I can go to the adoration chapel behind St. Thomas the Apostle church on St. Paul Blvd. It is a godsend place. If you want SOLID Holy Catholics and more of them and more priests offer more ADORATION Times throughout the day/evening. Listen to what Archbishop Fulton Sheen says about the important of Adoration before the blessed sacrament! Don't forget "secularism" has strived to take over our world! During Covid people were binge watching television programs, developing new secular habits while away from church and instead of devotions, rather comfortable being "entertained" by television and internet. Satan applauded when churches were closed!! Satan got his wish. We can't come back to church as normal as before because we were too comfortable in our worship! With fear and trembling we must conquer secular influence in our families. For heaven's sake get churches teaching-evangelizing on Adoration before Blessed Sacrament to soften hardened hearts, and conversion.

28. Commend parishioners of HC/MOS being brave as a community: retaining the parishes' names.
29. Evangelization, Food Pantry—Treasure Trove. We can feel their curiosity through exposure to 1) Sacramentals, 2) our church bulletin (improve the visual aspects to catch their attention. Emphasize: for the “young ones” – lifelong learning! (They have been exposed to this philosophy through their schooling. They are very familiar with this mantra.
30. Could there be some effort to look at balancing the number of masses over the weekend, holy days etc. so that overlap/redundancy is reduced? This could impact the workload, the costs, wear and tear on facilities, and strain on resources of all kinds.
31. The draft recommendations seem pretty clear and all inclusive.