

# Parish Planning Questions & Answers

*On April 3, 2008 Bishop Galante announced his intentions for a reconfiguration of parishes in the Diocese of Camden to address longstanding challenges and to strengthen parish life in South Jersey. Below are Questions and Answers related to the parish planning initiative.*

## **I heard that Bishop Galante intends to close half the churches in the diocese. Is this true?**

No. No parishes are being suppressed and most of the churches in the diocese will remain open. Once configurations are established formally by decree, there will be, in addition to 25 parishes not involved in a merger, another 37 parishes resulting from mergers (one of which will later cluster), and three parish clusters involving seven parishes. The reconfiguration will result in 68 parishes served by more than 107 worship sites.

## **Does the Bishop have the right to merge or alter parishes?**

Yes. Under Church law, only a diocesan bishop has the right to alter parishes after hearing from the Presbyteral Council (a council of 31 priests). Alteration could mean the joining of two or more parishes, the modification of parish boundaries, or other changes.

## **What are the reasons for reconfiguring parishes in this diocese?**

Soon after Bishop Galante's installation in 2004, he held listening sessions ("Speak Ups") at each parish and with various groups within the diocese to hear firsthand from the people about their concerns and hopes for the Catholic Church in South Jersey. More than 8,000 men and women—lay, religious and clergy—participated

in the more than 140 sessions held in 2005 and 2006. From these sessions, six key pastoral priorities were identified: lifelong faith formation, youth and young adults, compassionate outreach, liturgy, lay ministry and priestly vocations.

Hearing directly from the people over a 15-month period, Bishop saw how great the needs were in the diocese. Yet, it was also equally clear that many parishes lacked the means to address these needs given the challenges that they now face. With this in mind, Bishop Galante announced a comprehensive, multi-phased parish planning process in fall 2006 in order to strengthen and revitalize parish life, to address the decline in the number of diocesan priests available for ministry, the long-term decline in religious practice, population and demographic changes, and to bring financial health and stability to our parishes.

## **Did Bishop Galante have a predetermined outcome in mind when he asked parishes to plan?**

No. Bishop did not predetermine the outcome of the planning initiative. Rather, he established a comprehensive, multi-phased, collaborative process that involved clergy, religious and laity. The process involved finding ways to address pressing challenges and to strengthen parishes in every area of the diocese.

## **How, then, did the Bishop arrive at his intentions for parish reconfiguration?**

The Bishop's intentions for reconfiguration, which were announced last April (with modifications in August) followed a period of extensive study and consultation with Deans, Deanery Planners, the Diocesan Planning Commission and the Presbyteral

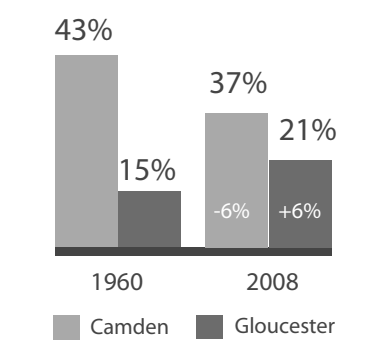
## *Gathering God's Gifts, from 2005 to the present*

- Spring 2005-Spring 2006: Bishop Galante consults with the people of the Diocese at Speak Ups.
- January 2006: Diocese promulgates Vision Statement that envisions the Church "growing ever more into a dynamic community of faith, hope and love..."
- Summer 2006: Six Pastoral Priorities are identified through Speak Up Sessions: Lifelong Faith Formation, Compassionate Outreach, Youth & Young Adults, Priestly Vocations, Liturgy, and Lay Ministry.
- Fall 2006: Parishes begin preparing to plan together by gathering and studying data and trends.
- December 2006: Diocesan assembly approves goals and strategies to advance pastoral priorities identified through parish Speak Up sessions.
- January 6, 2007: Diocesan In-service Planning Day at Camden Catholic High launches parish planning process.
- Winter/Spring 2007: Parish Planning Teams study data from other parishes in their region/groups within the deanery. Representatives from Parish Planning Teams work with planning partners in deaneries to formulate planning recommendations.
- May 15, 2007: Preliminary Planning Recommendations developed and forwarded to the Diocesan Planning Commission for review.
- June/July 2007: Diocesan Planning Commission Review of Recommendations.
- Fall 2007: Deanery meetings with Bishop Galante and representatives of the Diocesan Planning Commission to review.
- January, 2008: Revised recommendations due from deanery planners.
- February 2008: The Diocesan Planning Commission meets February 25-27. Working under the direction of a facilitator, first in small groups and then as a body, they develop a final set of recommendations regarding each deanery to give to the Bishop with the intent of promoting the common good of the diocese. With this action their work is completed.
- March 2008: Bishop Galante then consults advisors on the work of the Diocesan Planning Commission and holds a formal canonical consultation with the Presbyteral Council on March 12-13 to ensure that the presbyterate has been fully consulted. He brings them back for an additional consultation on March 27.
- April 3, 2008: Bishop Galante meets with priests and staff of the diocese to share the outcomes of the parish reconfiguration process and to reiterate the reasons why the diocese has planned: to revitalize the Church in South Jersey. Bishop Galante makes the announcement to parishioners through a web video and the April 4 edition of the Catholic Star Herald.
- July 29, 2008: After hearing again from affected parish communities, Bishop Galante consults with the Presbyteral Council regarding a number of proposed modifications to his April 3, 2008 announcement. Following consultation with his advisors, a public announcement is set for August 26.
- August 26, 2008: Bishop Galante announces modifications to his intended parish configurations that were announced April 3, increasing the resulting number of parishes from 66 to 68. He also announces the names of the Priest Conveners who will guide the parishes in the preparations for merger.
- October 19, 2008: Bishop Galante presides at a Commissioning Ceremony where 41 Priest Conveners and nearly 400 Core Teams members comprised of parishioners representing merging parishes are commissioned for the work of guiding merging parishes toward reconfiguration.
- Spring 2009: Priest Conveners and Core Teams hold first meetings to prepare merging parishes to come together.



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## SHIFTS IN POPULATION



### Change in Population Camden and Gloucester Counties

Between 1960 and 2008 the percentage of the South Jersey population in Camden County dropped from 43 percent to 37 percent. At the same time, Gloucester County increased its share of the South Jersey population also by six percent, from 15 to 21 percent.

County	Parishes	# Municipalities	% Municipalities	
			Decline '70-'06	Declining
Atlantic	22	23	4	17%
Camden	48	37	24	65%
Cape May	15	16	3	19%
Cumberland	10	14	3	21%
Gloucester	23	24	9	38%
Salem	6	15	6	40%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>124</b>	<b>129</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>38%</b>

Even as there have been overall gains in the South Jersey population, Camden and Salem counties had the lowest rates of growth from 1960-2008 (32% and 13% respectively), while Gloucester and Cape May counties had the fastest growth (113% and 97%, respectively).

In addition, many municipalities have suffered population declines. In Camden County, for example, where many of the diocese's 124 parishes are located, 24 of the county's 37 municipalities—65 percent—experienced overall population declines from 1970-2006. Thirty-four of the diocese's 48 Camden County parishes, or 71 percent, are located in those municipalities in which population declined. In contrast, Gloucester County, saw 15 of its 24 municipalities increase in population during the same period of time. However, the diocese has parishes in eight out of the nine Gloucester County municipalities in which there were declines in population.

Council (see [www.GatheringGodsGifts.org](http://www.GatheringGodsGifts.org) for the phases of planning).

All parishes in the diocese engaged in a process of planning, first at the parish level and then at the Deanery level. More than 400 representative clergy and laity from every parish gathered and studied data and developed recommendations designed to strengthen and revitalize parish life in every area of the diocese. These recommendations included the joining of parishes through merging or clustering. In January 2008, representatives from each deanery, comprised of the pastor and 10-15 parishioners from each parish — under the guidance and leadership of the Deans — recommended to Bishop Galante that parishes be reconfigured in a way that would result in a reduction in the number of parishes in the diocese through the merging and clustering of parishes.

In addition, a Diocesan Planning Commission—a 23 person group of clergy, religious and laity—was formed at the start of the planning process to assist in the development of the initiative and to review Deanery planning recommendations. Bishop Galante also conducted two formal canonical consultations last spring and summer with the Presbyteral Council to ensure that the reconfiguration of parishes would ensure the pastoral care of the Faithful, would serve the common good of the Church, would strengthen the ability of parish communities to have the necessary human resources available to grow in vitality, and would provide an improved financial base in order to support the elements of dynamic parishes. In all of this consultation, there was consensus that there would be great benefit to the Faithful of the parishes by bringing parishes together.

Therefore, Bishop's intention to unite parishes through merger was formed after exhaustive study, careful deliberation and prayerful reflection. It is Bishop's firm belief that this is necessary at this time and will serve the common good of the Faithful in the diocese, while addressing the decline in religious practice, the decline in the number of diocesan priests available for ministry, shifts in population, changes in demographics, and the need to strengthen parishes to carry out needed ministries.

### What do you mean when you say a decline in religious practice?

Religious practice refers to the propensity of Catholics to participate in the Church's sacramental life, religious devotions and religious practices.

In a USA Today poll last year, almost 40 percent of Catholics interviewed said that the seven sacraments were not essential to their faith. Almost 70 percent said that they could be a good Catholic without going to Mass each week.

Between 1965 and 1975, according to the National Opinion Research Council, the proportion of Catholics who went to confession at least once per month fell from 38 percent to 17 percent. By 1997 a poll by the Roper Center for Public Opinion Research at the University of Connecticut found that only 10 percent of Catholics surveyed said that they went to confession at least once a month. Another 10 percent said they never went to confession at all.

Among those born after 1991, the percentages of Catholics saying they have received the sacrament of Confirmation has fallen to 69% (down from more than 90% of those born before 1960), according to the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA, Georgetown).

In the late 1950s, almost three quarters of Catholics attended Mass weekly. According to a poll conducted by the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate last year, less than a quarter of Catholics attend Mass weekly now and trends are even worse with younger Catholics. The national trends have been confirmed locally in the spiritual reports prepared by the parishes of the diocese.

The decline in religious practice has resulted in fewer Catholics having an even basic familiarity with the teachings of the faith. Coupled with the decline in religious practice, there have been shifts in population and changing demographics.

### What do you mean when you refer to shifts in population?

Over the last four decades, the overall population in the six counties of the diocese has increased, but the slowest rates of growth have been in Camden

and Salem counties, while the greatest growth has occurred in Gloucester and Cape May Counties. From 2000-2008, Camden County increased just two percent, below the state average. In contrast, Gloucester County increased by 13 percent.

Even as there have been overall gains in the South Jersey population, many municipalities have suffered population declines. In Camden County, for example, where many of the diocese's 124 parishes are located, 24 of that county's 37 municipalities—65 percent—experienced overall population declines in this period. Thirty-four of the diocese's 48 Camden County parishes, or 71 percent, are located in those municipalities in which population declined. In contrast, Gloucester County saw 15 of its 24 municipalities increase in population. The diocese, however, has parishes in eight of the nine Gloucester County municipalities that saw a decline in population.

The shift in population out of areas of the diocese that once were heavily populated, the decline in the percentage of the population which identifies itself as Catholic (according to a recent Trinity College survey), coupled with a decline in the percentage of Catholics attending Mass weekly, together have meant that there are far fewer Catholics in the pews on Sundays in many areas of the diocese (about 240,000 each week in 1960 to about 117,000 today, or 123,000 fewer Catholics in the pews each week). This has resulted in underutilized facilities in some parts of the diocese, often in very close proximity to each other.

### What do you mean when you say changing demographics?

In addition to the declines in population in some areas of the diocese, population studies indicate that South Jersey is becoming much more diverse. In Cumberland, Atlantic and Camden counties, Hispanics and Latinos represent 23 percent, 14 percent and 12 percent of the population, respectively. Since 1990, the Hispanic population in New Jersey has increased 98 percent, while total population grew at just 11 percent.

As was noted in a Pew Forum survey, the

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## *Villanova professor sees need for reconfiguration to revitalize parishes*

After Bishop Galante announced his intentions for the reconfiguration of parishes in the Diocese of Camden, Charles E. Zech, professor of economics at Villanova University and director for the Study of Church Management at the university thought, "What a shame."

His disappointment wasn't with the parish reconfiguration itself, but its timing.

Professor Zech had just finished co-authoring a book on parish planning, "Listening to the People of God: Closing, Rebuilding and Revitalizing Parishes," with Robert J. Miller, founding director of the Office for Research and Planning in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia. The book was published just a few weeks after the diocese's planning announcement.

"I thought, what a shame that we were unable to include the Camden Diocese's planning initiative in the book, since the process there is so close to what we've proposed. While nearly every United States diocese will feel the need to restructure parishes, if I can think of one diocese that's done it right, I'd point to Camden. The planning process there was well thought-out and the reasons for reconfiguration well justified."

In the book, the authors point to the realities that are driving the need for the restructuring of parishes: demographic shifts, availability of clergy, and changing practices of Catholic people and the expectations of their parish.

"Each of these trends puts pressure on the parish families to rebuild and reform," says Zech. "Parishes need financial resources and human resources. When a parish is too small or struggling it cannot possibly have the resources that it needs. By merging parishes, economies of scale and efficiencies can be obtained. Merging enhances the resources that are available, including drawing greater numbers into the pool of involved laity. Most importantly, it allows parishes to do more, like youth programs and adult education."

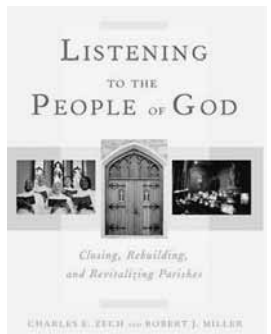
Zech also praised the diocese's Lay Ministry Formation program, where lay men and women can now enroll in undergraduate, graduate and certificate programs at participating Catholic colleges a fraction of the actual cost in order to obtain credentials in non-ordained ministry.

"We're killing our priests by making demands on their time and involving them in work that they could not possibly have imagined when they decided to become a priest. I don't know many men who became priests to run a small business. They did it to tend to the spiritual needs of their people."

He said laity shouldn't do the work proper to priests, that which is reserved to them by ordination, but collaborate with the priest to carry out the mission of the parish.

"In past, we had priests to rely on to do it all,

to do all of the parish's ministry. This is a luxury we can no longer afford. Lay people need to step up and accept the share in priestly ministry they have through baptism. Professionally trained ministers must help carry the ministry burden of priests."



Professor Zech said parishes sometimes want to put off addressing challenges until the situation becomes drastic. In his view, the merging of parishes, where two or more parishes join together under the care of a pastor, often is preferable to clustering, where two or more parishes remain separate, but under the care of a pastor.

"It is not fair to priests or parishioners for parishes to cluster. It is usually a short-term or temporary solution on the way to a merger. While mergers may be more painful at first, in the long-run, parishes and the diocese are much better off."

Zech acknowledged that in planning for the long-term, the future benefits are sometimes hard to see. "Parishes in this part of the country have not been through this before, so it can be hard to understand at first how this will make our parishes better."

Zech observed that part of the challenge of bringing parishes together through merger is connected to our understanding about how parishes are related. "As a Church, I think we've done a bad job conveying the communion of parishes, the reality that we're all in it together," he said.

"We can invoke the metaphor of the blended family to come to a better understanding of the challenges facing parishes and how parish restructuring can best be accomplished. It's not just economic blending that must occur, but the blending of families and attention to all the accompanying dynamics that occur when families are integrated."

While reflecting on the changes in the Camden Diocese, Zech said change is inevitable for all dioceses in the years ahead. One chapter heading in his book quotes Avery Cardinal Dulles' "Models of the Church." Dulles states, "The future forms of the church lie beyond our power to foresee, except that we may be sure that they will be different from the forms of yesterday and today. The Church will not necessarily mirror the secular society of tomorrow, for it must avoid the kind of conformity with the world condemned by the Apostle (Rom. 12:2). On the other hand, the Church will have to make adjustments in order to survive in the society with the challenge of the gospel."

*Editor's note:* For more information about the diocese's Lay Ministry Formation program, see [www.camdendiocese.org](http://www.camdendiocese.org)

Catholic Church has maintained its share of the population over the last three decades, but the percentage of Anglo Catholics has declined significantly. The Anglo decline has been offset by gains in the numbers of Hispanic Catholics, according to Pew.

According to a study cited by the United States Conference of Bishops, 72.6 percent of Hispanics living in the United States—close to 26 million—are Catholic. Sixty-four percent of all Hispanics attend church services regularly. Since 1960, Hispanics have accounted for 71 percent of the Catholic growth in the United States and the Conference estimates that by the next decade, Hispanics will make up more than half of the U.S. Catholic population.

### **Has there really been a decline in the number of priests available for ministry?**

Yes. The number of diocesan priests in ministry reached its peak in 1969 at 351. Today, there are about 160 active diocesan priests serving in 124 parishes. Many priests will leave active service in the coming years due to the unusually large number of priests ordained in the 1950's and early 1960's that now are entering retirement age. At least 51 diocesan priests — almost one third of the diocesan priests presently active — will be age 70 or above by 2015 and could retire or be lost through death or impairment of health. Approximately 85 diocesan priests will then be available for ministry, not all of whom will be suited for pastorates. Therefore, as we plan for the future, the diocese must deal with the number of diocesan priests that will be available for ministry, even as it works to cultivate new vocations to the priesthood.

### **But what about foreign-born priests? Couldn't we simply invite priests from other countries where priests are more plentiful to serve here?**

With the number of new priests ordained in the United States failing to keep pace with the number of priests who no longer are in ministry through death or retirement, and with Catholic populations becoming more diverse, many United States dioceses are being assisted by foreign-born priests. These priests come to the United States on loan from their home dioceses or religious congregations. The foreign-born priests typically work in the United States for a limited period of time, usually from three to five years, the time at which their religious work visas expire. There are 31 foreign-born priests currently serving in the Diocese of Camden, up from just eight in 1994.

However, a reliance on foreign-born priests is not sufficient to address the decline in the number of priests that will be able to serve in ministry. With new, more stringent religious worker immigration regulations now going into effect, and with increased demands for their service in their own dioceses, there are no guarantees that foreign-born priests always will be available to United States dioceses. As such, the diocese will continue to focus on cultivating priestly vocations in our own diocese, one of the six pastoral priorities identified at Speak Up sessions.

### **Is the diocese trying to have lay people replace priests?**

No. Bishop Galante has stressed repeatedly that even as we call the baptized to take their place in the

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life of the Church in accord with Vatican II's Lumen Gentium, the "Dogmatic Constitution on the Church," the ordained priesthood remains and always will be essential to the Church. Even as we take steps to train lay people for various parish roles, they always do so in collaboration with the ordained priest.

## But I heard that the diocese announced a "Lay Ministry Formation Program." How is this connected with the parish planning process?

With the objective of advancing the six key pastoral priorities identified by the Catholic people of the diocese, the Diocese of Camden last fall announced an initiative to help laity engaged in parish work to obtain the educational credentials

specific to their area of focus. The program offers college and university degree and certificate courses for parish leaders and staff in the diocese who serve in various capacities, including religious education, youth and young adult ministry, campus ministry, adult faith formation, Hispanic and Black Catholic ministry, family life, ministry to seniors, and liturgy. Programs also are offered for lay persons involved in pastoral administration, Catholic schools, and parish business management.

While parishes will still have the need for competent lay volunteers, given the pastoral needs of the people, they increasingly will need to augment these dedicated volunteers with qualified, paid lay persons who have the appropriate credentials, skill and experience. These lay persons do not do the work of priests, but work in collaboration with priests and parish staff to carry out the work of the parish.

## I just wish we could increase vocations so that the planning initiative would be unnecessary.

The planning initiative is being undertaken not simply because of the decline in the number of diocesan priests that will be available for ministry, but also to create stronger parishes in order to serve the Faithful of the diocese more effectively. The diocese and its parishes are working to strengthen parishes, to increase vocations to priesthood, and to call forth the talents of laity. All of these need to occur and are related. As parishes unite and become stronger, they will be better able to serve parishioners and to provide for the pastoral care of the people, including youth and young adults. By revitalizing our parishes, by offering the range of ministries that will respond to the needs of our parishioners (including youth and young adult ministry), and by attending to the lifelong formation of Catholics in the faith, an increase in priestly vocations will occur.

With the focus placed on priestly vocations in this diocese by Bishop Galante, the number of new ordinations to priesthood in the Diocese of Camden compares favorably with other dioceses in the region.

## Are parishes merging primarily for financial reasons?

No. Parishes are merging so that they may become stronger and more vibrant and to address the challenges facing the Church. Financial health is not a goal in and of itself, but only to the extent that it allows the parish to carry out the fundamental mission of the Church. If the financial situation of a parish impedes its ability to serve the people, then this must be addressed.

In the Jubilee Year 2000, \$12 million in parish debt was forgiven by the diocese. Since that date, another \$11 million in parish debt has been incurred, and continues to mount, by parishes that are struggling financially. The unfortunate reality is that more than 40 of the 124 parishes in the diocese today — almost one third — not only are carrying debt, but also are unable to meet their most basic operating expenses. These parishes do not have adequate resources to properly staff their parishes and carry out much needed ministries. They do not even have the resources to avoid continuous deficit spending. They have exhausted their resources simply to remain open. Given these challenges, it is necessary that struggling parishes join with healthier parishes to ensure the continued pastoral care of the Faithful.

## Are other dioceses also reconfiguring parishes?

Yes. Many dioceses, particularly those in the Northeast, have taken steps to reconfigure parishes, citing many of the same factors at work here in this diocese. The Diocese of Scranton (PA) recently announced that it is closing almost half of its churches, reducing the number of parishes from 209 to 118. The restructuring plan there will affect every single parish in the 11-county diocese in some way. Restructuring plans also have been announced by the Diocese of Cleveland (OH), the Diocese of Albany (NY), the Diocese of Greensburg (PA), the Diocese of Springfield (MA), the Diocese of Allentown (PA), the Diocese of Buffalo (NY), the Diocese of Lansing (MI), the Archdiocese of New York and the Archdiocese of Boston, among others.

According to the Center for Applied Research in

## Survey of Camden priests finds high levels of satisfaction in ministry

A recent survey of diocesan priests found high levels of personal wellness and satisfaction in their ministry, as well as strong support for Bishop Galante's leadership.

The survey was conducted in seventeen dioceses by the Saint Luke Institute in Silver Spring, Maryland in collaboration with the Secretariat for Clergy, Consecrated Life, and Vocations of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.

The surveys were distributed to diocesan and religious order priests in the Diocese of Camden in late November. 142 priests responded to the survey.

The survey report by Rev. Msgr. Stephen J. Rossetti, Ph.D., D.Min., President and CEO of Saint Luke Institute concluded that "overall the priests of the Diocese of Camden reported a good level of wellness and psychological health, higher than the general population. . . [O]verall, the priests of the Diocese of Camden compare very favorably to the general population on measures of psychological wellness."

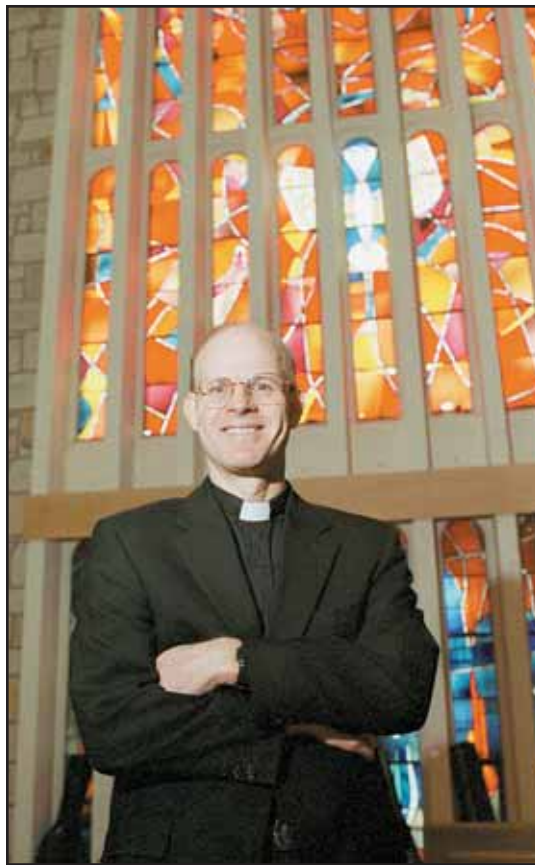
In particular, the report stated that the priests reported "exceptionally high" levels of satisfaction with priestly life and morale. 91 percent either agreed with the statement, "Overall, I am happy as a priest." 87 percent reported that their morale was good.

The report also found that the priests reported a good relationship with their bishop, Most Reverend Joseph A. Galante, (72 percent). An equal number were supportive of his leadership (72 percent).

Significantly, the positive survey results on Bishop Galante's leadership were obtained after the Bishop announced a reconfiguration of parishes in the diocese last April and after Priest Convener assignments were made last August. Priest Conveners are working with Core Teams to prepare merging parishes for reconfiguration.

"The level of support indicated by the priests for their Bishop is very striking, a sign of very strong support for a leader, especially compared to the population norm."

The priests also reported a strong spiritual life, with priests reporting daily prayer, attendance at



CNS photo by Paul Finch, Catholic Sun  
Father Stephen Rossetti poses inside the chapel at St. Luke Institute in Silver Spring, Md., in this 2002 file photo.

annual retreats, reception of the sacrament of penance, praying of the liturgy of the hours, the reading of spiritual books and magazines. 91 percent said they "feel a closeness to God," 95 percent said they "have a relationship to God or Jesus that is nourishing for me," and 92 percent agreed with the statement, "from time to time, I feel a joy that is a grace from God."

"The overall results were very positive and should be a source of encouragement for the priests, the Bishop, and the entire Diocese. Clearly, the strength of its priests is a significant grace for the Diocese," said Msgr. Rossetti.

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	Year 1960	Catholic % 36%	Mass Attendance 74%	Year 2007	Catholic % 36%	Mass Attendance 23.5%	% Hispanic
Camden	392,035	141,133	104,438	513,769	184,957	43,465	12%
Cape May	48,555	17,480	12,935	96,422	34,712	8,157	4%
Atlantic	160,880	57,917	42,858	270,664	97,439	22,898	14%
Cumberland	106,850	38,466	28,465	155,544	55,996	13,159	23%
Gloucester	134,840	48,542	35,921	285,753	102,871	24,175	4%
Salem	58,711	21,136	15,641	66,016	23,766	5,585	5%
	901,871	324,674	240,258	1,388,168	499,740	117,439	

The six counties in the diocese have experienced the combined effect of shifts in population, a decline in religious practice and demographic change. The result is that the total number of Catholics in the pews each weekend has declined substantially (the graph above assumes a consistent percentage of the population identifying itself as Catholic, although a recent Trinity College study suggests that the Catholic share of the New Jersey population has declined over the last decade to 36 percent). In addition to the decline in total numbers of Catholics in the pews, the Catholic population itself is increasingly diverse, with growing numbers of Hispanic, as well as Haitian, Filipino, Korean, and Vietnamese Catholics.

the Apostolate (CARA, Georgetown), the number of parishes in the United States reached its peak in 1995, with 19,331 parishes. By 2008, the number had fallen to 18,479, even before the reconfigurations noted in the paragraph above.

## What is the difference between a merger and cluster?

In a merger, two or more nearby parishes join together to form one larger parish under the care of a pastor. Both the assets and liabilities of participating parishes are united and become the responsibility of the merged parish. One budget is created with one new pastoral council and one new finance council, with representation from each of the parishes involved in the merger. There may be one or more worship sites that serve the new parish, depending on pastoral need.

In a cluster, a pastor is given the responsibility for two or three parishes, but separate parish pastoral and finance councils, worship sites and budgets are retained. Because they share one pastor, it is hoped that there is an increased collaboration between the parishes in the cluster, with parish organizations and activities combined to the extent possible.

## Why do parishes have to merge? Wouldn't it be better if they were to cluster under the care of a single priest?

In considering various approaches to strengthening parishes and addressing the challenges facing the diocese, Deanery Planners, the Diocesan Planning Commission, the Presbyteral Council, Bishop's Galante's advisors and Bishop himself considered several critical factors, including: 1) distance to and accessibility of Sunday Mass, 2) adequacy of worship space; 3) the pastor's workload; 4) consistency with the number of priests that will be available for ministry; 5) adequate provision for ministry through the hiring professional staff in key ministerial positions; and 6) demonstration of adequate parish income to support the proposed configuration.

With these factors in mind, the merger of parishes was a more realistic and sustainable approach for most parishes. By joining parishes together through merger, economies of scale are obtained, resources can be combined and parish energies can more easily be galvanized in order to create stronger, more vibrant communities of faith. This is necessary to ensure the continued pastoral care of the Faithful and, just as importantly, to ensure outreach to a more diverse Catholic population, lapsed Catholics and the unchurched.

## Are smaller parishes being absorbed by larger parishes?

No. Parishes enter into the merging process as equals and no parish has an advantage over another. While drawing on the strengths of each parish community, a new parish is created. The new parish has a new pastor, a new name (while church buildings that will be worship sites will retain their names), as well as new pastoral and finance councils.

## Didn't Bishop Galante carry out a similar process when he was in Texas?

No. Bishop Galante did not undertake a reorganization of parishes while he was in Texas. The planning initiative has been undertaken here specifically in response to the realities in this diocese and the pastoral needs identified by the people he met at Speak Up sessions.

## Isn't the Bishop trying to create "mega-Churches" in the style of Southwest dioceses or Protestant denominations?

No. Bishop Galante is working with the priests and people of the diocese to create stronger Catholic parishes in South Jersey. Even after the Bishop's intended reconfiguration of parishes, the parishes of this diocese will remain small in size — 2,100 parishioners, on average — relative to Catholic parishes in many other parts of the country and a fraction of the congregations of Protestant "mega-Churches."

While recognizing the impact many non-Catholic faiths have had recruiting Catholics into their ranks, Bishop Galante is seeking to reverse this trend by improving the faith formation of the Catholic people and through the sacramental life of the Church, especially Eucharist. This is given expression in the Vision of the Diocese:

*"We, the Catholic Church of South Jersey, envision growing ever more into a dynamic community of faith, hope, and love wherein we reveal the mind and heart of Jesus through our actions and worship. Empowered by baptism, inspired by the Holy Spirit, and formed by the Word of God and the sacraments, especially Eucharist, we will—with Jesus living in us — reach out with love: to proclaim and teach the truths that save; to welcome back those who have left our family of faith; to forgive and seek*

*forgiveness; to care for our sisters and brothers in need; to work for peace within our families and communities; to promote respect and justice for all people; to strengthen unity within our diversity; and to celebrate the sanctifying love of God that heals and transforms our world."*

Bishop Galante also has undertaken the parish planning initiative to fulfill Pope John Paul II's Apostolic Letter at the close of the Jubilee Year 2000, *Novo Millennio Ineunte*. In it, the Holy Father called on each local Church (diocese) to assess its fervor and find fresh enthusiasm for its spiritual and pastoral responsibilities. He called on each diocese to draw up a new pastoral plan, to search for and obtain necessary resources in order to invest in concrete initiatives that will generate fresh enthusiasm for the faith. Likewise, earlier this year, Pope Benedict XVI, meeting with the Bishops of Nigeria stressed the importance of training and diocesan planning in order to create strong, vibrant parishes. Bishop Galante has undertaken the planning initiative here to fulfill these pastoral imperatives for the Church.

## I do not understand how outreach, advancing pastoral priorities and added ministries helps my parish become more vibrant. We have the Eucharist. Isn't that enough?

Eucharist is the source and summit of Christian life. It nourishes and strengthens the People of God to carry out the Church's mission in today's time and place, including reaching out to the inactive and unchurched, the alienated, and the poor through spiritual and corporal works of mercy. Faith is never only inward, but must also be focused outward, as well: "The Mass is ended. Go in peace to love and serve the Lord." By creating greater spiritual vitality, by advancing pastoral priorities, by providing needed ministries, both Jesus and His people are served. In doing so, young and old alike will be drawn to our parish communities.

Pope John Paul II, in a 1997 talk entitled "The Vocation of the Parish," said the parish "is meant to provide the Church's great services: prayer in common and the reading of God's Word, celebrations, especially that of the Eucharist, catechesis for children and the adult catechumenate, the ongoing formation of the faithful, communications designed to make the Christian message known, [as well as] services of charity and solidarity..." These elements

# Parish Planning Questions & Answers

correspond closely to the pastoral priorities identified in parishes of this diocese at Speak Up sessions: lifelong formation, youth and young adults, lay ministry, priestly vocations, liturgy and compassionate outreach.

In many cases, however, parishes of the diocese as presently configured do not have adequate resources to offer the full range of ministries that will advance the pastoral priorities identified through parish Speak Up sessions and to provide the kind of outreach that is necessary to ensure the care of the people in the parish.

## Why can't we wait a few more years before we reconfigure parishes? Can't we wait to see what the future will bring?

The challenges the Church faces locally and in many parts of the country have not developed suddenly, but have grown over many years, even decades. These are not future challenges. They began in the past and exist now. Indeed, in many instances, action was deferred, which unfortunately has created even greater, more urgent challenges. Failure to act now will result in a further deterioration of conditions, to the great detriment of the People of God in South Jersey.

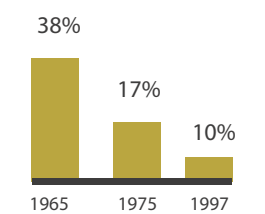
## Why did Bishop Galante initiate a planning process for the entire diocese at the same time?

The Diocese of Camden approached planning in an integrated and comprehensive fashion encompassing the entire diocese, rather than incrementally for several important reasons. First, because the challenges affecting the diocese were not isolated to one region or deanery, it was appropriate that the steps taken to address those challenges would involve the entire diocese since they would impact the entire diocese. Second, the planning process was designed to ensure that the common good and the needs of the entire diocese, not one particular region or deanery, were addressed through the reconfiguration. Third, pastoral solutions developed through an examination of the entire diocese are expected to be more effective than looking at parts of the diocese in isolation from others. Finally, Bishop Galante's intentions for the diocese were announced at one time so as to minimize disruption to the clergy and the Faithful whose inevitable discomfort and anxiety would be compounded if planning were carried out region by region, drawn out over many years.

## I have heard that the diocese is consolidating parishes in order to sell parish property for profit. Is this true?

No. The diocese is not a corporation sole. Each parish is separately incorporated under New Jersey law. As such, by New Jersey law, all parish property and assets belong to the parishes themselves, not the diocese. All assets and liabilities of the merging parishes follow the Faithful to the new parish, and belong to the new parish, not the diocese. As a result, the Diocese does not benefit from the sale of parish properties.

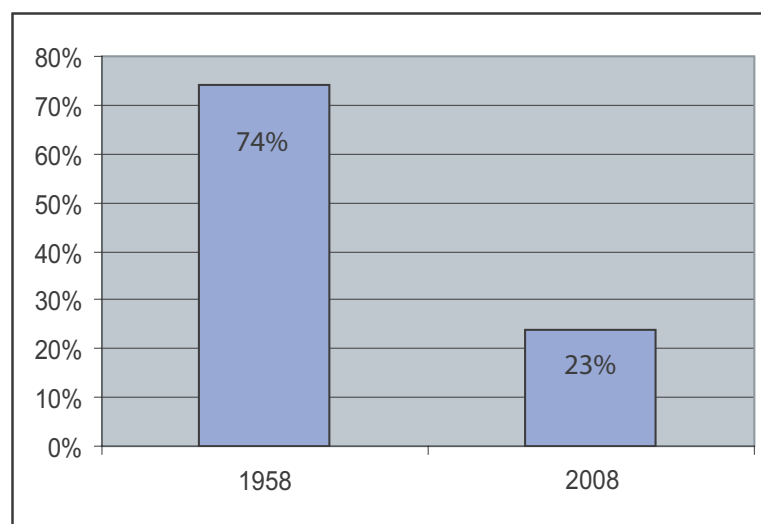
Rather, the diocese has undertaken this initiative to better serve the Faithful, to address population and demographic changes, a decline in the number



**Percentage of Catholics going to Confession**

Between 1965 and 1975, according to a national poll, the proportion of Catholics who went to confession at least once per month fell from 38 percent to 17 percent. By 1997 a poll found that only 10 percent of Catholics surveyed said that they went to confession at least once a month. Another 10 percent said they never went to confession at all.

## DECLINE IN WEEKLY MASS ATTENDANCE



According to Gallup, weekly Mass attendance by Catholics peaked in the years 1955-1958. According to spiritual reports of the parishes of the Diocese of Camden, Mass attendance is now 51 points lower. Other indicators of religious practice also are down significantly.

of priests available for ministry and to strengthen parishes to carry out much needed ministries, including those identified by parishioners at Speak Up sessions.

## But doesn't the Bishop ultimately control the sale of parish property by virtue of his being on the Board of Trustees of the civil religious corporation that is the parish?

No. It is true that the diocesan bishop is the President of the Board of Trustees of the parish. However, he is one member of the Board, which also includes the Vicar General of the diocese, the pastor and two lay trustees. In his capacity as Bishop, he also has the authority to approve or disapprove Board resolutions, but he does not have the authority in his position as bishop to buy or sell parish property.

## What happens to church buildings and parish facilities when parishes merge?

Property legitimately acquired by a parish is owned by the parish, not by the diocese. Both assets and the liabilities belonging to a parish, therefore, belong to the new parish that results from merger. This includes real estate (land, buildings); property such as automobiles, furniture; long-term investments in securities; restricted funds that have been set aside for a specific purpose, such as pension funds or certain building or educational funds. While the Bishop must provide for and review the fiscal operations of all parishes and work to ensure that the goods of each parish are being applied to their proper purposes, he functions in this regard in a supervisory manner. The pastor, not the bishop, has the decision-making authority over the assets of a particular parish within the limits set by canon law and the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.

## I have heard that the diocese is consolidating parishes in order to pay financial settlements related to sexual abuse of minors. Is this true?

No. Some United States dioceses have paid large settlements related to the sexual abuse of minors, including the Archdiocese of Boston (\$120 million), the Diocese of Covington, Kentucky (\$120 million), Diocese of Portland, Oregon (\$71 million), Diocese of Spokane (\$46 million), Davenport, Iowa (\$37 million), Diocese of Bridgeport, Connecticut (\$21 million) and others.

The Diocese of Camden, on the other hand, has not had comparable settlements. As previously reported, approximately \$7 million has been paid to abuse victims in settlements over the lifetime of the diocese. The last known incidence of abuse in the Camden Diocese occurred 14 years ago. As such, abuse settlements have not been and are not a consideration in the parish reorganization underway in this diocese.

## I heard from a friend that the planning process has some connection to Raffaello Follieri, who apparently had plans to develop unused parish properties from dioceses across the country. Is this true?

No. Italian real estate developer Raffaello Follieri, who was convicted last year of wire fraud and money laundering charges, claimed to investors and church organizations that he had a plan to redevelop dormant church properties for charitable purposes, including senior housing, day care centers, Catholic school scholarships, healthcare and food programs. Before Follieri's problems with investors became known, several dioceses or their parishes sold properties to Follieri. However, neither the Camden Diocese nor any of its parishes ever sold property to Follieri or his company.

A private property owned by Bishop Galante in North Wildwood was sold in 2007 to a limited liability corporation of Mr. Follieri's through ReMax in Wildwood. Bishop Galante purchased the townhome in 1996 while he was a Bishop in Texas for the times he was home in the Philadelphia area, where he was raised and where he has family. The property was already listed on the market through ReMax when Mr. Follieri's corporation purchased it at market value. The sale, which was publicly recorded, occurred months before Mr. Follieri's problems with investors and church organizations became known.

# Parish Planning Questions & Answers

## How does the Church define a parish?

The parish is a specific community of the Christian faithful established within a particular church (diocese) entrusted to a pastor under the authority of the diocesan bishop (Canon 515 § 1). A parish is not isolated from or independent of the diocese. Rather, the parish is integrated into the particular diocese, of which it is a part.

## How is a parish distinct from a church/worship site?

The history of the diocese (“Building God’s Kingdom: A History of the Diocese of Camden”) reveals that parishioners decades ago worshipped in various sites before they built their churches. This recognizes that a parish is distinct from the physical structures where the Christian faithful worship. As noted above, what is essential for the existence of a parish is not the physical church building, but the community of believers and the parish priest. A parish might have a single worship space or it could have multiple sites for worship.

## What is meant by the term “worship site”?

The term “worship site” is used to identify a church that belongs to and will serve the new parish after the merged parish is established. After parishes merge, each church building that remains designated as a worship site retains its name, is located within and belongs to the new parish.

## What is the function of the home (seat) of the new parish?

The pastor, the administration, the parish office, the staff, the coordination of ministries, and the sacramental and business records are located at the home (seat) of the parish. It is expected that events that affect the life of the new parish such as the Sacraments of Initiation will be celebrated in the home (seat) of the parish, including the entrance of RCIA candidates on Holy Saturday and the celebration of First Eucharist and Confirmation. However the pastor may determine that there are sufficient pastoral reasons to allow baptisms, reconciliation, weddings, and funerals at another parish worship site(s).

## Will all worship sites function the same way?

No, there are various options for how a worship site(s) might function. This would vary according to the local needs. For example, a worship site could be:

- a church kept open for daily mass or daily mass on a rotation schedule with the parish church or other worship site(s)
- a church where the sacraments of Baptism, First Eucharist, Reconciliation may be celebrated
- a church kept open on a limited basis for weekend liturgy, some daily masses and Eucharistic adoration
- a church where services are limited to weddings, funerals and special liturgies and



From 1990 to 2007, the Hispanic population in South Jersey increased by 98 percent, while total population grew just 11 percent (and most of the total population growth was in Gloucester and Atlantic Counties).

## INCREASING DIVERSITY OF THE SOUTH JERSEY POPULATION

		Population 1990	Population 2000	Population 2007	% Change 1990-2007	% Hispanic
Atlantic	Hispanic Population	16,117	30,729	38,894	141%	12%
	Total Population	224,327	252,552	270,664	21%	
Salem	Hispanic Population	1,436	2,498	3,382	136%	4%
	Total Population	65,294	64,285	66,016	1%	
Camden	Hispanic Population	36,022	49,103	61,479	71%	10%
	Total Population	502,824	507,907	513,769	2%	
Cape May	Hispanic Population	1,856	3,378	4,121	122%	3%
	Total Population	95,089	102,326	96,422	1%	
Cumberland	Hispanic Population	18,348	27,823	36,243	98%	19%
	Total Population	138,053	146,438	155,544	13%	
Gloucester	Hispanic Population	4,131	6,646	10,379	151%	3%
	Total Population	230,082	255,698	285,753	24%	
TOTAL	Hispanic Population	77,910	120,177	154,498	98%	
	Total Population	1,255,669	1,329,206	1,388,168	11%	

Source: Pew Hispanic Center (2009)

devotions

- a church used for some worship services (e.g. school) and some outreach ministry
- a church that is used only seasonally
- a church that combines some of the options above

## Did the Bishop decide where the seat of the new parish community would be?

Yes, but only after extensive consultation and careful examination of the reconfiguration recommendations made by local planners, deanery planners, the Diocesan Planning Commission, and the Presbyteral Council. In a few cases, upon further consultation and for the pastoral good of the people, the Bishop subsequently modified the announcements made in April, 2008 (see [www.GatheringGodsGifts.org](http://www.GatheringGodsGifts.org)).

## Why did the Bishop announce his intentions about worship sites before issuing Decrees for the mergers?

Gathering God’s Gifts, the parish planning process, included a review of parish facilities and the needs of parishioners in each area of the diocese. After having carefully and prayerfully considered input and recommendations, as well as having had formal canonical consultations with the Presbyteral Council of the diocese, Bishop Galante chose to identify the home (seat) of the parishes that were merging. He did this to ensure the proper care of the Faithful in each area of the diocese and to promote unity among the merging parish communities so that the new parish communities, once established, can begin to build on and strengthen that unity.

## Someone told me that a “worship site” has no standing in church law and that if a worship site is not designated as the seat of the parish it can be closed down at any time in the future. Is this true?

No. Churches designated as the seat of the parish and those churches that will function as additional worship sites enjoy the same protections under

church law. As sacred spaces, the worship sites that serve the new parish can only be altered under certain circumstances and never arbitrarily. For pastoral reasons, surfaced by the proper pastor with his consultants, the bishop of the diocese could determine that a church building is no longer necessary to serve the parish, but only after consulting with the Presbyteral Council of the diocese and having heard from those who might be affected by the alteration.

## Have there been any changes to the configuration of parishes announced last April?

Yes. Bishop Galante modified some configurations following meetings, feedback and additional data from parishioners, as well as consultations with his planning advisors, and the Presbyteral Council of the diocese, an advisory group of priests. While not significantly altering the reconfigurations announced April 3, Bishop has sought refinements in order to improve the pastoral care of parishioners, to clarify how worship sites will be used within the configurations, and to address specific concerns regarding accessibility to ensure that parishioners will be fully served by the facilities. With these modifications, Bishop intends there to be 68 parishes (versus the 66 announced on April 3) served by 107 churches.

## What are Priest Conveners?

“Priest Conveners” are guiding merging parishes through the reconfiguration process Bishop Galante announced last April. Priest Conveners have not replaced pastors, but are working with existing pastors, administrators and Core Teams made up of leadership from the parishes that will merge in order to create the new parish. In a few instances, there is more than one Priest Convener assigned to a parish configuration (Co-Conveners). The Priest Convener likely will become the pastor of the new parish once it is formally established by decree. In the meantime, existing pastors and administrators remain in place and parish life continues under their care until the new parish is established formally by decree. The Priest Conveners also retain their current assignments in addition to their Convener responsibilities.

## How were the Priest Conveners chosen?

# Parish Planning Questions & Answers

Respecting the needs and preferences of the priests, the diocese last May wrote to all the priests of the diocese with a listing of all parish openings, requesting that those interested in becoming the Priest Convener of one of the newly merged parishes indicate their choices for assignment by July 15. Priests who currently are the pastors of parishes designated as a “cluster” or “stand alone parish” could choose to remain in their present assignments until their term expires, until they seek a new assignment at another time, until they retire, or seek senior priest status. The Priest Personnel Board, which consists of six elected and six ex-officio members, met for four days last August to match priests to parish openings based on the ministerial skills of the priests and the pastoral and leadership needs of the parishes. Bishop Galante accepted the recommendations of the Priest Personnel Board in making the appointments.

## What are Core Teams?

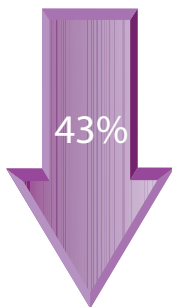
Core Teams are working with Priest Conveners in preparing parishes to merge. Core Team members were selected from a pool of nominated parishioners. Last fall, the Priest Conveners and current parish pastors met to review the nominees, their leadership skills and experience, their capacity for assuming the responsibilities, their attitude toward change, and their receptivity to the work ahead. The Priest Conveners then interviewed the nominees and, in consultation with parish pastors, chose the Core Team. The Core Teams include an equal number of members from each of the parishes that are merging. In configurations where two parishes will merge, the Core Team is composed of four members from each merging parish, in addition to the Priest Convener. In configurations where three or more parishes will merge, the Core Team is composed of three members from each merging parish, in addition to the Priest Convener. More than 350 Core Team members were commissioned by Bishop Galante in October 2008 and participated in six hours of leadership training sessions conducted throughout the diocese earlier this year. They are now working with Priest Conveners to prepare parishes for merger.

## What are the next steps in the Planning Process?

Last August Bishop appointed 41 Priest Conveners who will be the likely pastors of the new parishes. They, in turn, gathered representatives from each merging parish to form a Core Team to assist them in the work of readying the parishes to merge.

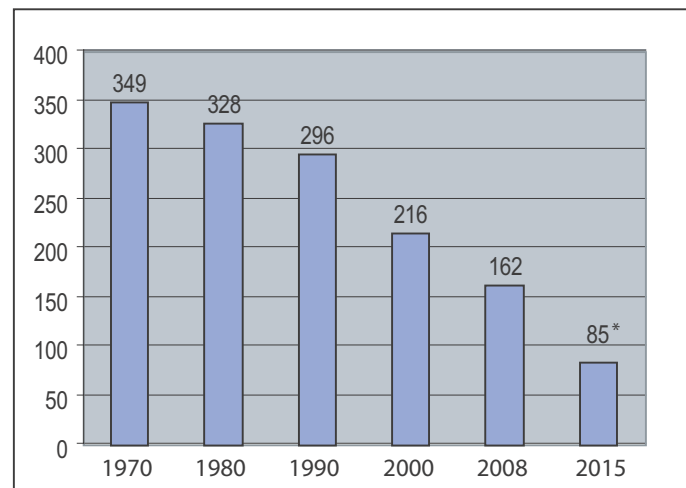
The Priest Conveners and Core Team Members have been working to lay the foundations for sacramental life, worship and pastoral ministries in the new parish. They are addressing issues related to the care of temporal goods, including parish organizational structure, capital projects, operations and maintenance, real estate and facilities. They will review various finance and accounting issues and prepare to establish new registers, accounts and record books for the new parishes. They also will attend to the range of canonical and civil considerations involved in bringing parishes together.

Working in collaboration with parish pastors they will develop a variety of community-building experiences among merging parishes, inviting merging parishes to worship and pray together, engaging



A 2007 national report indicates that of the 176 U.S. dioceses, the Diocese of Camden experienced the largest decline—43 percent—in diocesan priests available for ministry in the years 1995-2005. The decline is due to the large number of priests reaching retirement age. Other dioceses with steep declines are Rockville Center, Rochester, Metuchen, Albany, Pittsburg, Allentown, Philadelphia, Providence and Boston.

## DECLINE IN DIOCESAN PRIESTS AVAILABLE FOR MINISTRY



The largest decline in diocesan priests occurred in the years 1990-2000 (27%). The number of priests reached its peak in 1969 at 351. \*The number of diocesan priests available for ministry in 2015 is a projection based on anticipated priest retirements.

parishioners in suggesting names for the new parishes and developing parish mission statements. While about 14 meeting agendas have been suggested as a general guide to prepare the parishes for merger, each Core Team will determine the pace, timeline and the number of meetings that will be necessary for them based on the needs of their parishes.

## When will the first parishes merge?

When Bishop Galante announced his intentions for the reconfiguration of parishes in the diocese last April, he indicated that the process of bringing merging parishes together could take 12-24 months, depending on the needs and circumstances of the parishes that will be merging and only following a period of thorough preparation and transition that will take place in the months ahead.

Following an appropriate period of preparation, the priest and parish representatives who are engaged in the work of bringing the parish communities together will notify Bishop Galante of the parishes' readiness to merge. Following this Bishop will review each parish reconfiguration with the Presbyteral Council to assure that the specific merger serves the best interests of the communities involved. Thereafter, he will issue decrees to that effect, with the timing of each varying location by location. The 12-24 month time period before decrees are issued has been provided to ensure a responsible and respectful timeline for transition, to give parishioners ample time to prepare for the change ahead, and to ensure that any alteration of a parish occurs carefully, with due diligence, and with great pastoral sensitivity.

When a parish is ready to merge, a decree will be issued. The decree typically would note the goods and property of the parish, obligations and debts, boundaries, the appointment of the pastor, the name of the new parish and any other pertinent information regarding the new parish.

## Can my parish appeal Bishop's merger decree?

Yes. Church law requires that any decision to alter a parish be made by decree, along with a public notice of the right of parishioners to seek recourse against the decree. This is to ensure that any alteration of a parish is carried out in accord

with Church law, after appropriate consultation, and in a way that protects the rights of the Faithful and serves the common good.

## Some individuals in my parish are spreading misinformation about the planning process. Where can I get good information about the parish planning process?

Some that are opposed to addressing the challenges facing the diocese may try to misinform parishioners about the nature of the planning process. They may try to dismiss the need for parish reconfiguration or may say it should be deferred. They may even deny the data supporting the need to reconfigure parishes. They also may seek to undermine the work of the Priest Convener and Core Team members or attempt to divide the parish community. Sometimes this grows from anger or denial that is not uncommon in the face of feelings of loss or the anxiety that accompanies a time of change. However, in some cases, the misinformation deliberately is being conveyed, often times by those who are not members of the parish. While opinions are to be respected, no one has the right to undermine parish unity and every parish community has the right to good, reliable information.

With this in mind, Priest Conveners and Core Team members have been working to keep parishioners informed and are good sources for reliable information. Other resources also are helpful, including the Catholic Star Herald. In addition to the Q&A in this edition of the newspaper, dozens of articles have appeared over the last two years related to parish planning (if you contribute to the parish, to the House of Charity-Bishop's Annual Appeal, have children enrolled in Catholic elementary or high schools, or have children enrolled in parish religious education programs, are a DRE/CRE or faculty member, you should be receiving the newspaper each week). An archive of articles that have appeared in the newspaper can be found at [www.CatholicStarHerald.org](http://www.CatholicStarHerald.org).

The website [www.GatheringGodsGifts.org](http://www.GatheringGodsGifts.org) also has useful information about the planning process and Bishop Galante's video announcing the reconfiguration of parishes can be found at [www.camden-diocese.org](http://www.camden-diocese.org).