



Disciples in Mission
Archdiocese of Boston

DISCIPLES IN MISSION A PASTORAL PLAN FOR THE ARCHDIOCESE OF BOSTON

INTRODUCTION

"God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life" (Jn 3:16). For those of us who are baptized into Christ Jesus, this Gospel is both a comfort and a commission. It is indeed the consoling truth and grace of human life: we are created by God to live with him forever in the communion of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. At the same time, this truth is the Good News that Christ commanded his disciples to announce to the whole world. By her nature, then, the Church is a divine communion formed by and in Christ for the missionary work of evangelization, the work of bringing the Gospel of Christ to all peoples.

In January 2011, **Cardinal Seán O'Malley** established an Archdiocesan Pastoral Planning Commission. The Planning Commission is a representative group of the archdiocesan community, including a bishop, pastors, deacons, religious, lay ecclesial ministers, parish staff, school personnel, parish council members, and parishioners who are raising families and working in the business world. In his letter of appointment to the members of the Commission the Cardinal stated, "The particular work of the commission will be to develop a recommendation for a pastoral plan for the Archdiocese that identifies the resources available for the foreseeable future and allocates these in a manner that will allow the mission of Christ and his Church to grow stronger in our Catholic community."

In the years since establishing the Planning Commission, Cardinal Seán, echoing the teaching of Blessed Pope John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI, has repeatedly emphasized that the Church will only be strengthened to the extent that every practicing Catholic embraces the "New Evangelization," the particular work of reaching out to Catholics who are not currently active in the Church.

To read the entire Disciples in Mission Document visit:

[Disciples in Mission.com](http://DisciplesinMission.com)



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Archdiocese of Boston

What is Disciples in Mission?

Disciples in Mission is the Pastoral Plan for the Archdiocese of Boston. It was promulgated by Cardinal Seán in November of 2012. It was developed from a long process of consultation and deliberation, involving many thousands of people throughout the Archdiocese.

Will you summarize Disciples in Mission for me?

Parish-based evangelization works, and we can train for it, but we need strong parishes in order to do so. Disciples in Mission calls every parish of the Archdiocese of Boston to become a strong, stable, intentional, and effective center of the New Evangelization. Disciples in Mission is not a plan to close parishes, because we believe that parishes are going to grow, not shrink, and we are going to need all of the space that we have. In order better to focus our resources on evangelization, Disciples in Mission organizes the 288 parishes of the Archdiocese of Boston into approximately 135 Collaboratives.



Disciples in Mission Archdiocese of Boston

What is a Collaborative?

A collaborative is a grouping of one, two, or three parishes that work together for the goal of evangelization. A collaborative has one pastor, one set of assigned priests and deacons, and one Pastoral Team (including Pastoral Associates, Religious Education and Faith Formation leaders, Finance and Operations specialists, and administrative and facilities personnel). All of these work together for all of the parishes of the collaborative. The collaborative has one Pastoral Council, and one Local Pastoral Plan for evangelization.

The collaborative does not share money or bank accounts or other financial assets or obligations. If Parish A and B form a collaborative, and you put your money in your offertory envelope or give online for Parish B, it will go into the bank account of Parish B, not Parish A. If Parish B has obligations (debt, deferred maintenance, etc.) going into the collaborative, those obligations remain the obligations of Parish B alone, not Parish A. The collaborative is not a legal or canonical entity. It does not have a federal tax payer number. It does not have a bank account. It cannot own property.

Because the patrimony of each parish continues to belong to that parish, as well as the obligations of each Parish continuing to belong to that Parish, each Parish has its own Finance Council. However, since many costs are shared, the finance councils of all of the Parishes in the collaborative may often meet together.

There are some parishes which, because of their size or their geography or the distinctiveness of their mission will not have a collaborative partner. But, in every other sense, these parishes will be collaboratives. They will still enter the Pastoral Plan in a particular Phase. They will still participate in significant training for evangelization. They will still write a Local Pastoral Plan.



Disciples in Mission Archdiocese of Boston

In what sense is one parish a collaborative?

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Why are we doing this, and why are we doing it now?

We are dealing with what we have come to call our “four deficits.”

We don’t have enough priests.

We don’t have enough trained lay ecclesial ministers.

We don’t have enough money.

We don’t have enough people coming to Mass.

The first three deficits are directly related to the fourth. It is very tempting to try to make a Pastoral Plan which just addresses one of the first three. For instance, if we were to close a bunch of parishes, we would need fewer priests. If we cut way back on expenses and sold lots of property, we’d have more money. But no plan can outpace the rate at which the fourth, and most important, deficit is having an impact. In 1970, some 70% of self-identified Catholics went to Mass on a weekly basis. Now, about 16% of self-identified Catholics are at Mass on any given weekend. So, Disciples in Mission is basically a plan to address the fourth deficit. Without addressing that one, no plan can work.

You can say all that, but isn’t Disciples in Mission just a back door way of closing Parishes?

From 1990 to 2000, the Archdiocese of Boston closed about 60 parishes. In 2004, we closed another 65, in a process called “Reconfiguration.” Those closures solved some of our problems, but they did not solve the core problem. Each year, in the Archdiocese, about 5000 fewer people come to Sunday Mass. That has been a steady decline, which began in the early 1980s. That is our basic problem. No form of Pastoral Planning can be effective which does not address that core problem. Since we believe that Parishes can be effective centers of evangelization, this is not the moment to close Parishes.

Disciples in Mission is a plan for growth, not a plan for downsizing. Indeed, it would be a very poorly conceived plan if it were intended for downsizing. We believe that we are going to need the space we have, because we believe that we are going to refill our churches and our Parishes and our seminaries.

It is possible to conceive of a Pastoral Plan that is a managed form of downsizing. Disciples in Mission is not that plan.



Disciples in Mission Archdiocese of Boston

What are these “Phases” I hear about?

We can't implement the Pastoral Plan all at once, for several reasons. First, support and training are a big part of the implementation, and we don't have the size staff that would let us support and train everyone at once. Second, we are intent upon learning as we go, and want to be able to apply what we learn in the early Phases to what happens in later Phases. Third, priests have to move in order to make the collaboratives work, and this always causes some disruption in the parishes and in the Archdiocese. We can only move so many priests at any one time.

Therefore, we expect to implement the plan in eleven Phases:

*Phase One began in June of 2013. It involves 12 Collaboratives and 27 Parishes.
Phase Two began in June of 2014. It involves 20 Collaboratives and 42 Parishes.
Phase Three began in June of 2015. It involves 16 Collaboratives and 33 Parishes
Phase Four will begin in June of 2016; Phase Five will begin in June of 2017.
Phase Six will begin in June of 2018; Phase Seven will begin in June of 2019.
Phase Eight will begin in June of 2020; Phase Nine will begin in June of 2021.
Phase Ten will begin in June of 2022; Phase Eleven will begin in June of 2023.*

What do you mean by training?

Training is a key element to the implementation of the Pastoral Plan. We are not seeking to maintain the status quo – we believe that we need to move in a new, evangelization-centered direction. When any organization seeks to make a shift like this, it looks to training. We are doing the same thing. Our training is in the areas of leadership, evangelization, and general topics (for instance, cost sharing among the parishes of the collaborative, the process for writing a Local Pastoral Plan, etc.).



Disciples in Mission
Archdiocese of Boston

What is a Local Pastoral Plan?

In some sense Disciples in Mission is a Pastoral Plan, but in some senses what it really does is to create a context for Pastoral Planning. The heart of the archdiocesan wide implementation of the plan is the Local Pastoral Plan which each collaborative will develop. The plans are developed over a period of more than a year. Drafts of the plans will be submitted for comment, and Cardinal Seán will read and approve the final plan.

Each plan will identify three critical mission areas for a collaborative – we call these areas priorities. These priorities are central concerns that must be the work of every person in the collaborative. For instance, one priority could be Adult Faith Formation, or improved experience of Sunday Liturgy, or better welcoming on every level. One of the priorities must pertain to fostering vocations to the diocesan priesthood.

Each priority will have at least two SMART goals associated with it – goals that are specific, motivating, attainable, relevant, and trackable. Each goal needs to have resources assigned to it – both staff and money – and the assignment of those resources needs to be reflected in the staff job descriptions and in the budgets of the parishes of the collaborative. The plans last for three years. At the end of the three years, the parishes take a year to reflect, and to rewrite their plans.



Disciples in Mission
Archdiocese of Boston

What has Cardinal Sean said about this plan?

“Parishes are the heart of the New Evangelization; they must be well staffed and financially sound so as to be effective in this mission. For this purpose, the pastoral plan groups the parishes of the Archdiocese into approximately 135 collaboratives. Each parish maintains its own identity in a collaborative. Each parish retains its buildings, its canonical rights, its financial assets and obligations. The collaborative, however, will have one Pastor who will work with one Pastoral Team, one Parish Pastoral Council and one Parish Finance Council. Together they will develop a pastoral plan for their local collaborative, focused on serving the needs of their parishes and advancing the mission of the Church. Joined together in a collaborative, our parishes will be better equipped to celebrate the Sacraments, provide religious formation for children and adults, respond to the pastoral needs of the sick and infirm and assist those in need of material assistance, through the lens of Evangelization.”



Disciples in Mission
Archdiocese of Boston

Why training in evangelization?

“Parish based Evangelization works, and we can train for it, but we need strong Parishes in order to do so.”

Why training in leadership?

“Our baptismal call to discipleship is also a call to leadership. We are called to follow Jesus. Being a true follower of our Lord requires leading others to Him.”

What is the Archdiocese doing to support collaboratives of parishes?

“The Archdiocese of Boston [has realigned] some of its central ministry offices to support parish collaboratives, conceived as centers of the new evangelization in the pastoral plan, Disciples in Mission.” In addition to this realignment, the training in evangelization and leadership is meant to support collaboratives of parishes. Other support is available through the Office of Pastoral Planning for parishes not yet in official collaborative arrangements.

What is parish-based evangelization, what are we supposed to do?

“Ultimately, the New Evangelization is not a set of strategies, not a set of bullet points which, if we can check them all off, we've "accomplished" the task. The New Evangelization is about one-on-one encounters, with people who are formed and trained in the art of witnessing to their faith, inviting their fellow Catholics back into a powerful and transforming love relationship with Jesus.”