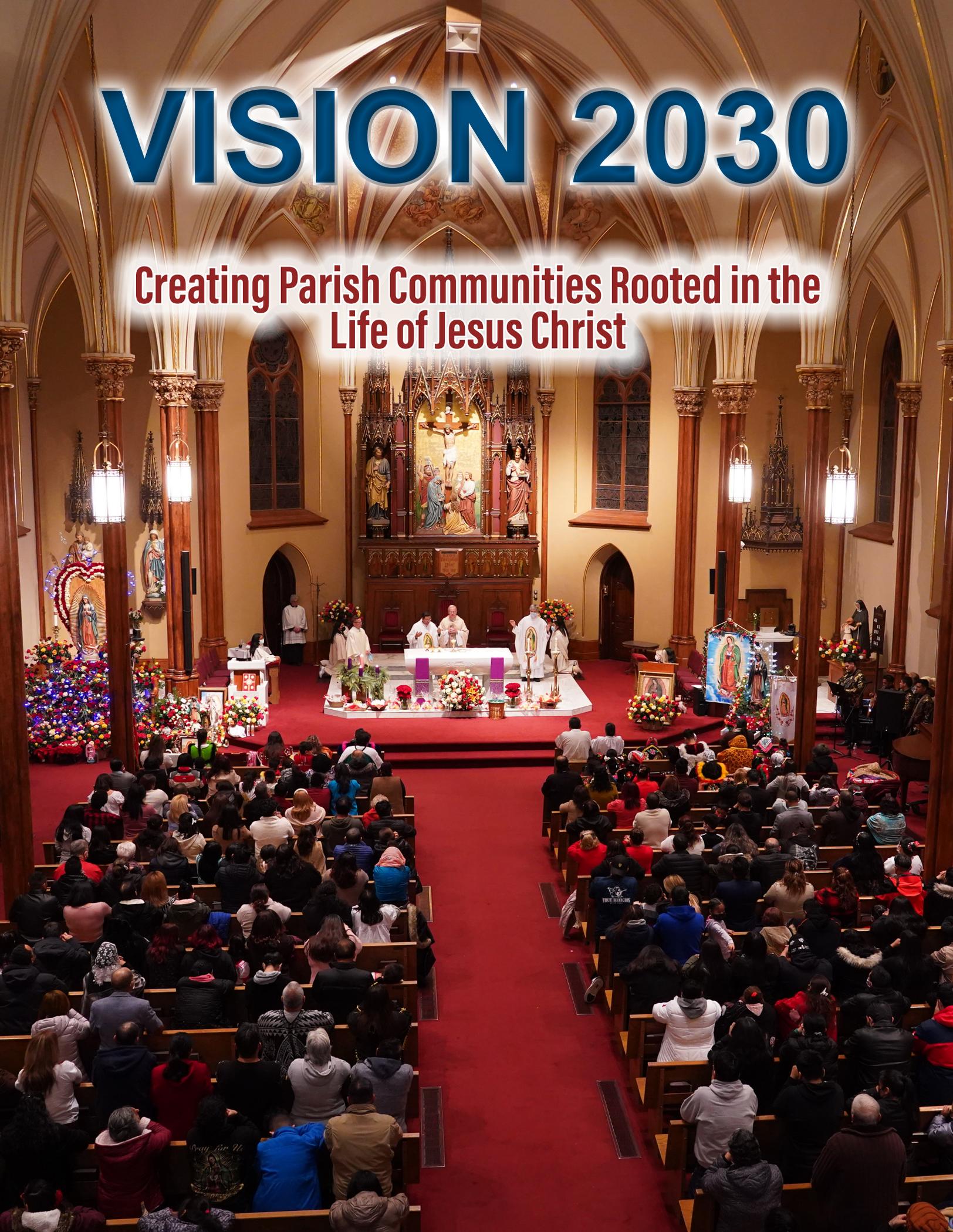


# VISION 2030

**Creating Parish Communities Rooted in the  
Life of Jesus Christ**





OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

DIOCESE OF SCRANTON  
300 WYOMING AVENUE  
SCRANTON, PENNSYLVANIA 18503-1279

January 2022

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

With the dawn of a new year, my prayer, like many of yours, is a prayer for peace: peace in our hearts, our families, our world, and within our Church. This season also affords us an opportunity to reflect upon where we have been – and more importantly – to look ahead to where we are going. As always, we give thanks to our generous God for the many blessings He has bestowed on us as we look forward to a future full of hope for us all (Jeremiah 29:11).

In 2019, you may remember that we began a pastoral planning initiative in the Diocese of Scranton with the goal of proactively looking at our local church in the present moment, while recognizing the opportunities and challenges ahead. Even during the COVID-19 pandemic, this blueprint planning process has been ongoing. To make sure everyone in all of our parishes is familiar with this continuing effort, I want to share with you the following document, *Vision 2030: Creating Parish Communities Rooted in the Life of Jesus Christ*.

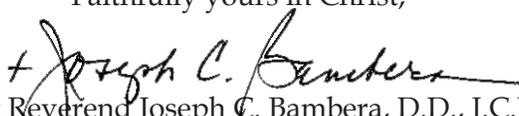
As you will see in the following pages, our Diocese faces significant challenges due to changing demographics in our 11 counties, from fewer people maintaining membership in our parishes to a diminishing number of ordained priests to serve our spiritual needs. At the same time, however, while our numbers have decreased over the years, the faith of our people continues to be strong and opportunities to proclaim the Good News of Jesus abound. With many people in our communities identifying as Catholic but not registered in our parishes and others not ascribing to any religion at all, our mission to invite them into our churches and show them the love of Jesus is more vital than ever. In so doing, through God's grace, our witness to Jesus will strengthen our parishes and also sow seeds for vocations to the priesthood, diaconate and consecrated life that are so necessary to the life and ministry of our Church.

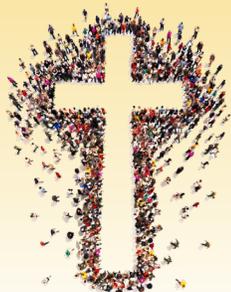
Based on all of the information contained in this document, you will see that it is inevitable that changes will become necessary in some of our parishes. Although it is not our plan to modify all of our parish structures at one time, it is important for you to know that different things will prompt change at different times in different places. While change is never easy, the most effective pastoral planning processes take place when everyone is actively informed and engaged. All of us – clergy and laity alike – must be able to look at the realities we are facing honestly and objectively. Prayer and honest dialogue with all of you will help us discern what God's will is for us as a Diocese at this time in our history.

Because of our Baptism, each one of us has a role to play in the Church. In working together to create vibrant parish communities, we must all proclaim the Good News of the Gospel through our words and the service we offer to our brothers and sisters. Each one of us must become an 'eager evangelizer,' sharing our love and faith in Christ.

As we embrace our future over the next decade and beyond, may we trust in the power of the Holy Spirit as our surest helper and guide. I look forward to walking with each one of you in this ongoing pastoral planning process as together we work to keep our Church a strong and vibrant beacon of hope for all.

Faithfully yours in Christ,

  
Most Reverend Joseph C. Bambera, D.D., J.C.L.  
Bishop of Scranton



# VISION 2030

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## MISSION STATEMENT OF THE DIOCESE OF SCRANTON

We, the Catholic community of the Diocese of Scranton, are called through Baptism to imitate the servant leadership of Jesus Christ. In union with Our Holy Father, the Pope, we proclaim the Gospel faithfully, celebrate the sacraments joyfully, and boldly promote life, justice and peace in northeastern and north central Pennsylvania.

### — GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR OUR MISSION —

#### **- WORD -**

This principle is about putting our relationship with Jesus first in our own lives and in the life of our Church. Focusing on Jesus' invitation to "Come and follow me," we desire to help all people meet Christ and build God's Kingdom - not our own.

#### **- WORSHIP -**

The principle is about the celebration of the Eucharist as the heart of parish life. The Mass is the source and summit of our lives as Christians. In the Eucharist, Jesus draws close to us and strengthens us. Participation at Mass and receiving the Eucharist brings us the Father's faithful love.

#### **- COMMUNITY -**

This principle is about forming parishes with people of faith devoted to prayer, committed to one another and enlivened by the living God in our midst. Faith is not a private affair acted upon in isolation; it is a call to holiness with a community of people.

#### **- SERVICE -**

This principle is about becoming the bearers of the Good News and the disciples of Jesus Christ. As baptized Catholics, it is the responsibility of each one of us to follow Jesus and use our gifts and talents to show His humanity to the world.



# VISION 2030

*Creating Parish Communities Rooted  
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## MISSION STATEMENT OF VISION 2030

The Vision 2030 Blueprint Process is a long-range pastoral planning process for the Diocese of Scranton. While looking proactively at the realities of our local church in the present moment, this process strives to meet the **opportunities and challenges** of the coming decade in order to create vibrant expressions of parish life rooted in the life of Jesus Christ.

### — **LIVING OUR MISSION TOGETHER** —

The Vision 2030 Blueprint process is a prayerful and participative process. As we seek to bring new life to our mission to spread the Good News of the Gospel, every one of us has an important role to play. We do not have the luxury of sitting on the sidelines. By virtue of our Baptism, we must participate in this process in an informed way, putting aside emotion, working to determine how best our local community and the entire diocese moves forward. As baptized Catholics, we are all called to participate fully in the life and mission of the Church. The mission of the Church is rooted in the mission of Christ who commanded everyone (clergy, religious and laity) to:

*“Go into the whole world and proclaim the gospel to every creature.” (Mark 16:15)*

*In order to create vibrant parish communities rooted in the life of Jesus Christ, all parishes should focus on:*

- ◆ Helping people encounter Jesus
- ◆ “Mission” over “Maintenance,” especially in regards to feeding the poor, helping the vulnerable and comforting the lonely
- ◆ Reawakening the understanding and awareness of the Sunday Eucharist and the celebration of Sacraments
- ◆ Inviting people to take their faith more seriously and become more faithful disciples of Jesus Christ
- ◆ Accompanying young people in the creation of a hope-filled future
- ◆ Embracing new immigrants and individuals moving into our communities and diocese
- ◆ Encouraging lifelong faith formation
- ◆ Creating a sense of unity and community
- ◆ Increasing charitable works and outreach
- ◆ Promoting vocations to the priesthood, religious life and diaconate



# VISION 2030

*Creating Parish Communities Rooted  
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## CHALLENGES WE MUST ADDRESS TO ENSURE THE CHURCH IS VIBRANT AND PRESENT TO FUTURE GENERATIONS

A lot has changed not only in society - but also in the Diocese of Scranton during its more than 150-year history. By working together, we hope to strengthen the most vibrant expressions of parish life and to embrace the unavoidable changes which require us to respond in new ways.

As members of the Church of Scranton, we must work together in a way that we best live out our baptismal calling in both a world - and local environment - that continues to change. We must continue to respond to the needs of the People of God with changing resources and opportunities.

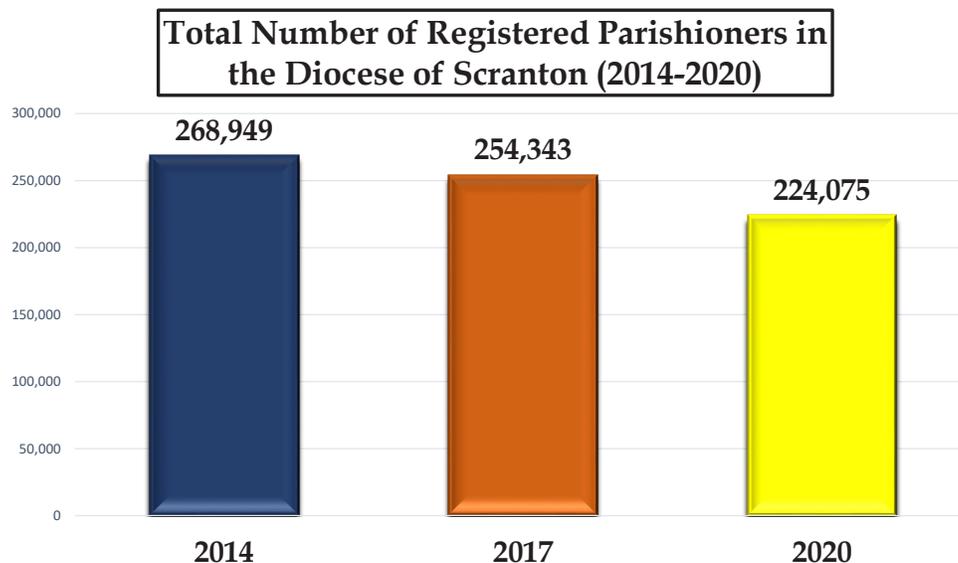
*The following are some of the factors that will prompt change and response in our parishes:*

### **1. Fewer Parishioners Supporting the Mission of the Church**

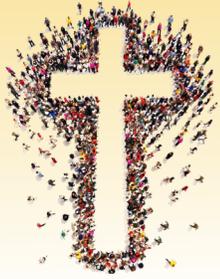
Long before the COVID-19 pandemic impacted parishes, regular weekend Mass attendance had been on the decline. As shown in the chart below, the total number of parishioners who are registered in all parishes of the Diocese of Scranton dropped by more than 16% between 2014 and 2020.

The total number of Baptisms, First Communion and Confirmations in the Diocese of Scranton also dropped during this time period.

In 2020, a custom demographics report from Mission Insite identified that there are more than 317,000 Catholic individuals within the 11-county geographic territory of the Diocese of Scranton. This gap between individuals who identify as Catholics, yet are not currently registered in a parish, is a challenge that must be addressed.



Source: Diocese of Scranton — Parish Report Statistics 2014-2020



# VISION 2030

## *Creating Parish Communities Rooted in the Life of Jesus Christ*

Parishes are meant to foster lives of holiness and discipleship among all their people. The following are some examples of societal changes that have impacted the number of parishioners who actively support the mission of the Church:

### CHANGING DEMOGRAPHICS

Many of the most faithful Mass-going parishioners continue to get older and while some young people are moving out of the area for employment, others are not actively attending Mass and practicing religious beliefs. In many parishes, the number of funerals far outpace the number of Baptisms taking place.

### GENERATIONAL DIFFERENCES

According to the Pew Research Center, individuals who profess no religious affiliation, “nones,” are now the largest subgroup in American society. In a study released in 2019, “nones” jumped from 17% of the adult population in 2009 to 26% in 2019. Catholics, meanwhile, slipped from 23% to 20% in 2019. While some young people embrace the concept of spirituality, they do not necessarily see the need for participation in Mass or the sacraments.

### SADNESS AND PAIN

While the Church has always been a gathering of the wounded, it must acknowledge the sadness and pain caused by prior parish reconfigurations as well as the clergy sex abuse crisis. As acknowledged in Bishop Bambera’s 2011 Pastoral Letter, “Wounded and Loved, Regathering the Scattered,” we simply cannot embrace the hope of Easter without first experiencing Good Friday and the wounds of our lives and brokenness of our world.

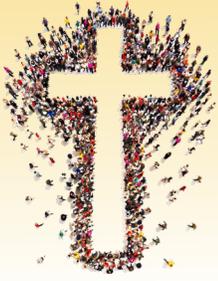


## 2. Financial Challenges and Parish Infrastructure Needs

Many parish buildings were built in a different era and there are countless facilities with deferred maintenance needs and no planned funding stream for necessary repairs. The Diocese of Scranton must continue to evaluate where and how to best invest resources not only on a particular parish-level, but also the deanery and diocesan levels.

Parishes are much more expensive to maintain now than they were in the past. With a fewer number of parishioners supporting the mission of the church overall, parish offertories have not been able to keep up with current realities.

As of early 2021, 19 parishes have been found to have significant bills, insurance premiums, or medical premiums that need to be paid to the Diocese of Scranton. The Diocese of Scranton provides pastoral and temporal services for people, parishes and institutions in the Diocese and represents the faithful in the Diocese in the worldwide Church. Funding to help support the work of the Diocese itself is primarily provided through an assessment that is paid by each parish. Likewise, funding to help support the Diocese of Scranton Catholic School System is provided through a schools assessment that is paid for by each parish. The resources provided by both parish and school assessments are carefully used to further the mission of the Church.



# VISION 2030

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## **3. Diminishing Number of Ordained Priests**

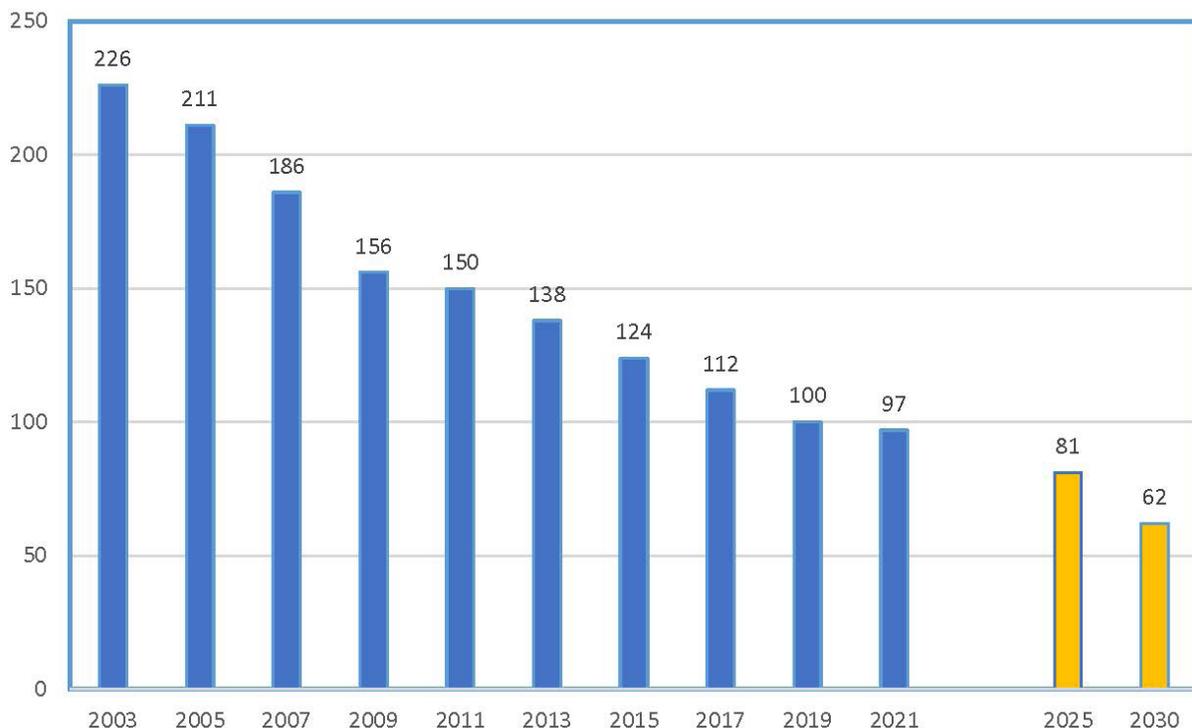
Over the coming decade and beyond, the Diocese of Scranton faces a decreasing number of priests. A fewer number of priests will represent a significant challenge to the entire diocese. Given the decline in people actively practicing their faith, there would naturally be fewer priests coming from our families. Changes will need to be prompted because of clergy retirement, infirmity or transfer.

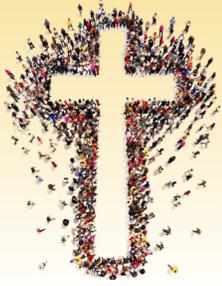
The number of Diocesan priests in active ministry has decreased significantly over the last several decades. As indicated in the graph below, the Diocese of Scranton had more than 200 active priests in 2003. That number has consistently declined in subsequent years. In 2021, there were 97 diocesan priests active in the Diocese.

While various factors can influence any projections - including the number of seminarians ordained by the Diocese in the coming years - the following is of immediate concern:

- **16 priests are expected to reach the retirement age by 2025.**
- **19 additional priests are projected for retirement between 2025-2030  
(The retirement age is 75 in the Diocese of Scranton)**
- **Because of health conditions known in 2021, 6 priests may not be able to continue in ministry until their expected retirement age.**

**Diocesan Priests Active in the Diocese**





# VISION 2030

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## OUR PATH FORWARD TOGETHER EMBRACING HOPE AMIDST CHANGE

As Catholics, we believe the Holy Spirit guides us, especially during challenging times. The Diocese of Scranton, along with all of its people, are being given the privilege and responsibility to write our history for those to come.

*As we embrace hope amidst change, we must focus on the following areas:*

### 1. Inviting Participation in Parish Life

The clergy and lay faithful should strive to form vibrant and faith-filled parish families guided by our common witness to the Lord Jesus Christ. The parish is where most Catholics publicly express their faith, joining with others to give proof to their communion with God and with one another. Parishes should be committed to proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ and aspire to lead others to grow in holiness and deepen their relationship with Christ.

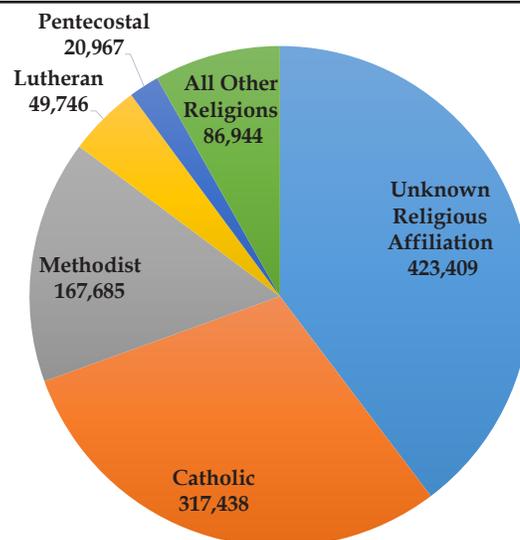
*The opportunity for evangelization exists*

While many focus on the number of people who are not in the pews, a custom demographics report from MissionInsite on the geographic territory of the Diocese of Scranton provides reason for hope.

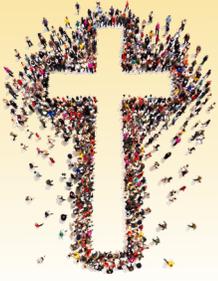
Using census information and other data, the report found that 29.8% of the population (317,438 people) identify as Catholic in the 11 counties of the Diocese. That means there is work to do in getting individuals who identify as Catholics registered in a local parish, since currently only 224,075 people are registered with a parish.

More importantly, the report shows that the religious affiliation for nearly 40% of the population (423,409 people) is unknown. This data provides a tremendous opportunity for evangelization and creating the invitation to participate in the Catholic faith and parish life.

Religious Affiliation of Individuals Living  
in the Diocese of Scranton



Source: Mission Insite Demographics  
Report 2020



# VISION 2030

## *Creating Parish Communities Rooted in the Life of Jesus Christ*

### *There are numerous ways to invite participation in Parish Life including:*

- ◆ Nurturing a more welcoming, hospitable environment
- ◆ Cultivating a sense of belonging throughout the parish family to encourage more active participation
- ◆ Clergy and lay leadership in the parish should make an intentional effort to be present not only in the parish itself but also the community itself. Meet potential parishioners where they are if they are not already attending Masses.
- ◆ Encourage everyone to give of their time, talent and treasure
- ◆ In a digital world, make sure your parish website is constantly updated and utilize new and emerging forms of social media to reach parishioners, evangelize, catechize and inform. If a parish places little or no emphasis on its digital footprint, they are not actively working to meet parishioners where they are and invite participation in parish life.

## **2. Supporting and Inviting Youth & Young Families to Make the Church their Second Home**

The clergy and lay faithful should aspire to give special attention to our youth and young families, enabling them to meet the unique challenges of our modern world.

### *There are numerous ways to support and invite youth and young families including:*

- ◆ Promoting and encouraging each young person to have a personal relationship with Jesus. This can be done in many ways through the guiding principles of Word, Worship, Community and Service. Some examples include: strengthening Eucharistic Adoration opportunities or other parish prayer opportunities geared to young adults at times that are convenient, holding faith formation opportunities for single young adults, performing parish service projects in conjunction with area non-profits and simply asking young men and women to take part in parish life activities.
- ◆ Promoting strong marriages and healthy families with the goal of making each household in the parish a vibrant domestic church
- ◆ Inviting young adults to have a voice in parish ministries, for example, personally inviting young married couples to share their witness to those couples who are newly engaged
- ◆ Simply taking the time to make youth and young families feel welcome. Take time to notice the single young adults when they attend Mass. At the end of Mass, include them in conversations and activities.





# VISION 2030

*Creating Parish Communities Rooted in the Life of Jesus Christ*

## **3. Promote vocations to the Priesthood, Diaconate and Consecrated Life**

The clergy and lay faithful must be dedicated to promoting vocations to the priesthood, diaconate and consecrated life through prayer and education and to renewing our prayers and support for those who are considering one of these particular vocations. As a diocese, pastoral care of vocations should shape our activities and be at the heart of diocesan pastoral planning.

*As we embrace hope amidst change, we must create a culture of vocations by focusing on the following areas:*

- ◆ Intentionally focusing on increasing vocations to the priesthood as well as the diaconate and religious life
- ◆ Joyfully celebrating the Sacraments, most especially the Eucharist, so each parishioner has a connection to a priest who serves them
- ◆ Making prayer for vocations essential throughout all of parish life
- ◆ Working on behalf of vocations involves encouraging individual young men to consider serving the Lord and His people as a priest.
- ◆ Celebrating and promoting the recruitment of seminarians at the parish level



## **4. Embrace Immigrants and Newcomers in Our Communities**

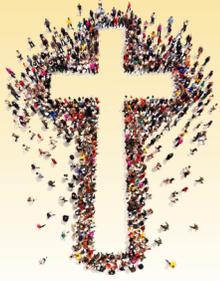
Throughout Holy Scripture we are taught to open our hearts to others. The Diocese of Scranton and its parishes should create faith communities where every person feels seen, heard and welcomed.

Over the last two decades, the 11 counties of the Diocese of Scranton have seen many new immigrants and individuals moving into our communities. One example includes the Hispanic population. According to data from the U.S. Census Bureau, the Hispanic population in the Diocese of Scranton increased 846% over the last two decades. Every county in the Diocese of Scranton saw an increase in the number of Hispanic residents.



Total Hispanic Population in the Diocese of Scranton	2000	2010	2020
	12,798	65,241	108,209

Source: U.S. Census Bureau



# VISION 2030

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## **5. Matching Parishes and Worship Facilities with the Number of People and Resources Given to Support Our Mission**

Given the decreasing number of parishioners who are practicing their faith, good stewardship calls for the responsible and repeated evaluation of all parishes and facilities throughout the Diocese of Scranton.

Change in our parishes will be prompted by different things at different times in different places. Implementation will be approached gradually as needs arise. There cannot be a “one size fits all approach.” Much of the planning process will be undertaken at the deanery level, which will allow for the unique needs of each community to be addressed.

In order to keep the mission of the Gospel alive throughout all 11 counties of the Diocese of Scranton, change in one area may be prompted by the overall needs of the diocese as well. The goal of any change will be to have a vibrant parish in as close proximity to our people as possible. The current footprint of parishes will need adjustment and that might mean change in your community. More often than not, changes in the Church have resulted in a reawakening and vibrancy of the faith. Christ’s Church continues to evolve and He promises it will be here when He returns, but it will look different from generation to generation. Throughout the process of any change, the faithful are encouraged to stay open-minded, remain focused on the Gospel and serving one another.

*Some possible areas for discussion and pastoral planning that may occur in parishes over the next decade include:*

### **- PARTNERSHIP WITH NEIGHBORING PARISHES -**

Parishes retain their own pastors but begin partnering with others to share ministries and resources such as the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, youth groups and religious education with the goal to avoid duplication as much as possible.

### **- LINKED PARISHES -**

Linking two or more parishes would involve the parishes sharing the same pastor. Such parishes, while independent, will by necessity cooperate more closely than parishes in partnerships. Linked parishes do many things cooperatively, such as programs, and are encouraged to work toward combining Pastoral Council meetings and establishing common committees where possible.

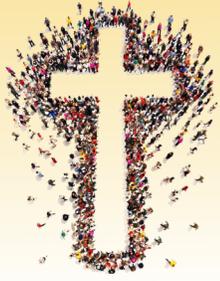
### **- ALTERNATIVE TYPES OF PARISH LEADERSHIP -**

The Diocese of Scranton currently has several Parish Life Coordinators who are entrusted with the responsibility of leading a parish community in the absence of a priest serving as pastor. The Parish Life Coordinator provides pastoral and organizational leadership for a parish community and works with a Sacramental Minister, who is a priest authorized to provide for the liturgical and sacramental needs of the parish community.

### **- MERGER/CLOSURE -**

In a parish merger, two or more parishes are united as one parish. Parishes may be considered for a merger when one or more of the parishes involved appears to lack the resources for long-term sustainability. This lack of resources might be financial in nature but might also apply to the number of active parishioners or the ability to maintain a safe and secure facility/property.

This option is most generally considered when the membership of a parish has so diminished that the community is unable to sustain the pillars of parish life in Word, Worship, Community and Service and/or financial and infrastructure needs cannot be met.



# VISION 2030

## *Creating Parish Communities Rooted in the Life of Jesus Christ*

By the essence of our Baptism, each person is called to take an active role in realizing the mission of the Vision 2030 Blueprint process. The laity, in an informed way based on data – and not simply emotion or sentimentality – must be directly involved in the process of creating vibrant parish communities rooted in the life of Jesus Christ. The participation of the faithful is not just to be invited and welcomed – but deemed critical. The laity and the clergy are co-responsible for the success of this mission. There must be equal participation and dialogue from all sides as this process moves forward.

The opportunities and challenges that the Diocese of Scranton faces are not unique to us alone. Many other dioceses are responding to similar circumstances. Locally, we must confront all situations that arise as a community of faithful disciples, relying on the Holy Spirit as our helper and guide.

The Vision 2030 Blueprint Process is not an outdated model of thinking of pastoral planning that should sit on a shelf, to be dusted off when situations arise. Instead, it should be a proactive initiative focused on being as responsive as possible to the mission of the Church.

While change to parish life and structure will be necessary during this process, this planning process allows for the unique needs of each deanery and even special circumstances within each deanery, to be brought forward. Consultation among the clergy and the laity - as well as the formulation of specific recommendations - will take time.

While any change prompted by this process may be difficult, this process aims to help all of the faithful grow more deeply in our faith. The Church of Scranton will continue to be vibrant and build on its past. The current reality of parish life will need to look different in some communities.



*“The parish is not an outdated institution; precisely because it possesses great flexibility, it can assume different contours depending on the openness and missionary creativity of the pastor and the community”*

*(Pope Francis, Evangelii Gaudium 28)*