



DIOCESE *of* GAYLORD

November 29, 2025

Dear Parishioners,

The Jubilee Year 2025 diocesan pastoral planning process has been a time to exercise the virtue of hope. Our parish churches hold deep meaning; they are places where families celebrate baptisms, weddings, funerals and countless moments of grace. There are emotional ties to these sacred places. They are part of your story—and mine.

Yet, our mission is not about buildings; it is about people—bringing Christ to every heart. Across the United States, Catholic communities face similar challenges: fewer people attending Mass, fewer weddings and baptisms and fewer priests to serve. In fact, the number of priests nationwide has declined by more than 40% since 1970. These trends cannot be ignored. Many of our churches have diminished in size, and most priests in our diocese serve multiple parishes. To ensure vibrant communities of faith for generations to come, we need to focus on mission more than on maintenance.

Since March, we have been discerning a path forward together. The Presbyteral Council and I began reviewing parish data and the 2009 pastoral planning report. In the Spring, we held vicariate meetings with finance and pastoral councils, pastors and directors of parish life to share the data and the last report's recommendations. This Fall, we reconvened and prayerfully reflected on proposed ideas and solutions. This process has been deliberate and collaborative, not rushed or done in isolation. The voices of your priests and parish leaders have helped shape the road ahead.

In December, with prayerful discernment, data and the voices of our faithful, I will begin drafting the diocesan pastoral plan. In January 2026, I will share it with priests for final feedback, and in February 2026, the plan will be announced publicly, with implementation beginning in July 2026. While the plan is not yet written, I anticipate some parish closures will occur, along with some altered parish structuring and Mass scheduling. Our goal is to have strong, sustainable parish communities centered on Christ and priests who have the time and energy to be truly present to their people.

In this Jubilee Year, we are called to be pilgrims of hope, trusting that God is doing something new among us. Together, as we look to the future, let's do so with a firm sense of love, communion and mission.

I invite you to visit dioceseofgaylord.org for more details and to watch my video message. Please join me in a renewed and profound trust in Divine Providence.

In Christ our Life!

Most Reverend Jeffrey J. Walsh
Bishop of Gaylord