



Q&A

1. Why is the Diocese of Gaylord doing pastoral planning now?

Pastoral planning helps us look honestly at our current realities and prepare for the future. Across the United States, Catholic life is changing—Mass attendance has declined, fewer weddings and baptisms are celebrated, and the number of priests has dropped by more than 40% since 1970. In our diocese, many churches are diminished in size, and most priests serve multiple parishes. These trends cannot be ignored. To ensure vibrant communities of faith and priests who can be fully present to their people, we need to focus on mission more than maintenance.

2. Does this mean my parish will close?

The plan is not yet written, but we 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 minister well.

3. Who is making these decisions?

This process has been underway since March 2025 and has included input from parish finance and pastoral councils, priests and directors of parish life. We held vicariate meetings in the spring and listening sessions in the fall. Bishop Walsh will draft the plan in December, share it with priests for feedback in January 2026, and announce the final plan in February 2026. This has been a deliberate, prayerful process—not rushed and not done in isolation.

4. Why can't we just keep things the way they are?

Our current structure is not sustainable. With fewer parishioners and fewer priests, maintaining every building would stretch resources and limit ministry, reducing the impact of our mission. We want priests who can be present to their people and parishes that are alive with faith and mission—not just buildings that are maintained.

5. What will happen next?

- **December 2025:** Bishop drafts the plan based on all input received.
- **January 2026:** Draft shared with priests and directors of parish life for final feedback.
- **February 2026:** Final plan announced publicly.
- **February – July 2026:** Transitional planning.
- **July 2026:** Implementation begins.

6. How can I learn more or stay informed?

Watch Bishop Walsh's video message explaining the process in more detail and review the rest of the details on this webpage. We will continue to share information through your parish bulletins, bishop's videos and the diocesan website throughout the process.

7. What is the Diocese of Gaylord doing about the decline in priestly vocations?

With the help of a large bequest, the Diocese of Gaylord made a \$100,000 investment into raising awareness of priestly vocations. The diocese, and its partner Vianney Vocations, created a strategic plan for vocations that includes the following elements: the formation of a vocations team with six priests to assist the vocations director, the launch of an intensive *Called by Name* program to identify faithful young men, new vocations website with many resources to help men discern their call from God, new discernment events, personal assistance to help men through the discernment journey, and prayer support from the whole diocese. The strategic plan was launched in Spring 2025.

8. Can the lay faithful be trained to help our priests?

The lay faithful play a vital role in strengthening our parishes and supporting the mission of the Church. You can help by actively participating in parish life—volunteer to serve on parish councils, assist with ministries and contribute to fundraising efforts that sustain our communities. Beyond service, seek opportunities to deepen your own faith through prayer, study and formation, and share that faith with others by evangelizing in your families, workplaces and neighborhoods.

Many parish leaders have expressed the importance of ongoing formation for the laity. In response, the Diocese of Gaylord's Faith Formation team will relaunch a diocesan lay formation program in 2026 to equip parishioners for various ministries and leadership roles. Watch for more details in early 2026 as we work together to form disciples who bring Christ's love to the world.