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# DIOCESE of GAYLORD

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## Pastoral Plan 2026: Love, Communion and Mission

### A Message to the Faithful

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

For more than a year, clergy, parish leaders, lay faithful and I have worked together in a concerted effort of pastoral planning, discerning how our diocese can best live out its mission in the years ahead. The impetus for this process sprang from conversations at Presbyteral Council meetings over the course of several months in 2024, where concerns about priest burnout and pending retirements, as well as the challenges to parish viability and resources, came to the forefront. What followed was a broad and collaborative effort: fresh data gathered from parish surveys in the winter of 2024, a series of vicariate meetings that engaged parish leadership and written input submitted via email and letters.

Over the course of six spring vicariate meetings and six fall vicariate meetings, and months' worth of submissions, hundreds of statements were compiled for prayerful discernment. Guided by the model of synodality, collaboration and listening in the Spirit led to careful consideration of the best way to address challenges with hope and to formulate a plan that is rooted in the credo: *Love, Communion and Mission*.

This week, I released the Pastoral Plan 2026, which will be implemented in July of this year. As with many dioceses across the country, this plan includes:

- Limited use of some churches (20) and a few parish closures (2)
- Restructured clustering of parishes to share resources and strengthen communion
- Personnel changes, including new priest assignments and support roles. Three directors of parish life will no longer serve in that role: Sr. Chris Herald, Sr. Sue Gardner and Dcn. Martin Korson. The diocese has been blessed by their many years of dedicated and loving service.

Decision-making certainly involved review of important data—Mass attendance, priest availability, finances, geography, history and future projections—but, more importantly, it was driven by a vision of faithful stewardship for the gift of the Catholic Church across 21

counties of northern lower Michigan. This vision includes a sacrificial participation in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The realities of the Pascal Mystery involve sacrifice and will touch each of our lives. Some will experience the closure or limited use of their parish; others will adjust to new cluster structures and schedules; still others may feel little change but are invited to welcome those who join them from neighboring communities. Throughout the upcoming transition and implementation of this pastoral plan, I ask for understanding, patience and generosity in practical things like parking spaces and pew sharing, and in the deeper gift of sharing ministries and volunteering, as we live out the communion we profess.

This pastoral plan, we pray, will achieve two main goals:

1. Enrich parish and sacramental life, renewing missionary zeal for all.
2. Provide a more balanced workload for clergy, supporting better health of body, mind and spirit.

At the same time, the plan joyfully embraces the challenge to build and sustain a culture of vocations, form lay faithful for ministry and mission, and celebrate our young people with new opportunities to share their gifts and leadership potential. There is an abundance of fertile soil from which God can raise up saints. I ask for full, active, conscious participation and openness to the new changes.

While no plan can solve every problem, we move forward hope-filled, trusting that “God provides.” Let us forge ahead with great confidence in Divine Providence, embracing the future with the credo of *Love, Communion and Mission*.

To view the full plan, including parish closures and limited-use designations, new clusters and priests’ assignments, please visit: [DioceseofGaylord.org/PastoralPlan2026](http://DioceseofGaylord.org/PastoralPlan2026)

In Christ our Life!



Most Reverend Jeffrey J. Walsh  
Bishop of Gaylord

“Love never fails.” (*1 Cor 13*) • “They devoted themselves... to the breaking of the bread.” (*Acts 2:42*)  
“Go, therefore, and make disciples.” (*Mt 28:19–20*)