

# FAQs About the Pastoral Plan 2026

## Q Why did the diocese create a Pastoral Plan now?

**A** Our diocese—and the Church across the U.S.—is experiencing real shifts. Mass attendance and sacramental practice have declined since the 1970s, and the number of priests has fallen by more than 40% nationwide. Many local churches are smaller, and most priests already serve multiple parishes. Pastoral planning helps us look honestly at these realities and prepare for a mission-focused future.

## Q Did the bishop create the Pastoral Plan 2026 alone?

**A** Bishop Walsh is responsible for the final plan, but it was formed through the synodal process; in-depth review of parish data; input from parish finance and pastoral councils, parish leaders, priests, deacons and directors of parish life; and of course, prayer. This has been a deliberate, collaborative process with input from hundreds of other sources—not rushed or done in isolation. The bishop has been quick to state: “This is not my plan; this is our plan.”

## Q When was the Pastoral Plan announced and when will implementation begin?

**A** Bishop Walsh announced the Diocese of Gaylord’s Pastoral Plan 2026 on Jan. 20, 2026, with implementation beginning this July. The diocesan Pastoral Plan 2026 webpage outlines a timeline that moved from early data collection and spring vicariate meetings to drafting and consultation, culminating in a public announcement before implementation. See the timeline at [www.DiocesefofGaylord.org/PastoralPlan2026](http://www.DiocesefofGaylord.org/PastoralPlan2026).

## Q What kinds of changes are included in the Pastoral Plan?

**A** The plan includes parish closures, parishes becoming limited-use churches, new parish clusters, revised vicariate boundaries and updated clergy assignments. These changes are being implemented to sustain sacramental life and strengthen the mission of the Church. Read the complete Pastoral Plan 2026 at [www.DiocesefofGaylord.org/PastoralPlan2026](http://www.DiocesefofGaylord.org/PastoralPlan2026).

### At-A-Glance Diocese Highlights:

29	Pastors	8	Seminarians
2	Priest Administrators	3	Directors of Parish Life
10	Parochial Vicars	3	Sacramental Ministers
29	Deacons		

Total Catholic Schools: **16 - unchanged**

Total Parishes in July 2026: **56**

Total Limited-Use Churches in July 2026: **20**

## Q What is the difference between “parish” and “church”?

**A** A parish is a portion of the people of God in a defined territory under the guidance of a pastor who is responsible for the care of their souls. A church is a physical structure which has been dedicated for divine worship.



## **Q What happens to parish registrations and sacramental records from a closed or limited-use church?**

**A** When parishes close or are designated limited use, registrations typically transfer to the receiving parish; however, each parishioner can ultimately decide the parish to which they wish to be registered. The sacramental records are preserved by diocesan and canon law norms. The receiving and closing parishes/limited-use churches will be provided with specific instructions.

## **Q What about sacred art, memorials and cemeteries at closed/limited-use churches?**

**A** Diocesan offices of Worship and Archives/Chancellor oversee the reverent transfer or disposition of sacred items at parishes that are closing. In most cases, some sacred items from the closing parish will be transferred to the receiving parish.

No sacred items are moved from limited-use churches.

Cemeteries retain their dignity and oversight; the clustered parishes will continue to care for any cemeteries associated with a parish that is closing or designated limited use. Parish leaders should consult the Office of the Chancellor for parish specific guidance.

## **Q How are the parish clusters changing?**

**A** Today, some parish clusters group four or five parishes, which stretch clergy and make sustained presence difficult. Under the new plan, clusters are three or fewer parishes, with most clusters at two parishes. Additionally, many parishes will be entering a new parish cluster in July. These new clusters, along with updated clergy assignments, including support from parochial vicars, many of whom are international priests, are meant to balance workloads so priests can be more present to their people and parish life can flourish.

## **Q How does the Pastoral Plan affect Mass times, ministries and schedules?**

**A** Within each parish cluster, pastors will coordinate Mass schedules so priests can serve effectively, and parishioners have access to the sacraments. Ministries will be encouraged to collaborate across cluster partners. Changes in schedules, especially for new clusters, will be communicated by the pastor as implementation nears.

## **Q How will the diocese support those who are grieving?**

**A** Bishop Walsh acknowledges the sorrow many feel when a parish closes or changes. Parishioners can submit comments and questions through the online comment form at [www.DiocesefofGaylord.org/PastoralPlan2026](http://www.DiocesefofGaylord.org/PastoralPlan2026). All submissions will be responded to and shared with Bishop Walsh. Many parishes are offering listening sessions, hospitality and pastoral care during the transition (now through the summer), and leaders are asked to welcome those who may join their communities. Reminder, we are never abandoned—new communities await.

## **Q How does the plan connect to “Love, Communion and Mission”?**

**A** As we implement the plan, Bishop Walsh invites us to embrace the future with the credo: *Love, Communion, Mission*. Love in conversation and action, Eucharistic communion with Christ and each other, and missionary discipleship that send us out as Pilgrims of Hope.

## Q What is being done to grow vocations?

**A** The diocese launched a vocations strategy, in partnership with Vianney Vocations, in spring 2025. A team of priests was appointed to walk with men through the discernment process. Various vocation programs, like the *Called by Name* campaign, have been created to help identify faith-filled men who are discerning God's call. A variety of events are scheduled for men to learn more information about priestly vocations. A new website was launched to raise awareness of the priesthood and accompany men in discernment; visit [www.GaylordVocations.org](http://www.GaylordVocations.org). These initiatives have been a serious investment of time, talent and treasure.

## Q What is being done for a lay formation program?

**A** A lay formation program is slated to relaunch in 2026 to equip parishioners for ministry and leadership. It was overwhelmingly clear from the vicariate meetings that there is a hunger for lay formation and education along the lines of the former Center for Catholic Studies. A similar model will be developed. It was also overwhelmingly clear that we need to provide enriching experiences of faith for our young people. The bishop is hopeful to establish a Bishop's Youth Advisory Council and develop a leadership training retreat program for youth and young adults.

## Q Are Catholic schools affected?

**A** The Pastoral Plan 2026 indicates schools remain unchanged at this time. Future adjustments, if any, would come only after extensive research and collaboration.

## Q What if circumstances change (a priest becomes ill, retires early or dies)?

**A** No plan can anticipate every scenario. If a single pastor were to become unavailable, additional adjustments would be necessary. The diocese will communicate promptly and accompany affected communities.

## Q How can I stay informed and help parishioners do the same?

**A**

- a) Read the bishop's letter, watch his video and review the complete plan with vicariate and parish-specific details like the listing of closures, limited use, clusters and clergy assignments.
- b) Encourage prayer, welcome our brothers and sisters and participate in parish listening sessions.
- c) Keep conversations charitable, accurate, hopeful and rooted in Divine Providence.

