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Welcome to the pastoral planning process for the parishes and faith communities of the Diocese of Rochester. Comprehensive diocesan-wide pastoral planning began in 1997 and involved all 200 parishes and faith communities organized into 35 planning groups. Called "Pastoral Planning for the New Millennium," this process produced pastoral plans for each of these planning groups. These five-year plans focused on the most important pastoral concerns shared by the parishes and faith communities of each group. As each group enters the fifth year of implementation, it will begin a second round of planning, called "Pastoral Planning for the New Millennium: Phase Two" (PPNM2).

We have all learned much from our five years of experience and that learning is reflected in the revised process used in PPNM2. Perhaps most important, however, has been our mutual understanding of pastoral planning and its goal. Pastoral planning is the process in which we pray and think together about the actions of the Body of Christ in this place and at this time. As baptized Christians, we are the Body of Christ. Christ is present in the world because we are present to the world and in his name act to express the gospel values for which he died. The goal of pastoral planning is to sustain and increase the vitality of parishes and faith communities. We seek communities whose faith is so alive, so vital that they cannot keep it to themselves. The life and love of God overflows our communities and gushes forth to nurture the world and all its inhabitants.

Each parish and faith community is situated in time and space. Pastoral planning responds to the realities of each concrete, specific situation; it is not done in the abstract. We may not like the reality; we may wish things to be otherwise. But the Spirit always works in the world as it is, not as we would like it to be.

We must maintain a creative balance, perhaps even tension, between our ideals of how we would like things to be and the way they are. Out of that creative tension we must discern and plan for the path toward the Reign of God. Most of us do not think that the declining number of priests available to lead our parishes and faith communities is a good thing. Out of it, however, good can come if we proceed with the confidence that Christ is with us. Whatever the overall result of our planning, it is essential that we respond to the challenges we face and seize the opportunities that arise.

PPNM2 provides a path forward for this creative and Spirit-filled activity. The process is rooted in prayer and reflection. It is in both praying and thinking together that we will be able to respond to the call to be Christ's Body in this time and in this place.

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