

STATEMENT OF BISHOP DAVID A. ZUBIK ABOUT THE *ON MISSION!* ANNOUNCEMENTS

On April 12, 2015, I called the Church of Pittsburgh to join me on a journey to better fulfill the mission of Jesus and ensure vibrancy in every one of our parishes. This initiative, *On Mission for The Church Alive!*, seeks to offer a deeper relationship with Jesus and His Church to everyone, including those actively engaged in the Church, those who have lost touch with Jesus or who have left the Church, and those who have never belonged to the Church, but are seeking deeper meaning in their lives.

While the *On Mission!* initiative calls the Catholic Church of Pittsburgh to change in many ways, at the heart of this process is the invitation for all local Catholics to refocus on those three virtues that last, even in the midst of change, namely faith, hope and love. Faith is more than a church building, a Mass time or a pew. It is a relationship first with Jesus and then with others that seeks to unite us as one. It cannot be a passive endeavor, but an active trust in God that grows deeper each day and is shared with others by a courageous, vibrant and authentic witness. Hope is what spurs us on in life. It motivates and inspires us to live the best life we can while on earth so that we can reach our goal of heaven, and to do whatever it takes to help others get there, as well. Love is rooted in the realization that we are all God's children, created in his image and, as such, we all deserve to be treated with respect and compassion. It seeks to follow the will of God and reach out to others, neighbor and stranger alike.

No matter how the Church is structured, it is the responsibility of all the faithful – bishops and priests included – to make faith, hope and love remain alive in the world around us. That is why we are all charged over the coming weeks, months and years to be creative and tireless in making these virtues a reality in new and enlivening ways. Our churches will continue to be places where local Catholics gather to be nurtured and nourished by the God who loves us. Yet, *On Mission!* gives us a new context and new opportunities to make ever more alive a faith that abides both within and outside of our church walls.

That is why for the past three years, we have labored to discover how best to position our parishes for the future. We have been called to respond to the reality that populations in our region have shifted, that many Catholics have drifted away from Mass, and that we will have fewer priests. These realities are opportunities for us to think about and create new ways to share and mobilize our resources to draw people deeper into the faith and serve those in need.

As this initiative began, I invited all Catholics to join in prayer during the summer of 2015. Following this year of prayer, 329 parish consultation meetings were scheduled so that anyone who wished to weigh in on this initiative could do so. More than 30,000 people participated. In addition, lay leaders from each of our 188 parishes participated in *On Mission* Parish Teams, representatives from across the diocese served on the *On Mission* Commission, and all of our

priests and deacons were engaged throughout the process. As a result of this thorough consultation, I have reached the decisions that I believe will best help us to fulfill our mission.

These decisions have resulted in our 188 parishes being joined into 57 parish groupings. In most cases, a parish grouping is a collection of two or more neighboring parishes in a geographic area that will work with their clergy to one day become a new parish.

Each parish grouping will be served by a clergy team. This team will be led by an administrator. An administrator is a priest who fulfills all the obligations of a pastor. During the first year of transition, the administrator, together with his clergy team, is called to build relationships with and among the parishioners of the parishes in the grouping. The clergy team may also include any number of the following: parochial vicars, parish chaplains, and deacons. Priests are also being assigned as institutional chaplains to major hospitals, as well as to assignments in diocesan administration. Finally, our retired priests, whose service to this local Church is exemplary and invaluable, will continue to be available to assist in parishes as they are able.

The maximum number of weekend Masses per grouping is based on the number of priests assigned. This includes Saturday evening and Sunday Masses and, according to canon law, is not to exceed three Masses per priest assigned. Each newly assigned administrator will work in collaboration with the current pastors/administrators to create an interim Mass and Confession schedule that will go into effect on October 15, 2018.

Each parish grouping has been assigned a category that will help guide it to create a new parish in a timely manner. Ideally, groupings in Category A will complete this process by the end of 2020. Those in Category B will have until the end of 2021. Groupings in Category C will have until the end of 2023. It is important to note that during this time the groupings will study and make a recommendation about which buildings will best serve the new parish.

All the decisions I am announcing today will take effect on Monday, October 15, 2018. Until then, as we prepare to undertake these new models for parish life, I will rely on the cooperation, understanding, and patience of all involved as we make this important transition.

I truly believe that change can bring new life and joy. I realize that such transformation is rarely easy, especially in the heartfelt matters of faith and parish life. I know that this change will require us – the faithful, the clergy, and myself – to let go of some things that are precious and familiar. I also am convinced that our clergy and faithful have what it takes to form deep and lasting relationships within their groupings and to create welcoming communities.

Now that these decisions are made, we all need to continue to pray for the success of On Mission for The Church Alive!, that the priests, deacons, religious sisters, brothers, and lay faithful, will be strengthened as they work to fulfill the mission of Jesus in the Church. And I ask them to continue to pray for me, that I may be a courageous and compassionate shepherd in the years ahead. I believe with all my heart that, embracing the will and the wisdom of the Holy Spirit, we can all together do what Jesus asks of us: We can be The Church Alive!