

“As a body is one though it has many parts, and all the parts of the body, though many, are one body, so also Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body . . . But God has so constructed the body as to give greater honor to a part that is without it, so that there may be no division in the body, but that the parts may have the same concern for one another. If one part suffers, all the parts suffer with it; if one part is honored, all the parts share its joy” (1 Corinthians 12:12-13, 24-26).

One of the gifts of our ongoing diocesan pastoral plan is that it reminds us that we are part of a much bigger reality. We are all members of the Body of Christ, the Church, sharing the same baptism, the same Spirit, and the same Lord. As members of the Diocese of Erie, we also share the same bishop, the same diocesan ministries (such as the diocesan tribunal where I serve as judicial vicar), and the same mission to witness to the Gospel in the thirteen counties of Northwestern Pennsylvania.

As St. Paul reminds us in his first letter to the Corinthians, our unity as members of the same body calls us to have a special concern for all the members, not just for those who live next door. Our diocesan pastoral plan reminds us to have that same concern for our brothers and sisters throughout the Diocese of Erie, and in that spirit I ask that we keep in prayer in a special way all of our fellow Catholic parishes throughout the diocese who are experiencing significant restructuring as part of the diocesan plan. Whether their parish partnered with one or more other parishes, or, even more painfully, their parish was closed and merged into another parish, or if their parish simply received a new pastor, some 40% of the people in our diocese experienced a significant change in their parish life this past week as those changes took effect. In our prayer, let us support them as they go through this difficult experience and ask our one Lord to shepherd and guide them through the difficulty of this transition to the joy of new, more fruitful, and ever-more faithful parish life in their new configurations.