

KEY FINDINGS AND OBSERVATIONS

A plan for the future requires an accurate and objective understanding of the present. The key findings presented in this report point toward critical issues that should be considered in the plan. The plan will direct parishes and schools toward a new desired future and call for changes that reflect the reality of where the Archdiocese is today.

The following facts and observations are drawn from an extensive review of community demographics, parish data, Catholic school data, interviews with pastors and lay leaders, and assessments completed by the Catholic Schools Office. The report does not reflect the totality of the information received nor all the information needed to shape a plan.

This report will serve as a starting point for a discussion about the future direction for parishes and schools in the urban areas of Omaha. The findings will be supplemented by the input received throughout the planning process.

A. Demographics

COMMUNITY DEMOGRAPHICS

1. Population in the City of Omaha was 408,958 as of the 2010 Census. This is almost unchanged from 2000 using the same geographic area for 2000 as for 2010.
2. The population east of 72nd is estimated to be about 237,000 in 2011. This population area declined 2.5% since 2000.
3. The population east of 72nd is diverse. Estimates indicate the population in 2011 is 57.1% White non-Hispanic, 20% Black/African American, and 17.8% Hispanic or Latino, 1.7% Asian, and 3.5% other. The White population declined in the last decade by almost 24,000 persons, while other population groups increased.
4. The Hispanic population east of 72nd is estimated at 42,000 persons. This number grew 58% or over 15,000 in the last decade.
5. Average household income east of 72nd was estimated at \$52,956 in 2011, 83% of the average household income for the State of Nebraska.

PARISH DEMOGRAPHICS

6. Mass attendance in the three deaneries declined from 34,400 in 1991 to 22,400 in 2010, a decline of 35% over nineteen years. The number of Masses declined by 29% over the same years.
7. A total of 109 Masses are offered on the weekend in the three deaneries with an average attendance of 212 per Mass. At many Masses, attendance is less than 100.
8. From 2005 to 2010, attendance at Mass in English (and Latin) declined by 4,000 or 19.5%. Over the same time period attendance at Mass in Spanish grew by 1,500 or 40%.
9. A number of Masses in Spanish are full or overflowing, discouraging new comers who are seeking a church for the first time.

10. The three deaneries had 1,343 infant baptisms in 2010; however, over half (724) of these were in five parishes with large Hispanic populations. Baptisms in non-Hispanic parishes have declined 39% from just over 1,000 per year in the early 1990s to around 615 in 2010.
11. The three deaneries had 930 first communions in 2010; however, 497 of these were in five parishes with large Hispanic populations. First communions in non-Hispanic parishes declined 48% from around 835 per year in the early 1990s to around 433 by 2010.
12. The pattern of growth in parishes with large Hispanic populations and decline in non-Hispanic parishes is repeated with confirmations and marriages. Consistently, the Hispanic community is younger with more families than the non-Hispanic community.

STRATEGIC QUESTIONS

- A1. How has the makeup of parishes changed and not changed as a result of changing demographics in the city? Does parish membership reflect the population where the parish is located?
- A2. Who are the people the Church is not adequately reaching or emerging groups of people the Church should be reaching in the future?
- A3. What do long-term demographic shifts mean for the current organization and structure of parishes and schools?

B. Mission and Ministry

1. Many parishes draw members from outside the geographic boundaries of the parish, often extending outside the urban area. Parishes with this characteristic generally have a certain attraction or history that causes people to travel there. The old notion of a neighborhood parish has largely vanished because neighborhoods have changed dramatically.
2. Catholic schools are widely regarded as an important mission and ministry in the Archdiocese by clergy, lay leaders and principals. Catholic schools often attract young families, but those families may or may not be active in the parish.
3. Concern was expressed that the parish is under-investing in parish ministry. Sometimes the high parish investment in its Catholic school results in very limited resources for other parish programs, outreach and services.
4. Few parishes have a youth ministry program or ministry to young adults. This was frequently identified as a serious need in order to maintain young families in the parish and prepare future leaders.
5. A need for more adult faith formation programs was frequently expressed.
6. The in-parish and out-of-parish tuition model results in some families being registered in more than one parish to qualify for the lower parishioner rate.

STRATEGIC QUESTIONS

- B1. What services and ministries should parishes be ready and able to provide?
- B2. What resources, both human and financial, does it take to provide them well?

C. Hispanic Ministry and Ministry to Other Minority Groups

1. The Hispanic population is vastly underserved. The opportunities for reaching the Hispanic community are immense, and in the big picture the services and programs provided by the parishes are not functioning at a level that reflects the magnitude of the need.
2. Hispanic ministries have popped up in parishes when there has been a Spanish-speaking priest or a local initiative to welcome the Hispanic community. While these initiatives are good, they have resulted in a patchwork of solutions rather than a strategic use of resources.
3. Parishes serving large Hispanic populations are the same parishes which lack financial resources. Newly-immigrated Hispanics are unaccustomed to supporting the Church financially. There is a need for ongoing formation in financially supporting the Church.
4. Young Hispanic Catholics are frequently poorly catechized. They come for sacraments but do not continue as active members of the Catholic Church.
5. More programs that foster faith formation, especially for adults, are needed. While parishes do a great job with the resources they have, the possibilities for reaching many more Latinos is far greater than what is currently available.
6. Cultural customs and paying for Catholic education are major deterrents to enrolling in Catholic schools by immigrant families.
7. Canonical parishes have been established for the Vietnamese (Our Lady of Fatima) and Korean (St. Andrew Kim) Catholics in Omaha. Each of these parishes uses the facilities of another designated parish for worship and community activities. Mother of Perpetual Help Parish is the designated parish which serves the deaf community in Omaha. The Sudanese community has concentrated at St. Patrick Parish. St. Benedict the Moor Parish has had a long, rich history of serving primarily the African-American community of Omaha.

STRATEGIC QUESTIONS

- C1. What would the Hispanic ministry of the Catholic Church in Omaha ideally look like if it operated on a bigger scale and served 50% more people? Are parishes welcoming and ready?
- C2. How can more Hispanic families be convinced to choose Catholic schools and pay a reasonable tuition?

D. Collaboration

1. Collaboration is a voluntary agreement under which parishes work together to sponsor programs, share resources, and plan jointly. While a few examples of collaborative efforts exist, parishes generally function independently of each other, sometimes duplicating programs and even competing.
2. In many instances several parishes are serving the same geography and even somewhat similar populations.
3. Some parishes do not have a large enough population on their own to effectively support ministries for youth, young adults, special needs, and other areas identified by the criteria for vital parishes.

4. Several times parish leaders expressed a desire be effective at evangelization or offer other programs, but lack the knowledge or experience to initiate something new for them. There is not a strong collaborative network to share experience, ideas or resources.
5. Parish elementary schools view themselves as independent entities and are often in competition with one another for students and resources.
6. There is very limited collaboration among schools and no sense of a common vision for schools broader than the local situation. Principals frequently expressed a desire for more communication and collaboration with each other and the Catholic School Office so they are not each independently “reinventing the wheel.”

STRATEGIC QUESTIONS

D1. In what areas would vital and thriving ministries be possible or enhanced if parishes collaborated with each other?

E. Clergy Serving and Leading the Church

1. A full-time equivalent of thirty-four priests (*meaning some are part-time*) serve the thirty-four parishes in the three deaneries. The ratio of priests to Catholics is 1:1,300, and probably higher if all the non-registered Catholics could be counted.
2. The Archdiocese has 139 diocesan priests available for active service. The Archdiocese will experience a significant decrease in the number of priests. This decline will be strongest from now to 2025, when the number of priests is projected to be 113, a decline of 19%.
3. A total of seven priests serving parishes in the Archdiocese are from religious orders.
4. Twelve of the parishes share a priest with another parish. With a few exceptions, these parishes continue to operate relatively independently of each other. The priest/pastor is essentially managing two parishes.
5. The Archdiocese is blessed with a large number of permanent deacons. Currently just over 200 active permanent deacons serve in approximately half of the Archdiocese’s 147 parishes and missions.
6. The Archdiocese has a very limited number of Spanish-speaking priests with only eight being fluent and twelve having some Spanish language skills.

STRATEGIC QUESTIONS

E1. How will fewer priests in the Archdiocese affect the model for pastoring parishes?

E2. How is the role of pastor changing for the future?

F. Lay Leadership

1. Parishes have very little paid staff. For 45,000 Catholics in thirty-four parishes there are thirty full-time lay ministry staff, and another sixty-four part-time ministry staff. This staffing is about 1 staff to every 785 Catholics.
2. Many pastors do not have business and administrative staff to delegate management functions that can be handled by a lay person. With administrative support, pastors could be freed to provide more pastoral care and leadership.

3. Lay leaders serving in volunteer capacities identified lack of empowerment as an obstacle to giving of their time and talents. Many parishes lack a means for lay leader training, or a comprehensive vision of how to engage lay leaders in ministry. The role of lay leaders is often minimal with regard to providing spiritual leadership.
4. About 90% of the schools in the study area have a School Advisory Board or Committee. These operate with varying degrees of involvement and expertise, and their role varies from school to school. In a few instances the Home School Association serves as the Advisory Committee.
5. The transition to an increased role for lay leadership in the church will require: a fuller understanding of the role of the laity; the willingness of pastors to identify, encourage and support lay leaders; and training for the leaders in their new or expanded responsibilities.

STRATEGIC QUESTIONS

- F1. In what capacity are lay staff needed to help parishes be more vital and offer the necessary programs and services?
- F2. Where is the funding to support highly qualified and talented staff?

G. Catholic Education

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

1. Religious education programs are shared by a few parishes.
2. In the three deaneries, Religious Education programs for PreK to 8 enrolled 2,623 students in 2010. Of these, 1,695 attended classes in five predominantly Hispanic parishes.
3. Only a handful of high school students attend Religious Education programs, and almost all are at predominantly Hispanic parishes.

CATHOLIC ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

4. In the study area in 2010, of the PreK to 8 Catholic students enrolled in Catholic schools and parish Religious Education programs, 55% were enrolled in a Catholic school in the study area.
5. From 2005-06 to 2011-12, K to 8 enrollment in the schools the three urban deaneries declined by nearly 1,000 students (29%) to 2,437 students. PreK enrollment in the same area decreased by 19 students (6%) to 289 students. Over the same period, the number of Catholic elementary schools in this area decreased by two.
6. From 2006-07 to 2010-11 (years for which data was available) PreK to 8 enrollment in Omaha Public Schools east of 72nd street decreased by just over 3,000 students (-13%).
7. In 2011-12, eight of the eighteen schools in the study area have a K to 8 enrollment of 150 students or less. Seven of these schools are east of 72nd Street.
8. The schools in the three urban deaneries are currently operating with an average class size of seventeen students. In 2010-11, 80% of the students in Omaha Public Schools were in classes of eighteen or more students.

9. In the Urban Southeast Deanery in 2011-12, 85% of the enrollment is non-white and 96% of the enrollment is Catholic. The two schools in this deanery serve very different populations. At All Saints School, 49% of the enrollment in 2011-12 is Black/African-American with the majority being recent Sudanese immigrants who are Catholic. Assumption-Guadalupe School enrollment is 92% Hispanic and 94% Catholic in 2011-12.
10. The majority of students at All Saints and Assumption-Guadalupe Schools come from low income families with 74% and 68%, respectively, qualifying for free/reduced lunch in 2011-12. At Holy Name and Sacred Heart Schools, 65% and 88% of the students, respectively, qualify for free/reduced lunch. In addition, three schools have 30% to 50% of their students who qualify and all schools in the study area have some students who qualify. According to federal poverty guidelines, annual income for a family of four to qualify for this program is at or below \$40,783.
11. Each year students withdraw before reaching 8th grade. On average schools in the study area had a five-year average net loss of 157 students each year from 2005-06 to 2011-12. The current 6th grade class of 485 students numbered 603 when they were in kindergarten.
12. In 2011-12 Catholic schools in the study area have 1,720 empty seats. The schools are only at 71% of the capacity for which they are staffed. The cost of maintaining Catholic schools is pushed higher by inefficiencies and less-than-full classrooms.
13. The five predominantly Hispanic parishes with large religious education enrollments report that few of their Spanish-speaking children in PreK to 8 are enrolled in a Catholic school.
14. Eleven of the eighteen schools drew more than 90% of their enrollment from their sponsoring parish(es). Six of these schools reported no Catholic students from other parishes enrolled. The practice of many parishes to charge a different tuition rate for parishioners and non-parishioners may be a contributing factor.

CATHOLIC ELEMENTARY SCHOOL MODELS FOR LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

15. The majority of schools in the study area are sponsored by a single parish. Three schools operate using a multi-parish model of governance (All Saints, Assumption-Guadalupe and St. Pius X/St. Leo). The role of the sponsoring parishes and pastors differs from situation to situation. Overall, parishes with a school on-site seem to feel much more ownership of the school with that pastor being more present and involved than sponsoring parishes which are more remote.
16. Across the nation since 2000, the number of single parish schools has fallen from 79% to 73% and the number of inter-parish and diocesan schools has increased from 16% to 21%.
17. In general the concept of consolidation has a negative connotation in the Archdiocese. Consolidations and closures have historically resulted in a high percent of enrolled students leaving Catholic schools. The most recent closing/consolidations (St. Richard and Blessed Sacrament Schools) were reported to have had a higher student retention rate.
18. The Catholic School Office is perceived as having responsibility for coordinating school efforts and providing recommendations and guidance but has no authority to hold schools accountable.

STRATEGIC QUESTIONS

- G1. Are there areas of the City or populations within the City where Catholic schools are critical to carry on the mission of the Church? How many schools are needed and sustainable long term?
- G2. How will Catholic education be funded for families who can only pay a small portion of the cost?
- G3. What is the best way to organize and govern schools in the study area to create a viable business model and provide quality Catholic education that is sustainable long-term?

H. Facilities

1. In the three deaneries there are thirty-three churches with a one-time seating capacity of over 15,575.
2. Parishes generally have a plan to maintain facilities and are regularly undertaking major projects. Over \$3 million is spent annually on plant and equipment.
3. In a few cases, parishes own more facilities than they need for parish-related ministry. Several school buildings sit vacant. Plant and equipment costs become a higher percentage of expenses leaving less for ministry and programs.
4. Overall, schools in the study area are older buildings which have been well maintained.
5. Eight parishes in the three deaneries have raised \$5.8 million in capital dollars over the last five years. More than half the money raised was at Sacred Heart Parish. Very little has been done to use capital fund drives as a means to provide for parish needs.
6. Most churches are buried in neighborhoods with little visibility to the major thoroughfares. Sites are often land-locked. Parking is sometimes a problem.
7. Many parishes have a limited number of meeting spaces that are inviting or furnished for adults. Most meeting areas retain an institutional feel or dated aesthetics. There has not been much of a vision for attractive and inviting facilities for adult programs.
8. Most meeting rooms and halls lack access to technology. The uses for technology as part of ministry have not been explored.

STRATEGIC QUESTIONS

- H1. Are there too many facilities being maintained (churches, schools, halls, rectories)?
- H2. Are facilities lacking for their functionality, attractiveness, or convenient location?
- H3. How will parishes afford to pay for capital repairs, maintenance, and updates in the future?

I. Finances

1. Some parishes have not moved very fast in improving financial giving based on a program of stewardship. While initiatives to improve the understanding and living of stewardship are happening, the Catholic practice of living a life of stewardship is uneven across the region.
2. A number of parishes run deficits and borrow from savings to cover operating expenses.
3. Fifteen of the thirty-four parishes show declines in offertory giving in the last five years.

4. Several parishes are financially struggling, and sometimes in places where there is the most life and spirit. Finances are not necessarily tied to viability.
5. There are three main sources of funding for Catholic schools: tuition, parish investment and fundraising/development. In total, these sources accounted for 36%, 42% and 7% respectively of 2010-11 school revenue. Other income represented 15%, of which archdiocesan grants and Children's Scholarship Fund each represented 2%. The national average is about 62% tuition and fees, 18% parish subsidy, 11% fundraising and 10% other.
6. For the 2011-12 school year, the Children's Scholarship Fund provided \$.9 million of the \$2.9 million in tuition assistance awarded to needy students attending schools in the study area.
7. From 2008-09 to 2010-11 the Archdiocese has given over \$1.4 million of aid to seven schools in the study area to help them pay expenses. This amount does not include dollars designated for tuition assistance.
8. Most of the funding for Sacred Heart School comes from CUES.
9. In practice, almost all schools look to their sponsoring parish(es) to fund the yearly operating deficit after other sources of revenue are accounted for. The parish has to pick up the gap between school expenses and school income. Some parishes have had to dip into savings to do this.
10. In 2010-11 the parishes in the study area contributed \$8.9 million to the support of Catholic schools. Of the twenty-seven parishes in the study area that sponsor schools, sixteen invested the equivalent of more than 50% of their Sunday/Holy Day collections in the school in 2010-11.
11. In the study area, the 2011-12 average tuition rate for the first Catholic child is \$1,892 and ranges from \$550 at Sacred Heart School to \$2,550 at St. Cecilia School. The national average for Catholic elementary school tuition in 2010-11 was \$3,383. Per pupil cost in 2010-11 in the study area ranged from \$3,937 to \$6,692 with an average of \$4,748, which is lower than the national average of \$5,436.
12. While most schools have endowments, not much is being done to grow these endowments and the current economic situation has limited the income from these endowments.
13. Teacher compensation varies greatly from school to school with different salary scales and employee contributions for health insurance. Higher salaries offered by more affluent parishes result in competition among schools for teachers.

STRATEGIC QUESTIONS

- I1. What changes are needed in the parish model to sustain balanced budgets and fund growth in ministry?
- I2. How drastically does the funding model for schools need to change to achieve long-term viability?