



## *Sacred Heart Catholic Church*

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***JEREMIAH 29:11 says, “For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, to give you a future, and a hope.”***

May 18, 2023

Dear Parishioners,

On October 18, 2022, Bishop McKnight announced a diocesan-wide planning initiative called “Shaping Our Future Together” (S.O.F.T.). He asked parish leaders from across the diocese to make plans for the future of their local churches. (You can find a video of Bishop McKnight explaining S.O.F.T. at [vimeo.com/diojeffcity/shapingourfuturetogether](https://vimeo.com/diojeffcity/shapingourfuturetogether).)

As you know, many factors have caused discouragement and despair in our churches, including the Covid worldwide pandemic; the decline in participation at Mass and in Church programs, e.g., our youth; the shortage of priests; and the decrease in the number of vocations to the priesthood. It is evident that something must change for our local churches to thrive and fulfill their missions.

The Diocese of Jefferson City has over 75,000 Catholics within 93 parishes and 9 mission churches in 38 counties. Within the Diocese, there are 42 active priests and 18 more priests “on loan” from other dioceses. Their average age is about 61 years old. Our Diocese also has about 80 active deacons.

Bishop McKnight has made it clear that he has no desire to close church doors in our diocese. Instead, he is eager for individual parishes to embrace the S.O.F.T. initiative and its purposes, identify the core values of their parish, build on the good that is already happening, collaborate with their neighboring parishes, and build parishes that flourish. He welcomes the opportunity to work with parishes wanting to grow, knowing we cannot continue to operate as we have been.

Some initial work and efforts have already been underway to begin the S.O.F.T. process as it affects Sacred Heart Parish. It is time now for parishioner participation. This is our opportunity to help re-set our Catholic faith on a strong foundation, help build a vibrant parish/community, and help shape the future of our parish.

The Jefferson City Diocese is divided into 5 deaneries. Sacred Heart Parish, along with 26 other parishes, is in the Southeast Deanery. The S.O.F.T. initiative involves grouping those 27 parishes into 6 clusters (coalitions) based on geographic location (see attachment). The coalition to

which Sacred Heart belongs includes Holy Family/Freeburg, Visitation/Vienna, St. Boniface/Koelztown, St. Aloysius/Argyle, and Guardian Angel/Brinktown.

The actions to be taken in embracing the S.O.F.T. concept follow:

- Each of the 6 parishes within our coalition will identify their parish's areas of strength and the areas where they might be struggling. This will be accomplished by a survey which will be provided to parishioners for their input (survey forthcoming). The survey is structured in a way that considers Bishop McKnight's "Seven Essential Values" for thriving Catholic parishes (included on attachment).
- Based on the areas of strengths and weaknesses identified by parishioners, the 6-parish coalition working team will determine ways that we can best share resources with each other, thereby developing a plan for our coalition/parishes. Such plan will begin the recurring process of parishes working together as a coalition.

As you see, there is much work to be done. During this time of discernment, the goal is to have broad parishioner participation by each parish within our coalition.

Parishioners are strongly encouraged to complete the survey that will be provided in the near future. The survey is devised so parishioners can identify whether or not they feel our pastoral needs are being met, what parish strengths and weaknesses they perceive, and what objectives, issues, long-range plans, etc. they want to specify. You will be given ample opportunity to voice and explain your opinions. Please note that a very important portion of the survey will be for our youth and young adults to complete. Specific instructions will accompany the survey.

Survey responses will be compiled, summarized, and presented at meetings of our 6-parish coalition working team. The coalition team will utilize survey input from parishioners to develop an actionable plan which will include the collaboration of all parishes in our coalition, with the goal of identifying what parishes can do to work better and smarter together by sharing their resources.

The pastoral plan for our coalition will become part of a Southeast Deanery pastoral plan, which is expected to be presented to Bishop McKnight as soon as possible so he can approve and provide assistance to us in implementation.

Thank you for your attention to this important process of planning for the future of Sacred Heart Parish.

Sacred Heart coalition working team,

Fr. Bill Debo  
Debbie Reinkemeyer  
Megan Markway  
Mary Jane Bexten