



August 20, 2016

Dear Friends in Christ,

In my pastoral letter, *Find Your Home in Christ*, promulgated in April of 2014, one of the priorities set forth was to “Build Parishes with Living Stones.” For the past two years, the *Living Stones* Planning Committee has been working diligently to develop a plan for our Diocese (“*Living Stones Plan*”) along with strategies for its implementation, in order to: 1) enhance parish vibrancy; 2) encourage greater participation among the laity in leadership roles; and 3) assess parish demographics in relation to the economic, human and spiritual resources available in each parish and those of neighboring parishes.

In the formulation of this *Living Stones Plan*, the Committee consulted extensively with pastors and parishioners. Every parish pastoral council in the Diocese was asked to conduct a self-evaluation, measure the vibrancy of the parish and suggest possible placement of priests in order to provide the best care of souls and meet the needs of the faithful in the parishes of the area. The fruit of consultation, deliberation, and prayer, the *Living Stones Plan* is sent to pastors this week and includes the reconfiguration of many existing parishes into parish groupings and the assignment of 34 available diocesan pastors. Although currently there are 59 resident pastors, the number 34 reflects the current estimate of available pastors in 2020. In the near future, the *Living Stones Plan* will be available on our diocesan website under “Planning”.

As you know, our Diocese covers an expansive geographical area with a limited number of priests available to minister. One of the major challenges in planning is to ensure that our faith communities have a pastoral presence, assigning our priests where they are most needed. Although all parish groupings will have a pastor and all parishioners will have access to Sunday Mass, your pastor may not reside in your community and the Mass location and time may not be what you are accustomed to at present. In situations where a priest is not in residence, it is imperative that someone be available to attend to pastoral needs through ministry that is not reserved solely to priests. Our pastors will be calling upon our permanent deacons and qualified laity to assume an even greater role in providing pastoral care through various ministries or service as pastoral associates. Also, in some particular situations, the bishop may assign a pastoral life coordinator to assume the administration of a parish. Each parish grouping will be called upon to formulate a detailed plan to address all the pastoral needs in their grouping.

The goal of this *Living Stones Plan* is to form vibrant parishes utilizing the gifts of all the baptized, both clergy and laity. In the coming weeks and months, your pastors will be asked to share with you details of the *Living Stones Plan* and begin the necessary collaboration with groups in your parish and with your neighboring parishes to formulate the pastoral plan for your parish grouping.

Change is not always easy but it is a requisite for growth. In appreciation of the fine work done by the *Living Stones Planning Committee* and acknowledging the great faith of the people of our Diocese, I am confident that we will continue to grow and to move forward as we work together to “*Build Vibrant Parishes with Living Stones.*”

Faithfully yours in Christ,

Most Reverend Terry R. LaValley
Bishop of Ogdensburg