This plan was created in conjunction with Vianney Vocations, an organization that has served more than fifty Vocation Offices, offering consultation, support, and resources.

The planning process included a three-day on-site visit and a series of meetings with the Vocation Director, the Archbishops’ Cabinet, the Vocation Board, recently ordained priests, and other key archdiocesan personnel.
THE ARCHDIOCESE OF HARTFORD
A PLAN TO CREATE A CULTURE OF VOCATIONS

In conjunction with the Archdiocese of Hartford’s ongoing pastoral planning process, the Office of Vocations submits this Vocation Plan with the overall goal of creating a culture of vocations in our archdiocese.

THE VOCATION CRISIS

The recent Stewards of Tomorrow publication states that the current planning process was undertaken because many established practices “no longer correspond to reality, and are no longer bearing fruit that they once did or should do today.” This is particularly true of priestly vocations. We have gone from 193 seminarians in 1965 to just 19 seminarians in 2017—statistically the largest decrease of all key indicators, including Mass attendance, marriages, baptisms, and students in Catholic schools. The problem is particularly stark when one considers that in ten years, the archdiocese will have only 104 active diocesan priests for approximately 130 pastorates. Even with our new pastoral restructuring, this can rightly be described as a crisis in priestly vocations.

WORKING TOWARD SOLUTIONS

The Vocation Office recognizes that the roots of the vocations crisis are deep. Our low number of seminarians is, in some ways, an inevitable result of the advance of secular society, the decrease in numbers of Catholics, and the general decline in the vitality of parishes and schools. The vocations crisis is, at root, a crisis in discipleship. As such, it can only be solved by revitalizing the spiritual health of our archdiocese. This is the broad task of the pastoral planning process. Within this context, the Vocation Office must set realistic goals. While the entire archdiocese works toward creating a culture of discipleship, the Vocation Office will do its part to inspire priests, engage youth, reach out to parishes, and host events that focus on vocations. This plan lays out the components of these efforts for the next three years.
Overall Goals of the Vocation Plan

1. To ensure that a strong vocations message is being presented to the healthiest cohorts of youth and young adults in the archdiocese.

2. To collaborate with the Office of Youth Ministry to foster and promote discipleship in general, and vocation discernment in particular.

3. To hold numerous high-quality events for young people to help them discern their vocations, and to facilitate attendance at World Youth Day and national events of proven effectiveness for vocational discernment.

4. To encourage parish priests to be allies in promoting vocations, and to provide the tools they need to do so.

5. To collaborate closely with chaplains in high schools and campus ministries, especially by proposing concrete ways to foster vocations.

6. To greatly improve communication about vocations in parishes and schools, particularly during periods recommended by the universal Church.

7. To introduce vocations curriculum in Religious Education and Catholic schools.

8. To build fraternity among seminarians, and to help them become emissaries for vocations in their various assignments.

2017-2020 Timeframe

The timeframe for these initiatives is 2017 to 2020. Each fall (September-October), the plan will be assessed and adjusted based on which initiatives have worked well and which need improvement.
I. Bishops’ Emphasis on Vocations

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1. Confirmation Celebrations
   a. The Vocation Office requests that bishops preach on vocations while celebrating the sacrament of confirmation.
   b. Specifically, bishops are asked to offer an overt invitation to young men to consider priesthood, and to young women to consider religious life.

2. Presence at Retreats
   a. The Vocation Office will invite Archbishop Blair to attend discernment retreats and Andrew Dinners, and to address the men present.

II. Priests’ Role in Fostering Vocations

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3. 2018 Priest Convocation
   a. As a follow-up to the 2018 Synod on Youth & Vocations, hold a vocations-themed convocation on the theme “The Role of Priests in Vocational Accompaniment.”
   b. Invite Fr. Brett Brannen (or similar speaker) to address balance in the priestly life, and how to effectively promote vocations as a natural part of priestly ministry.
   c. Equip priests with a small number of realistic ideas for promoting vocations in their parishes, including the possibility of a Parish Vocation Ministry.

4. Deanery Presentations on *Lend Your Own Voice to Christ*
   a. The Vocation Office will visit each deanery to give a 20-minute presentation on the landmark NCDVD publication *Lend Your Own Voice to Christ* which gives clear guidance on how priests themselves can be the primary inspiration for new priests.
5. **Regional Vocation Advocates**
   
a. Explore the possibility of naming several priests to work in an official capacity with the Vocation Office.

   b. Responsibilities could include helping organize local discernment opportunities, meeting with candidates, or presenting a vocations message at various events.

6. **Priest Chaplains to Foster Vocations**
   
a. Priests, deacons, and campus ministers who have assignments at universities or high schools are asked to make vocations a priority, incorporating a strong vocations message in homilies, talks, and one-on-one encounters with students. The Vocation Office requests that this be included in the chaplains’ job descriptions.

   b. The Vocation Office will schedule a meeting with all chaplains to present effective strategies for fostering vocations on schools and campuses.

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**III. Visitations to Parishes, Schools, and Colleges**

7. **Identify communities most receptive to a vocations message**
   
a. Because of the large size of the archdiocese, the Vocation Office will create a targeted list of schools and parishes that have both a vibrant faith life and a significant population of young people. It will then schedule visitations to these “vocation-friendly” sites.

   b. The office will create a list of approximately 25 sites based on feedback from the Seminary Advisory board and other advisors.

8. **Visits to Campus Ministries**
   
a. The Vocation Office will endeavor to meet with all campus ministers to build rapport and create a schedule for visitation.

   b. When possible, seminarians will also be invited to visit campus ministries to share their vocation stories with students.

   c. The Vocation Director will also make himself available
as a retreat leader for campus retreats.

d. High-quality materials will be given to students to help them discern their vocations.

9. **Visits to Catholic Schools**

   a. The Vocation Director will continue to visit Catholic schools as requested. He will also proactively approach those schools identified as “vocation friendly,” with particular attention to high schools.

   b. High-quality materials will be given to students to help them understand vocations to marriage, priesthood, and religious life.

10. **Visits to Parishes**

    a. The Vocation Director will continue to celebrate weekend Masses at parishes as requested.

    b. Promote regular prayer for vocations during each visit.

    c. High-quality materials will be given to parishes during each visit, for display in their narthex. Materials will focus on fostering vocations in Catholic families.

IV. **Vocations Curriculum**

11. **Use Vocation Lessons in pilot parishes and schools**

   a. Working in collaboration with OEEC, the Vocation Office will create a straightforward plan to introduce *Vocation Lessons*, a vocations-themed curriculum supplement into our Catholic schools and Religious Education programs.

   b. Identify 10 schools and 10 parishes as pilot participants to test the curriculum.

   c. Gather feedback from catechists and teachers about their experience with the curriculum, to better understand how to introduce in remaining schools.
### 12. In-service training for Teachers and Catechists

- A representative from Vocation Lessons may attend a teacher gathering to address why an emphasis on vocations is needed. This will include a demonstration of the curriculum.

### 13. Roll out Vocation Lessons in all parishes and schools

- After piloting the program and assessing best practices, the curriculum supplement could be introduced in the remaining schools and parishes.
- Continue to remind all DREs and principals to use Vocation Lessons during National Vocation Awareness Week.

### V. Discernment Events

#### 14. Andrew Dinner

- Continue the practice of holding Andrew Dinners in which parish priests bring young men to a special dinner with the archbishop.
- Encourage priests to identify young men in their parishes to invite. Develop a system of personal phone calls to priests (in addition to letters) to remind them of the dinners and emphasize their importance.
- Give all attendees resources to help them discern their vocations.

#### 15. Discernment Nights

- Continue to hold Discernment Nights at times when college students can attend, such as summer and Christmas break.
- Assess and investigate ways to better promote these events to increase attendance.

#### 16. Ordinations

- Send formal invitations to all discerners asking them to attend the ordinations to transitional diaconate and the priesthood.
VI. Collaboration with Youth Ministry

17. Youth Rally with Vocations Theme
   a. The Office of Vocations enjoys good rapport with the Youth Ministry Office, and will collaborate on youth rallies, retreats, and other programs.
   b. Ensure that attendees have good materials to bring home and help them pray about their vocations.

18. Confirmation Retreats
   a. The Vocation Director will continue to make himself available to lead confirmation retreats, at which he will help students listen to God's call.

19. More ideas for collaboration
   a. Materials for vocations-themed youth meetings.
   b. Screenings of Fishers of Men & For Love Alone.
   c. Encouragement for youth to attend Steubenville Conferences, World Youth Day, and SEEK, perhaps with accompaniment from seminarians and the Vocation Director.

VII. Communication & Vocation Awareness

20. Vocation Office Website
   a. Continue to use the new HartfordPriest.com to provide information on the priesthood, discernment, and upcoming vocations events.
   b. Continue to improve the website, including: better front page layout, prominent links to social media, better contact form, better event registration forms.

21. Social Media
   a. Continue to use Facebook and Instagram to publish information about the priesthood and discernment.
   b. Establish timeline for frequency of posts.
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### 22. Vocations Bulletin Insert

- Publish biannual Vocations Bulletin Inserts to inspire Catholics to remain open to the priesthood and religious life. Issues will include articles and priests and seminarians, photos, and ads for upcoming events.
- Publish for World Day of Prayer for Vocations and National Vocation Awareness Week.
- Distribute the appropriate number to each parish.

### 23. E-newsletter for Vocation Promoters

- Publish a monthly e-newsletter for those in the archdiocese who wish to promote vocations.
- Issues will include how to promote vocations in schools and parishes.

### 24. Seminarian Poster

- Continue to create an annual seminarian poster and distribute to all parishes and schools.

### 25. Called By Name Campaign

- Organize a large-scale email campaign to gather the names of potential candidates for the priesthood. A series of emails will be sent to priests, deacons, youth ministers, educators, parish secretaries, etc.
- Place notices in all parish bulletins with invitations to all parishioners to submit the names of faithful young men via the Vocation Office website.
VIII. Prayer for Vocations

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26. St. John Vianney Vocation Prayer Society
   a. Hold periodic gatherings for the SJVPS.
   b. Mail and email vocation prayer material to members.

27. Holy Hour for Vocations
   a. Continue monthly Holy Hours in sites throughout the archdiocese.
   b. Invite permanent deacons to help lead Holy Hours when the Vocation Director is not available.

IX. Parish Vocation Ministry

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28. Establish Parish Vocation Ministries
   a. After the 2017 parish restructuring, ask pastors to appoint lay persons as liaisons with the Vocation Office.
   b. Hold a meeting with the initial parish liaisons at the Vocation Office.
   c. Provide parish liaisons with specific tasks, such as holding a vocations Holy Hour, promoting a certain event, and ensuring that the parish narthex has good vocation materials.

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29. Hundredfold Workshop for Parish Vocation Ministries
   a. Invite author Rhonda Gruenewald to speak to parish vocation ministries about how to energize their work and create a realistic yearly plan for their parish.
   b. Widely promote the workshop, especially to parish council members.
“It was not you who chose me, but I who chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit that will remain, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name he may give you. This I command you: love one another.”

John 15:15-17