



BISHOP EDWARD B. SCHARFENBERGER

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

We stand at a sacred threshold—a time for reflection, imagination, and faithful courage. For generations, our parishes have been homes of worship, service, and cherished memories. Yet, Christ’s mission is ever-unfolding. The Gospel moves, transforms, and calls us into deeper discipleship and wider service.

At the start of Holy Week, I shared a vision for a diocese “*Remade for Mission*” - “a call to action” - turning our hearts, resources, and efforts beyond our church walls to sustain a future in service to the Gospel. Beginning in the Fall 2025, each parish network, or neighboring parishes, will enter a journey of discernment, asking: What do we have? What do we need? What must we let go of? What are we being called to become? “No one pours new wine into old wineskins. Otherwise, the wine will burst the skins, and both the wine and the skins are ruined. Rather, new wine is poured into fresh wineskins” (Mk 2:22).

This process will stir emotions, challenge attachments, but more importantly inspire new dreams. It is not about forgetting our past but honoring it by shaping a sustainable, faithful future. Jesus reminds us: “Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” (Matthew 6:21). Our treasure must be Christ’s mission—to make disciples, transform lives, and serve the world.

Through a synodal process we must ask honestly: Are we stewarding our gifts—our buildings, programs, and energy—in service to the Gospel? Can our parishes become vibrant centers of outreach, learning, and compassion? What if we were known not only for Sunday worship, but daily witness to Christ’s love?

This synodal process is not about preservation, but purpose. We are not merely registered parish members—we are the Body of Christ, brought forth from our baptisms, to be carriers of His light meant to shine far beyond our walls. With every voice coming together, we need to dream boldly while we seriously self-reflect on our current focus and realities. Parishes can all become “beacons of hope” going out to serve ever growing and changing needs in our communities. Refocusing on Mission we can feed the hungry, comfort those in need, evangelize through encounter and building relationships...we can become parishes where strangers are truly our neighbors. Christ calls us to go and make disciples, not just hold onto what has been our history, but to make history. We can be a people actively seeking who Christ calls us to become.

Some may be tempted to reduce this refocus on mission to just parish church closures, overlooking the deeper call to spiritual renewal of change of mind and heart. But the core of this effort is conversion—a return to mission rooted in faith, trust, and openness to God’s will. Beginning in the Fall 2025, together, we will assess our structures, ministries, resources, efforts and even identity, listening to the Spirit and one another, seeking a unified vision where new life can grow and flourish.

This is a moment of hope, not loss, of discernment, not despair. May we stay rooted in Christ, trusting the Spirit to lead us forward - honoring our past, embracing our present, and stepping boldly into the future.

With deep gratitude and hope for what lies ahead,

+ Edward B. Scharfenberger

Remade for Mission” Fall 2025 – Spring 2026

Goal: “Mission focused” Recommendation to Bishop Scharfenberger – to create disciples through encounter, relationships, community outreach while simultaneously identifying the parishes, churches, buildings, etc. needed to fulfill that outward focused mission.

Why are we doing this? We stand at the threshold of a new age. Our world is changing, and so as a diocese and Church we must realize:

- *Self-assessment of parishes’ focus and sustainability is long overdue: what we have vs need, inward vs outward focus, repurposing resources towards faith not confined to four walls!*
- In the past four decades, our diocese has seen a *decline in vocations and aging of clergy*
- *Weekly attendance and regularly active parishioners have declined significantly*
- Today *only 20% of U.S. adults identify as Catholic* with less than 25% of them believing in the *Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist*
- *Beautiful Churches and Catholic Schools once full are now partially filled or close to empty*
- *Maintenance Costs have increased substantially*, and the infrastructure is aging
- *Unifying of parishes, repurposing buildings and closing churches are all needed*

Summer 2025: Information Gathering

• 5-yr Notitiae/Financial Statements consolidated	• Templates for Info sharing
• Community Needs Assessment Questionnaire	• Mission sub-committee groups

****** Simultaneously, Diocesan Leadership will continue to meet with Parishes Identified as Vulnerable***

September 2025: Vicariate Meetings with Mission Focused Support Team

October 2025: What will we be doing during our Synodal Sessions? I have instructed every parish network, or neighboring parishes, to discern prayerfully through the eyes of fulfilling our Mission leading toward a **combined recommendation to Bishop that is Mission focused and Sustainable - due April 1, 2026**

• Churches/Buildings needed	• Current/Future Service Opportunities
• Financial stability	• Evangelizing by Encounter and Relationship
• Community needs/outreach efforts	• Clergy Wellness and Balance
• Shared Resources and partnerships	• Combining Sacramental Programming

What we should strive toward:

- Transform into “beacons of hope” through encounter, relationship, and presence in the community
- Discern what assets/buildings/churches are needed for fulfilling our Mission
- Determine collaboratively current and future service opportunities

Spring 2026 – Winter 2027 Synodal Sessions continue – Implementing outreach/partnerships

- Bishop reviews recommendations, consults with Presbyteral Council – Issues Decrees to bring back to Synodal groups for implementation over next 6-12 months

For more information go to: www.rcda.org