

# SYNODAL CHURCH IN MISSION

The Ongoing Efforts of Our Pastoral Planning Initiative

## UNITED IN CHRIST



**MOST REVEREND  
WILLIAM E. KOENIG, M.S.W, D.D.,  
BISHOP OF WILMINGTON**

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

### Synodal Church in Mission

This past September, Pope Leo XIV gathered with the pastoral leaders of the Diocese of Rome to inaugurate the new pastoral year. In his homily at the Liturgy of the Word, our Holy Father reflected that being a synodal Church in mission “means, first and foremost, working for the active participation of everyone in the life of the Church.”

He invited pastors and pastoral leaders to strengthen participatory bodies at the parish level and emphasized the importance of parishes working with one another and with the diocese as a whole. Pope Leo observed:

“Today, as we know, in a world that has become more complex, in cities that move at high speed and where people live in constant mobility, we must think and plan together — going beyond pre-established boundaries and experimenting with joint pastoral initiatives. I encourage you to make these organizations true spaces of community life, places of discussion where communion is exercised, and where community discernment and baptismal and pastoral co-responsibility can take root.”

### Our United in Christ Initiative

The Holy Father’s call to be a Synodal Church in Mission has guided the United in Christ initiative that our diocese began in 2023. Over the past three years, parish representatives throughout the diocese have met in their respective deaneries to discuss, discern, and implement shared pastoral efforts — embodying precisely the spirit Pope Leo describes.

I now wish to update you on our progress and draw your attention to three key areas:

1) A summary of pastoral initiatives



Bishop Koenig prepares the Monstrance for Adoration at St. Paul Church during the 15th Annual Cross Pilgrimage, Saturday, March 28, 2026. Dialog photo/Don Blake

undertaken in each of our seven deaneries.

2) The realignment of certain deaneries within our diocese.

3) The next phase of pastoral planning, particularly concerning how parishes can work together to provide opportunities for us to gather for the Eucharist.

### Summary of Deanery Initiatives

The following overview highlights the principal goals, achievements, and

challenges identified across our seven Deaneries, along with key emerging themes.

### Brandywine Hundred Deanery

**Goals:** Develop youth and young adult programs, form parishioners as evangelizers and strengthen inter-parish communication.

**Progress:** Established a deanery-wide communication framework — including a website and shared bulletin promotions. Youth leadership roles in liturgy and ministry are being defined, and the

2025 Lenten Hymn Fest drew strong attendance. Implementation teams are finalizing youth and evangelization efforts to launch in September 2025.

**Challenges:** Parish transitions initially slowed progress, but renewed collaboration fostered unity.

**Impact:** Parishioners increasingly recognize a shared mission and collaborative vision.

### Central New Castle Deanery

**Goals:** Increase youth engagement, re-engage inactive parishioners and foster community through small groups.

**Progress:** Parishes now share Mass and confession schedules and collaborate on devotions and seminars. The Knights of Columbus have joined fundraising efforts. Plans for 2025–2027 include expanding youth participation, enhancing CYM events and launching a Come Home for Christmas campaign.

**Challenges:** Geographic distance and clergy shortages make coordination difficult.

**Impact:** Greater awareness of local events and growing openness to shared ministry.

### City Deanery

**Goals:** Reconnect with inactive Catholics, establish common faith formation programs, and foster parish partnerships.

**Progress:** Parishes are collaborating on religious education and youth ministry amid declining participation. Communication among clergy and laity has improved.

**Challenges:** Integrating parishes with different cultures and histories remains demanding. An evaluation tool for progress is still needed.

**Impact:** Awareness of the need for

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

DIOCESE of WILMINGTON | UNITED in Christ

Pastoral Planning for Our Parishes and Schools

FROM PREVIOUS PAGE

joint effort is rising, though implementation remains in early stages.

**Eastern Shore Deanery**

**Goals:** Improve communication through technology, expand lay leadership and strengthen community and catechesis.

**Progress:** A deanery website is active, and lay volunteers now support administrative needs. Youth ministry hubs have emerged in Salisbury, Easton and Kent Island, with events like the Carlo Acutis Presentation. Catechetical efforts are bolstered by Formed.org and Flocknote.

**Challenges:** The deanery spans six counties, complicating collaboration.

**Impact:** Improved visibility of events and resources has deepened the sense of deanery identity.

**Iron Hill Deanery**

**Goals:** Build a welcoming environment for youth, increase participation in ministries and expand communication.

**Progress:** Launched a deanery website, shared Vacation Bible School and successful youth events such as the 2024 Summit, Advent Reflection and 2025 Retreat. Pastors and catechetical leaders have aligned program guidelines and new Mass schedules take effect in September 2025.

**Challenges:** A merged religious education program proved unsuccessful due to family preferences.

**Impact:** Understanding and enthusiasm for deanery collaboration are strong.

**Silver Lake Deanery**

**Goals:** Share youth ministry opportunities, develop a common vision for sacramental ministry and promote parish-level activities.

**Progress:** All goals have been achieved. Common confirmation and penance services during Advent and Lent are now established traditions.

**Challenges:** Considerable distances between parishes limit frequent collaboration.

**Impact:** Regular shared sacramental services have become central to deanery life.

**Ocean Deanery**

**Goals:** Strengthen faith formation, enhance Hispanic ministry and foster a unified deanery identity.

**Progress:** Shared bulletins and a deanery website are active. A Come Home Reconciliation Service was well received. Committees are coordinating youth, marriage and special needs min-

istries using “north” and “south” hubs to address distance.

**Challenges:** Geographic spread limits collaboration, particularly for Holy Name of Jesus Parish. Greater provision for Spanish-language Masses is needed.

**Impact:** Growing sense of mission and engagement; several initiatives remain in planning.

**Emerging Themes**

Across the diocese, six consistent priorities have emerged:

**Youth and Young Adult Engagement:** Every deanery is expanding opportunities for youth leadership and community.

**Evangelization:** Re-engaging inactive Catholics is a shared goal, reflected in reconciliation and outreach efforts.

**Collaboration and Resource Sharing:** Joint scheduling and events are strengthening unity and efficiency.

**Enhanced Communication:** Websites and digital platforms are fostering transparency and participation.

**Faith Formation:** Renewed focus on catechesis and spirituality for all ages.

**Lay Leadership:** Lay teams are increasingly vital in meeting pastoral needs.

**Deanery Realignment**

The remarkable energy and dedication that parishioners and leadership teams have brought to the United in Christ initiative reveal the fruit of true collaboration. Yet as our experience grew, it became clear that a realignment of certain deaneries would better reflect pastoral realities and geography.

After extensive discussion within the Presbyteral Council, I am announcing a new configuration — effective Easter Sunday, April 5, 2026—that will reduce our deaneries from seven to six. This structure is designed to “foster pastoral care through common action” (Canon 374, Code of Canon Law).

**The City Deanery**

- Cathedral of Saint Peter
- Saint Ann
- Saint Anthony of Padua
- Saint Elizabeth
- Saint Hedwig
- Saint Joseph
- Saint Paul
- Saint Thomas the Apostle

**The Brandywine Hundred Deanery**

- Holy Child, Wilmington
- Holy Rosary, Claymont
- Immaculate Heart of Mary, Wilmington
- Saint Helena, Wilmington

- Saint Joseph on the Brandywine, Wilmington
- Saint Mary of the Assumption, Hockessin
- Saint Mary Magdalen, Wilmington

**The New Castle Deanery**

- Corpus Christi, Elsmere
- Holy Spirit, New Castle
- Our Lady of Fatima, New Castle
- Saint Catherine of Siena, Wilmington
- Saint John the Beloved, Wilmington
- Saint Matthew, Wilmington
- Saint Paul, Delaware City
- Saint Peter the Apostle, New Castle

**The Iron Hill Deanery**

- Good Shepherd, Perryville
- Holy Family, Newark
- Immaculate Conception, Elkton
- Resurrection, Wilmington
- Saint Dennis, Galena
- Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton, Bear
- Saint John the Baptist, Newark
- Saint Joseph, Middletown
- Saint Margaret of Scotland, Newark
- Saint Polycarp, Smyrna
- Saint Thomas More Oratory, Newark

**The Central Deanery**

- Holy Cross, Dover
- Immaculate Conception, Marydel
- Our Lady of Good Counsel, Secretary
- Our Mother of Sorrow, Centreville
- Sacred Heart, Chestertown
- Saint Benedict, Ridgely
- Saint Christopher, Chester
- Saint John the Apostle, Milford
- Saint Mary, Refuge of Sinners, Cambridge
- Saints Peter and Paul, Easton

**The Ocean Deanery**

- Holy Name of Jesus, Pocomoke City
- Our Lady of Lourdes, Seaford
- Saint Ann, Bethany Beach
- Saint Edmond, Rehoboth Beach
- Saint Francis de Sales, Salisbury
- Saint John Neumann, Berlin
- Saint Jude the Apostle, Lewes
- Saint Luke, Ocean City
- Saint Mary Star of the Sea, Ocean City
- Saint Michael the Archangel, Georgetown

**United in Christ, Gathered Around the Altar**

As we enter the next phase of our pas-

toral planning, our United in Christ initiative is evidence of how we are strongest when we walk together as parishes, as clergy and as a diocesan family. It is in this same spirit of unity and shared responsibility that I write to you regarding the next phase of our pastoral planning: a diocesan-deanery coordination of Mass schedules.

**Present Pastoral Reality**

Our Diocese faces shifting demographics, changing populations, seasonal needs and limitations of the availability of clergy. Coordinating Mass schedules across deaneries will allow priests to support one another, minimize overlapping services, and ensure the best stewardship of resources — strengthening parish life and the quality of worship. Our aim is not to reduce opportunities for worship but to enhance them: ensuring that the Eucharist remains vibrant, accessible, and pastorally sustainable for generations to come.

**Next Steps**

Each deanery is asked to review its current Mass schedules in light of local conditions — geography, travel distances, cultural needs, seasonal variations and priest availability. These reviews should include prayerful reflection and open consultation.

I recognize that Mass times hold deep personal and spiritual significance. Change, however small, can feel unsettling. I urge patience, openness, and trust in the Holy Spirit throughout this process.

After deanery discussions are complete, recommendations will be submitted for my prayerful consideration before any final decisions are made.

**A Final Word**

I extend sincere gratitude to all who have participated in the United in Christ initiative — pastors, priests, deacons, religious and lay faithful alike. Your commitment has brought forth vibrant youth ministries, shared sacramental life and a strengthened sense of unity across our diocese.

Together, let us continue to walk as a synodal Church in mission, discerning how best to gather around the Lord’s altar and be nourished by Jesus, the Bread of Life.

Faithfully yours in Christ,



*William E. Koenig*

**Most Reverend William E. Koenig  
Bishop of Wilmington**