



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

MEDIA CONTACTS:

Mr. Joel Hennessy

Director, Mission Advancement & Communications
jhennessy@dow.org office 507.858.1249 mobile 507.254.3948

Msgr. Richard Colletti

Vicar General/Director of Pastoral Planning
rcolletti@dow.org office 507.858.1240 or 507.858.1267

Diocese Shares Draft Plan to Strengthen Catholic Ministry in Southern Minnesota

WINONA, MN – February 1, 2015 – This weekend in Catholic parishes across southern Minnesota, the release of the recommended ‘draft’ plan for *Vision 2016* was announced. *Vision 2016* is a strategic pastoral plan for the Diocese of Winona which has been in development since late 2011. Over the past two years, clergy and lay leaders across the Diocese of Winona have worked collaboratively to develop a plan which addresses the changing demographics and the issue of a smaller number of priests available to serve the parishes of the Diocese. The goal is to finalize the plan by the spring of 2016.

“Pastoral planning is an ongoing effort in every Catholic diocese in the world. Like any responsible organization, the Diocese continually assesses and evaluates the ways in which it meets the pastoral and sacramental needs of the people in our communities,” states Bishop John M. Quinn in a recorded message. “The ultimate purpose is to ensure a strong and sustainable future for the local Church, which encompasses all of southern Minnesota.”

The planning and changes are necessary in order to ensure that the Diocese is adapting to three critical and compounding factors: Fewer priests (current and projected for the future) in the diocese to serve the far-reaching 114 parishes; variations in sacramental participation trends; and demographic shifts of both growth and decline in areas of the diocese. These will require examination and adaptation of how to serve specific communities and the diocese.

“Nearly half of our parishes have received recommended organizational change as a result of the draft plan. These may include variations in how parishes are clustered, the residence of a pastor, or the merging of parishes,” stated Msgr. Richard Colletti, Vicar General and Director of Planning for the Diocese. “The Bishop received recommendations from the planning teams formed in each deanery and after much consultation, discussion and prayer, has accepted their recommendation to take the difficult step of moving 21 of our smaller parishes toward ‘oratory status’ as they merge with larger parishes.” Converting to oratory status means that these smaller churches will no longer have a Sunday/Vigil Mass, but could host Catholic weddings, funerals, and local prayer, until the local congregants can no longer maintain the facility and wish to close it altogether.

The overall goals of *Vision 2016* are to strengthen parish and diocesan life in Christ, to be proactive and wise in stewardship and growth as a Catholic community, and to have the capacity to serve all of the faithful in the lower 20 counties of Minnesota. *Vision 2016* is a process of moving forward together toward greater and shared vitality, clearer expectations, and deeper hope and faith. --MORE

“Together we will set goals towards *Vision 2016* that will help us continue being the light of Christ in the world,” Bishop John M. Quinn states. “We will together define the key actions we must take at the parish level to build the Catholic Church and to attend to the pastoral and sacramental needs of the faithful ...we will grow in our faith and be strengthened in our Catholic identity so we can enable our parishes and schools and thus the entire Diocese of Winona to indeed become a stronger, more visible presence of Christ in southern Minnesota.”

The Diocese of Winona has provided detailed information regarding *Vision 2016* including the video message from Bishop Quinn on its website www.dow.org/vision2016 and in current and past issues of The Courier newspaper www.dowcourier.org.

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ABOUT THE DIOCESE OF WINONA

The Diocese of Winona encompasses 13,000 square miles of the southern 20 counties of Minnesota, serving a population of more than 131,000 Catholics. Currently, there are 114 parishes/missions, more than 100 active and retired priests, 365 sisters, 21 religious brothers, 20 deacons and nearly 200 professional lay ministers. There are 29 Catholic Schools and a Catholic university for women and men, St. Mary's University. Bishop John M. Quinn was installed as the Eighth Bishop of the Diocese of Winona on May 7, 2009, at the Cathedral of the Sacred Heart, Winona, the home parish of the diocesan bishop.