



DIOCESE OF BUFFALO
OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

November 8, 2023

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Thank you for your attentiveness in returning your annual financial and statistical reports, due last week (November 1). Your conscientious work in reviewing and producing these numbers help us to capture a sense of our local Church today as together we try to make good decisions for tomorrow and beyond.

The *Road to Renewal* has changed much and we will continue to learn as we progress. Families of Parishes are beginning to see the fruits of collaboration, but it is also important that we remind each other that each parish entity remains distinct in terms of its corporate and canonical structure. One area that this affects is in how we record the sacramental life of the Church.

I have been heartened by the beautiful celebrations of Confirmation, parish anniversaries and other Masses and events that have prompted parish choirs and other liturgical and pastoral ministries from multiple parishes to collaborate as one in their families.

However, in this collaboration, it is important to still capture and document the sacramental life of each individual parish. To that end, I am promulgating recently updated *Precepts for Sacramental Record Keeping*, effective today, November 8, 2023. (Please see the attached.)

This comprehensive document, produced by the Office of Worship and the Chancellor's Office has revisited our sacramental, civil and canonical obligations when it comes to recording and disseminating information regarding the sacraments.

As the central office of a Family of Parishes is chosen and organized, I recommend only one or two people be responsible for the sacramental records of a given parish family. These individuals may already be familiar with the general norms of sacramental record keeping, many of which remain the same.

The entrance into the Family of Parishes model has naturally created questions, even for the most experienced among us, and these policies seek to standardize our procedures throughout the diocese in the context of this new reality.

For example, even though the sacramental registers of each parish in the family can be kept in the central or hub office, a "family register" that consolidates all sacraments into one book **is not permitted**. Canon law dictates that sacraments be recorded in the register of the church where they are celebrated.

These policies also outline a new procedure for utilizing the *Parish Data System* (PDS) software for capturing the annual statistical information for each parish.

For instance, If a parish family begins to celebrate the sacrament of Confirmation in the largest church in the family for practical reasons, the register at that parish would show a great number of Confirmations, but they represent the sacramental life of perhaps three or four distinct parishes, whose registers would not show any Confirmations, creating a skewed view from a statistical standpoint.

With the procedure outlined, PDS and its reporting capabilities will help us to ensure that the life of each of these parishes is accurately represented, while still adhering to the basic principles of Canon Law. We also hope this new procedure will make the statistical reporting process easier in the future.

Please ensure that the individuals in your Family of Parishes who you deem responsible for sacramental record keeping read and understand the policies attached. As a reminder, **parish staff should be the only people with access to sacramental registers**. Sacramental records do not exist for genealogical research or anything outside the mission of the Church. The registers and the information contained therein should be disclosed primarily to support the ongoing sacramental life of the Church, and only to the individuals properly entitled to them, as outlined by these policies.

This document should be kept at the ready as a resource for parish staff. It is also available via the Office of Worship section on our diocesan webpage, <https://www.buffalodiocese.org/what-we-do/office-of-worship/>.

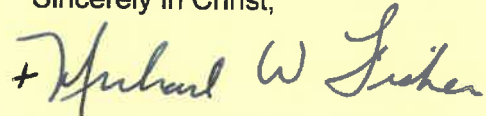
The Office of Worship and the Chancellor's Office stand ready to assist with any individual situations or clarifications as needed. Please contact worship@buffalodiocese.org or call (716) 847-5545.

Rev. Seán Paul Fleming, Director of the Office of Worship, will be available for "virtual office hours" on Wednesday, November 29, 2023 from 2 pm to 3 pm to field any questions you may have regarding these new policies. Please email him at spfleming@buffalodiocese.org to RSVP and to receive a link. He will also make himself available in person by appointment if your family needs assistance on evaluating current procedures/registers.

Thank you for your attention to these new policies as we seek to adapt to the new realities of our Families of Parishes. God bless you for all you do as the Church, the Body of Christ!

Know that you are in my daily prayers.

Sincerely in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael W. Fisher". The signature is written in a cursive style with a cross at the beginning.

Most Reverend Michael W. Fisher
Bishop of Buffalo