



A Time for Fortitude

Frequently Asked Questions

What is “The Stronger Priests, Stronger Parishes, Stronger Church Initiative”?

On December 8, 2024, Bishop da Cunha released a Pastoral Letter titled “A Time for Fortitude,” which introduces a new three-year diocesan plan called the “Stronger Priests, Stronger Parishes, Stronger Church Initiative.”

This initiative, running from 2025 to 2027, aims to strengthen the priesthood within our Diocese. Its goal is to foster a Church culture that places priests at the core of its mission so as to strengthen them to boldly live their vocation.

Why are we doing this?

Ultimately, the success of our Diocese and Parishes in preaching Jesus Christ and saving souls will not outpace the success of our priests. As the Second Vatican Council puts it, “The desired renewal of the whole Church depends to a great extent on the ministry of its priests” (Second Vatican Council, Decree on Training of Priests, 1965). This is not because of any single priest but rather Who the priest has become by ordination...another Christ, according to Church teaching. In other words, thriving priests are an imperative foundation for thriving parishes and ministries.

We are taking these steps because the Diocese of Fall River, which includes all our priests, parishes, and ministries, is facing a number of unprecedented challenges. These challenges include a crisis in vocations, an aging priesthood, decreasing Mass attendance, and increasingly aggressive secularization. Given these realities, maintaining the current status quo is not feasible if we want to fulfill the mission entrusted to us by Christ in the best possible way. Doing nothing is not an option.

Consequently, “The Stronger Priests, Stronger Parishes, Stronger Church Initiative” aims to refocus the Diocese on promoting the thriving and holiness of our priests. **Our ultimate goal is to have thriving priests who shepherd great parishes.** Every aspect of this initiative is designed to support this unifying vision.

Has this been a consultative process?

Yes, this plan has been in the development and discernment stages throughout 2024. Over 35 priests and lay experts have been consulted in its creation.

What makes this different than other “programs”?

Although numerous action plans and renewal efforts have been undertaken throughout the Diocese’s history, this is the first comprehensive plan specifically focused on fostering a strong priesthood. This innovative approach recognizes that a thriving priesthood is crucial to the overall success of our Diocese.

How will this goal be accomplished?

There are seven strategies for success:

- Redesign Church Structures:** Improve the operations of the Diocese and Parishes to create an environment that encourages priestly thriving and enables priests to fulfill their most important priestly functions.
- Create a Strong Priestly Culture:** Strengthen the priestly culture by fostering fraternity and trust within all levels of the Church hierarchy.
- Emphasize Natural Wellbeing:** Renew the focus on mental and physical health for priests to promote a balanced and resilient personal life capable of sustaining active ministry.
- Prompt a Spiritual Renewal:** Encourage a spiritual Pentecost to renew the connection with the grace of the Holy Spirit, invigorating the spiritual lives of priests and creating a spirit-filled priesthood.
- Ensure Effective Priest Assignments:** Match priests to suitable assignments and provide comprehensive guidance and support.
- Cultivate a Culture of Vocations:** Create an environment that actively supports and encourages individuals to pursue priesthood while providing the highest quality seminarian formation.
- Reallocate Resources:** Make strategic decisions at every level of the Church to reallocate time and resources to strengthen our priests.

How can I participate?

There are two actions you can take right now:

- Education:** Take the time to read the two foundational documents—the Bishop’s Pastoral Letter and the Initiative Summary. You can access these by scanning the QR code provided.
- Prayer:** Prayer is the most effective way to engage with this initiative. Please use the official Diocesan prayer card, which your pastors have made available, in both your personal prayer life and in the ministries and groups you participate in.

Where can I learn more?

To learn more, please scan the QR code below or visit www.fallriverdiocese.org.

