

Revisiting Beacons of Light (Part II)

In my previous article (Jan. 4), I explained some of the real and felt needs motivating Beacons of Light. I also explained that we'll be sharing about different facets of parish life and organization throughout 2026, and giving updates on each of these areas. Before we get into each area, however, I thought it would be worthwhile to revisit some of the history of Beacons and the language the Archdiocese uses when it comes to Beacons.

The initial planning work on what would become Beacons of Light began in 2020. The pastoral planning process officially launched in 2022 with the arrangement of 208 parishes into 57 Families of Parishes. The Archdiocese defines a family of parishes as "a grouping of parishes led by a common pastor and unified lay leadership, and characterized by collaboration and shared resources. A parochial vicar (or multiple parochial vicars) or retired priest may also serve in a Family of Parishes." As you well know, our Family of Parishes consists of St. Bernadette, St. Mary, St. Peter, and St. Thomas More — the combined parish boundaries of which cover roughly the southern third of Clermont County.

Beacons challenges us to ask a hard question, namely: are our parishes optimally set up to evangelize and make disciples today? This tough question brings up another one, one that strikes at the very root: What is a parish in the first place? What is the purpose of a parish?

We can take some cues from Canon Law. According to Canon Law, a parish "is to be territorial" (Can 515 §1); it is "a certain community of the Christian faithful stably constituted in a particular church, whose pastoral care is entrusted to a pastor" (Can 518). A parish is a geographical area, a region under the pastoral care of the pastor.

Now, within the parish, the pastor "is obliged to make provision so that the word of God is proclaimed in its entirety to those living in the parish . . . He is to make every effort, even with the collaboration of the Christian faithful, so that the message of the Gospel comes also to those who have ceased the practice of their religion or do not profess the truth faith" (Can 528 §1). It is incumbent on the pastor, with the collaboration of the lay faithful, that the Gospel be proclaimed within the parish. When it comes to the "why" of a parish, then, things are fairly straightforward: the parish exists for Catholic parishioners and for all who live within its boundaries, that they might know the love of God in Jesus Christ and respond to it.

Ultimately, Beacons will result in 208 canonical parishes becoming 57 canonical parishes. To say this more clearly and for our purposes, right now, Stella Maris consists of four parishes. In the future, Stella Maris will be one canonical parish with four campuses. We're thinking of our campuses as missionary outposts, so to speak. They are all strategically located across our parish territory and are critical places where we can carry out our mission of helping people encounter Christ.

As we move toward this reality of becoming one parish, we are arranging our resources and maximizing the gifts brought forward from each parish within the Family. And we are seeing tremendous fruit. With everything we have going on across the Family, we are experiencing Beacons of Light rather than merely talking about it. We are moving and growing; we are trying new things and learning a lot about how to be a united family of Catholics in our area.



Fr. Tim Ralston
Pastor of Stella Maris

Why do bad things happen to good people?
A Talk at Stella Maris

Jan. 20, 2026 | 7pm | Stievenard Hall, St. Bernadette
Our personal experience of life will inevitably present each of us with various levels of trials, challenges, and sufferings. It is the experience of such "evils" that proves to be the greatest test of faith for many people. Is it possible to reconcile our experience of evil in the world with our faith in an all-good and providential God? Fr. Eric Wood will outline the Catholic theological tradition on the problem of evil and the mystery of God's providence. The event is free; no pre-registration required.

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