

Pastoral plan

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came on board, Deacon Cass acknowledged — and activity that has been going on for the past five years.

The draft plan, for example, was prepared by the Synod Implementation Commission, based on the work of five analysis teams — one for each of the five recommendations approved at the General Synod. Their work, in turn, has been abetted by parish and faith communities throughout the diocese who studied the analysis teams' ideas. All of this work generated hundreds of pages of material to be read, studied and incorporated into the pastoral plan.

But beyond the plan, Deacon Cass said, the greatest success of the synodal process "is the continuing level of activity in the parishes in implementing the Synod."

Indeed, the deacon noted, some parishes have not waited for the pastoral plan to begin work.

Parishioners at St. Cecilia's Church in Rochester, for example, realized through synod discussions that the parish needed youth and young adult ministry. Consequently, the parish hired a youth minister and created a young-adult and family life committee.

In addition, St. Cecilia's has joined three other parishes — Christ the King, St. Salome's and St. Margaret Mary — to provide adult and spiritual enrichment programs, promoting the pro-

grams at each parish through a joint brochure.

These efforts came in response to recommendations made at parish synod discussions and to the General Synod's call to offer such educational opportunities and work cooperatively with other parishes where possible, noted St. Cecilia's parish life coordinator, Sister Roberta Tierney, SSND.

"I think basically the response we're getting from people is, 'We're glad you didn't file these (recommendations) away in some drawer,'" Sister Tierney reported.

In a similar vein, St. Patrick's Parish in Macedon is also looking at ways to improve adult education and youth ministry. According to Larry Vanderveer, a member of the parish's synod implementation team, St. Patrick's has already begun to address these and other needs that surfaced through synodal discussions.

Martha's Ministry has been created to help provide hospitality and support during funerals. A newly formed women's group has organized coffee hours after Masses and dish-to-pass dinners to help promote community. Teens in the 11th and 12th grades have been invited to become lectors and eucharistic ministers in order to get them more involved in parish life. A children's choir is being formed.

St. Patrick's implementation committee also surveyed parishioners the weekends of Sept. 17-18 and 24-25 to recruit volunteers both to assist with current

parish ministries and to prepare for programs that might develop in response to the diocesan pastoral plan.

St. Joseph's Parish in Livonia likewise has begun implementing ideas that surfaced through synodal discussions, reported the parish's parish council president, Bob Shearer. A full-time youth minister was hired, and she has begun a group for seventh- and eighth-graders called JAM (Jesus And Me).

Father William Trott, pastor of the Livonia parish, has been contacting parents to encourage them to enroll their children in religious education. Two small Christian communities have "blossomed since the Synod," Shearer said, and the parish is scheduled to host a Nov. 17-19 workshop focusing on how to develop small communities. The parish has now developed a ministry similar to Martha's Ministry to provide meals for funerals. And the parish has conducted a census in part to identify potential volunteers for these and other activities that might surface once the diocesan pastoral plan is released.

"Certainly the Synod charged us up," Shearer said.

The number of parishes and communities similarly "charged up" by the Synod has become apparent to diocesan officials.

"I think the level of participation and sustained interest has been quite remarkable," Bishop Clark observed.

In fact, that level began building even before Bishop Clark officially announced the Synod on June 17, 1990.

The bishop said he had first broached the subject of a Synod to the Priests' Council as early as 1985. The council at that time had recommended not pursuing the idea. But by the spring of 1989, after studying the need for long-range pastoral planning in the diocese, council members called for a Synod.

In the fall of 1989, the diocese conducted listening sessions throughout its 12 counties to gain input on the prospect of a Synod — thus beginning a process that was to involve thousands of people in meetings at the parish, community, regional and diocesan levels.

Bishop Clark said he called for a Synod because he believed the diocese was "at a stage in our life where we should gather the community and reflect on Catholic life 25 years after the Second Vatican Council."

Father Joseph Hart, who directed the Synod from Aug., 1990, until Jan. 1 of this year, pointed out that getting people involved was indeed one of the initial challenges faced by synod planners.

But in involving so many people throughout the process, the diocese was "modeling" a vision of the church, Father Hart observed.

"If this is the way church is to be, we knew we had to model somehow the involvement of everyone, the ability to lis-

ten respectfully, the prayerful means to consensus, the ability to move together with trust," Father Hart said. The Synod's success and people's response to it "was reaffirming that this is the way the church is supposed to work."

The process of local and regional meetings employed in developing potential recommendations helped encourage participation and to give people the sense that their input was not only valued, but essential, Father Hart noted.

Deacon Cass, who was involved with parish-level synod discussions at St. Michael's Parish in Newark before taking on his current position, observed that he found the discussions eye-opening.

"One of the things it reinforced is that the church has many faces," Deacon Cass said. Many social, spiritual and sacramental dimensions are embraced by the church, he continued, and "all of those dimensions have importance in terms of who we are, what we believe, and how we try to live the Gospel."

The process also helped to energize parishes and make them aware of what needs to be done, Father Hart observed.

"There's no doubt that if we had not done the pastoral plan, (the Synod) was worth it for what the parishes have been able to do," Father Hart said.

Further, Deacon Cass noted, the synod process is now beginning to have an impact on the diocese's budgeting plans. The budget for the 1995-96 fiscal year will be based, in part, on priorities established through parish responses to the pastoral plan.

"I think it's the first time we established a cycle like this where we look to parish input to set Pastoral Center budget priorities," Deacon Cass said. "We are starting to change the Pastoral Center into a resource center in support of what the parishes are doing."

Indeed, the deacon added, parishes are ultimately where the Synod will be lived out. "The Synod goes on at the parish level," he remarked.

As parishes are carrying out this work, Bishop Clark said he will be actively bolstering their efforts by seeking to improve communications throughout the diocese, supporting pastoral ministers in attempts to continue their education and training, and paying special attention to the needs of Catholic schools.

Even though the Synod placed special emphasis on these initiatives, Bishop Clark noted that he had been involved in each of them before the synodal process was envisioned.

"The Synod is clearly our driving force right now," Bishop Clark observed. "But there are things that went on before the Synod went on."

"It's not as though the Synod gave us a totally new agenda," he continued. "It just gave us a clearer direction for the next five years."

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