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Parishes

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and not the diocese, recommend the direction it will take, acknowledged Father John Mulligan, moderator of the pastoral center.

This parish involvement in the decision-making process has been at work in the diocese for some time, he added — although not to the extent it is now and will be.

"I think the whole idea of planning at the grass-roots level is not new to us," Father Mulligan said. "We started doing this seven years ago with Corning-Painted Post and Watkins Glen-Odessa.

"We made our minds up early on we will begin planning at the parishes," Father Mulligan continued. "I think it was very much our impression that these people know what's going on at the local scene."

In contrast, the "impression" at the local scene remains that the diocese often makes decisions about pastoral leadership, acknowledged Bob Capellazzi, St. Helen's Parish council president and a member of the parish's planning team.

"In the beginning, when we had our town meeting, people were telling us, 'Bishop Clark will have the final say,'" Capellazzi recalled. "We've been trying to say, 'No, Bishop Clark will listen to our recommendations.'"

Chris Trombley, a member of the planning team for the Catholic Community of St. Anne and St. Gregory, likewise acknowledged the perception that the decision is in diocesan hands.

"There are some (people) that believe that it's already been decided, this is just a game the diocese is playing," Trombley said.

But as the process has continued, it has become increasingly clear to people that they do have a say, she added.

Moreover, even though her cluster is not undergoing a change, the cluster team members recognize that such planning is important for the future.

"We don't see ourselves as the parish or the cluster that's going to solve Macedon's problem," Trombley said. "We're looking outside our community to the bigger community. We're looking beyond ourselves."

"I think a lot of parishes in the future are going to be going through this process," Capellazzi observed. "I'm glad they're doing it this way (letting the parishes decide) and not giving them the options."

In launching this planning process, the Diocese of Rochester is following a nationwide trend.

A study on transition processes undergone in 46 dioceses will be released the first day of the Nov. 12-16 meeting of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops in Washington, D.C. The study was conducted by the Conference for Pastoral Planning and Council Development.

Meanwhile, at the Diocese of Rochester's Oct. 12 Ministry Day at the Henrietta Holiday, parish ministers heard from John Reid, coordinator of transitional services for the Archdiocese of Seattle. Reid explained to them the lessons learned from the process that began in Seattle in 1986 — a process on which the Rochester diocese's effort is partially modeled.

"The goal is really to help the parishes



grow stronger through this process of transition," Reid later said in a telephone interview with the *Catholic Courier*.

Reid said that to successfully go through the process, even parishes in clusters must be allowed to keep some sense of their identity and history. In addition, people need to be reassured that the sacramental life of the parish will be maintained when a parish is clustered with others or when a parish is run by a pastoral administrator.

"One of the fears of the people is, 'Gee, if we don't have a resident priest pastor, how can we be a Catholic parish?'" Reid reported. Once they come to realize that sacramental needs will be met, he said, the people's question shifts from, "Are we Catholic?" to, "Are we receiving quality pastoral care?"

Reid said fears are normal at such times of transition, and that people will be resistant, but that's not necessarily bad. "It's hard to change," he said. "It's painful."

In many cases, Reid said, people "don't want to let go of something that's meaningful to them now because they don't understand the reasons for the change."

To help them through the process, Reid said, people need the time and information required to understand the reasons for change, leaders who can present them with a vision of the direction the parish is taking, and a clear plan for where the parish is heading.

The process in Rochester has been changed this year to give people more time to consider all these elements, noted Claude Lester, a permanent deacon who is director of the diocese's Office of Pastoral Council Formation and a Pastoral Office liaison to the parishes undergoing transition.

"We're trying to be more kindly with the time line so all the work is not crunched into what in the past was a small window of time," Lester said.

Thus the process began Aug. 16 with a

meeting involving the parishes' pastors and representatives, Bishop Clark, Father Mulligan and other diocesan staff members.

Parish planning teams have already begun parish vitality studies to assess strengths and needs, and were to meet Nov. 8 with representatives from parishes that have the various models of pastoral leadership, from priest pastors to pastoral administrators. The teams were to return to their parishes to develop their own plans and to meet with their parishioners for feedback on the proposed plans.

At St. Helen's, Capellazzi reported, the team had already reduced its options to priest pastor and pastoral administrator, and has held several town meetings with parishioners to explain what is going on.

"We've had a lot of town meetings because we want people to feel comfortable," Capellazzi said.

Before January the team will conduct a survey of parishioners to determine which of the two models they prefer. If the vote is overwhelmingly in favor of one option, he said, that is the main recommendation that will go to Bishop Clark. If the vote is close, he added, the parish council will decide which route to take.

Barbara Pedeville, coordinator of the diocese's Parish Personnel Services and the Pastoral Office liaison working with St. Helen's Parish, acknowledged that in most cases, people would prefer no changes.

"Given the option, most people at this stage would certainly want to have the status quo as they have it in their parish," Pedeville said, noting that the status quo is generally priest pastor.

"That's unrealistic," Pedeville continued, "given the number of priests we have available for full-time pastorates."

Even if the reflection process parishes are undergoing results in no changes, Pedeville said, it will allow them to develop a vision statement detailing "the type of leadership that is needed for that parish to be a vital community where the spiritual and temporal needs of the people are met most effectively."

Reid pointed out that the Seattle archdiocese has moved beyond a planning process based on year-to-year needs for parishes to one focusing on long-term regional concerns.

"I think we've moved from just this yearly planning around retreats and resignations to much more comprehensive planning," Reid said. "We're really looking well beyond that to 2010, 2015."

The idea of long-term, broader-based planning resonates with Trombley.

"People have been looking at this as a yearly process," Trombley said. "It must become a process of, 'Let's begin planning now for our future in five, 10 years.'"

In the process, Trombley said, her own cluster is beginning to get ready for changes that may be coming both in their region and in the diocese as a whole.

"We see our role as part of the community looking to the future," Trombley said. "This is part of the community problem. This is part of the Catholic community problem, and we want to be part of the solution."

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