

Planning process needs everyone's input

I have learned from experience that the prospect of change can be unsettling for some individuals and communities. For this reason I am not surprised to learn that our pastoral planning process has generated concerns among some people in a few of our parish communities.

People who hold such concerns express them in different ways. I hear them expressed most commonly in such comments as:

"They already know what they are going to do. Why go through all of this?"

"This surely means they are going to close us" and

"Smaller, poorer parishes are bound to be the losers in all of this."

As one of the "they" referred to in the above listed statements, I want to assure you that our planning holds no hidden parts or phases. It will be carried out with great care according to the open process we have established after broad consultation and which we have made public in all of our communities. Some key ideas about our pastoral planning process:

1.) Our common goal in the process is to create as favorable an environment as possible in which people can mature in their faith, celebrate it in life-giving fashion and enjoy the support of the community as they respond to their call to be the salt of the earth.

That goal impels us to attend carefully to the health and vitality of our parish com-

along the way



BY BISHOP MATTHEW H. CLARK

munities. It is in those communities that most people celebrate life's richest moments. It is in those communities that they baptize their children, seek reconciliation, celebrate the Eucharist, marry, commend their deceased loved ones to God and generally work through, celebrate and probe the significance of events, relationships and circumstances that really speak to their hearts.

2.) Each parish will be asked to look at what it needs to be faithful to our Synod goals. That challenge invites parishes to reflect on many things. Among them: their mission in and to the community in which they exist; how the Eucharist will remain at the center of parish life; the implications of demographic and financial trends they are experiencing; the facts that lay leadership will become more important in the years ahead, and that good stewardship of our financial and human resources demands that all parishes develop intentional planning relationships with their neighbors.

3.) As implied above, no parishes are exempt from this process. Put more positively, all parishes can offer to and benefit from this process by which we will plan for the future health and vitality of our local church.

We must face some significant challenges. That is for sure. But we also have wonderful gifts and strong faith to bring to the task. We also have the experience of our Synod, which gave many people a deeper awareness than ever that we can accomplish together things we could never dream of accomplishing alone.

4.) It is important to establish a clear and fair process for an endeavor as important as this pastoral planning process is to our diocese. I think we have been successful in our efforts to do so. But it is also important to remember that we need to keep learning from our experience and be willing to make adjustments when fairness calls for them.

For that reason we all need to recommit ourselves to the open and honest dialogue we have espoused as one of the lasting values of our Synod experience. So, if you have concerns about, suggestions for or ideas to share about our pastoral planning process, please send them to Bill Pickett, director of pastoral planning, or to me. We may not be able to fold all of them into the process, but we will take all of them very seriously.

Peace to all.



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