

Planning the future parish

For purposes of planning, parishes have been organized into 35 "Planning Groups." About one-third of our parishes will participate in each of the years leading up to 2000: 1997, 1998, and 1999.

Fifty-five parishes and faith communities in 12 Planning Groups will be part of the 1997 phase.

Process

There are three stages:

- (1) Parishes complete a self-assessment
- (2) Collaborative planning, resulting in joint recommendations to the Bishop
- (3) The Bishop acts on the recommendations and communicates his decision.

1) Parish Self-Assessment

Each parish will form a Planning Team to review the parish's history and expected future in several critical areas:

- progress on the four Synod goals
- trends on demographics, staffing, finances, facilities, sacramental life and other parish/faith community activities
- the Eucharist as central to parish life
- other factors relevant to the particular faith community.

Based on its assessment, the team will develop a "Priority Issues" report. This identifies the three to

five priorities for the parish for the next five years, based on the challenges and opportunities revealed by the self-assessment.

2) Collaborative Planning

Representatives of each parish and faith community in a Planning Group will meet to:

- develop financial and facility profiles
- review Priority Issues identified by Parish Planning Teams
- develop collaborative activities to address common priorities based on the parish reports
- create a joint recommendation for Bishop Clark of a five-year plan for structure, staffing, programming and facilities and resource implications.

Most joint efforts will involve ministry programs and staffing. Sharing of resources will be the greatest single benefit of this collaborative approach to planning.

3) Decision-Making

Many of the Planning Group's ideas will not require the Bishop's approval. Where approval is necessary, the Bishop will seek advice from diocesan staff and consultative bodies in preparing his response. Relevant offices and advisory bodies will review aspects of plans dealing with human resources, finances, facilities, data management, etc. Church law will guide the implementation of appropriate elements (for example, suppression or creation of a parish).

Working in partnership

Parishes and faith communities carry out their mission under the guidance and support of the Bishop, their servant-leader. The Bishop has organized his staff at the Pastoral Center* to assist him in carrying out his responsibility for the general governance and collaborative support of our local church. To enhance the Pastoral Center's effectiveness as a support system for parishes/faith communities, we will:

- Structure and operate the Pastoral Center in a manner that provides leadership and maximum responsiveness to the needs of parishes, regions, Planning Groups and other Catholic faith communities as they implement the Diocesan mission and conduct day-to-day operations
- Seek input from all of these as services are designed and as quality of service delivery is continuously evaluated.

*The term "Pastoral Center" refers to the staff and activities funded by the Diocese as a part of the Bishop's ministry.

Process

The Bishop has appointed a team of Pastoral Center staff, persons from parishes and others to analyze related issues and operational models. They will analyze all services currently offered by the Pastoral Center as well as new services which may be necessary.

As part of the process, they will gather input from parish staff regarding what services are most valued and what actions would most improve service delivery. They will recommend services and a structure to the Bishop including financial, human resource, technological, communications and other implications, along with an implementation schedule.

After the Bishop acts on the recommendations, implementation will begin in July 1998. After that, improvement plans and budget adjustments will be developed annually, based on feedback from parish leaders and Pastoral Center staff.

Pickett staffs process

William L. Pickett, president emeritus of St. John Fisher College, became the diocese's first full-time Diocesan Director of Pastoral Planning Apr. 1.

In this new post, he is directing implementation of the pastoral planning process, and will advise Bishop Clark in assessing and responding to recommendations from parish collaborative Planning Groups. He will also help develop ways of improving Pastoral Center services to parishes.



Q&A

Q How will parishes change as a result of this process? Is the purpose of this process to close parishes? Will there be more consolidations?

A The planning process will begin immediately. Changes will be an outgrowth of the process.

It is possible that some parishes will decide they can no longer operate as "stand-alone" parishes. Some under-used facilities may no longer be needed. But the intent is to strengthen the ability of the Church of Rochester to meet the needs of our people in changing times, through collaboration.

By releasing the creative energy of our parishes and faith communities, there will be many, diverse outcomes. The goal is that the process be truly collaborative, realistic, carried out with honesty and trust, and focused on how best to achieve Bishop Clark's vision in the local circumstances.

Q Would we be doing this if we didn't have a priest shortage? Wouldn't ordaining women or married men solve the problem?

A We should be planning consistently. But without the pressure of declining numbers of priests, we probably would not be doing it systematically.

If the Church's self-understanding regarding the ordination of women were to change, or if the requirement of celibacy were removed, it would certainly have a major impact. However, it is not likely that such changes will take place within the immediate future. We must plan in a way that addresses this issue within the context of current church teaching.

Q How does the pastoral planning process relate to Synod planning?

A The pastoral planning process is grounded in the Synod goals. A major part of the parish self-assessment involves analyzing how well parishes are doing on Synod implementation. Parishes are encouraged to use the Synod Goal vision statements and vitality indicators to develop their Synod plans for 1997-98. Finally, the process reflects Synod values:

- calling forth lay leadership
- valuing diversity
- collaboration
- encouraging ecumenical/interfaith activity
- based on open, trusting dialogue.

Q Who makes up the Parish Planning Teams?

A The team should be representative of the faith community. The Chair and most members should be non-staff, lay persons.

Q What is the role of the team?

A The team will:

- assess progress on Synod Goals
- review how the parish is organized and plans,
- assess financial health (revenue and expenditure trends;
- study parish trends (the number of parishioners compared to weekly Mass attendance; number of weddings, funerals, births; social and population changes in the community, etc.)
- and communicate with the parish.

Q How are campuses and other faith communities included in this planning process?

A Campuses, jails, and health facilities are considered "parishes" for the purpose of this process. They are included in the Planning Groups.

Q How were the Planning Groups determined?

A Proximity, a history of previous collaboration, and similarity among the communities served are some of the reasons different groups were created. The Auburn group, for example, has operated a consolidated school, conducted a joint census program, and has long regarded itself as a natural planning cluster.