

Researcher stimulates discussion

Last Tuesday afternoon we had a joint meeting of our Stewardship and Presbyteral councils. Also present were the directors of the diocesan ministries. It was another in a series of occasional joint meetings that we have when we want to generate ideas about — or explore possibilities in — areas of special importance to the life of our diocese.

At this session we heard from Bryan Forehle, executive director of the Center of Applied Research and the Apostolate (CARA) at Georgetown University. I thought it was a rich and stimulating meeting. Bryan presented a broad range of findings. Among them: differences in attitude and habits of Catholics across generational lives; trends in vocations to both religious life and diocesan priesthood; key indicators (e.g., strong sense of commonality) of healthy parishes; and several others.

Following his presentation he asked us to break into groups to consider some interesting sets of questions. We had a chance to do that then we re-convened. At that time, each group had a chance to share the principal points of their discussion.

I wish we had had more time. I would love to have heard more from Bryan about CARA's research and more from all present about how to use CARA's findings for the benefit of our local church.

The process is by no means over. We will be following up on what we learned and sharing the fruits of the work with our faith communities as that may be helpful to them.

Just to give you a fuller flavor of the pro-

along
the way



BY BISHOP MATTHEW H. CLARK

ceedings — and, perhaps to get your mental wheels spinning — let me share with you three sets of questions we thought about:

1. People

a. What aspects of the background, thinking or experience of the various generations of Catholics are most likely to be helpful or of interest to those of other generations?

b. Given the different generations and their changing presence within the Catholic community, what impact will they have on shaping parish life and the directions of our diocese?

c. Families cross generations, and the strongest communities are often intergenerational. How can particular parish ministries best incorporate a generational diversity that welcomes all generations?

2. Parishes

a. What mega-trends are observable in the Diocese of Rochester? How do they compare with national realities?

b. Larger parishes create economies of scale and opportunities for involvement while diminishing solidarity. How can positives be emphasized while minimizing nega-

tives?

c. Some of the biggest challenges as parishes grow in size are those that get left behind in growth — small rural parishes and declining city parishes. In creating economic savings in personnel, costs in parish solidarity can be overwhelming. What lessons have been learned in this area? What trends or models offer possibilities?

3. Priests

a. What is the role of the pastor? What proportion of his time should be in administration, sacramental ministry, pastoral ministry or other areas? At a time of fewer priests, what alternatives exist if individual priests cannot match such a job description?

b. There are fewer priests but more diversity by generation, country of origin, ecclesiology and other factors. The need for priests to serve and thus be satisfied and fulfilled is greater. How can presbyteral unity be deepened? How can their fulfillment grow?

c. Priests are less likely to be similar to their people today. How can the priest, and the presbyterate as a whole, be most effective in relating to the cultures of those they serve?

You may have different levels of knowledge or interest in these questions. But I do ask you to think about the ones of greatest interest to you. I also invite you to pray that together we'll face these issues — and others like them — with the vision and courage that have always characterized the people of this diocese.

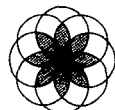
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