

Report on the Fifth General Session

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Bishop Caggiano called the session to order, and Morning Prayer and the Blessing of Mothers followed. Bishop led off the program with a presentation entitled "*Genesis and Global Initiatives*". This speech gave the context for our day and the local initiatives that will be formally presented at our next Synod meeting on May 30. Seven principles will serve as our guide. The first is **Change**, a conversion and spiritual renewal of individuals, communities, and diocese. Second is **Subsidiarity**, a confirmation that the Holy Spirit is alive in all of us and that all participate in true renewal. This will insure that decisions are made, wherever possible, at the local level. Third, there must be a **Buy-in** by all; we are in this together. Fourth is **Accountability**, something that all will be held to and measured by as time passes. Bishop encouraged us to be patient because change takes time. Fifth is **Creative Tension** that allows for the Holy Spirit to guide us. Sixth is the **Need to Plan**, because the journey is as important as the destination. We must be intentional in what we do. Finally seventh, we must engage the true spirit of **Collaboration** by sharing life, vision, and mission.

The Book of Genesis provides the spiritual context for these principles. As God created the world from a "great abyss," so our diocese is creating much good in our midst. Bishop termed it "Holy Potential," giving Our Lord the opportunity to build on the good already out there. We as Synod must communicate what is already good and evaluate what may be better. Bishop Caggiano presented four spiritual qualities that must accompany our journey. First is a spirit of **Gratitude** that should mark our interactions with others. Second is a spirit of **Docility** that must be embraced before the promptings of the Holy Spirit. Linking this quality to the story of Adam and Eve, Bishop warned us against the sin of Pride in our deliberations. One path will be chosen and we must walk it even if we disagree. We have to be willing to let go. Our Bible story begins with the banishment of Adam and Eve from the Garden, but the rest of the story is about God running after them. **Hope** is that fragile gift that saves us from the enemy in our midst, Indifference. Yes, we as a Diocese have problems, but we must be honest, and exhibit no passive-aggressive behavior. Finally, Bishop reminded us that the only thing that lasts is us. Our journey is about people sowing seeds, one person at a time. We are on an Evangelization Journey as missionary disciples to find the person of Christ real in every broken heart. It was a beautiful homily.

The last part of Bishop Caggiano's address related to what he called the **Global Initiatives**, six overarching proposals that will add multiple areas of challenges that are essential to the success of the Synod. The six encompass management and spiritual development. First, the Diocese will create a permanent strategic planning commission to reform the Diocesan Curia. The objective is to model servant leadership, find ways to communicate effectively, provide resources for communication and effective planning, make the diocese more responsive to its multiple dimensions, incorporate cost-effective measures across the diocese, and

provide forums for diocesan meetings. Second, the bishop asks for a comprehensive pastoral planning process for the diocese in order to invite, empower, and hold accountable all parishes to answer the six challenges identified by the Synod. While each parish will follow its own path, all will be evaluated and will answer to the bishop. This is a cyclical and intentional process. Third, because charity, justice, and service are integral to all we do, Bishop Caggiano will create a Catholic Service Corps, along the lines of the Peace Corps. Young adults will be invited to join first and then the corps will become intergenerational. "We need a clarion call to service," something that is integral to catechesis, said Bishop Caggiano. Fifth, Bishop will create a Leadership Institute, a school without walls that will have four pillars of development: human, theological, moral, and spiritual. Adults will receive training, support, and nourishment in order to accomplish a mission that will lead them to the recognition of the salvific will of Jesus Christ. Fifth, Bishop called for the creation of a Presbyteral Council that will establish concrete initiatives to help priests live a holy, healthy life. Among the possible areas to be considered are communal rectories, mentoring programs, and fraternal support structures. Finally, Bishop Caggiano will create a Leadership Institute for the Laity because he believes that consultation is essential to the ecclesial life of the diocese. All of this will take time, and to help Bishop going forward, he has asked that the Synod delegates and committees remain intact for two more years. At the end of the Synod, Bishop will issue a Synod Pastoral Letter that will summarize the initiatives brought forth by the Synod. Recalling the Bible verse chosen at the last general meeting, Bishop reminded us that we are many branches on one vine. A spirit of inclusiveness is especially important for the laity. The laity needs to have a real voice in order to change the culture. Priests need to be critical in a positive sense when contemplating changes suggested by the Synod. Bishop Caggiano will meet with the priests of the diocese on May 19 to present his initiatives.

Deacon John DiTaranto's talk, entitled *Overcoming Resistance to Change*, was delivered after lunch but is reported here (as originally scheduled) for better flow. Regarding the people aspect of change, Deacon said there were two points of view: Why resist? and How to overcome resistance? Major change takes place when people shift their values, aspirations, or behavior. In an organization like the Church this can mean significant shifts in strategies and processes. Fear of change, rather than the reality of it, is typically the major cause of resistance, which is a mental and emotional issue. Why do people resist change? Because it is uncomfortable. Ninety to ninety-five percent of behavior is habitual, fast, effortless, and often satisfying. Major change may be disruptive for people who don't want to let go of what is familiar and comfortable. Getting to commitment to change must be done at one's own pace.

The five Global Challenges approved at our February meeting were considered in turn. Each Challenge study committee, plus the Empower the Young Church study committee presented several best practices or models of ministry that have been successful, as well as identifying characteristics within those programs. Having also reviewed suggestions and feedback from the Synod delegates, the study committees will offer initiatives or recommendations on how the Diocese of

Bridgeport can begin to address the specific stated challenge. Formal recommendations from the bishop, the Synod Commission, and the Office of the Synod will be presented at the May 30 General Session, where the delegates will have an opportunity to vote on each resolution.

- 1. Liturgy and Worship: Every Catholic is called to Full, Conscious, and Active Participation in the worship life of the Church.** Father Tom Thorne cited four areas for emphasis: (1) Foster an attitude of welcome and hospitality at every occasion of prayer and worship. (2) Special attention should be paid to the preparation and delivery of homilies. They should be relevant, inspirational, engaging, and challenging. (3) The cultural and ethnic diversity of each community needs to be reflected and celebrated in its worship life, as well as in all diocesan events. (4) Every ministry associated with the celebration of the sacraments must be revitalized. The committee recommended a roadmap for the entire diocese to create a sacred space within common practices. To enable this, the Liturgical Commission should be reinstated and made permanent. Secondly, the diocese should review and revise sacramental guidelines to strengthen hospitality and welcome ministries, thus encouraging parishes to focus efforts on integrating and celebrating their cultural and ethnic diversity.
- 2. Family Life: There is a need to strengthen and support family life, and to empower and assist parents as the primary teachers of the Catholic Faith.** Al Barber called families to a personal relationship with Christ, to reconnect/connect to the sacraments. He said it was imperative that parents come back to the basics of our faith with their children, and engage in faithful stewardship and service to the Church. We strengthen our Catholic families when personal connections are made in the parishes, and families begin helping families. He suggested that parishes establish new-family home visits, reinforce a welcoming environment, and engage the youth in parish life after Confirmation. Other recommendations were these: Look at Baptismal preparation as the beginning of a journey, take back Sundays, engage whole families in the corporal and spiritual works of mercy, and support those in non-traditional family situations. Bishop Caggiano announced that the diocese shortly will be creating Diocesan Pastoral Outreach services to the divorced and separated, make efforts to streamline the annulment process, and bring resources to bear so that families will return to Church. He also announced the creation of an electronic virtual internet-based Family Life Center with resources to help families in distress.
- 3. Evangelization: We must create concrete plans for evangelization through our parishes, schools, ecclesial movements, and communities.** Father Peter Towsley, presenting for his committee, offered a large number of “Best Practices” or programs that encouraged faith communities in their worship and spiritual life and ministry to others. He also identified the characteristics of a successful program: strong lay participation, intergenerational programs, optimistic outlook, new energy and personal relationships with Christ, charitable work, and attention to traditions and customs. Father Towsley recommended that the Diocese coordinate, facilitate, educate, and fund parish-based evangelization teams through the diocesan office of

ministry, in order that the diocese may create missionary disciples. Bishop Caggiano responded that there would be no diocesan-wide evangelization program; rather all parishes will do something, but not necessarily the same thing.

4. **Leadership: There is a need to continually call, form, and support clergy, religious, and laity in active leadership roles in the life of the Church.** Bob Rooney opened his presentation by describing “Leadership” as a critical enabling capability for transformation, and asserting that true leaders are role models who are spiritually well formed, have excellent management and leadership skills, and exhibit subject matter knowledge and expertise. The challenge when considering vocations is that we must develop a culture that promotes and supports vocations to the priesthood, diaconate and consecrated life in our diocese. Father Ian Jeremiah discussed clergy leadership challenges, asserting that ongoing education, formation and support of clergy is vital to promote holy and healthy living. He advised that clergy training should provide increased emphasis on homiletics and effective community engagement programs and that parishioners and the community support their priests. As a member of this committee, I addressed lay leadership discernment and formation. The committee recommended an approach that, in its simplest form, is two-pronged. First the Faith Community welcomes the gifts and talents of its members, and then those talents are formally developed and employed in parish management and leadership. These parish leaders then become role models for future parish development and the source of a thriving parish atmosphere. The recommended approach to leadership formation incorporated the earlier definition of leaders as role models, and asserted that the object is to create a common framework for formation with resources across the diocese that will be centralized in its focus, but incorporate flexibility for the diversity in our local Churches. Bob Rooney summarized the discussion, adding that the solutions to this challenge will require both managerial and spiritual training so that collaboration and the culture of sharing talent and resources will be promoted.
5. **Faith Formation: We must renew the ministry of faith formation throughout our Diocese, leading each person to a deepening relationship with the Lord Jesus in and through His Church.** Andrea Woronek explained that the definitive aim of catechesis is to put people not only in touch but also in communion with Christ. To do so, we must take Faith from the classroom to discipleship, create a lifelong thirst for catechesis, be joy-filled as an Easter people, and make sure that our faith formation tools are relevant, contemporary and contextualized for the student group. It was suggested that we move away from the traditional academic model towards a more discipleship-focused model, thus creating a journey to conversion. Young adults want to learn about their faith, perform group activities that solidify the message, then spend time to think, reflect, and pray on the experience. They should be integrated into all parish life. As Pope Francis advised, “Do not be afraid to go beyond your boundaries. God is already there.” Bishop Caggiano commented that the Diocese is looking at multiple models of catechesis, and will be formalizing the search at the diocesan level for the most effective models in order to re-imagine and restructure the current system.

6. **Empower the Young Church.** Youth are not a problem to be solved; rather they are Church and should be treated with love and respect, said Christin Nauheimer and Julie Rodgers. When thinking about solutions, they need to be more inclusive, rather than exclusive. A dynamic parish involves all ages in parish liturgies and ministries. Family life will only be strengthened and supported when parishes empower and assist parents as the primary teachers of the Faith. The leaders recommended that parishes meet teens and young adults where they are instead of trying to get them where they ought to be. One program that does this well is St. Aloysius in New Canaan. They also advised that we develop a culture that promotes and supports vocations to religious life. They agreed that a more discipleship-focused model will better suit the diocese and help create a journey to conversion for all ages.

After a brief review of upcoming events and meetings, Bishop Caggiano closed the Fifth General Session of the Fourth Diocesan Synod with the Synod prayer.