

Report on the Third Post-Synod Session

November 19, 2016

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Bishop Frank Caggiano welcomed delegates and outlined the agenda for the day. The three main areas to be discussed were the Catechetical Task Force, Youth and Young Adult Ministries, and the Pastoral Planning Process. Bishop first gave a scriptural context for his overview in order to elucidate where he believes the Lord wants from us. He reminded us that we had chosen the vine and the branches as the context for the Synod. In order to see the fruits of the Synod and bring life to our parishes and diocese, we must focus on the parable of the seed and the sower; the seeds abide in our parishes and communities, and it is up to us to bring these seeds to fruition.

Bishop Caggiano then introduced a series of his ideas to further the goals of the Synod. Among them were creating an annual pilgrimage to the Holy Land for young people, parishes addressing needs and outreach to their communities, a forum for sharing pastoral plans, and the creation of a deanery structure for the diocese. At the latest Presbyterial Assembly, Bishop announced that he has given permission for any pastor who lives alone to move to another rectory if he so chooses. In January, the diocesan deanery structure will be completed, including regional planning for the whole diocese. Bishop also announced that in January Brian Wallace will publish snippets from parishes about how they are fulfilling the Synod goals. This is part of a greater plan to make people more aware of what is happening in our diocesan churches and thus to encourage greater involvement in ministries. Interestingly, Bishop ended his presentation with a short reflection on one's personal relationship with Christ, based in Scripture and experience. He recalled that he had once heard from a nurse that Catholic priests would not minister to non-Catholics in a hospital setting. Such refusals, he said, demonstrated the need for priests to receive ongoing education. Bishop then said, "Where is there room for personal witness, as in AA? Not in the Church. But there should be. First, the homily, then personal witness." This is a very encouraging sign for inclusivity and the spiritual health of our diocese.

Patrick Turner then introduced Patrick Donovan, head of the Leadership Institute that will be launched on January 11, 2017, at Assumption Parish in Westport. The event will include evening prayer, reflections by Chris Padgett, and a reception. The Institute will provide ongoing education for religious and laity through a three-part program: Encounter, Formation, and Discipleship. It is open to all who are interested and will feature personalized learning paths based on the participant's experience of faith, life, and ministry. The study modules include Scripture, morality, creed, prayer, evangelization, sacraments, and spiritual life, to name a few. Digital badges will be issued to indicate accomplishments, skills, qualities, or interests in many environments. Mr. Donovan also gave a report on the Catechetical Task Force

Survey taken in August 2016. The primary finding was that there is no typical parish or formation program in the diocese. He also noted that the survey showed that youth ministry, early childhood formation, and clergy matter. Forty-five percent of parishes reported decreased enrollment. However, where enrollment is increasing, it is a direct result of the parish taking action to revise programming. Additionally, nearly 60 percent of parishes that have preschool programs report that more than 75 percent of preschool families attend Mass regularly.

Among the challenges identified through this survey were widely differing Confirmation programs; parent engagement; more training for DREs, youth ministers, and catechists; more visibility of diocesan support for DREs and their work; and the need to develop an electronic facility where catechists can share ideas and resources. Recommendations included early childhood formation, improved communication, diocesan curates' resources, engaged families, renewal of youth ministry, and catechist formation.

Evan Psencik, Coordinator for Youth and Young Adults, reported on four programs that are up and running, but noted that youth ministry across the diocese is experiencing a wide variety of results in the parishes. World Youth Day in Krakow, Poland (7/22–8/1), was a huge success for the youth of our diocese. Bishop Caggiano has praised the group for their heartfelt response to this experience. CONNected Catholics is a new young adult ministry in the diocese that is having some success through group outreach, Masses, and New Covenant Center meal making. Finally, the C4Y Concert is the result of the Youth Choir organized last year at this time. They will perform a Christmas Concert on December 18. To aid in the development of these ministries to youth and young adults, a diocesan task force will convene in June to determine the best model. The Leadership Institute will help support formation and provide resources for parishes addressing these needs for youth and young adults.

The diocesan Coordinator of Elementary Formation, Rose Talbot-Babey, announced that there will be a Formation Day on January 28, 2017, co-sponsored by the Faith Formation team and the Leadership Institute, whose theme is "Prophets of a Future Not Our Own."

Michelle Smith, Coordinator of the Catholic Service Corps, reported on an inaugural Service Day and Mass at Sacred Heart University on September 24. Another is scheduled for February. Twelve chapters made up of high school- and college-aged students are up and running. It has been noted that youth and young adults want value-driven outreach and engagement with others. But the main reason that service to others is such an important factor in forming Christians is social: How a society cares for those on the margins is an indicator of faith practice and will have residual affects for many years to come.

Patrick Turner, Director of Strategic and Pastoral Planning, next took the podium. He described the Strategic Planning Commission as having eight members with four areas of study: Communications, Procurement, Information Technology/Database

Management, and Human Resources. It has four objectives: to foster servant leadership; to allow the Curia to be more efficient, responsive, and cost effective; to oversee pastoral planning; and to position the Curia to respond more efficiently to the needs of the parishes as they implement the Synod recommendations. As part of the pastoral planning process, the diocese has taken two major steps since April: the Disciple Maker Index results from 29 parishes and communities have been received, and prioritization has begun for the Pastoral Plan for the next two years. Several priorities have been identified: catechesis and education, buildings and facilities, liturgy and worship, evangelization, family life, finances, community life, and leadership formation. At least three of these will become formal goals. The first-year evaluation is slated for September 2017.

Patrick Turner also announced that several events marking outreach to groups on the margins have occurred or are planned. Among them are a prayer service for victims of clergy sexual abuse (11/2/16), a prayer service for racial peace and healing (11/22/16), and events for lesbian and gay Catholics and their families, and diocesan addictions support and Healing (DASH).

The meeting ended at noon. The concluding Post-Synod Session is scheduled for April 29, 2017. On a personal note, I would like to commend Bishop Caggiano for the fine team he has assembled to lead our diocese. Everyone is first-rate and highly qualified. It is obvious that the Catholic Center has become a very fine place to work.