

## **Report on the Final Post-Synod Session- April 29, 2017**

### **Jamie Dance**

The final Synod session opened with a morning prayer. Patrick Turner welcomed the delegates and gave us an outline for the day. He reflected on the Synod process from the initial Listening Sessions in the vicariates to the opening and closing of the Synod, mentioning all the diocesan language groups, youth, parishes, religious, and others involved in the process. The Synod mission statement, “To foster personal conversion and deepen each disciple’s relationship with the Lord Jesus in community with the Catholic Church”, was recalled and formed the basis for our work together. Ten principles were our guideposts for this work: continuity, subsidiarity, accompaniment, sharing and collaboration, evangelical outreach, unity in diversity, creativity, empowering the young Church, accountability, and transparency. In recounting this process, Patrick Turner urged us to see how far we have come and what remains to be done.

Patrick Donovan, Chair of the Catechetical Task Force, next reported on the efforts made toward renewing faith formation in the Diocese of Bridgeport. Their executive summary will be published in its final form in September. However, Patrick did break down their major findings: 1) There is no single “persona” to define a “typical” parish, 2) Nearly twice as many parishes report decreased student enrollment overall (45%) versus those that report an increase (25%), 3) Where enrollment is increasing, in nearly every case it is due to a direct action by the parish in creating/revising programs or parish clergy taking an active, outreach role. A preliminary report, entitled “An Invitation to Lifelong Formation”, detailed “Indicators” and “Recommendations” for effective infant Baptismal preparation, pastoral ministry in early childhood, childhood, First Communion preparation, Confirmation preparation, early and older adolescents, adults, new members (RCIA), marriage preparation, and families. It is a very comprehensive report that details a broad range of issues associated with life in parishes. Donovan said that the focus of catechetical instruction can be summed up in the pillars of Catechism:

Profession of Faith (Creed and Sacred Scripture), Celebration of the Christian Mystery (Liturgy and Sacraments), Life in Christ (Personal and Social Morality), and Christian Prayer. This leads to the six tasks of catechesis: knowledge of faith, liturgical education, moral formation, learning to pray, education for community life, and missionary discipleship and service. Expectations of the parish communities and what parish communities should expect from their members was briefly discussed. That too will be part of parish conversations to understand that each plays an important role in the life, mission, and ministry of a faith community.

Bishop Caggiano next offered thoughts on our Synod journey, and asked Synod delegates to recall personal high points. Many offered their opinions, ranging from the listening sessions, to the opening and closing Masses. Bishop then asked, "Where will we be in ten years?" He answered his own question by replying that it will depend on how well "we connect the dots- people not programs." Bishop will begin to assess how well parishes have implemented the diocesan plans for renewal by making pastoral visits to all the parishes. He will meet with parish officials and challenge them to explain where they are, starting in September. It is important, he says, that the whole diocese be empowered.

Patrick Turner then introduced the next steps in the diocesan plan, and enumerated the already approved initiatives (some on-going, others done): establish the Diocesan Strategic Planning Committee, begin the Comprehensive pastoral Planning Process, establish the Catholic Service Corps, establish the Leadership Institute, create the Council of Religious and Diocesan pastoral Council, implement a Presbyteral Assembly focusing on measures to help priests to live healthy and holy lives. Patrick Turner also listed the approved proposals (some now done): re-establish the Diocesan Liturgical Committee, revise the diocesan sacramental guidelines and diocesan pastoral handbook, strengthen marriage preparation and outreach to couples and those who are separated/divorced, create family life centers, strengthen outreach for priestly vocations, and create a catechetical task force.

Bishop Caggiano ended our Final Post-Synod meeting by recalling the three lessons that he has learned through this process. He said that he has always been impatient, wanting things done now, not later. But the Synod and its implementation have changed him. Now, he says, "Things are done in God's time, not Frank's." A sense of trust has been enkindled, and allows him to surrender to the Lord. Next, he said was "Not in my way, but God's way," a lesson from Our Lady. Finally, Bishop said he is "in shock and awe of God's blessings" and reminded us of the importance of testimony in our prayer lives. With that, he wanted to end by giving us some very good news: the Diocese of Bridgeport will soon be debt-free!

The meeting was adjourned at 11 a.m. in order for delegates to attend a Mass in honor of St. Catherine, the patron saint of the parish where our Synod convened.