

Fourth General Session of the Fourth Diocesan Synod

March 21, 2015

This Synod session began with morning prayer and an outline of the tasks for the day. The first order of business was the Synod delegates' approval of the Declaration following the Third General Session that occurred on February 7, entitled "Discerning the Challenges and Pivoting to Solutions". This document detailed the series of five global challenges that will be addressed in revitalizing our Diocese and will be our most immediate Priority Challenges. As a reminder, they are:

1. Liturgy and Worship: Every Catholic is called to FULL, CONSCIOUS, AND ACTIVE PARTICIPATION in the life of the Church.
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.
3. Evangelization: We must create concrete plans for the evangelization through our parishes, schools, ecclesial movements, and communities.
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.
5. Catechesis and Education: 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.

The vote to approve the Declaration was unanimous. The next order of business was an update on the *Lineamenta* survey that was offered to the delegates. This survey is part of the Vatican Synod on the Family. Only fifty-five responded, amounting to just 16% of the delegates. Three broad themes dominated the responses: education and formation, evangelization, and greater pastoral collaboration. Among the comments mentioned in the survey replies were the importance of active, continuing theological education, particularly for the Confirmed "before it's too late". Also mentioned was the needed shift in the paradigm of clergy pastoral formation towards greater collaboration with the laity, and an initiative to reach out to the disenfranchised in the Diocese.

This session of the Synod was dedicated to "best practices", identifying ways that will push forward the Synod's work into real pastoral activity that will transform our parishes and energize our people. Our first speaker addressed a new model of Youth Ministry. Eric Gallagher, from the Diocese of Sioux Falls, South Dakota, spoke of "Discipleship Focused Youth Ministry: Changing Youth Ministry Models". Eric was young and engaging,

enthusiastic about his work and dedicated to addressing the needs of all young people in his diocese. He first became a youth minister in his hometown at the age of 21. He knew nothing about the work, and his pastor left him to figure it out. He quickly recognized that, even though his students were grouped by age, they were not all on the same page spiritually. No single curriculum or program could suit everyone's needs. He understood that smaller groups were necessary, and this led to his enlisting parents as teachers and youth ministers. It took time to discover what worked, and he found himself shifting models every six months in order to find something to inspire and motivate his students. Now, as head of his Diocesan Youth Ministry Program in Sioux Falls, he has developed a formal program that is followed when a new parish requests his services in setting up Youth Groups. He described four earmarks of Discipleship: intimacy, mutual responsibility, customization, and accountability to growth. He also identified four areas of formation: human, intellectual, spiritual, and pastoral. The process for implementation of his program in parishes is a ground-up approach that is founded on four principles: cultivate an atmosphere for discipleship, begin initial evangelization so that the fruit of discipleship may be used to plant seeds in others, adapt to growth and the needs that come with it, and feed the nations, so that they will spread out and bring others in. His final words were "Go slowly, and wait for pastors to ask for your help."

The next speaker was Jim Lundholm-Eades who is a member of the National Leadership Roundtable on Church Management. His presentation was entitled, "Patterns of Dynamic Catholic Leadership: Changing Leadership and Parish Models". The focus of his talk was Pastoral Councils and the formation of leaders who will guide them. Leadership Roundtable's program for the development of lay leadership is entitled "Good Leaders, Good Shepherds" and the three frames of reference for this task are structure, resources, and culture, all of which are interdependent. Jim explained that in order to resource what a parish is going to structure, it must find leaders that display the culture of the Church. Dynamic leaders must be able to adapt to problems that arise, be able to lead a discourse, gather the right people, set a climate for respectful discourse, and encourage a long-term perspective. Because people attend parishes where they are fed spiritually, parishes often must adapt to problems that range from dissonance to disintegration. He advises a "management by coffee" whereby everyone sits down and talks. When conditions change, leaders must be able to weigh options, keeping good ones in mind, and prepare to adapt as conditions change. Jim's recommendation to any pastoral council is to annually pick two to three items for the parish agenda, so that focus may be kept on the most important

projects. He has also learned that 60% of parishes in the United States have professional business managers, an enormous boon to overworked pastors.

Pete and Claudia Roux of St. John's Parish in Darien gave the third presentation of the day. They spoke on "Changing Evangelization Models: Amazing Parish Conference, Forming Intentional Disciples, Alpha, and Nativity Parish in Timonium, Maryland". They began by discussing tools for evangelization, ways of pointing people to God. Among them were acknowledging that faith is a gift from God, that God uses all of us for a purpose, that we must find people where they are and cooperate with God as we reach out to strangers. They described "Forming Intentional Disciples" as a framework for understanding where people are in their faith journey that allows us to shift our focus to others. There are five thresholds that support this journey of exploration: trust, curiosity, spiritual openness, spiritual seeking, and intentional discipleship. The International Alpha Course stresses the centrality of Christ and the Gospel, and is for anyone who wants a fresh encounter with Christ. It is a ten-week course that ends with a weekend retreat. The Amazing Parish program is based on best practices for a profound encounter with Christ, providing hands-on guidance from experts that help build a community of "amazing" faith. Nativity Parish in Maryland is an example of a parish that went from failing and falling-down to a reenergized church that moved from maintenance to mission in what was called a "Divine renovation".

After midday prayer, Bishop Caggiano asked us to consider the scriptural passages and discern which will become our mission prism, our spiritual guide, reorienting us back to Christ. In the morning we had been asked to submit our top two choices of scripture. From those submitted, two won the largest number of votes. They were, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me (Phi. 4:14)" and "I am the vine, you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit. Apart from me you can do nothing. (John 15:5)" After much debate, some of it heated, the quote from John was accepted. Bishop commented that he was very pleased since both encapsulated the idea that Christ has to be in charge.

Bishop Caggiano then turned to the central question of the day: "Where do we go from here? Methodology for Implementation of Synod Recommendations". He said there are seven principles, all with creative tensions:

1. We want to make both substantial and lasting changes while holding onto the best we do in Christ. Conversion: the sort of change that is lasting and leads to our ultimate goal of salvation.

2. There has to be tension between what comes from above and below, not either/or. The Diocese will practice the principle of subsidiarity, not opposing decision-making that takes place in parishes. The Diocese will reform itself, and will become invisible while parishes more visible. The Diocese will be held accountable for that which parishes can't do themselves, and for what primarily belongs to the Diocese itself. Parishes will be held accountable for what the Diocese asks.
3. The laity has been looking at the Synod from far away, but will need to buy into the reforms. It will take time and trial and error. Synod closure ends nothing; implementation will take a while because we will need to renew programs and initiatives. Bishop calls this kind of working together the "Theology of Accompaniment" that is a journey of faith that will be responded to in an individual way, one person at a time.
4. Accountability, both qualitative and quantitative. We will create benchmarks for success by using the stories of people's lives. Bishop will provide venues to share studies for discerning qualitative change.
5. Creative tension between community (i.e. Latino, etc.) and parochial life will remain. Practices that are not too divergent yet still parochial will be deemed acceptable.
6. Strategic pastoral planning will involve creating roadmaps that will allow the community to be vital and vibrant, and to do things the Synod discerned as priorities. The Diocese, parishes, schools, and ecclesial communities will create these roadmaps.
7. A spirit of collaboration will animate this implementation and allow the tension between priests and deacons, and priests and laity to be admitted and healed. Collaboration is not cooperation. We are looking at Christ, allowing Him to take the lead. We are not in competition for position and authority.

Bishop Caggiano said that communication in the second half of the Synod will get more overt. The implementation program will feature three phases:

1. The Diocese will create its own roadmap with goals and objectives that parishes can realize and qualify/quantify by benchmarks.

2. The Diocese will make resources available for implementation in the parishes. The Diocese will supervise from “below”, and hold parishes accountable for what the Diocese asks.
3. The Diocesan administration will hold itself accountable for its own roadmap. Parishes will be asked to create their own roadmaps, using a process that looks at the five Global Challenges and prioritizes them. Bishop will have to approve all parish plans. Each parish will be asked to give the rationale for its choices. Each parish will need to identify its own benchmarks for success both quantitatively and qualitatively. In each parish, the roadmap will be revised based on success.

At the end of the Synod, this process is permanent. Pastoral planning will be ongoing. A group of laity will be empowered to collaborate with pastors and staff as a new permanent body of leadership in every parish. Bishop Caggiano ended by saying that, in this case, “The journey is as important as the destination.” The bishop encouraged delegates to send suggestions for implementation to Patrick Turner, and promised that a more formal Diocesan proposal will be announced at the next Synod session. Bishop Caggiano was given a standing ovation by the delegates at the end of his presentation. The delegates appreciate his wisdom, courage, and enthusiasm.

Patrick Turner, the Deputy Synod Director, offered the final presentation. Entitled “Combating Lack of Knowledge of Synod/Communicating to the Broader Church Community”, this addressed the problem of Synod information not getting back to the parishes. Patrick offered several suggestions to combat this issue:

1. Delegates could speak to the congregation after Communion, using materials from the Synod office.
2. Delegates could write columns for their bulletins, breaking open the five Challenges and addressing one each week.
3. Parishes could hold assemblies, similar to town hall meetings where there could be two-way communication between the delegate and the assembly.
4. Finally, the Diocese will produce a more consistent stream of information to the parishes.

Bishop Caggiano closed this Synod session with a prayer. He added, “Jesus was born in poverty and anonymity because it was the only way to avoid the enemy.” I believe that he

was referencing Jesus' dire beginnings so that delegates may see Christ in the marginalized, particularly the poor and homeless.