

PASTORAL PLANNING INITIATIVE REPORT

Local Planning Group Meeting: January 7, 2007

And Now the Work Begins

The second phase of the Diocesan Planning Initiative got underway at St. Ambrose Church with six parish teams in attendance. This introductory meeting of our Local Planning Group, (LPG), focused on helping participants come to a fuller realization of the tasks and processes needed to function prayerfully and collaboratively as a group in meeting its responsibilities to invigorate the mission and ministry of Jesus. Sister Anne Bryant Smollin served as facilitator.

Local Planning Group Parishes and Planning Team Members

St. Ambrose: (Fr. Frank DuBois - Sr. James Marie – Theresa DeAngelis – Caroline Gomez – Dolores Murphy – Richard Ostiguy)

St. Clare's: (Fr. Tom Konopka –George Cline –Nadine Cunningham –David Eads –John Szypulski –Nancy Volks – Ann Walsh)

St. Francis DeSales: (Fr. David Noone – Mary Beth Buchner - Jack Hauck – Ed Prince - Terry Ryan – Nancy Streeter and
At-Large, Carla Hood – Steve Mawn – Joan O'Sullivan – Fran Ralph)

St. Pius X: (Fr. Michael Farano – Gayle Bouchard – Mary Beth Ryan – Nancy Urusky – Sandy Zelka)

Our Lady of Assumption: (Fr. Geoffry Burke – Linda Berkery – Lillian Cunniff – Vic Gilbert – Margaret Griffin
– Jim Morrell- Mary Ellen Egelston)

Our Lady of Mercy: (Fr. John Waldron - Robert Gallati – Mark Keegan – John Kennedy – Bill Mielke – Anne Snyder)

WHY?

Qs: “Why,” you might ask, “is the Bishop having the whole diocese go through a planning process? I’ve heard that some parishes have had to merge because of dwindling numbers, but our parish is doing just fine.” “Hasn’t the Bishop already made up his mind?” “What does pastoral planning mean, anyway?” “What can I do about it?”

A: While there is still much uncertainty, even among PPG members, about the future and the outcomes of the “Called to Be Church” initiative, even a cursory look at what the diocese is facing will tell us there most certainly is a problem everywhere and that it is better to address it now rather than later. Look at these numbers.

- The Albany Diocese currently has 166 parishes in 14 counties. Somewhere between the years 2015 and 2020, there will only be 95 priests available to serve in parishes. This reality means only one priest for every two parishes, on average. The table shows what it will be like just in the capital district.

County	Albany	Schenectady	Rensselaer	Saratoga
# of Parishes	30	17	25	12
# Priests (2015-2020)	19	9	12	11

- There are roughly 9,830 families registered in parishes in our regional planning group. The number of *individuals* who attend weekend Masses is approximately 6,584. Since families consist of more than one person, you can see there is a dramatic difference between active and inactive Catholics when total numbers of individuals are taken into consideration. The median age of parishioners is 49.1.

These numbers seem to indicate that we have both a priest and a people problem; we have a shortage of both!

The First Planning Meeting: Challenges

Sister Anne confronted those in attendance with the following challenges:

- How can we come to own the process? [“It doesn't belong to one person; it doesn't belong to a pastor; it belongs to all of us because we are all church and we all have to own this.”]
- Who are we in relationship to Jesus and who is Jesus for us? [“Our response to this question as a group will ultimately influence the church for this Local Planning Group and our Diocese when we arrive at the recommendations phase of our ongoing pastoral planning process in June of 2008.”]
- How can each identify their own unique skills and strengths that will contribute to the whole? [What are the gifts and talents that we need to achieve the goals of creating a “Called To Be Church?”]
- Where are we now? What insights can we draw from the profiles of our various parishes? [“What do we see happening among parishes? What ministries are well done? How could we strengthen ministry in this Local Planning Group? How are we doing at fulfilling the mission of Jesus?”]

The First Planning Meeting: Insights and Concerns

In six groups, with members from each parish, the challenges were discussed and insights reported to the whole group.

Owning the Process

The planning process and its outcome belong to all of the people in the parishes. The members of the Planning Group are your representatives. Your input will be sought, valued, and incorporated. We cannot and should not do this alone.

Our Relationship With Jesus

This must be the focus and foundation of the planning process. Our perceptions of Jesus – Lord, Son of God, Savior, Father, Abba, etc. will lead us to see Him as friend, guide, and spiritual support, which in turn will lay the foundation for prayerful discernment and recommendations.

Skills and Strengths We Will Need

The groups' came up with an impressive list of needed skills and talents. Most were mentioned in all groups.

- **Personal:** Realistic- Patient – Prayerful – Visionary – Innovative – Practical - Tolerant of other's ideas - Accepting of change- Ability to listen – Joyful – Optimistic - Flexible
- **Group Leaders:** Good organizers - Ability to prioritize – Ability to focus and refocus - Good people skills- Good public speaking – Committed - No empire building – Build on others' strengths
- **Communication:** Communicate to this group and to the parishes. - Don't limit the process to these meetings - Know that we don't have all the answers. - Seek others' opinions. - Reach out to the young, the elderly, and all other groups that are part of the church such as clergy, former clergy/religious, single people, the divorced and widowed, inactive and fallen-away Catholics
- **Preparation:** Do research - Read the materials- Study other churches.

Parish Profile Insights

- Lack of young people in this group
- Data not sufficient. No trend data or baselines. Hard to analyze in relationship to the questions.
- Discrepancy between the number of families who attend church versus individuals who attend
- The low number of RCIA candidates from each parish
- More funerals than baptisms
- Relatively homogenous group
- A lot of duplication of services. We're not efficient.
- Parishes very isolated; work independently
- # of people trained to lead Sunday service without a priest - something that we need to look at
- Faith formation through Confirmation, nothing after that to educate/keep students connected.
- Each parish does many ministries well, but little sharing among them, no specialization such as the fire houses do

The last part of the meeting took people through an exercise designed to highlight how participants perceive the group process and their role in it. Many feelings were expressed:

“I had a piece to contribute.” - “I felt left out.” – “I had to sit back and wait.” - “I really wanted to push forward.” - “I could find similarities and connections.” – “I had the piece that didn't quite fit.”

These feelings are akin to feelings we will likely experience as we go through the process, not only in the planning group, but also in the parishes. Sr. Anne concluded, “Maybe things may not quite go together. Things may not always look like they fit. And sometimes things will be awkward and there will spaces. So we have to figure out what to do. The important thing is that we identify our roles and work together.”