



Parish Pastoral Planning 101

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You may have heard recently that your parish is entering into a pastoral planning process for 2016. You probably have many questions about what exactly that means, what is involved in the process, and the timeline for a parish pastoral plan. This article will attempt to address many of those questions.

One of the major initiatives that emerged from the Synod was the recommendation that every parish in the Diocese engage in a comprehensive and intentional process to create a parish pastoral plan for the next two years. Throughout the Synod, the Delegates recognized that there were many strengths in our individual parishes, but also identified a number of challenges facing our parishes and our Diocese.

What was noted was that a number of our parishes operated on a year-to-year process, responding to the immediate needs, without having the occasion to step back and carefully and intentionally set priorities and identify needs to be addressed. This process is designed to provide that opportunity for a broader discussion of goals and a renewal of our parishes.

The Office of Strategic and Pastoral Planning (OSPP) was created in January 2015 to provide the resources to assist the parishes in the Diocese in implementing this Synod initiative. Led by Fr. Michael Dogali, Vicar for Strategic Planning, and Patrick Turner, Director of Strategic and Pastoral Planning, the Office will develop the materials and provide the formation necessary to assist parishes in drafting a two-year pastoral plan.

Ideally, parish pastoral planning helps to answer the questions:

- Who are we as a parish?
- What are we called to do?
- How are we best going to do it?
- Do we have the necessary resources, personnel and structures in place to do what we want to do?

Pastoral Planning will provide the priests, deacons, religious, professional staff and lay leaders of each parish the opportunity to engage in **ongoing, systematic and comprehensive** planning toward the establishment of each parish's plan for long-term viability and pastoral vitality. The goal is to create a mechanism by which every aspect of parish life is intentional, missionary driven, and open to periodic evaluation and improvement. It is important this process be rooted in prayer and open to the guidance

of the Holy Spirit, and that those involved are faithful to patient discernment and study and committed to creating a plan with the Pastor that will set the roadmap for vitality and vibrancy.

The pastoral planning process will consist of five components:

- Collection of data, including financial, sacramental, pastoral, demographic and the state of the parish's physical plant;
- Evaluation of that data;
- Identification of Strengths, Challenges and Priorities for the next two years;
- Creation of a two-year pastoral plan that addresses both the parish's particular challenges and the Synod's global challenges, and;
- Evaluation of that plan on an annual basis.

In order to undertake this planning process, each parish has been asked to identify 6-10 lay leaders to serve as a **Planning Task Force** for the next nine months. Pastors have been encouraged to seek out members of their parish and finance councils and trustees to serve on this body, but also to invite new lay leaders into this visioning process. The Pastor will serve as the leader of the Planning Task Force.

There are a number of broad steps to the planning process after the establishment of the Planning Task Force.

1. Each Planning Task Force will be asked to review a parish snapshot provided by the Office of Strategic and Pastoral Planning in early February that will include financial, pastoral and sacramental data trends over the last few years.
2. After reviewing the parish snapshot, the Planning Task Force will be asked to complete a parish self-assessment evaluation: identifying pastoral strengths and challenges through the prism of the Synod global challenges, a projection of the financial resources for the coming years, and a review of the current condition of all parish buildings.
3. After meeting with parish staff, pastoral and finance council members and trustees to review the parish self-assessment, the Planning Task Force will identify several priorities for the next two pastoral years.
4. Provide opportunities this spring and summer for the broader parish community to have discussions with the Planning Task Force about the priorities established, before the finalized pastoral plan is submitted to Bishop Caggiano by September 30, 2016.

In addition to the process outlined above that will be undertaken in all 82 of our parishes, 29 parishes will also be participating in the Disciple Maker Index (DMI) survey offered through the auspices of the Catholic Leadership Institute in Philadelphia. Thanks to a generous donor, these self-selected parishes will have the opportunity to engage their parishioners in a broad-based survey that will allow respondents to reflect on their own personal spiritual growth and discipleship and identify ways in which the parish effectively supports that growth. By asking questions about the parish, individual spiritual growth, participation, and satisfaction, these parishes will receive feedback that will help them discern their priorities for the coming years.

As a means to support this planning process, Fr. Dogali will be meeting throughout the spring with each pastor individually to review their parish data and to engage in a conversation about their particular parish priorities. In addition, there will be several *"Pastoral Planning 101"* workshops designed specifically for the Planning Task Force members to come together, share ideas and experiences, and to learn best practices from local and national experts.

All of this: the planning process, the data review, the consultations and collaboration, and the identification of goals for a parish pastoral plan, is designed to strengthen our parishes, to identify needs, to celebrate strengths, and to position our churches to be beacons of lights to the people of Fairfield County for many years to come.

You will hear much more about this process in the coming months. You are encouraged to actively engage in the consultation opportunities provided in your parish. Provide your thoughts and ideas to your pastor and your Planning Task Force. This is a wonderful moment for our Diocese in light of the Synod – a fire has been lit and it is an exciting time to be part of the church in Fairfield County!