



Responses to specific questions from Facilitators:

Communication Plans:

First, the diocesan website at www.syrдио.org has an enhanced site for pastoral planning and for the Vicar for parishes. We are continuing to add items to the site and welcome your thoughts about other items that you believe might be added to it.

Communications regarding the issues that are facing the diocese have been shared by every means available since 1983. It seems to be an inherent truth of the human condition that we are so involved in our own life stories that certain realities do not “register” until they affect us directly. The ‘Seeing Natural Bridges Process’ has asked PCA planning groups to be particularly attentive to strategies to communicate with “the people in the pews” about the future. We are listening for your wisdom. Are there ways that the diocese can improve its “macro” communication? Probably, give us your thoughts. Yet, the “micro” is also important. What are the methods that should be utilized by the PCA and parishes to provide an understanding to active parishioners and others?

Decisions and the Planning Process:

The challenge of pastoral planning lies in the fact that it is made ambiguous by the unique situations of the priesthood. The bishops of Syracuse have been steadfast in inviting input and ideas from planning groups from throughout the diocese. The groups have been listened to and their recommendations respectfully discussed. At every level the bishops have asked local groups to investigate, ponder and propose options for their choices. Once those recommendations have been made and the bishop has consulted his advisors he is guided by his prayer and the wisdom that God gives to him.

The diocese is 5600 square miles. He is responsible to assure the best pastoral practice that is possible in every area of the diocese. Literally a decision that impacts S.E. Broome County has implication in Oswego County, and the process goes on.

The most difficult part of the planning process may be that it has built in ambiguities. A diocesan plan is unlike a business plan. The variables in diocesan pastoral planning are different from those in business strategic planning. And, both methods are fraught with natural limits.

To name one variable the bishop has no control over the age and availability of priests. Currently (022715) there are 16 priests serving beyond the Canonical retirement of age of 75 and a similar number over the optional retirement age of 70. Most of these are pastors. In each case, the individual priest will determine the age at which his service will be completed. When he makes that decision, the bishop must make a final determination about priest staffing of the vacant pastorate. The recommendations that have been offered by the planning groups form a significant basis for his decisions.

There are other unique ambiguities to pastoral planning, however, the scenario offered above will provide a sense of the challenge and limitations experience by the bishop in the exercise of his office.

Mass Schedules:

The directive about Mass schedules was addressed to every parish and each PCA. As we all learned together from “a view from 20,000 feet,” when one looks at the rate of Mass attendance in the diocese, the seating capacity of the churches, and the number of weekend liturgies, the parishes may have, diocesan wide, 40% to 50% more scheduled weekend Masses than are needed to serve the spiritual needs of parishioners.

Add to this factor, the reality of a declining number of priest celebrants, and the issue of Mass schedules takes on a special challenge. On the one hand, every parish needs to have celebrations that welcome full, conscious, active participation. On the other hand, to have priest celebrants available at as many parishes for as long as possible it is clear that every parish needs to consolidate its Mass schedule.

The bishop has asked that every PCA create a Mass schedule that will allow the priest of the area to cover each other in the event of illness, vacation, or other variable. If the area is unable to do this the PCA is asked to invite the participation of the pastoral planning office.

We have been suggesting that pastors and their planning groups design the schedule so that catechesis and preparation may occur this spring. This would allow the preliminary use of the new schedule for the summer or for a period mutually agreed upon by the pastors. In the fall of 2015, this schedule may be tweaked or modified, if necessary. After further catechesis, the new schedules can be initiated simultaneously, perhaps as we enter 2016. We hope that the combination of catechesis and collaborative effort will sustain parishioners in their parish.

The second Mass schedule invites a discussion of what the Mass schedule will look like in the area after the announced re-alignments are executed. This Mass schedule, which may continue to be tweaked, will be held in reserve until the future plan for the area is implemented.

Oratory:

The diocesan definition of an Oratory is found on page 43 of “Seeing Natural Bridges,” where it states, “A sacred space that exists for the convenience of a group of the faithful. The local bishop defines the liturgical functions celebrated at an oratory/devotional chapel, which is the responsibility of a neighboring parish.”

Currently St. Mary in Florence and St. Mary in Irish Ridge are designated as oratories or devotional chapels. Our Lady of the Snow in Otter Lake is designated as a ‘summer chapel, which is a form of an oratory. Each of these oratories is self-sustaining. Florence

and Irish Ridge are each surrounded by cemeteries that create another layer of concern and administration

Looking to the future, one notes that as the number of priests available for the celebration of Mass and the Sacraments and the desire continues that sustainable parishes remain open a shift in the manner that we celebrate Mass on weekends will develop. Most likely the biggest shift in the future will be toward central parishes being the site of weekend worship.

As these transitions occur, a number of parishes at which weekend liturgies are not celebrated will continue to exist so long as they are sustainable. They will be able to be used by their faith communities for all functions except weekend Masses. The specific presence of each of these oratories will be articulated in a “memorandum of understanding” formulated between the oratory and parish hosting weekend Masses and authorized by the local bishop, at the time these parishes enter into that new relationship.

A question has arisen about whether or not these sites might be designated as missions rather than oratories. A mission is “a community of the faithful committed to the care and administration of another parish” and thus the definition might seem applicable. The difference is that missions are the site of weekend Mass. As the number of Eucharistic Celebrants continues to decrease it will become very difficult to use the designation, ‘mission.’

The diocese is also receiving questions regarding the criterion that will be the basis of receiving designation as an oratory. This question continues to be a dynamic issue in the College of Consulters’. Here is the framework. The diocese covers 5600 square miles. Whatever their number, the full time active priests of the diocese must be distributed to care for the entire area of the diocese. While the issue continues to be discussed, the conversation has considered the concept of identifying “Core Parishes.” **IF** adopted we would move toward the “hub and spokes” concept of parish organization. This method is frequently used by dioceses that are further along on this journey. The hub would be the site of weekend Masses, the spokes would continue their life as ‘faith communities.’ The diocese is not prepared to launch this style of structure at this time. However, clear the College of Consulters’ needs to make a recommendation to the bishop about the deployment of active priests that meets the needs of the people and reflects a clear application of the Code of Canon Law.

PCA Planning Groups which are described in more detail in other places in this document are consultative not administrative in nature. The civil and canonical authority of managing parishes is entrusted to the pastor or Canonical administrator. Each parish is responsible for the work of its trustees, finance council, and pastoral council. With this foundational information, the PCA planning group is empowered to study, design and recommend programs and ways for parishes to work together to develop a mutual sense of identity. This may include recommending the development of shared ministries, economies of scale, centralized programs, joint efforts, and methods for funding these efforts. At this time, it is already clear, that every parish should expect that in its future, at some time,

it is likely to be linked to another parish. In the future different levels of mutuality with its neighbors will need to be considered.

In the future, the PCA Planning group may anticipate that the official group: pastor, trustees, and Pastoral Council offices will meet on a more infrequent basis to maintain a sense of the PCA. The “micro” work will be done by pastors and lay leadership of parishes that are being, linked, clusters, or becoming oratories.

As we develop a greater sense of mutuality in ministry as pastoral care areas the discussion of the types, varieties, methods and funding for a vast variety of pastoral ministry ranging from adult education to youth ministry; catechesis and evangelization to health care ministry among senior adults; from Mass attendance to parish business management & facilities; from sacramental formation to effective parish organizations, will be on the intersecting agendas of each of these collaborative groups. Interdependence is replacing independence in parish planning.

PCA Planning Group Membership: This is a formal group of official representatives

While the group may consult, hold town meetings; ask question to staff and others, Bishop Cunningham and Bishop Moynihan before him have joined us in setting an official structure.

The original structure was pastors, trustees (the 2 lay trustees are members of the legal corporation which consists of the Pastor, themselves, the bishop and the vicar general.

Two representatives of the pastoral council, usually the chair and vice chair because the council has the responsibility to join the pastor in clearly developing a vision for the future of the parish.

Thus, the distinctions were developed based on the Code of Canon Law and the New York State Religious Corporations Laws to utilize and enhance the designated roles of those named.

The only change that we have recommended, largely because of their pastoral role is that the ordained should be present so they know and can articulate what is going on in the area.

As to term limits, the trustee term limits are set by law. Trustees serve one year terms. They are recommended by the pastor and elected by the pastor as nominator and the Bishop and Vicar General. Five years is recommend as the total number of terms, however, with the authorization of the pastoral council acting with the pastor years six to ten are possible.

The Diocesan term guide for Pastoral Councils recommends terms of three years with 1/3 of the membership being elected each year and the leadership discerned each year.

As the PCA planning group morphs into it future style, the transitional nature of our parish leadership will require the development of an orientation program, and some emphasis will be placed on the periodic ‘re-forming’ of the groups.

PCA Collaborations (other):

We are finding ourselves periodically ‘tongue-tied’ by the Church’s preference for the word ‘council’ to designate consultative bodies.

Certainly, PCA Planning Groups (of which pastors are members) are welcome to create **'Ad Hoc' committees** to explore the issues that need exploring. Likewise, they may invite to these time-limited groups people with the specific expertise to explore the question. It would seem appropriate that a member of the PCA Planning Group act as the chair or facilitator of ad hoc groups.

PCA Collaboratives: Previous communications have spoken of 'cluster councils.' We have discovered that this language is perceived to be confusing. While we seek a more descriptive title we will use 'collaborative' because it describes the function. As we move through the current stage of 'Seeing Natural Bridges, PCA Planning Group may wish to streamline some of their activity by using a hybrid 'executive committee' formed of a smaller group of people and focused on more long-range objectives than those which would lead to an ad hoc committee. As an example, such a collaborative might focus on the key goals identified in the 'Seeing Natural Bridges' process. Many groups identified evangelization, youth ministry, welcoming new parishioners, moving beyond parochialism as particular foci of their work. The full group may be too large to develop a long-range strategy; a collaborative may host a more focused dialogue and plan.

Linkage or Clustering Committees: First a reminder is offered to you. A linkage is the unity of two parishes which have a common pastor. A Cluster is a group of three or more parishes that have a common pastor. Using the principle of subsidiarity, parishes that are to be linked or clustered should begin working together or, in a term more prevalent in the literature – dating. These groups formed of members of pastoral councils or parish wisdom figures need not be large. Indeed, four to six people may be sufficient. These may involve individuals other than those on the PCA Planning Group for they are doing more localized work. Their work is important as their primary work is to provide for a smooth movement toward cooperation between the two parishes.

Other questions:

- 1) How will we be able to consolidate in a positive and necessary way and at the same time evangelize and try to bring back lost Catholics, people who are divorced and grow the church?

The question raises a significant concern and it also focuses a specific challenge for us all. If our focus is on the parish as Church rather than on the parish as a local community of the Church, the process of realignment will have a negative impact on the desired pastoral results. However, the focus is on the evolution of the faith community and its depth rooting in the Gospel, we should be able to move forward under the direction of the Holy Spirit.

We are all aware that the extensive numbers of beautiful parish churches were created by the people of the European immigrations of the late 19th and early 20th century. The diminished population and the loss of business and industry have left our faith community in a challenged position with regard to sustainability. It is much easier to grow the local church than it is to deal with its re-organization. However, our focus is on the health of the future even as we strive to deal with our sense of loss.

2) Create a list of requirements that need to be done at the local level. What are the expectations that the diocese has of local groups?

- We are working on this item. Today's conversation is part of developing those understandings.
- This note is being added on 4 March in the aftermath of the meeting. We clearly hear the desire of facilitators that they be provided with clear, specific, tasks for each meeting. Perhaps in the manner of the direction received in "Seeing Natural Bridges."