

## 2012 Focus Session Findings: Executive Summary

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This report consists of the following: A) Background, B) Facilitator Observations, C) Areas of highlight, and, D) recommendations. This summary is provided to the PPC leadership at the 03.09.2013 DPC Meeting.

**Pages 2-4: The areas of highlight will be noted in five clusters:** 1) Leadership Development and the future, 2) Communication, 3) Reconfiguration/Clustering, 4) Collaboration, 5) Formation Issues, and, 6) Resource Concerns. **The Recommendations are found on page 5-6.**

### **Background:**

The Process: From Thanksgiving Day 2012 to Memorial Day 2013, Father Jim Lang and Brother Edward Falsey, OFM Conv. Invited groups with similar ministries and parish leaders by PCA to reflect on the current and future needs of the diocese and its parishes. These meetings, for those who participated, were characterized by candor, faith, and the desire to maintain dynamic Catholic Communities.

The invited participants included, all priest (active and retired) all religious involved in parish ministry, seminarians, deacons, parish faith formation directors, parish staff members, parish pastoral council key leadership and parish trustees. Nearly 150 focus sessions were convened and most of these were attended by 7 to 10 people. There were several gatherings at which it was evident these sessions had not been promoted by their pastors. Pastors are the primary source of information to parish based leaders.

This summary will not report all of the findings. The summary findings are available to those who would lo read them. This précis will highlight the themes that may define diocesan administrative and program actions for the near future. Therefore, the salient themes that may be adapted by our local Church, and which coursed through the priests, religious, seminarian and deacon sessions will be added here. We will highlight the intensity of agreement in the most noted areas.

Based on the projection that there will be 81 priests (ages 26-75) serving the people of the diocese in 2020, the projected absence of religious in parish ministry (due to their aging cadre), and the continued diversification of the Catholic Community in the diocese it is clear that a new leadership strategy is necessary and that we have only a brief period to implement it. Our situation is urgent.

### **Facilitator Comments:**

#### **Facilitator Observations:**

- A. People love, support and are concerned for their pastors. They also express concern that pastors, of most age groups, seem to lack the skills and/or willingness to develop the new methods of pastoring. The theme of training and mentoring priests for these new leadership systems is a recurring theme.

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- B. Most participants are proud of what they accomplished in the earlier phases of reconfiguration. They are very aware that the process is not completed.
- C. The former emphasis on parochialism, that was so successful in its time, leaves us with a very difficult challenge in welcoming neighboring parishes into collaboration. The need for a high level of collaboration which includes linking and cluster remains a challenge to older parishioners. On the other hand, the lack of overt parish identification by family aged parishioners poses issues of sustainability.
- D. The former pastor centered parish needs to be transformed to see itself as a community centered parish that enjoys the presence of a pastor.

### **Area 1: Leadership Development and the Future:**

- I. All groups are clearly aware that the process of developing new leadership styles and roles is an on-going work in progress.
- II. The most anticipated addition to the leadership cadre is the addition of Canon 517.2 – Parish Life Directors or Coordinators. Also discussed were two other roles that will occur in a parish and report directly to the pastor. These will be discussed as pastoral life Assistants and parish program facilitators.
- III. There is an abiding concern in the process about the on-going training of priests particularly in collaborating more effectively with the laity. The most poignant requests have been linked to establishing the levels of trust, delegation, and models for authority sharing that will be necessary of collaborative ministry.
- IV. Participants noted the training needs including formation that are necessary for the new roles in parish ministry. This theme included the requests for information about needed competencies, professional training, standards, role descriptions, evaluative processes, salary structures and other Human Resources elements essential to a professional ministry team.
- V. All participants were willing to share their own experiences of linking, merging, clustering, as well as their own visions of the future. Section will note the key best practices that they highlighted.
- VI. Deacon participants indicated openness to a high degree of involvement, responsibility, and the creation of a Deacon Personnel Process that would place their ministry in the

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locations where it is most needed. Several deacons shared an interest in becoming Canon 517.2 Parish Life Coordinators.

- VII. Participants urged increased emphasis on recruiting potential candidates for permanent deacons, parish life coordinators, faith formation specialists, etc., and increased training for each of these groups.
- VIII. The need for mandatory diocesan standards in preparation for the Sacraments is strongly urged, particularly among Faith Formers, shopping for Baptism, First Reconciliation, First Communion, and Confirmation programs has created significant opportunities for parish shopping and confusion among parishioners. The collaboration of neighboring parishes in offering a menu of opportunities for all parishioners is likewise encouraged.

### **Area B: Communication:**

- IX. Communication with parishioners and others remains a vibrant topic. It is noted that the Diocese has been actively communicating the changing needs of the diocese since 1983. However, it is also noted that the message does not have the level of penetration required to promote community pastoral planning and the reality based change that grows from it.

### **Area C: Reconfiguration/Clustering**

- X. Participants are aware that there will be a continuing evolution in the structures of parish life, including the development of a parish cluster management style involving priests, deacons, parish life coordinators, and other parish ministries. They are also aware that in many locations a team of qualified professionals serve as a central team to a cluster.

### **Area D: Key Collaborations:**

- X. Priests are aware of but hesitant about the needs for re-defining the priests' personnel system and its policies for term and tenure. With 41 % of our assigned priests now age 68 or higher and another 32% between the ages 60-62 the urgency of the moment is poignant.

The redistribution of the parish and diocesan work-load will not diminish. The new cadre of professionals in needed now. The distribution of priest personnel will become an ever more sensitive issue and require greater collaboration.

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- XI. There is a bedrock concern about enhancing evangelization, parish based hospitality, youth and young adult ministries, and recruiting the next generation of parish based volunteers. Indeed, some expressed concern that in a number of parishes the aging arc of priests seems to be matched by the aging arc of parishioners.

### **Area E: Formation and Training Concerns:**

- XI. There is a foundational hope that the ministry of the priest will have an ever greater focus on the spiritual formation of the faith community, and our parishes are to be communities be isles of Sabbath, peace and community in the midst of the world. While the most frequent wording for this request is framed in terms of tradition such as Eucharistic Devotion, Bible Study Groups, Adult Religious Education, etc. There is a clear awareness that we need to develop some new 'wineskins' to welcome an ever changing community.

- XII. Faith Formation leaders, pastors, and most others share a deep concern that methods for adult engagement in parish life particularly with PARENTS be designed, highlighted and implemented. We need means to connect families to parish life. Faith formers also seek to increase the number of men who teach in religious education programs, lest the life of faith be seen simply as a role for women. Male role models are important.

### **Area E: Resource Concerns:**

- XIII. Priests also express deep concern about the limitations of resources. With due respect for the recent and successful implantation of the increased offering campaigns the tension of parish life with the costs of shared diocesan services (i.e. the insurance systems), assessments (i.e. Catholic Schools) and other demands of parish income, which parallel the rest of the non-profit world, leave pastors with a tension between the current needs of the Church and the need to intentionally prepare for its future. The vortex of these issues may be an avenue for diocesan assistance in preparing, training, certifying, the new personnel identified by parishes.

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### Recommendations:

- 1) Re-align Pastoral Care Area [PCAs] for future collaboration:
  - a. The existing PCA groups are a good place to begin, although their borders should be porous and open to new configurations.
  - b. Recommended participants in the PCA identification process would be the Pastor and Pastoral Council Chair/Vice Chair of each parish
  - c. Groups should dialogue about natural inter-parochial collaborations, distance, significant commonalities (i.e. school systems), and the potential for linkage or clustering as may be required in the future.
- 2) Prepare for the use of Canon 517.2 in the Diocese of Syracuse:
  - a. Discern and publish role specifications for the use of Deacon and Lay Parish Life Coordinators under the description found in 517.2 in which the diocesan bishop appoints parish leadership who have direct responsibility to him in collaboration with a parish priest/moderator.
  - b. Identify the model or models to be used in clustering with a view toward the relationship of the priest pastor/moderator and the Parish Life Coordinator.
  - c. Discern and promulgate faith, educational and experience requirements for those to be considered for appointment applying 517.2.
- 3) Acknowledge and develop the specific role specifications and training for other parish pastoral leadership who work in tandem with a pastor rather than in a Canon 517.2 appointment. Namely,
  - a. A Pastoral Associate who is appointed by and responsible to the pastor for ministry assisting him with specific areas in the care of one or more parishes.
  - b. a Pastoral Aide who may be designated by the bishop or a pastor, so authorized by the bishop, for the purpose of coordinating the life of a parish (i.e. the current situation of New Berlin).
- 4) Develop and implement a renewed pastoral planning communication plan directed to parish level communication.
  - a. Develop Hope Appeal, homily time, video presentations that inform and positively point toward the future.
  - b. Design and facilitate the ability of parishes or pastoral care areas to hold and benefit from town meetings.

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- c. Develop training programs for parish staffs that examine 1) Collaboration, 2) Internal and external Communication, 3) conflict resolution, 4) Inter-parochial program facilitation, 5) economies of scale, and 6) planning techniques.
  - d. Offer evenings of recollection in which members of parish finance councils and parish pastoral councils may examine ways to strengthen their efforts for the mission of the parish.
  - e. Include, in the Catholic Sun and Syrdio.org, a series that explores the outcomes of the Sustaining Pastoral Excellence Initiative and the Emerging Models of Pastoral Leadership Project.
- 5) Identify, mentor and collaborate with those pastors/parishes that may be among the first to formally use the 517.2 model of leadership in a cluster.
  - 6) Provide specialize training for pastors under age 60, and others who desire it, training in the models of ministry used in the pastoring of parishes in the United States and Canada.
  - 7) Review flexibility and vibrancy of the Priests' Personnel process (appointment, term, and tenure)
  - 8) Review the flexibility and vibrancy of the Deacon personnel process.
  - 9) Engage the New Evangelization at all levels.