

Faith in our Future At-a-Glance

Faith in Our Future is a process through which the Diocese of Trenton, its parishes and ministries, will plan to meet challenges and respond to new opportunities for sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ for years to come.

FIVE GOALS

Bishop David M. O'Connell, C.M., has identified five goals for Faith in Our Future:

► **Strengthen and enliven**

the parishes of the Diocese as well as diocesan sponsored organizations and ministries.

► Explore **new models of leadership**

in parishes and ministries in institutional settings (schools, colleges, hospitals, nursing homes, prisons, etc.) in order to address the challenges presented by the anticipated retirement of a large number of clergy and religious over the next 10 years.

► **Improve our stewardship** of personnel, finances, and facilities and other parish and diocesan resources.

► Establish **collaborative relationships** among the parishes and ministries of the Diocese that will build upon the Gospel to re-evangelize the local Church, especially those who live on the fringes of the Church, as well as those who do not yet know Christ.

► Provide for pastoral ministry to **Hispanic Catholics**, the fastest growing segment of our Diocesan population, within our parishes and organizations.



MONTHLY UPDATE March 2016

This MONTHLY UPDATE is a report from the Diocese of Trenton on Faith in Our Future, the pastoral planning process to strengthen parishes.

MARCH HIGHLIGHTS

Cohort process now underway

For the first time in the Faith in Our Future initiative, neighboring parishes across the Diocese came together as small groups, or Cohorts, in March to begin the next step of the pastoral planning process.

The Parish Cohorts – each made up of several Parish Core Teams – began their work during one of five training sessions held March 15 and 16 in various locations throughout Burlington, Mercer, Monmouth and Ocean Counties. There are 25 Parish Cohorts, ranging in size from three to six parishes. All 107 parishes of the Diocese belong to a cohort.

The Parish Cohort process is Step 2 in an 18-month, 8-step overall initiative. For this new phase, Cohorts will use what they learned from the self-study/evaluation process that was conducted in all parishes from December to early March and included parishioner surveys, town hall meetings, small group discussions and verification of parish census and sacramental data.

In this new step, each Cohort is to work as a single unit, determining how best to strengthen the parishes included in its group. The Cohorts are tasked with evaluating their parishes and developing suggestions for an organizational model or models and other measures that will allow the parishes to meet the goals set by Bishop David M. O'Connell, C.M., for the future path in the Diocese.

More than 500 parishioners took part in the March training. The Cohorts will have had a total of six meetings running from March through May, and will submit their preliminary suggestions to the



Father Phillip C. Pflieger, pastor of St. Isaac Jogues Parish, Marlton, and episcopal vicar of Burlington County, engages in discussion during the Parish Cohort training held in his parish in mid-March. Craig Pittelli photos

Planning Commission by June.

Representatives of the pastoral planning consultant firm, the Reid Group, conducted the training sessions, walking cohort members through organizational details and helping them to understand their roles in the overall process. Each training session also afforded an opportunity for cohort members to get to know one another and begin to share findings from the parish self-studies.

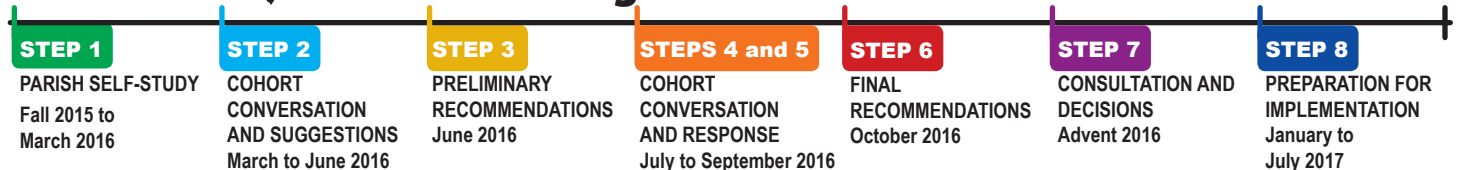
Called to Lead, Serve

John Reid, who led several training sessions, reminded Cohort members of the challenges facing the Diocese in the areas of ministry, demographics and finances, to name a few. While Faith in Our Future is a response to those challenges, Reid said, it is also an opportunity to imagine a parish community that is vibrant, mission-driven and transformational.

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Planning Process Timeline



Here's where we are in Faith in Our Future ...

STEP 2 | COHORT CONVERSATION & SUGGESTIONS

MARCH 2016 TO JUNE 2016

- Cohorts come together for training March 15, 16 at one of five sessions held around the Diocese.
- Cohorts meet throughout spring to review reports submitted by Parish Core Teams and discuss different measures that would address the need to be more effective as Church. These discussions will include, but are not limited to, discernment of which parish models will best fit the needs of the Cohorts, with an eye toward possible solutions to strengthen specific areas of ministry and operations, such as the need to strengthen youth ministry, or dispose of underutilized buildings, etc.
- Cohorts' suggestions are submitted with a rationale to the Diocesan Planning Commission by June 1, 2016.
- Diocesan Planning Commission members attend an orientation session and begin to prepare for their work that will take place in Step 3.

Look for these topics in the next MONTHLY UPDATE

Diocesan Planning Commission •

We will introduce the members, share a bit about their backgrounds and indicate the county to which each has been assigned.

Models of Organization • There are six different Parish Models under consideration for every Parish Cohort. We will identify and provide perspective on each of them.

Stay Informed

To read more about the Faith in Our Future initiative, go to dioceseoftrenton.org/faithinourfuture/

For ongoing reporting visit **TrentonMonitor.com** and click on **NEWS>OUR DIOCESE**

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He encouraged the parish delegates to keep the following in mind as they approach their work:

► **Focus on the Opportunity** – The cohorts are called to imagine possibilities; to work toward a future based on mission; a renewal of Church; a transformation.

They need to answer the question: "How can we strengthen the Church in our part of the Diocese?"

► **Learn through Listening** – Reid pointed out that good listening is the key to learning, and that "another name for planning is learning."

► **Be Realistic** – The discussions that take place and suggestions that are developed should be based on the realities that exist in the parishes. The results of the parish self-study process, such as the data verification and parish self-evaluation forms, should guide the work of the cohorts.

► **Be Collaborative** – The Cohort process should be driven by a spirit of collaboration and shared responsibility for the future of the parishes and institutions in their areas.

Reid stated, "This is what is being asked of you – You have been called upon to lead in this process, to offer your best thinking and to work together."

Information Sharing

In all training sessions, the need for a



Msgr. Leonard F. Troiano, episcopal vicar for planning, addresses the Cohort members gathered for training in Marlton.

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strong communication effort within the parish was emphasized.

Comments offered by some cohort members pointed to a sense of surprise at what they had learned in the Parish Self-Study/Evaluation work.

Reid advised, "There is a lot that we don't know about our parishes. So it's important that we share what is learned with the broader parish communities."

Planning Commission preparation begins

The month of March also saw the first gathering of the Diocesan Planning Commission, which began its preparation for the role that it will play in the Faith in Our Future initiative. On March 14, commission members attended the first of several preparatory meetings that will take place in advance of their primary work in June. It is then that the Commission will review the suggestions that come from the Parish Cohorts in light of the established goals and return preliminary recommendations to the Cohorts with a rationale. After the cohorts have taken a few weeks for further study and comment, the Commission will meet again in October to review the cohort responses and bring together a set of final recommendations for Bishop O'Connell, to consider.

The 20 or so members of the Planning Commission are priests, deacons, women religious, and lay men and women from all four counties of the Diocese who have been identified because of their experience in the

parish, school and ministry setting, or their professional expertise. Each was specifically invited to serve by Bishop O'Connell in order that the membership reflect the make-up of the diocesan community, with a wide variety of church, education and business perspectives. Each commissioner will be assigned to a county, based, for the most part, on where they live or work.



Lots of questions and lively discussions surfaced during the Faith In Our Future Cohort training sessions held in mid-March throughout the four-county Diocese. Here, a Burlington County parish core team member takes the microphone during the session held in St. Isaac Jogues Parish, Marlton. For full coverage of this training session, visit **TrentonMonitor.com** and **click on NEWS>OUR DIOCESE**.