

Diocese of Brooklyn - Office of Pastoral Planning
Vines and Branches: News for Pastoral Planners... and those making the plan a reality

Newsletter -Fall 2008

Graphic-free text version for printing (see our website for graphic/color version...)

A message from the Director...

So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised. For in just a very little while, "He who is coming will come and will not delay. (Hebrews 10:35-37)

It seems only right that this year has been designated by the Church as the Year of St. Paul. As parishes, Parish Pastoral Councils, and clusters focus on implementing parish pastoral plans, St. Paul stands as a great icon of perseverance in spite of adversity and confidence in the face of great turmoil. Perhaps our lives are not as tumultuous as this missionary saint, traveling the known world unsure of who he would meet, being arrested and imprisoned, being shipwrecked and then put to death, but Paul's fortitude and deep devotion to Christ was as much an inspiration to the early Church as it is to us today. Paul teaches us, through example and word, that our call is to hold firm in our individual and community pledge to spread the Gospel. Paul understood the real difficulty of living the Gospel in the long haul. He knew that there were times when we would be tempted to lose hope and to abandon our aspirations.

And so, we turn to him now. Each parish has come together to engage in a process of planning. These plans are the fruit of much conversation, consultation and just plain work. Parish Pastoral Councils, pastors and staff worked to articulate an achievable plan for the New Evangelization in the local parish. The challenge now comes in sharing the ownership of that plan with the entire community and, most importantly, calling individuals into active discipleship, participants in the life of the parish. These invitations are slow steps that can only be achieved with a belief that God is working in the hearts of each parishioner, calling them to greater participation in the work which is nothing less than the establishment of the Kingdom of God in the world and in our own hearts. We can discuss methods and strategies to engage people, to perk their curiosity or just inform them, but ultimately, this is the work of the Holy Spirit and we must put our faith in the Spirit, just as Paul did.

As we go forward, I encourage you to persevere in your efforts by giving the plan away, let it take a life of its own, let others own pieces of it. Allow them to shape it and to offer their creativity and gifts to make it come alive. We are about God's work in God's Church which can only be accomplished by the collaboration of God's people. As we seek to make our plans real, let us always remember the greater goal of building an inclusive and far-reaching communion focused on the great mission given to us by the God who first called us into being and calls us each day to persevere for the sake of His Kingdom and our salvation.

- Robert Choiniere

Stay Strong

As we enter into a new pastoral year, if there are any words of advice I can give Parish Pastoral Councils it is, as you read above, Stay strong!

Despite the hard work that goes into organizing assemblies, holding one to ones, and all the other hoops you jumped through the last few years to write your plan, we have always held the belief that this coming

year would be the true test of planning. The “events” are done. The plan is completed. For many parishioners, the temptation is to return to status quo, see all those activities as stand alone events and allow the parish to “get back to normal”. Add to that the frustration of finding implementers and raising new leaders, and it’s easy for a PPC to become disheartened.

I am reminded of those bright yellow Livestrong wrist bands that were so popular a few years back. Maybe PPC’s need to find some Livestrong bands to remind themselves to stay strong. You are not only implementing a plan, but living out a new way of being church within communities of busy people often unaccustomed to accepting responsibility for the livelihood of their parish. As you well know, that takes times and considerable energy, but with the grace of God, we can use this year to look at ways to stay strong and transform planning from a program to a way of life.

This year my prayer is that councils across the diocese identify those points of light that are shining from their work and like St. Paul says to the people of Corinth ; “*Finish now what you began last year... Be as eager to finish it as you were to plan it, and do it with what you now have*” (2 Cor 8:11) But most of all I pray that you are kind to yourselves. Celebrate your successes, even small ones. Cut yourselves some slack since real transformation takes plenty of time. In one of our new orientation videos (see pg 8) Dr. Gubish states that will take almost 100 years before the plans of the Second Vatican Council are fully realized. (Thank God for PPC term limits!)

This is the year that we establish the routines that will help carve out and define the role of the council in the parish for years to come. It is the year to stay strong and trust in the slow work of God.

-Ellen Rhatigan

The Slow Work of God

- Pierre Teilhard de Chardin

Above All, Trust in the Slow Work of God. We are quite naturally impatient in everything to reach the end without delay. We should like to skip the intermediate stages. We are impatient of being on the way to something unknown, something new.

Yet it is the law of all progress that is made by passing through some stages of instability and that may take a very long time. And so I think it is with you. Your ideas mature gradually.

Let them grow. Let them shape themselves without undue haste. Do not try to force them on as though you could be today what time, that is to say, grace, and circumstances acting on your own good will -will make you tomorrow. Only God could say what this new Spirit gradually forming in you will be. Give our Lord the benefit of believing that his hand is leading you, and accept the anxiety of feeling yourself in suspense and incomplete. Above all, trust in the slow work of God, our loving vine-dresser.

Amen.

Catholic Education and the Parish Pastoral Council - a Continuing Conversation

Bishop DiMarzio recently instituted a diocesan wide initiative to hold a global conversation on the state of catholic education in the Diocese of Brooklyn. This process will seek to establish a vital communion of schools, with each school possessing all the elements needed for long term stability and excellence.

The conversation and consultation will include all Catholic elementary schools and parishes and have far reaching impact upon the preservation of the vision of catholic education in the diocese.

As a leadership and consultative body within the parish, it is essential that the Parish Pastoral Council engage in conversation on the integral relationship between parish life and catholic education. Members of the PPC must ask themselves if they share responsibility in helping the parish community broaden their understanding of Catholic education. Perhaps the PPC must work internally to educate themselves on what it means to form and educate children in the Catholic faith.

These are important conversations. This process seeks to create a communion of schools with a shared mission and purpose with distinct vision and governance. For many people, this requires a great change in mindset, a breaking down of territorialism, the parochialism that historically has been hallmark of Catholic parishes and schools. We have the great benefit of each other, and only by working together can we realize the vision of the founders of the diocese of Brooklyn.

In 1822, Peter Turner organized a group to petition for a parish church in Brooklyn so they would not have to travel to Manhattan. He wrote: "In the first place, we want our children instructed in the principles of our Holy Religion". A monument to his memory at St. James basilica reads, "...Thousands of Catholic children have helped to erect this monument as a grateful tribute to the man who made Catholic education the first reason for the establishment of a church in Brooklyn."

Today, we can honor those first Catholics in Brooklyn by renewing our commitment to Catholic education in our schools and Faith Formation programs. It is the role of the PPC to seek to understand how the parish will live out this vision and support education for Catholics of all ages.

Recommendations for PPC:

Read the process "Catholic Schools: Preserving the Vision" in totality. (Your pastor can find it on Dionet). The document provides information not only on the process but on the ideals of Catholic Education. PPC members may be called upon to correct misperceptions within the parish and should have as many facts as possible on hand.

Questions for discussion:

1. In what ways have Catholic education shaped the identity of the parish throughout its history?
2. "Preserving the Vision" encourages multiple partnerships supporting an individual catholic school- what are the benefits and challenges of multiple partnerships for both the school and your parish?
3. In what ways can the parish encourage participation of Catholic school families in the life of the parish? In what ways can the parish reach out to families who are not in a Catholic school?

Annual Evaluation of the Parish Pastoral Plan: What We Learned

This past Spring, Parish Pastoral Councils were asked to evaluate their plan and reflect upon what was

called for during the year- what was accomplished, and what needs to be adapted or changed. By intentionally taking the time and creating the space to reflect upon the past year, councils can learn from their experiences and grow together. They can celebrate what went well, encourage those who are struggling and adapt strategies to better achieve success.

While the evaluations serve as internal tool for council accountability to the parish and to each other, they serve an equally valuable purpose in affording the Pastoral Planning Office a unique snapshot of the evolution of planning all across the diocese. That snapshot shows incredible variety in the degree in which councils are progressing. To attempt to review or summarize them here would not do justice to this diversity. However, many councils shared an honesty and openness in the lessons that have been learned through their successes and challenges. Many of those lessons reappear as recurring themes throughout multiple evaluations. Those shared experiences remind us of our unity in faith and in this planning journey and they are worth noting for all. Below are several lessons multiple parishes have learned and shared in their evaluations:

Exploring new methods – Parishes who viewed their plans as organic living documents were not afraid to explore new methods to achieving goals. They realize that the plan serves the parish, not the other way around.

Those PPC's who focused on themselves were better able to focus on the parish. This includes multiple areas such as addressing internal conflicts, providing mutual support, discussing communication with each other, continual respect for others' opinions, and perhaps most of all...

Praying together- Councils that took the time (*at least 15 minutes*) to pray, particularly through faith sharing, work better together, are more open to each other and to the Holy Spirit moving through their work. Have too much business to attend to? One planner wrote, "Our business IS prayer".

Streamline meetings- more than one PPC realized that despite the importance of sub-committee reports, using meeting time to read reports to the group was not the most effective use of time together. By giving out reports before the meeting, time together can be used for prayer, and for troubleshooting issues within those reports.

Flexibility- many parishes reported turnover of PPC members or even of the pastor during the past year. The reality of continual change within a parish requires a great deal of flexibility, communication and understanding.

Replace PPC members who have moved on. Whether through life circumstance or term limits, councils who replaced members were better able to evolve their plans. In addition, Councils reported the importance of asking **who** would be on the council. Whether through formal discernment or appointment, PPC's who reflected on the gifts needed at this time on the council fared better than those who made quick decisions.

We in the Pastoral Planning Office have also learned a valuable lesson. As a plan is being implemented, **Leadership** and **Stewardship** quickly take precedence as not only two of seven essential elements but the two that are essential to the other five! Identifying new leaders and engaging them in parish activities (or on the PPC) are the two most predominant themes threading through the evaluations.

To that end, research is ongoing in areas of leadership development, parish gift discernment and evangelization. Our annual formation day (see pg 9) will focus on raising new leaders. The web-site article "*Where are all the Implementers*" has been reprinted here as well for greater distribution. We will continue to keep you informed as resources become available to assist in these crucial areas.

Many thanks to all who submitted their evaluations and shared their experiences thus far in planning. We encourage councils who have not done so already to give yourselves the gift of honoring the work you've done and progress you have made as a council. Evaluating your plan will give you the next steps in moving forward as a parish.

November 15, 2008—Stewardship Day- Immaculate Conception Center, Douglaston

For more information on workshops in Receiving God's Gifts, Sharing God's Gifts and Growing God's Gifts, call Parish Stewardship at (718) 965-7300 x1609 or e-mail: Stewardship@rcdob.org

"The promotion and practice of Stewardship is important for the mission of the Church and for the spiritual well-being of each individual..." - His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI

Where are all the Implementers?

No one is surprised (least of all pastoral council members) that one of the greatest challenges right now in the Implementation phase of planning just happens to be, you guessed it, finding Implementers. From the first training session, council members were told, "You create the plan but do not do the work," and eyes rolled each and every time. I suspect that's because we all know that one hallmark of the age old traditions of the church is that a core group of 5-10% of people do all the work. We are no exception.

People seem to freely accept that this should not be the case, that parish vitality is dependant on the activity of many people, and the primary motivation of evangelization demands that we seek involvement of others. But anyone who volunteers within the church knows the difficulty of recruitment. We all know there will always be parishioners who just want to go to Mass and go home, and there are others that are genuinely overwhelmed in other areas of their lives. The goal here is what we like to call the "hidden second tier"- those 10-15% of parishioners right behind the core folks who just may step up to take part in implementation if asked the right way. This is the group to target from which parish activity can truly burst forth.

We've been listening to recruitment stories all over the diocese and keeping track of both successes and stories where the blocks could be identified and minor strategy changes that target the "hidden second tier" can lead to success. Several themes developed that I share with you in the hopes it will spark conversation within your council on your own techniques and strategies.

These themes are Time Commitment, Personal Invitation, and Investment in the plan.

1. Time

PPC members are the busiest people around and I firmly believe that a good portion of the people who say they are too busy to volunteer would actually make time if the activity was important to them. Very often, there's something else underlying the line, "I'd love to help, but

I'm just too busy". It would be very difficult to uncover an individual's motivation, and it would be a bit rude to ask. However, there are some steps that can help draw in the "too busy" people.

- Define expectations and be as specific as possible (in time and in talent)

One parish I know of tried to be specific when they said, "We need volunteers to serve on a liturgy committee". They doubled their numbers when they changed the request to something like "We need people to serve on a task force that will meet 3 times over the next 2 months to engage in an ongoing conversation on what a vibrant Mass looks like." People knew exactly what was expected of them, and when their work would be done. We also need to respect that room is needed for flexibility and creativity. This group decided to meet two more times and expand membership, but it was their decision, their own willingness to extent their commitment.

- Watch terminology – Note that in the above example the word "committee" was changed to "task force". This subtle change in terminology gave energy to the proposal. In this parish, membership on "committees" was considered a permanent position. Consider what words are deathly in your parish and what words breathe new life into an idea.

2. Personal Invitation

When asked, people will usually agree that the weekly bulletin is not an effective stand-alone method for getting volunteers. But time and time again, people resort to the bulletin as the ONLY means of communication and outreach. The other common block is that many who tell me they use personal invitation and people simply say "no," never move outside their own comfort zones and approach people they do not know well. They ask the same people who are usually part of that inner 10% and involved in other parish activities. While it is difficult to move beyond what is familiar and comfortable, the number one stated reason why people do not participate is not "I'm too busy" but "No one asked."

In addition, remember, the planning model is entirely based on relationship. Each step of the consultation of the community reflects a different way to engage parishioners and is intended to draw people closer and closer in to parish life. If you have not already done so, use the steps of the planning model to identify potential volunteers. Ideally, at least some of the "hidden second tier" agreed to "One to One" conversations or attended the parish assembly or reflection groups. Their involvement shows they are invested at some level in the parish and in the plan, and by reviewing those lists, PPC members can target personal invitations.

Some parishes are looking into processes of Gift Discernment with the understanding that some people truly do not know what they have to offer, or that the gifts they use in other areas of their life, such as their occupation, may be of value in the parish. One parish aiming to hold a bake sale to help raise money to fix some broken pews were surprised to find the quiet gentlemen in the back row every Sunday is a carpenter. Sometimes, we have to start not by asking people to do something specific, but asking what people have to offer.

Investment

Recently, I overheard an Implementer say to a council member, "I'll do my best to make your plan work." A dedicated volunteer, she saw the plan as belonging to the council, not the parish. The council then reflected on the questions:

How has the plan been communicated?

Is it a plan for the whole parish – If not, how can it become one?

Consider small ways to engage the community, to remind them it is the plan of the entire parish. We have seen plans prayed for at Sunday Mass, regular bulletin updates and pulpit announcement. We've seen flyers and banners and tri-fold brochures. Consider how to make the plan (as well its progress) public in as many ways as possible and eventually, it will move beyond familiarity to become an ingrained part of the parish.

Many of these points may appear common sense, but I've learned that unless we are intentional in our strategies, we tend to fall back on ways that are familiar, whether or not they make good sense! A few small changes in the way in which you seek volunteers can go a long way to reaching out to people where they are and drawing them into active participation.

I hope these are helpful and please let us know about others that have worked for you!

Resources for PPC Members -Web Based Training Sessions!- New and Expanding!!

Ongoing formation is a necessary part of any Parish Pastoral Council to develop as a community of leaders, individual disciples, consultants to the pastor and servants to the People of God.

We are very excited to offer on-line sessions on a wide range of planning topics. These videos are meant for individuals and Parish Pastoral Councils to assist in understanding and reflecting on your ministry within the parish. They range from theological overviews to practical skills for effective planning. You can watch these videos on your own or at your PPC meetings. Reflection questions are included for discussion.

Most sessions are between 10-20 minutes in length and take the form of PowerPoint presentations (with audio), or video sessions. Four sessions were produced this past summer by pastoral planners around the country specifically for our diocese, and many more will be added taking advantage of our local talent!

There are seven sessions posted already with several more to be added throughout the year. Check them out at our website under "Orientation and Training". Information is just a click away.

<http://pastoralplanning.diobrook.org>

Current Sessions include:

- Orientation I—From Mission to Vision
- Orientation II— Mission and Communion
- The Holy Spirit in the Church
- Called and Gifted
- The Relationship of the Pastor and Parish Council
- Consultation with the Laity—an Intro to Church Teaching on Consultation
- And Who is My Neighbor—Introduction to the Use of Data in Pastoral Planning

Quote from the video “Called and Gifted”

“The Parish Pastoral Council has the visionary and planning role to keep this crazy dream of God’s alive. We need to create parishes that draw attention to God, rather than themselves, who become witnesses and instruments of the reign of God rather than an end in themselves.” - Dr. Barbara Sutton

Save the Date:

March 21, 2009 - Pastoral Planning Annual Day of Formation

“Raising New Leaders” -

More information will follow in November...

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