

Diocese of Scranton Planning Commission Releases Preliminary Recommendations for Parish Reconfiguration

The Diocese of Scranton Planning Commission has issued preliminary recommendations on how all parishes in the 11-county Diocese might be reconfigured.

This is part of *Called to Holiness and Mission: Pastoral Planning in the Diocese of Scranton*, the project that is focusing on the effective revitalization of all parishes.

To facilitate the planning process and to engender cooperation among parishes in a given geographic area, each parish was grouped into one of 50 clusters. Each cluster has a Cluster Core Team consisting of the Parish Core Teams in that cluster.

Members of the Cluster Core Teams have received the preliminary recommendations for their cluster and a summary of the preliminary recommendations for all the clusters in their region. The complete list of all preliminary recommendations is posted on the Diocesan website at www.dioceseofscranton.org.

"We need to emphasize that these are preliminary recommendations; this is not the final plan," said Monsignor Vincent J. Grimalia, V.G., project director. "As we have said all along, nothing has been predetermined and no decisions have been made. There will be a lot more discussion and input at the parish and cluster levels before we reach that point. We welcome any constructive suggestions that are supported by a sound rationale and can be realistically accomplished."

Each pastor will convey to the entire parish the preliminary recommendations of the Diocesan Planning Commission for its cluster. These recommendations will be conveyed by being published in the parish bulletin either the weekend of July 19-20 or July 26-27 at the discretion of the pastor.

During the week of July 28, regional meetings will be held with members of the Diocesan Planning Commission so that the members of the Cluster Core Teams can obtain clarification and ask questions about the preliminary recommendations. These sessions will also prepare the Cluster Core Teams for the next step, which is conversation and response to the preliminary recommendations.

Following those meetings, the Cluster Core Teams will spend time over the summer and early fall to discuss the preliminary recommendations and formulate a response to them.

As these conversations are occurring, the Parish Core Teams are responsible for informing and engaging their respective parish communities. This is a crucial part of the process, said John Reid of The Reid Group, the national consulting firm that is helping to facilitate the planning project.

"The Parish Core Teams should share the details of the recommendations with the parishioners and ask them to provide feedback on a regular basis," he said.

The Cluster Core Teams must submit their responses to the Planning Commission by Oct. 1. The Planning Commission will gather to reflect on the responses and to prepare the final recommendations for parish reconfiguration.

In November, the final recommendations will be presented to Bishop Joseph F. Martino, who will consult with the Council of Priests and other advisors before announcing the final reconfiguration plan in January 2009.

Implementation of the plan will begin in July 2009.

The preliminary recommendations were formulated after the Diocesan Planning Commission, comprised of priests, deacons, religious and laypersons from the various regions of the Diocese, came together June 30-July 2 for a planning retreat at Fatima Renewal Center in Dalton. They engaged in two-and-a-half days of prayer, discernment and intense discussion. This was the third step of an overall eight-step planning process.

The Planning Commission's main task was to review the work of the Cluster Core Teams, which for the past two months have been studying the parish self-evaluations that were completed during the first phase of the project. These self-evaluations, which were performed by the Parish Core Teams, examined ministries and resources, finances, demographics, liturgical and sacramental life, and evangelization activities.

Based on these self-evaluations, the Cluster Core Teams suggested one or more of four models for the parishes in their cluster: consolidation to form a new parish entity, linking of two or more parishes under one pastor, establishing partnerships with other parishes to operate joint programs and share resources, and forming teams of two or more priests, deacons and lay people who would serve multiple parishes.

The Planning Commission retreat was a two-tiered process. First, work groups for each of the four pastoral regions of the Diocese reviewed the suggestions submitted by the Cluster Core Teams in those regions.

Then the four work groups presented a list of possible preliminary recommendations to the whole Planning Commission. The Planning Commission discussed the possible preliminary recommendations, gave further suggestions, and sometimes asked for more study from the work groups.

After deliberation of the work groups' further study, the Planning Commission ultimately reached a consensus and approved preliminary recommendations. In some cases, the suggestions made by the Cluster Core Teams were affirmed as submitted. In other cases, the Planning Commission determined that modifications were appropriate.

In addition, the Planning Commission made four general recommendations that would apply to all clusters:

- The rich ethnic heritage of the people should be honored and celebrated whenever appropriate.
- A new Mass schedule should be developed that reflects good stewardship of priestly resources and maximizes opportunities for larger assemblies to provide a more robust celebration of the liturgy.
- The Preliminary Recommendations and rationale should be shared with each parish community, and their questions and feedback should be sought on an ongoing basis now through September.
- Upon reception of the Bishop's directives, an Implementation Team for each cluster should be established to design ways to fulfill the directives.

The Planning Commission was inspired by the effort put forth by the Cluster Core Teams, whose members faced a challenging task with faith and an understanding that their work will have implications beyond their individual parishes.

"As we studied the suggestions accompanied by the reasons for them, it became clear that the Cluster Core Teams took this very seriously and have been very diligent. The Planning Commission paid close attention to what the people are saying, and they considered all that in their recommendations," Monsignor Grimalia said.

Monsignor Grimalia said the preliminary recommendations represent the "best thinking" of the Planning Commission after listening and seriously studying the good work of the Cluster Core Teams in the light of the Diocesan Mission Statement, and the goals and criteria of *Called to Holiness and Mission*.

GOALS FOR THE *CALLED TO HOLINESS AND MISSION* PROJECT

The parish planning project for the Diocese of Scranton is inspired by the following goals:

1. To foster the personal and communal holiness of Catholics and support them to deepen their commitment in living out the mission of the Church.
2. To enhance quality parish life throughout the Diocese of Scranton.
3. To strengthen the presence and ministry of the Church in the urban, suburban and rural areas of the four regions and eleven counties.
4. To increase collaboration between and among leaders, parishes and the whole Diocese of Scranton.
5. To act as good stewards of all human, financial and facility resources.

6. To support increased understanding of and action for the assumptions and criteria related to vibrant parish life.
7. To build a greater sense of unity within the rich ethnic, cultural and generational diversity present within the local Church.
8. To work on the deanery, vicariate and diocesan wide revitalization.

CALLED TO HOLINESS AND MISSION PROJECT
CRITERIA FOR USE IN THE PLANNING PROCESS

Eucharist, Prayer and Communion

1. The Eucharist is the source and summit of the life and mission of the parish.
2. Sacramental celebrations and devotional practices reflect the cultural heritage of the people assembled.
3. Disciples are formed by the Eucharist who support and are in communion with parish members, the diocese and the Church universal.
4. A spirit of communion encourages co-responsibility and a collaborative style of leadership where all are valued and respected.

Evangelization, Formation and Education

5. Evangelization is recognized as an essential aspect of the life and mission of the parish.
6. The parish provides excellent catechetical/formational experiences for all ages.
7. The parish actively encourages and supports diocesan Catholic schools in their operation and mission.

Vocation

8. Parishioners are encouraged to cultivate a culture of vocation in the parish and are educated to “live their lives as a vocation” (Pope Benedict XVI) to holiness and mission.
9. Formation and education in vocational awareness is an integral part of the parish catechetical programs and the religious formation program in the Catholic school.

Stewardship and Justice

10. Parishioners are educated and formed in stewardship where all disciples share their time, talent and treasure.
11. Social justice, advocacy and outreach programs are well integrated into parish life through the spirituality of good stewardship.
12. A comprehensive view of being good stewards of God's gifts: of creation and of the Church is embodied in all aspects of parish life.

Stewardship and Administration

13. The pastor, staff, parish councils and finance councils exert effective leadership that embodies stewardship and points to the future.
14. The parish is financially stable and exercises good stewardship of its resources.
15. Working with neighboring parishes and sharing resources is operational in the parish.
16. The parish exercises good stewardship of human resources as it works positively and creatively with the diminishing number of priests.
17. The parish is taking into account its geographic proximity to other parishes and its Mass attendance when it plans for the future.
18. The parish has adequate staff to carry out its mission.
19. The parish has adequate and well-maintained facilities to carry out its mission.
20. The parish supports the programs and ministries of the diocese and the Church universal.