

Diocesan Pastoral Council Sept 17, 2011

Opening Prayer – Bill Flynn and Larry Hagan led the DPC in opening prayer. It focused on evangelization and discipleship.

Opening Remarks - Tina Dyer, Executive Secretary of the DPC introduced the staff and guests to the DPC members. Bishop Cunningham was at a funeral for Father George Hartnett and joined the group later that day. Tina also introduced us to Jason Hage, a seminarian doing his internship at Holy Cross with Msgr. Yeazel. He spoke of his family life and experiences.

Opening: - Margi Lawrence, the new DPC Chairperson for the next two years, welcomed all DPC members and asked the new members to stand. She reminded everyone to turn in their tags when leaving. That is how parish attendance is taken. Margi then introduced Fr. Lang, Vicar for Parishes, to give the group an update of pastoral planning. Before his presentation Father Lang spoke of the 125th anniversary of the Diocese which will be held on November 6. There are a limited amount of seats available for the Mass and the information for attending has been sent to the parishes. Fr. Lang is also working on the St. Bernard's School of Theology and Ministry. He wanted to give more information to the DPC on it. He then spoke of the workshops that Brother Ed is working on. It is to train the people about a new program to energize parishes in a positive manner on how to be Catholic. It is called the "Appreciative Inquiry Process".

Main Presentation – Father Lang stated that in 1983 the Diocese started talking about the future of the Church. After looking at the ages of the priests and the amount of young men in the seminary, there appeared to be a problem with future staffing of our parishes. Today, this is true. He said that we cannot ignore what is happening. It is a time to come together as people of God in the diocese and recreate the Church. The Church has to announce a vision and move towards it. Bishop Cunningham has asked Father Lang for a plan to be on the table in December to solve the major personnel problems. Father Lang said that the diocese is having focus group meetings with the priests and laity. Pastoral planning is an ongoing process, and a difficult process. He said that we have to look at the Church with a different set of eyes. What is the world's perception of the Catholic Church? It is welcoming, or is it just welcoming to the current parishioners. He said that the State of New York is in the process of a massive demographic change. In just eleven years there has been a 30% reduction in Mass attendance.

Father Lang then distributed information showing a general overview of the Diocese as it pertains to the priests. Chart one showed that in 1974 the Diocese had 400 priests. In 2011 the number of priests has decreased to 240. The other statistic that stood out was the number of priests under the age of 45. In 1974 there were 203 priests compared to 14 in 2011. Chart three states that the projected ordinations to the priesthood from 2012 through 2018 will be just 16. He said that it is not only the shortage of priests that is the problem, but also the pattern change in the demographics. Chart four, from the National

Catholic Directory (Kenedy) demonstrated the change. In 1974 the number of baptisms was 7864 as compared to 3130 in 2011. Catholic marriages decreased from 3876 in 1974 to 1015 in 2011. From 1999 to 2010 infant baptisms decreased 55%, adult baptisms decreased 76%, first communion decreased by 31%, confirmations decreased by 29%, marriages decreased 51% and funerals held steady. Father Lang challenged the people to become involved with the process of change. He said we have to plan our future not stumble into it.

Small Group Discussion: The small groups had two tasks to undertake. One was to formulate questions to ask Father Lang about the challenges that the Diocese faces. The other task was to survey the small group for suggestions as to how to convey to parish communities the information. There is a sense that the average parishioner does not understand the seriousness of the situation.

Annulment Q and A Sheet: Margi spoke of the Question and Answer sheet concerning annulments in the DPC folder. It had been reviewed by Father Elmer, our Judicial Vicar, and all the information is correct. It was recommended to insert the sheet in the weekly bulletin or print individual questions and answers over a period of time.

Office of Faith Formation: Cathy Cornue spoke of the two day evangelization conference to be held at Christ the King Retreat House January 27 and 28, 2012. Its purpose is to immerse participants in the Church's vision of evangelization.

Special Tribute: Tina Dyer made a special presentation to Jane Klaben. Jane has been a member of the DPC for about 20 years. She held every position on the executive committee culminating with being chairperson of the DPC. She is moving to Liverpool and won't be representing St. Patrick's Church in Jordan anymore.

Question and Answer Period – Because Bishop Cunningham had just arrived from the funeral Mass, Msgr. Yeasel responded to questions collected from the DPC. Many of the questions submitted had already been answered by Father Lang prior to this segment. Some of the other questions were:

Q: Is the Diocese still in contact with other countries in recruiting new priests?

A: Yes. We still have relationships with other Dioceses in Europe and Africa. We have a covenant with them that they will send a priest here for three to five years and replace them. We have had some wonderful priests. The problem is that in the United States the ratio of priest to parishioner is 1:1900. In Africa it is 1:8000. So it is difficult to take the priests away from that many people.

Q: How do you get young people back to Church?

A: You have to have a strong youth ministry to attract the kids. Another thing you have to do is to answer their questions. Many of the young people are involved in drugs, alcohol and sex and they don't know how to handle it. They are in broken homes and are confused.

Q: Can the lay people take over many of the duties of the priests?

A: Most of the things done in the parish are done by lay people. Priests perform the sacramental. A statistic furnished by Father Lang said that 85% of the work done in the parishes is done by women. More help is better in freeing up the priest's time to do the sacramental work. Lay people can be trained to do many of the jobs of the parish. I am sure that your priest would be happy to get you the proper training.

Q: How many priests have more than one Parish?

A: There are 16 priests that have two parishes. There are also 10 priests that have two jobs. So I guess the answer would be that there are 26 of us holding two different positions.

Q: When will we ordain women as deacons?

A: Not in the near future. We do need deacons in the Church. Holy Cross is having a deacon ordained next year and I can't wait for that day. The deacon can do anything that I can do except celebrate the Eucharist and absolve.

Q: Could you talk about the flood damage in Diocese?

A: There is extensive damage in the southern tier. We are in contact with the priests and trying to do what we can to help the parishes. Blessed Sacrament in Johnson City was badly damaged by the water. The water filled the basement and the first floor of most of the buildings. The Bishop has also asked parishes to take up a special collection to help the Churches in the southern tier.

Q: Is our school enrollment holding steady?

A: We don't the final enrollment numbers for this year yet. October 1st is when we see the official numbers. If the enrollment follows previous years, it will show a 3% - 5% decline. Some decrease can be attributed to people moving. Our schools do charge a tuition fee, but there are ways to reduce the cost for them. We have a program at Holy Cross where parishioners adopt a student and either pays full or part of the tuition of a student.

Q: Is there any help in the diocese in setting up parish web sites?

A: You can call the communication office and talk to Danielle Cummings. There are free web sites that will walk you through web designs.

The next scheduled meeting of the DPC will be November 19th.
The meeting adjourned at 12:20 p.m. and followed with lunch.

Respectfully submitted,

Ray Czachor
Secretary Pro Tem