



Prayer - Planning - Possibilities

An open letter about moving forward with the Faith Formation Preliminary Recommendations:

Now that the preliminary recommendations for Faith Formation have been made public, Bishop Lawrence Persico has created a Faith Formation Implementation Team (FFIT). This new team will review the feedback that is currently being submitted to further refine the recommendations as well as to identify ways to help parishes carry them out. As a first order of business, the team would like to address a number of important questions raised in recent weeks.

TIMELINE

- Please be assured that Bishop Persico and the implementation team members recognize that many parishes are still dealing with the demands of partnering or merging, and/or are working with new pastors. As discussed when the recommendations were unveiled, it is likely parishes will ultimately receive a menu of options from which they can design the best possible path forward regarding faith formation. No individual or job position will be saddled with driving the change; it will take a parish and diocesan-wide effort over time to bring the recommendations to fruition.
- It is clear the timeline for implementing changes needs to remain fluid. In response to concerns that many who are involved with parish faith formation do not meet regularly in the summer, **the feedback period has now been extended an extra month, through August 28.**
- A clear plan and timeline will be created eventually, but unlike parish and school restructuring, changes will not be rolled out all at once. This is an ongoing, lifelong effort that will involve considerable thought, planning and refining by parishes and deaneries over time. Some recommendations may take several years to be fully realized.
- While parishes should remain mindful of the broad recommendations, planning for the 2017-18 and even the 2018-19 academic year can proceed as usual. No sweeping or immediate changes will be imposed on parishes.

- It is important to remember that religious education programs are but one part of the overall vision for faith formation, and that religious education leaders and catechists will not bear the sole burden of implementing these recommendations. The recommendations call for all parishes to have access to trained professionals, who may or may not be the same person as the religious education leader. The plan also calls for religious education leaders and catechists to receive more consistent training. This area will require a great deal of planning. Current parish leaders will not suddenly be required to have college degrees and catechists will be able to continue in their vital roles. The goals have been established, but a pathway to fulfilling the goals still needs to be developed.

COMMUNICATION

- The implementation team is considering a number of options for communicating with parishes and for helping parishes plan for the future. When it is time to discuss the details regarding implementation, it is possible this will occur by bringing parish leaders together at the deanery level rather than at large vicariate meetings.
- The FFIT requests that each parish strive to communicate information about the Faith Formation plan to anyone in the parish that is impacted by the recommendations.

THE GOAL

- Finally, the implementation team will keep the 1999 document by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us*, uppermost in their minds. As Bishop Persico said in his presentation at the vicariate meetings, the bishops “gave us three charges that parish communities need to fulfill:
 - Invite and enable ongoing conversion to Jesus Christ in holiness of life;
 - Promote and support active membership in the Christian community;
 - Call and prepare adults to act as disciples in mission to the world.”

Bishop Persico referred to these as “our ongoing charge for life.” We look forward to making this vision a reality.

Please see the following page for a list of members of the Faith Formation Implementation Team. More information also is available at ErieRCD.org/planning.htm.

Faith Formation Implementation Team

The Most Reverend Lawrence T. Persico, JCL
Bishop of Erie

Deacon Marty Eisert
Pastoral Planning Chair

Greg Baker
Director of Campus Ministry
Mercyhurst University

Rev. Msgr. Edward M. Lohse, JCD
Vicar General

Mary Ann Nicholls
Pastoral Associate
St. Catherine of Siena Parish, DuBois

Rev. Nicholas J. Rouch
Vicar for Education

Michele Smith
Religious Education Leader
St. Callistus Parish, Kane

Anne-Marie Welsh
Director of Communications