



Prayer - Planning - Possibilities

Update on the **LIFELONG FAITH FORMATION** initiative in pastoral planning

A letter from Bishop Persico:

As you know, we have implemented the first two initiatives of the pastoral plan: school and parish restructuring. I realize we are still dealing with significant changes in our parishes and schools, and that it will remain an ongoing challenge. But I am very impressed with the progress I have seen, and have every confidence that the important work we are doing is strengthening us for today and for tomorrow.

We've begun work on two other initiatives, creating a culture of vocations and reorganizing office responsibilities at St. Mark Catholic Center to ensure we can respond to today's needs in the most efficient way. Efforts on each of the pastoral planning initiatives will be ongoing.

Last spring, we unveiled the preliminary recommendations of the fifth pastoral planning task force, those having to do with lifelong faith formation.

There is no doubt this is the most important component of planning. Dealing with logistics and resources was and will continue to be necessary. But all of that is a means of preparing us to focus on renewing ourselves, growing as disciples in Christ and reaching out to others.

Admittedly, this is also the most challenging component. Almost every aspect of parish life is touched by faith formation, from religious education and family life to service and worship. Progress in this area also will require continued commitment. But the Faith Forma-

tion Implementation Team has reviewed your feedback and is carving out a tangible plan for the diocese.

As we work on the next steps, I thought it was important for you to receive this update. We know the Holy Spirit has guided us to this point, and I am very excited about all that is being developed.

I want you to understand we really are talking about a new era in the life of the Diocese of Erie. We will be working directly with pastors and with parishes to discover new ways to empower both clergy and laity. A new director of lifelong faith formation will soon be hired to help shape the effort, which will include ongoing discussions and training with clergy, parish staff and volunteers on the local, regional and diocesan level.

What we will put into place will be designed to renew parishioners and parish life well beyond our current configuration of pastors and parishes. Please be sure to visit our planning website at www.ErieRCD.org/planning.htm, where we will continue to post information about the progress that is being made in our planning for lifelong faith formation.

Sincerely,

The Most Rev. Lawrence T. Persico
Bishop of Erie



We asked... and you responded

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE FEEDBACK REGARDING FAITH FORMATION

After the Faith Formation Task Force unveiled its recommendations, pastors, religious educators, parish groups and individuals had several weeks over the summer during which they were invited to offer feedback on the recommendations.

We received more than 100 responses, many of which were submitted as the result of a group effort. The insights were shared with the Faith Formation Implementation Team, and will remain an important resource as the plan is developed. Here are some of the kinds of comments that were received:

- ... "More **collaboration** between parishes."
- ... "We must let go of our 'parish identity' programs and work towards a **more regional concept**."
- ... "We need to be **more welcoming** as a whole."
- ... "We need to provide **family catechesis programs**."
- ... "We need **more technology** in parishes."

MEET THE FAITH FORMATION IMPLEMENTATION TEAM

The Faith Formation Task Force, which worked for two years under the direction of Sister Phyllis Schleicher, OSB, submitted its recommendations to Bishop Persico last spring. After his review and further refinement, the preliminary recommendations were unveiled at vicariate meetings in Erie, Hermitage and St. Marys, and can be found at www.ErieRCD.org/planning.htm.

With the task force's work complete, Bishop Persico named a Faith Formation Implementation Team. The team's job is to transform the recommendations into practical, tangible steps, providing a pathway through which parishes will be able to begin implementation.

TEAM MEMBERS

The Most Rev. Lawrence Persico Bishop of Erie/Chair
Msgr. Edward Lohse Vicar General
Father Nicholas Rouch Vicar for Education
Deacon Marty Eisert Pastoral Planning Chair
Greg Baker Campus Minister, Mercyhurst University
Mary Ann Nicholls Pastoral Associate,
St. Catherine of Siena, DuBois
Michele Smith Religious Education Leader,
St. Callistus, Kane
Anne-Marie Welsh Director of Communications

FOUR KEY AREAS OF FOCUS

As the team considers implementation, here are four areas of encounter where the six recommendations of the Faith Formation Task Force will be lived out in a practical way:



- 1. Community welcoming and belonging**, providing an environment conducive to growth in discipleship and evangelization.
- 2. Catechesis**, defined as imparting the faith. It must embrace people of all ages.
- 3. Sacramental preparation** as part of a continuum that supports lifelong faith formation.
- 4. Service** as a key way in which we live out all that we have experienced through the sacraments, through catechesis and through our communal life.

To review the original recommendations, please visit www.ErieRCD.org/planning.htm.

WHAT ABOUT CONFIRMATION?

A number of people expected that the way we handle confirmation would change significantly as we focus on lifelong faith formation. While Bishop Persico is giving this topic priority, working on options with key personnel, it is not a part of the work of the Faith Formation Implementation Team.

WHAT ARE THE NEXT STEPS?

Now that the implementation team has begun considering the many aspects involved in faith formation, it is time to hire a new director of lifelong faith formation. Working with the Faith Formation Implementation Team, this person will help shape a comprehensive plan that provides parishes with an array of options as they seek renewal. We expect to begin recruiting for this key position before the end of December.

Bishop Persico has said he wants this person to be willing to "roll up his or her sleeves and get down in the trenches." The director also will weigh in on the best way to fill positions in the Office of Religious Education that have been vacant for several months. The implementation team expects that the new director will spend a great deal of time meeting with pastors, parish staff and volunteers, continuing to listen and integrating ideas that will make sense on parish, regional and diocesan levels.

The Faith Formation Implementation Team also plans to collaborate with the Presbyteral Council, continuing to listen and to uncover the most helpful and practical ways to renew parish life.