



Commission for
SYNOD 
IMPLEMENTATION

Update

FALL 2008

Progress being made on implementation of synod norms

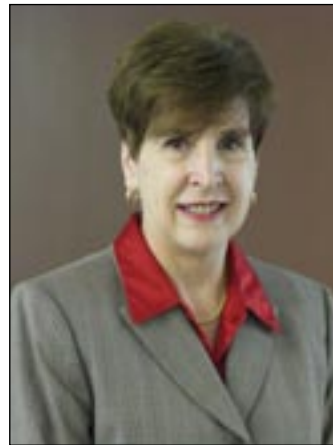
By Msgr. Gregory E. S. Malovetz
and Judith Tabert
co-chairs Commission for Synod Implementation

As the first Synod of the Diocese of Metuchen came to close and the Commission for Synod Implementation began its work almost two years ago we have traveled a challenging and exciting journey toward building and strengthening the church of Metuchen. It is a journey of change, of hope, a journey of discovery leading to a new way of thinking and living out the mission of Christ in our local church.

The commission met with diocesan executive directors and staff, priests of the diocese and lay leaders to listen to their needs and to learn of their experiences. Our conversations touched on what successful implementation would look like, what norms were priorities, and how the commission could help. We discovered that implementation of synod norms is a process grounded in prayer that will unfold in a careful and well thought out way over a period of time. It requires a new spirit of collaboration and communication between diocesan offices and between those offices and parishes. Successful implementation recognizes the wealth of talent and experience of our priests and lay leaders who seek guidance and assistance from the diocese yet feel disconnected from this support system. Implementation must be sensitive to the multi-cultural needs of our members.

The commission made the following recommendations to Bishop Bootkoski and with his approval we continue to move forward:

A Letter on Vibrant Parish Life. Successful implementation must focus on the parish as the center of Catholic life and all diocesan structures are to be in service to creating vibrant parish life. *Update:* the letter



Judith Tabert



Msgr. Gregory E. S. Malovetz

and an accompanying study guide is in progress.

Establishment of a Department of Diocesan Planning. There is a need for a clearer vision and plan for the diocese. *Update:* the department has been established and the first executive director is in place (see page four). The Department of Pastoral Life was also restructured at the close of the synod in order to better meet the needs of implementation.

Establishment of Deanery Councils. These councils would increase communication between parishes and between the diocesan offices and parishes. *Update:* Deanery boundaries are currently being re-evaluated and a task force will be formed in early 2009 to establish a model for organizing the deanery councils.

Establishment of regular meeting with executive directors and commission co-chairs to follow the progress of implementation. *Update:* executive directors will prepare a 3-year strategic plan for each synod norm. The Commission co-chairs will meet quarterly with those leading the implementation of each norm.

Norm Prioritization and Implementation. The norms related to the establishment of deanery councils, personnel in ministry and priestly life, communication in the diocese of Metuchen and religious formation/youth ministry were deemed priorities in our listening

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Synod Shapes Direction of Catechetical Office

Newly appointed diocesan Director for Catechesis Cele Regan brings to her ministry a commitment to synod norm implementation. Indeed, she represented St. Thomas Parish in Old Bridge at the synod and currently serves on the Commission for Synod Implementation. Cele's first step toward implementing synod norms took the form of renaming the office—from "Office of Religious Education" to "Office for Catechesis."

"The idea was that 'Office of Religious Education' meant the school model," she said. Choosing the broader label "catechesis," she hopes to convey both adult formation and home-based models of child and youth catechesis addressed in norms 11, 12, and 18. Cele's first hire in the Office of Catechesis will be an associate director for adult formation, a new position at the diocesan pastoral center. This adult formation specialist will work to implement synod norm 12, developing "recommendations for the content of adult faith formation programs for parish selection and implementation and ... offer training for such program coordinators."

The Office for Catechesis has been assigned lead responsibility for developing an implementation plan for nine synod norms. These include utilizing "new media" like Internet and cable television for catechesis, encouraging and facilitating formation and continuing education for catechists, promoting intergenerational opportunities for catechesis, and fostering collaboration among parishes in providing spiritual growth, formation, and renewal programs.

But Cele is also passionate about norms addressing communication within the diocese. In an inter-



Cele Regan, Director for Catechesis — Chris Donahue photo

view at her office in the St. John Neumann Pastoral Center, Cele frequently returned to the theme of intra-diocesan communication. "The synod surfaced the need for communication—not just between diocese and parish, but also between, for example, this office and other offices of the diocese," she said. She stated her view that the future of diocesan activities is intradepartmental.

Asked to cite an example, she pointed to an upcoming regional day of recollection for parish catechetical leaders and youth ministers to be held at St. Elizabeth Parish in Three Bridges on January 10. The planning for this event brought together the diocesan catechetical and youth ministry offices to collaborate in new ways. Cele stressed her hope that this new way of working together will be the rule rather than the exception in the future, as diocesan offices live out the spirit of Norm 48.

Concluding the conversation, Cele referred to growing in intimacy with Christ as a "journey." Many journeys follow a map. It's clear from the ways she has mapped out new directions for the catechetical office that in this journey toward synod norm implementation, no one walks alone.

"The effectiveness of catechesis is and always will be a gift of God, through the operation of the Spirit of the Father and the Son."
(General Catechetical Directory (288))

Norm 11 – Pastors are to appoint an adult faith formation coordinator responsible for establishing an adult faith formation program.

Norm 12 – The Office of Religious Education is to develop recommendations for the content of adult faith formation programs for parish selection and implementation and is to offer training for such program coordinators.

Norm 18 – Parishes are to provide opportunities for intergenerational family faith formation as an integral part of their catechetical program. Such opportunities will include catechesis, prayer, and service opportunities.

Norm 48 – The Bishop is to establish an atmosphere of open and honest communication, fostering discussion and collaboration among existing diocesan offices, parishes, diocesan commissions, and agencies.

PASTORAL LETTER *On Parish Life*

Catholics of a certain generation, who grew up in urban areas, often identify themselves in a unique way. When asked where they grew up, they will tell you the neighborhood, but inevitably include the name of the parish. “St. Rocco’s,” they tell you proudly, certain you must have heard of it. Or they might say “Saint Stan’s” using the nickname for Stanislaus to indicate a warm familiarity. More often than not, the identity with the parish was formed from several generations of the family who built, supported and served it.

Shifting demographics and a mobile society have changed parishes. These days, it is not uncommon for a person to belong to more than one parish through adulthood. What has not changed is the pride and love people have for the community of believers they call “my parish.”

This reality was evident when the Commission for Synod Implementation conducted listening sessions in the Fall of 2007. At those meetings we wanted to hear what priests and parish leaders thought successful implementation of synod norms would involve. In the course of the conversations, a constant theme emerged: the parish is the place where people experience the Good News, encounter Christ in the community, and understand what it means to be Church. The voices we heard spoke of their parish’s challenges, concerns, best practices and gifts. In every meeting, there was a real energy when people spoke about parish life. They wanted to share their experiences, as well as hear how they could face problems and challenges.

As a result of these meetings, the Commission for Synod Implementation asked Bishop Paul



Bishop Paul G. Bootkoski addresses “Synod Reunion” participants at Queenship of Mary Parish, Plainsboro, June 23. Bishop Bootkoski reflected on the progress made so far as well as the work that remains to be done. — Kathleen Ogle photo

Bootkoski to write a pastoral letter on parish life. While this was not one of the synod norms, it became clear to the Commission that a letter would be an important step in implementing norms that would affect parish life. A pastoral letter on parish life, with a study guide, would allow parishioners to have a conversation about their parish. It would be an opportunity to renew the strengths, and to critically examine the challenges.

Bishop Bootkoski welcomed the opportunity to share his vision

and hopes for the parishes of our diocese. He spent many years as a pastor. As a result, the Bishop understands the need for parishes to be vibrant communities of faith. It is hoped that his pastoral letter and the study guide will be completed in the spring of 2009.

What makes your parish a vibrant community of faith? The Commission would like to hear your present experience of parish life. Tell us what makes you most proud to belong to your parish. Email your thoughts to csi@diometuchen.org.

Implementation Updates

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sessions. *Update:* The commission continues to meet with those responsible for implementation. All norms including the priorities mentioned are in varying stages of implementation. Some norms have been implemented; some can be implemented soon; others require preliminary changes or new structures to be put in place first. The commission along with the executive director of

diocesan planning will continue to monitor progress and assist in any way needed to insure that the process of implementation continues to move ahead.

This diocese is blessed with talented, faith filled members of the body of Christ, each willing to use their gifts to build this Church giving us hope and promise for the future. We ask for your prayers and support as we continue implementation.

Synod Outcome:

A Diocesan Department of Planning

“So what is pastoral planning, anyway?”

“When will you release your plan for the diocese?”

These are two of the most popular questions I’ve been asked as I began my first month as executive director for the Department of Diocesan Planning here in



By Jeffrey Odell
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*Executive
Director for
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the Diocese of Metuchen. They’re fair questions, and I hope my answers in this article will help clarify the mission of this new diocesan ministry. First things first: this new department is one of the many concrete outcomes of the diocesan synod. Bishop Bootkoski, the Commission

for Synod Implementation, and the many clergy and laity who participated in the synod believed that without a diocesan department responsible for working with clergy and diocesan staff on transforming the synod norms into goals, measurable objectives, and concrete outcomes, the synod norms might well sit on a shelf gathering dust. But norm implementation is just one of the roles of the Department of Diocesan Planning.

The main task of the Department of Diocesan Planning is to promote a ministry of pastoral planning at all levels of the diocese. Simply put, according to my colleague Bill Pickett in the Diocese of Rochester, pastoral planning is *praying and thinking about the actions of the*



Members of the Commission for Synod Implementation gather outside the St. John Neumann Pastoral Center, Piscataway in September 2007, with Bishop Paul G. Bootkoski: from left, Sara Acevedo; Msgr. William Benwell; Mercy Sister Elizabeth O’Hara; Peg Garvey-Mitchell; Erin Jones; Clare Giangreco; Msgr. Seamus Brennan; Bishop Bootkoski; Judy Tabert; Cecelia Regan; Msgr. Gregory Malovetz; and Ted Ellis. Not pictured is Mercy Sister Alice Swartz. Garvey-Mitchell served as facilitator for the CSI before its chairs were elected and currently is not on the Commission.

body of Christ in a given place and time. Read that definition again. We have to *pray* if we are to let the Holy Spirit guide our choices. We have to *think*, using up-to-date statistical research and the gifts of human reason and prudence that God gave us, as we sort through the many ways we might shape the *body of Christ*, his Church, in a *given place and time*: these four counties of New Jersey in the early 21st Century.

What does it mean for us to be Christ’s body in the Diocese of Metuchen over the next five years? The next ten? How will we “proclaim liberty to captives,” “give eyesight to the blind,” or “proclaim a year of favor of the Lord,” as Christ himself proclaimed in Luke 4?

Planning starts with a conversation about mission and leads into a discussion of concrete goals for the year. We then refine these goals into measurable objectives to later evaluate our progress toward them. During the next year, this department will work with all responsible for synod implementation to develop those plans. In addition, we will work with all diocesan offices to produce their own pastoral plans. To answer the second question, those

whom God called to lead diocesan ministries will develop plans for their ministries, with technical assistance from the Department of Diocesan Planning. In addition, the department stands ready to assist parishes with “signs of the times” statistical services and training in developing their own pastoral plans.

As we begin this exciting ministry in consultation with pastors and Bishop Bootkoski’s gifted staff, I ask for your prayers and continued support for synod implementation.

***Through
implementation
of our
Synod Norms
we are continuing the
Mission of Christ.***

The synod implementation process is made possible through your generous support of the 2008 Bishop’s Annual Appeal

***Every gift is needed
and appreciated.***