



## Cohort 6 Update — June 2016

(OLS-St. Anthony, SR-Holy Angels, St. Gregory, St. Vincent, St. John)

### First Round of Recommendations to Diocesan Commission

The OLS-SA Parish Core Team has been busy analyzing and making suggestions through membership in Cohort 6 (parishes listed above) of the *Faith in Our Future* project. Our team consists of Msgr. Gervasio, Deacon O'Boyle (Chair) Lea Novak (Secretary), Amanda Baranowski and Len Commini. This process was undertaken at the behest of Bishop O'Connell so that future diocesan pastoral planning would benefit from recommendations coming from the parishes. *Faith in Our Future* is a process that works from the "bottom up" rather than from the "top down." It is done to meet head on a growing number of factors that impact our future:

- Demographic changes throughout the Diocese of Trenton
- Significant reduction in available priests (due to retirements) in the next 5 years,
- Real life experiences of our parishes.
- Need for more effective outreach to the growing number of inactive Catholics
- The need to strengthen responsible stewardship of the Church's resources.

Our recent parish surveys were "points of reference" guiding our cohort's deliberations. On June 1, all cohorts were to provide initial proposals to the Diocesan Commission that will submit recommendations to the Bishop for final decisions. These initial recommendations were based on detailed studies of the parishes' Sacramental Life; Evangelization, Catechesis and Catholic Schools; Communal Life; and Stewardship and Leadership.

The following ***common trends and suggested responses*** emerged in our cohort:

- ***Trend:*** Declining Mass attendance causing the sub-optimal use of our churches.  
***Response:*** Collaborative scheduling of Masses among the five parishes to make effective use of our ordained and lay ministers and provide a better worship experience that a larger congregation provides. This may result in fewer Masses but greater attendance.
- ***Trend:*** Critical impact of an impending priest shortage within the next four years  
***Response:*** Explore ways to reduce a priest's administrative burdens so that they might devote their efforts to sacramental and pastoral ministry. Address the impact this will have on current parish staffing. A paid or volunteer business manager and the establishment of a Ministry Coordinator in each parish may assist in this effort.
- ***Trend:*** Enhance key components of worship: e.g. homilies, music, reverence  
***Response:*** Collaboration in training of various liturgical ministries across the cohort.

- **Trend:** Need to reenergize efforts at spirituality and catechesis.  
**Response:** In order to rekindle the “fire”, of interest and action, countering the mentality that renders Mass a mere routine, there must be a focus on family based initiatives, shared by parishes to build the “domestic church.”
- **Trend:** Need for new methods of evangelization  
**Response:** Development of joint activities within the cohort with focus on Youth and Young Adults. Plan a well-publicized cohort-wide “Reconciliation Day: -celebrating the Sacrament of Penance to draw the inactive/alienated.
- **Trend:** Pressing financial concerns  
**Response:** At least one parish cited severe financial stress beyond a significant school subsidy issue. On initial review, the cohort believed it is beyond the financial resources of any Cohort Parish to address this situation through merger. Parishes should explore together “best practices” and cost-saving measures.
- **Trend:** Sustaining Catholic Schools is a high priority and a challenge. There are four elementary schools in Cohort 6 which often “compete” for students  
**Response:** Reduce undercurrent of competition through greater cooperation and support from parishes without schools. Strengthen school marketing efforts. The cohort is receptive to considering alternate models of school administration that contribute to its financial stability and increased enrollment.

### Initial Recommendation

The cohort considered six models for future pastoral activity provided in Canon Law. At this point, Cohort 6 recommends to the Diocesan Commission the **Collaborative Model**. This involves entering into cooperative relationships with the cohort parishes. This model promotes good stewardship of the spiritual and temporal resources of the parishes. It seeks to avoid unnecessary duplication of staff, facilities, and services in order to expand ministries. Well-functioning collaborative parishes

- Provide for the common training of catechists and liturgical ministers
- Share some aspects of youth and young adult ministry
- Sponsor joint adult faith formation programs
- Sharing of some staff; joint in-service programs for staff
- Cooperative programs to assist the needy

Multiple solutions were proposed for our common situations. Many ideas are not fully vetted and may be changed or even dropped as the process continues. New ideas may emerge as we go forward. **These are starting points, not final solutions.** *Faith in Our Future* is a **work in progress**. The Diocesan Planning Commission will review our report and respond with its own suggestions. The cohort will have an opportunity to review and comment before the commission finalizes the report to be presented to the Bishop for his ultimate decision. We will keep you informed of this process. We value your reactions and comments. Contact Deacon Kevin by email: [kevinob@aol.com](mailto:kevinob@aol.com) or drop a letter in the collection basket