



Prayer - Planning - Possibilities

What were the PARISH LISTENING SESSIONS?

One of the five task forces created for the Pastoral Planning Process is the **Parish Listening Session Task Force**. Each pastor in the diocese was asked to invite ten active parish members who have leadership roles in the parish—in addition to clergy, women religious and school principal if applicable—to one of the sessions held in each of the ten deaneries of the diocese.



During the two-hour sessions, participants sat at tables with their fellow parishioners so that all of their discussions were held in the context of their particular communities.



After a video introduction by Bishop Lawrence Persico, during which he encouraged participants to speak honestly and openly, facilitator Msgr. Richard Siefer emphasized that the evening would not include any discussion about closing parishes or schools.

“No decisions have been made,” he said. “We are early in the planning process, and proposals for change will flow out of the process in the months to come. **Your ideas are needed for how we can make our parishes and the diocese better.**”



★ Meet the TASK FORCE MEMBERS!



DAVE HEINZER ▶
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◀ **CHAIR, MSGR. RICHARD SIEFER**
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◀ **MAUREEN HORAN**
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DAVID THIEMANN ▲
Holy Trinity Parish, Erie

WHAT PROCESS WAS USED TO GATHER INFORMATION at the Parish Listening Sessions?

Throughout the sessions, participants were invited into several “structured conversations.” After praying for guidance to the Holy Spirit, each parish table received various questions throughout the evening. Sometimes everyone had the same question while other times, a variety of questions were distributed. *(cont'd on next page)*

Participants then had a short time to reflect on the questions and write responses prior to sharing their ideas at the table. After each person responded, the group discussed and came to consensus about which response their facilitator would share with the entire room. All of the responses from each table were later collected to be tabulated for the task force.



Among the questions considered during the sessions were:

1. *What do I consider the greatest strength of my parish to be?*
2. *What can the administrative offices of the Diocese of Erie do for us as a parish?*
3. *With the decrease in Mass attendance, how will my parish sustain community, good liturgies, facilities and pastoral services?*
4. *With the decrease in the number of priestly vocations, how can my parish assure Catholics of a strong Catholic leadership for them and their families as well as provide sacraments and pastoral services?*
5. *With the rising cost of a Catholic school education, how can my parish assure children and young adults of a foundation in their faith for the future?*
6. *With the rising cost of running a parish, how can today's Catholics financially sustain a viable parish?*

HOW WILL THE INFORMATION FROM THE LISTENING SESSIONS BE USED?

Members of the Parish Listening Task Force have been tabulating and organizing responses from the listening sessions. The Meitler firm, hired to help guide the Diocese of Erie through the pastoral planning process, will be looking at common themes and developing a report to ensure that the task force has access to the creative and useful suggestions made by those who attended the sessions.

TIMELINE Here is a look at some of the key components of the Pastoral Planning Process and an estimate of the timeframe in which they are expected to occur:

ACTIVITY	DATE(S)
Data collection/analysis	Oct. 2014 to Jan. 2015 (Done)
Listening Sessions	March to May 2015 (Done)
Presentations: Key findings/issues	June 2015
Task Force groups work on preliminary plans for diocese	June to Sept. 2015
Parish self-assessments	July to Sept. 2015
Consultation on diocesan-level plans	Sept. to Nov. 2015

THE STANDING SURVEY

After reviewing information about a number of trends in the diocese—several of which have been shared in these bulletin inserts—members were asked to take a standing survey, selecting two of the following trends as the challenges they considered to be the greatest concerns in the diocese:



1. Increasing Mass attendance
2. Bringing back the one-third of Catholics who are registered but inactive
3. Increasing vocations to the priesthood
4. Counteracting the rising number of unchurched
5. Encouraging more baptisms and partaking of the sacraments
6. Encouraging more Catholic parents to send their children to Catholic schools
7. Encouraging more Catholic parents to send their children to religious education
8. Encouraging Catholics to increase their financial support to the church

Finally, the evening concluded with participants filling out a two-sided survey exploring a number of important topics including collaborative efforts, faith formation for children and adults, and evangelization. Among the questions were:

- What is the greatest challenge facing my parish?
- What is one way my parish could be forming adults differently or more creatively?
- What big idea or change in approach would make my parish more vibrant and healthy?

ACTIVITY	DATE(S)
Group parishes into regions or clusters for planning purposes only	Nov. 2015
Presentation of goals and plans for diocese; suggest models for parishes and schools	December 2015
Establish regional task force groups	December 2015
Plan implemented by region	Starting January 2016