

Archdiocesan Synod: Recommendations by the Focus Commission on Governance

The significance of Church governance cannot be overemphasized. We are therefore humbled to have been chosen to serve in this Focus Commission for the Archdiocesan Synod.

God, in His wisdom, has always appointed leaders for his people. This is obvious as we read through the Old Testament where we find the call of Moses and many others like Saul and David. We also find the same in the New Testament where Jesus, the anointed Son of God, chose Peter and the other apostles and disciples to lead the Church after Him. This ministry continues in the Church today through the Pope, Bishops, Priests, Deacons and lay faithful who serve in various capacities as leaders of institutions and as leaders of pastoral councils.

We of the Archdiocese of Winnipeg sincerely appreciate the amazing structure and style of governance which we enjoy. It is our hope that the efforts and suggestions of this Focus Commission on Governance will further enhance the governance style in our Archdiocese.

In his encyclical, *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis reminds us that we are a Church meant to “go forth”. We are on a common journey to spread the joy of the Gospel to all people. To better fulfill this mission within the Diocese of Winnipeg, The Archbishop proclaimed the Synod on Discipleship to discern how we should proceed to better live our discipleship during this time of New Evangelization and renewal in the Church.

From the Listening Sessions, three overarching themes were discerned:

1. Education and formation for Evangelization: Forming missionary disciples;
2. Transmitting faith to and involving all of the baptized in the life and mission of the church, especially the next generation (children and youth) as well as inactive Catholics;
3. Outreach and service to the poor and the marginalized – our mission of charity, mercy and justice.

From comments made during the Listening Sessions and from feedback by clergy in the diocese, nine Focus Commissions were struck to develop recommendations to the Archbishop on how to better support discipleship in the Diocese. Focus Commissions were tasked with developing recommendations rooted in the themes emerging from the Listening Sessions as well as in the overarching Synod theme of fostering discipleship.

The Focus Commission on Governance was asked to review and make recommendations on six concerns that arose from the Listening Sessions and discussions by Clergy. Concerns relate to governance structures and services within the Diocese that may need to be improved in order to better support the discipleship of parishioners.

1. The Role of Parish Pastoral Councils (PPC)

The Focus Commission (FC) reviewed “Norms for Parish Pastoral Councils” and concluded that the guidelines are not followed by many active PPCs. Each PPC operates differently because parishes differ in size and have different numbers of ministries. Some parishes have schools, others do not. While some PPCs do follow the Norms document fairly

closely, others do not. Some PPCs meet on a monthly basis, some meet once in a year. Formats range from formal meetings to dinner meetings. Membership ranges from about 8 to 30 members. Although PPCs generally address the themes arising from the listening sessions, (eg. catechism ministry, charitable activities), they do not typically address issues such as inactive Catholics in the parish, divorced parishioners, youth who do not attend Mass after they complete catechism. Parishes need direction from the Archdiocese about how to structure their PPCs but, because parishes are diverse in size and in the number and kind of ministries they support, PPCs should reflect that diversity. PPCs currently operate somewhat in isolation, not knowing how other PPCs are structured or how they operate.

Recommendations:

- Review and update “Norms for Parish Pastoral Councils” to reflect the individuality of parishes
- Explicitly include the three themes arising from the listening sessions in PPC mission focus.
- Include the rite of commissioning of PPC members in the Appendix.

2. The Role of Deanery Pastoral Councils (DPC)

Some DPCs meet regularly and function well as conduits for communication, others do not. DPCs are important for discussing results of deanery meetings and passing along information on parish activities to the Archdiocese through representation on the Archdiocesan Pastoral Council. DPCs are also important community builders. Representatives from different parishes get to know one another and develop a better understanding of concerns and activity in nearby parishes. Even within active DPCs, some parishes do not attend. It is difficult to know why this is the case. Reasons likely differ among parishes. Deanery level social activities, such as those held recently in the Interlake Deanery, have been successful community builders and excellent sources of funds for charities such as a homeless shelter in Selkirk and the prison ministry at Stony Mountain Penitentiary.

Recommendations

- Develop guidelines for DPCs, similar to what is available for PPCs remembering that the governance structure should be fluid, able to accommodate diversity among Deaneries.
- Examine DPCs that are currently struggling or inactive in order to determine why they are not functioning.
- Consider a different model for DPC meetings. As an example, some meetings could include parishioners and gather feedback, similar to a listening session.

3. Archdiocesan Pastoral Services

The current structure reflects a top down approach. It is not clear that the pastoral offices, for which parishes are paying, reflect the needs of parishioners. It is not clear who develops the pastoral plan.

Recommendations

- Deaneries should identify the pastoral needs of their parishes and contribute to the pastoral plan.
- Pastoral services should be reviewed pending the outcome of the Synod and updated to reflect new priorities.

4. Creating viable parishes and the challenge of smaller and ageing parishes

There are three major issues with parish governance in the Archdiocese. Within the city, there are areas like St. James where several churches exist within a relatively small area. These parishioners could worship together in one large church. The original smaller churches could be kept open as centres for parish ministries such as catechism and bible studies. Building a new large church on newly purchased property would eliminate any sense of ownership by a single parish.

Another issue relates to parishes which began as National parishes (eg. Polish, Italian, Hungarian) and which are now mostly populated by new immigrants especially those from the Philippines. Some Masses are overflowing with new immigrant parishioners while Masses given in the original National language may be poorly attended.

Thirdly, there are small parishes especially in rural areas where numbers are declining and populations are ageing. Many of these parishes could be closed but other options could be explored. These include renting worship space in a nearby church, worshiping in a nearby larger parish and keeping old churches open for ministries and making better use of lay ministers and deacons to lead prayer and worship services. Maintaining even very small mission parishes in remote areas would maintain church communities and a church presence where other options are not available.

Recommendations

- Consider combining parishes in urban areas where several churches serve parishioners in a relatively small area.
- Conduct demographic studies of National parishes which now serve new immigrants to develop a long term plan. Use of these parishes will continue to change as children of these new immigrants disperse and intermarry.
- Look at small parishes to see what options are available and consider their financial viability. Consider options such as using lay ministers and deacons. Although parishioner numbers are important, other factors such as remoteness may be more important criteria for maintaining small parish churches.

5. Expanded Relationship with St. Boniface Diocese

Having two Archdioceses in Winnipeg has long historical roots. The first missionaries to come to Manitoba were French Oblates serving mainly French speaking Métis. Thus the first Diocese in Manitoba reflected its Francophone origins. The Diocese of Winnipeg came later to serve mainly Anglophone settlers. It is possible that, in the future, the two dioceses could be combined. Both Dioceses are now made up of a diversity of people who have immigrated to the province so the French/English dichotomy is less relevant than it used to be.

Recommendations

- Invite St. Boniface Diocese to sit down with us and discuss what we could do together to serve parishioners and meet our goal of fostering discipleship.
- Examine pastoral services offered by the two dioceses and identify overlap.

6. Discerning the possibility of a campus on the Cathedral property relative to the Catholic Centre's relocation, expanded Cathedral facilities, possible school and social services.

At this time, with the information currently available, it is not clear that such developments are needed. There does not seem to be enough property available at the current Cathedral location to accommodate further development unless there are plans to use some of the new buildings that are going up. Any future plans should consider the valuable role of the Church serving the poor and marginalized in the downtown area.

Recommendations

- The St. Benedict's Monastery and retreat centre property could be purchased and these pastoral services could be moved there.