

AT-A-GLANCE

Faith in Our Future is a process through which the Diocese of Trenton, its parishes and ministries, will plan to meet challenges and respond to new opportunities for sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ for years to come.

What happened in May and June?

► [The Cohorts \(grouping of parishes\)](#) wrapped up their consideration of possible measures to strengthen their parishes, and submitted their suggestions on proposed Parish Models along with their rationale to the Diocesan Planning Commission by June 1. These suggestions reflected the best thinking of the Cohorts in regard to which models best fit the needs of their parishes in key areas, such as strengthening youth ministry and the ways that facilities are used.

► The Diocesan Planning Commission convened for a [three-day retreat](#) in mid-June during which they reviewed the Cohort suggestions and formulated [preliminary recommendations](#) with a rationale for each Cohort. These recommendations were sent to each pastor and the Cohorts the week of June 27.

What are the next steps?

STEPS 4 and 5

Response from the Cohorts July, 2016 to September, 2016

► Conversations about the preliminary recommendations will take place at the parish and Cohort levels.

► Responses will be sent by the Cohorts to the Diocesan Planning Commission regarding a particular Parish Model or Models with a rationale by Sept. 30, 2016.

This MONTHLY UPDATE is a report from the Diocese of Trenton on Faith in Our Future, the pastoral planning process to strengthen parishes.

Preliminary recommendations issued for parish changes, Cohorts to discuss and respond

Faith in Our Future, the pastoral planning process that has been underway across the Diocese of Trenton since Fall 2015, calls for each of the 107 parishes involved to pursue a new course that will lead to stronger faith communities and more effective ministry.

This month, these parishes covering Burlington, Mercer, Monmouth and Ocean Counties, are getting a clearer idea of what that new course might look like following the issuance of preliminary recommendations by the Diocesan Planning Commission.

Process now at halfway point

With its focus on consultation that includes parishioners, lay leaders, clergy and diocesan leaders, Faith in Our Future is an 8-step process that will culminate with the July 2017 implementation of decisions made by Bishop David M. O'Connell, C.M. The process has now just entered Steps 4 and 5, after preliminary recommendations were developed by the Commission during a 3-day retreat in mid-June. Those recommendations were sent to the 25 Cohorts (a grouping of four to six parishes based on proximity to one another and other relevant factors) the week of June 27 for further discussion and response.

The leadership team of the Faith in Our Future initiative has consistently stressed the preliminary nature of the current recommendations, pointing to the opportunity that the Cohorts and individual Parish



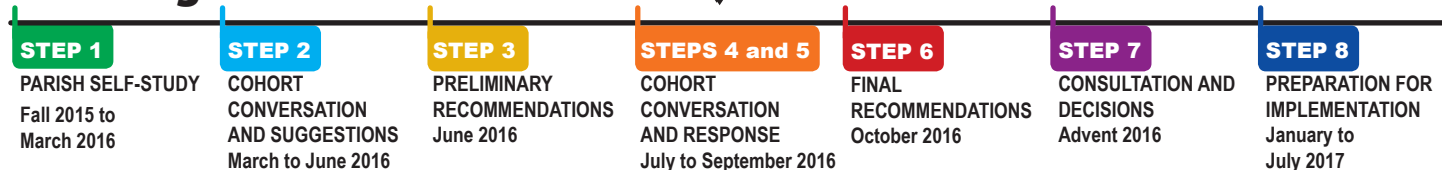
John Reid, a consultant for Faith in Our Future, counts votes during the Planning Commission's retreat. Joe Moore photo

Core Teams now have to study them and respond with their "best thinking."

The Planning Commission will meet again in October to review the Cohort responses and bring together a set of final recommendations for Bishop O'Connell to consider. This will lead to the last two steps – consultation and decision-making by the Bishop (expected to take place by the end of 2016 or the beginning of 2017) and preparation for implementation (to begin early in 2017). Implementation of the Bishop's decisions is expected to begin July 1, 2017.

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Planning Process Timeline



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Need to catch up?

You can find the following resources at dioceseoftrenton.org/faithinourfuture

- ◆ [The five goals for the process established by Bishop O'Connell](#)
- ◆ [A video message from Bishop O'Connell](#)
- ◆ [A list of parishes organized by Cohorts](#)
- ◆ [Profiles for each of the Diocesan Planning Commission members](#)
- ◆ [The Six Parish Models](#)
- ◆ [Written coverage in The Monitor on the Planning Commission's work](#)

Recommendations reflect 'best thinking'

The Planning Commission's recommendations focused on four of the six possible Parish Models for each community within the Cohort: 1) Collaboration; 2) Linking; 3) Merger, and 4) "In Solidum" team.

The remaining models that have not been among the preliminary recommendations are: 5) Parish Life Director, and 6) Personal Parish.

In customized reports written to each Cohort, the Planning Commission expressed appreciation for the efforts of Parish Core Team members and Cohort representatives, commending each for the quality, depth and sense of mission reflected in the work. The Commission also acknowledged the different suggestions and rationales submitted by the Cohorts, pointing out areas of agreement and disagreement between them and the Commission.

In a few cases, the Commission cited Cohorts that submitted incomplete information or suggestions that were deemed unrealistic and/or unsupported by data. Some Cohorts were asked to submit the missing information when they file their responses by October.

In rendering their preliminary recommendations, the Commission took into account the Cohorts' suggestions; the data and input on which they were based,

such as parish size, debt and findings in parish surveys, and the different make-up of each Cohort, such as the ethnic breakdown, the presence of Catholic schools and hospital ministries that must be supported, and the existence of a religious order ministering in one or more parishes.

The recommendations also went beyond the six Parish Models, finding different and specific ways for parishes to work together, particularly as Cohorts, even after possible mergers or other restructuring. For instance, the recommendations promoted the idea for certain Cohorts to develop an identity as a regional faith community; to hire a professional business administrator or youth minister to serve all parishes within a Cohort; to coordinate schedules to reduce the number of Masses and increase attendance at each across the Cohort, and to study ways that buildings can serve the Cohort, as opposed to just the parish.

Back to the parishes

In letters sent June 28 to pastors and Parish Core Team members, Msgr. Leonard F. Troiano, episcopal vicar for planning, encouraged ongoing consultation over the next several months within parish communities to fully digest what was being asked and consider how they might respond.

This second round of parish consultation, Msgr. Troiano reports, provides another opportunity for community members to have a voice in this process. He advised the parish leaders, "Once you have prayerfully listened to the input of your parishioners, please work with the members of your Cohort to consider how to respond to the recommendations."

He expects that with parish input the Cohorts will be able to provide a substantive response back to the Planning Commission that could affirm one or more of the preliminary recommendations or suggest a different course of action.

To view the recommendations, go to dioceseoftrenton.org/faithinourfuture

How did the Diocesan Planning Commission develop its recommendations?

The preliminary recommendations for each of the Cohorts were developed by the Planning Commission during its three-day retreat and conference in mid-June.

To get an idea of what happened at the retreat and how the recommendations were created, check out The Monitor's video news report, available at dioceseoftrenton.org.

