Consultation process draws review, response from thousands of parishioners

Summer in the parishes of the Diocese of Trenton had a decidedly different look and feel this year.

The typically quieter months of July and August were instead quite busy as parishioners, lay leaders and clergy worked to fully digest and respond to preliminary recommendations that had been made about the future of their faith communities. Small group meetings, town hall-style gatherings and official deliberations by the 25 Paish Cohorts (groupings of parishes) unfolded

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Here’s what Cohort members have said about the Faith in Our Future process:

“All four priests in our Cohort are committed to this process, and when you have this kind of leadership, it really does flow onto the laity working with them. Their support is contagious.” Mary Ann Figura, Cohort 2 co-chair

“A lot of improvements have been made in all of our parishes, and we appreciate the nature of the process.” Mary Frances, Cohort 11 Core Team member

“We need to let go of the short-term concerns and focus on where we are going in the next five to 10 years.” Tom Mullooly, Cohort 19 chairman

“The group understands this is a serious issue. There's what I want, what the other 19 people want and what God wants. I like to think he’s [God] going to get what he wants and needs at the end of the day.” Anthony Coticelli, Cohort 22 chairman

To read a full report from the Monitor on the summer consultation process, go to dioceseoftrenton.org/faithinourfuture/news/

Planning Process Timeline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STEP 1 PARISH SELF-STUDY</th>
<th>STEP 2 COHORT CONVERSATION AND SUGGESTIONS</th>
<th>STEP 3 PRELIMINARY RECOMMENDATIONS</th>
<th>STEP 4 and 5 COHORT CONVERSATION AND RESPONSE</th>
<th>STEP 6 FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS</th>
<th>STEP 7 CONSULTATION AND DECISIONS</th>
<th>STEP 8 IMPLEMENTATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fall 2015 to March 2016</td>
<td>March to June 2016</td>
<td>June 2016</td>
<td>July to September 2016</td>
<td>October 2016</td>
<td>Late 2016/Early 2017</td>
<td>Early 2017 to July 2017</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Continued from front

steadily throughout the mid-
and late-summer weeks
as part of the Faith in Our
Future initiative.

The results of weeks of
work and consultation were
set to emerge during the
final days of September, as
the Cohorts submit their
official responses to the
Diocese in preparation for
the Oct. 18-20 Diocesan
Planning Commission
retreat. During the retreat,
the Commission will review
all the input it receives from
the 25 Cohorts. In light of
the goals and criteria for
Faith in Our Future, the
Commission will prepare
final recommendations
of models and ministries,
including campus ministry,
hospital chaplaincy and jail
and prison ministry, along
with a rationale.

The final recommenda-
tions will be sent directly to
Bishop David M. O’Connell,
C.M., by Oct. 31 for his
prayerful review as he
consults with the diocesan
Curia, Episcopal Council and
other consultative bodies at
multiple levels before
making his final decisions.

He is expected to announce
his final decisions in
December 2016 or January
2017 with planning for
implementation to follow.

Once the responses
are submitted, the work
of parish core teams is
completed. The next phase
of parish-level work will be
that of implementation,
to begin after the final
decisions are announced by
the Bishop.

![Image](image-url)

Tom Mullolly, Cohort 19
chairman, speaks during a
Town Hall-style meeting Aug.
17 in St. Mark Parish Center.
Sea Girt. Rose O’Connor photo

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
- Video from the
  June Planning
  Commission retreat
- The Parish Models
- Written coverage
  from The Monitor
- The Preliminary
  Recommendations
  issued by the
  Diocesan Planning
  Commission in June

Important to Know

- The recommendations that have been reviewed and discussed were
  preliminary only. As several stages of the process have yet to be completed, no
  course of action will be taken until Bishop O’Connell announces his final decisions,
  which is not expected to happen until December 2016 or January 2017.

- There are a number of different models of parish organization under
  consideration, and every parish will have some level of change in connection
  with its neighboring parishes. At a minimum, parishes will be asked to enter
  into collaborative relationships with other parishes in their Cohorts. Among other
  models are merger, linking, in solidum and personal parishes.

- Merger and closure are not synonymous terms. If parishes are selected for
  merger, it means they join together to become an entirely new faith community. It
  is not about the closing of one parish and the strengthening of the other.

- Parish and church are not synonymous terms. The parish is the community
  of believers and the territorial boundaries in which they reside; the church is the
  worship site in which the faithful gather. When parishes merge, some worship sites
  will remain open and some will close, depending on the needs of the new parish
  and several other criteria.