The Spiritual Life
SPIRITUAL LIFE
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The ongoing renewal of our spiritual life, individually and corporately

• how will the parish/diocese structure ongoing organized renewal programs?
  • what must be developed to encourage individual and corporate spiritual development, through the sacramental life of the church?

During the past several years the parishes of the diocese have benefited from the spiritual renewal generated through organized programs, such as, Cursillo, Marriage Encounter, Renew, etc. The continued spiritual renewal of the entire diocese is of utmost importance if the church is to fully engage itself in the mission of proclaiming the Gospel to all. The sacramental life of the community is the ongoing means by which each member, and the community as a whole, is invigorated with God’s grace. It is through our celebration of the sacraments and participation in renewal movements that we will find the strength to carry out the Church’s mission today.

The following areas need to be addressed:

1. How will the parish/diocese structure ongoing organized renewal programs for the benefit of all? What is needed on the parish level, vicariate level, diocesan level?

2. How can the celebration of the sacraments in the parish be improved? What areas of celebration need further development and how will this be done? What can parishes do together to assist in their celebration of the sacraments? What devotional areas might be encouraged and fostered both on the parochial and diocesan level?
SPIRITUAL LIFE COMMISSION
BACKGROUND STATEMENT

Spiritual life is the life of grace which the people of God enjoy through God's reconciling intervention in human history. The quality of that life involves: How I, as a person, relate to God. How we, as the people of God, relate to, help, affirm and inspire one another. How I (we) see our relationship to Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The parish, and indirectly the diocese, provides the climate which can help or hinder spiritual development.

Within a parish, the signs of good spiritual life are to be found in the variety and depth of prayer of the people, their concern for the poor, their openness as a welcoming community, and their ability to reach out to those hurting in any way: the sick, the bereaved, the elderly, and the disaffected.

For Catholics in the Diocese of Charlotte, the parish is particularly significant. The majority are centered in urban areas, a middle class population tending toward the affluent. For the most part, they have migrated to North Carolina from other parts of the country and the world, and some reflect Latin and Oriental cultures. Many experience themselves for the first time as a minority. Fundamentally, they are a rootless people, and if the Church does not become family, there is nothing.

At the same time, there are also Catholics who are rooted in the history of the rural South. This group comprises Blacks, migrant workers, and small clusters from the mountain regions. They also experience themselves as minorities, but not simply from the perspective of being Catholic. In general they are peoples with low self-esteem, and it is important for them to move beyond their missionary status and become more self-sufficient in the life of the Church. While they are not so numerous as the urban middle class population, they are very significant to the Diocese of Charlotte.

The distinct influences of the Southern environment upon Catholicism are at once positive and negative. There are rich and rewarding opportunities for ecumenical dialogue and collaboration. At the same time the fundamentalist tendencies of the evangelical approach are confusing to some Catholics while challenging to others. In general, Catholic parishes have not reached their potential in evangelization and in opening their doors to marginalized and alienated groups (singles, young adults, youth, those alienated by Vatican II, etc.)

The data gleaned from the Parish Lenten Synod process indicate that, generally speaking, the pastor is central to the spiritual life of the parish. From one perspective this is a statement complimentary to priests who are working hard to develop vital congregations. However, in the light of future trends it is clear that such centrality and dependency will be detrimental to the on-going life of the Church. Sociological studies point to a decline in the number of clergy and religious. While there is reason to pray for and encourage vocations to the priesthood, the diaconate and the religious life, there is also a great need to educate Catholics, clergy included, to theologies of the diaconate and of lay ministry as proclaimed by Vatican II with emerging roles open to both men and women. It is not simply a question of providing training programs for various ministries, but also a question of the need for education which opens people to receive new forms of ministry within the Church.

It is clear that there is a dynamic relationship between the spiritual life of the parish and its liturgical and sacramental life. In reality, liturgy is really central, but much effort is needed to make the liturgical symbols and action meaningful and understood: good music, effective homilies which bring the word of God to bear upon the lives of the people, and trained lectors, Eucharistic ministers, greeters, and ushers. Architectural forms must be developed which promote community and which are conducive to the
proclamation of the Word and the celebration of the Eucharist. Sacramental preparation, especially the RCIA, requires the best coordinated effort, and periodic communal penance celebrations are important. When liturgy both expresses and effects a welcoming community, then all else follows.

In all of this, education is key—education for Catholic Christian identity, for ministry, for liturgical action. In the life of grace many opportunities arise for adult education and must be organized in the parish so that adults are grounded in their faith and in their understanding of the sacraments. However, it is established, the educational process must be attuned to the reality of the lives of those who participate in the parish or on the diocesan level, as well as those who are marginalized or alienated. Programs should reflect the diversity of language skills and the educational ability of the people. Many opportunities are possible through the media, through bulletins and newsletters. At the same time, homilies are a central source of education for the parish. However, new ways need also to be explored to improve communication between clergy and laity. Whatever form it takes, continuing education is important for all, especially for those in leadership positions, and vital to the life of the Church.

There is a need to develop a variety of kinds and opportunities for prayer within parishes to deepen our Catholic Christian faith, to foster new understandings of reconciliation and to strengthen the meaning of Eucharist. A variety of programs is available to the Diocese to facilitate parish renewal. For the most part these programs involve trained Lay leaders and organized faith-sharing opportunities. However, any single program selected on a Diocesan level should include all parishes and be accommodating to different groups within parishes, especially those on the fringe. Also important are extended opportunities for varied retreats and spiritual direction. To this end, the training of new spiritual directors, particularly among the laity, is a priority.

It is the challenge of the Synod to call the Church of Charlotte to a renewed and strengthened spiritual life, to acknowledge the present moment of grace, and so to recognize God's intervention in our own diocesan history.
SPIRITUAL LIFE COMMISSION

I. THAT THE DIOCESE INITIATE PROGRAM(S) OF SPIRITUAL RENEWAL WHICH EVANGELIZE AND WHICH PLACE EMPHASIS ON CATHOLIC IDENTITY, ON HOSPITALITY, ON RECONCILIATION, ON SUPPORT FOR THE POOR AND MINISTRY TO THOSE ALIENATED IN ANY MANNER WHATSOEVER.

   • EACH PARISH WILL ENGAGE IN A PASTORAL PROGRAM FOR THE VISITATION OF EACH REGISTERED HOUSEHOLD.

   • EACH PARISH BE REQUIRED BY THE DIOCESE TO ENGAGE IN AN ORGANIZED SPIRITUAL RENEWAL AND EVANGELIZATION PROGRAM.

ACTION PLAN
The Diocese of Charlotte will establish a three-phased program of: parish visitation, parish renewal, and evangelization.

A. At the Diocesan level: A coordinator and staff will be provided to 1) plan the program; 2) coordinate it; 3) provide training; 4) identify and publicize resource persons and materials; 5) provide financial support where needed; and 6) develop and implement a process for evaluation of results.

B. At the Parish level: In Phase I (Parish Visitation), each parish will a) appoint a coordinator, who will recruit and train a team of visitors, drawn from the parish; b) develop a format for the visit; c) provide a simple but complete information collection system; and d) a follow-up program for dealing with areas of concern.

C. In Phase II (Parish Renewal), each parish will develop and present for the Bishop’s approval a parish plan for renewal. Upon approval, implementation shall take place.

D. The Diocese will establish a) minimum expectations for such plans; b) calendar constraints; c) models of renewal programs appropriate to differing types of parishes; d) assistance in the formulation of the plans; assistance in the implementation and evaluation of the effort.

E. That the Diocese will continue to provide support for programs which strengthen the spiritual life of individuals, families and groups and provide education in parishes about the need, benefits, and types of spiritual direction. That this support include the development of a spiritual resource library where individuals could borrow retreats on audio and video cassettes as well as books and periodicals on spiritual enrichment. That there also be training for parishes which desire to give home and group retreats (e.g. Cenacle Home Retreats or 19th Annotation Retreats).

F. In Phase III (Evangelization) each parish will draw up a plan and implement it, designed to a) assist former Catholics to be reunited to the parish; b) meet the special needs of minority groups; c) reach out to the unchurched and others who may be interested in the Church. (Refer to the Evangelization report for further delineation.)

II. THAT THE DIOCESE SPONSOR A PROGRAM TO TRAIN PRIESTS, DEACONS, RELIGIOUS AND LAITY AS SPIRITUAL DIRECTORS IN ORDER TO INSURE INCREASED AVAILABILITY FOR SPIRITUAL DIRECTION AND RETREATS ON THE DIOCESAN AND PARISH LEVELS.

ACTION PLAN
A. Initial responsibility for the program be assigned to the office of
Vicar for Religious for the sake of continuity with the present program.

B. The Vicar will set up a process for identifying spiritual directors, provide training for persons desirous of engaging themselves as spiritual directors. Set up a process for certification, evaluation and publication of those gifted as spiritual directors.

C. A budget for this purpose should include fellowships for training at established centers already set up for this purpose; seminars for continuing education of those engaged in spiritual direction.

III THAT THE DIOCESE CONTINUE TO STRENGTHEN THE LITURGICAL COMMISSION THROUGH THE PRESENCE OF AN ACTIVE LITURGICAL DIRECTOR, PROVIDE FOR THE CONDUCT OF TRAINING PROGRAMS IN EACH PARISH, AND BACK UP THIS EFFORT WITH ADEQUATE BUDGET AND STAFF.

ACTION PLAN
A. The Diocesan Liturgical Commission shall develop the job description of the Diocesan Liturgical Director with a view to the eventual development of a full-time position.

B. The Diocesan Liturgical Commission shall develop a five year plan for the implementation of their mandate.

C. The Diocesan Liturgical Commission shall provide for programs which include:
   - Assistance in homily preparation and organization of thematic material for homilies;
   - On site assistance in parishes for the training of lay ministers;
   - Development of a music apostolate, through workshops, seminars and the provision of sheet music, tapes and books; assistance also to individual parishes in defining the roles of Music Directors, organists, etc., and assistance, where needed, in hiring for these positions;
   - Assistance in architectural design for new and restructured churches.

   The Diocesan Liturgical Commission shall also assist parish planning teams in developing thematic, seasonal, or special liturgical and para-liturgical celebrations through a quarterly newsletter of information, hints, creative ideas, and suggestions.

   The Diocesan Liturgical Commission shall provide training and resources to parishes in creating non-liturgical and varied private and communal prayer and worship services for children, teens, families, groups, etc. especially in areas where daily liturgy is not an option.

D. It shall be the aim of the Diocesan Liturgical Commission to insure a viable liturgical commission in each parish.

IV THAT THERE BE A COORDINATED EFFORT ON THE PART OF THE OFFICE OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION AND THE LITURGICAL COMMISSION TO PROVIDE CERTIFIED AND ACCREDITED EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS FOR ADULTS.

ACTION PLAN
A. Such programs should focus on: Catholic identity with particular emphasis on the teachings of Vatican II; The formation of Christian Conscience in the context of the workplace; Sacramental and liturgical life; The role of the laity with emphasis on emerging roles in ministry.

B. That there be a strengthening with staff and resources of the Department of Adult Education within the Office of Religious Education.

C. That the Diocese take leadership in providing cable accessibility to major Catholic networks, e.g., Paulists, Mother Angelica, etc.

D. When programs (cf. #1 above) are conducted within the Diocese, they should be recorded on videotape or cassette and should be available through the Diocesan Media Center for dissemination to parishes and vicariates.

E. Special attention should be made to the varied needs of adults (singles, families, separated, divorced, etc.) as well as to the cultural and language needs of minority groups within the Diocese.
EXPLANATORY NOTES FOR SPIRITUAL LIFE ACTION PLANS

GOAL I.
The visitation should be designed in such a way that: 1) forms of alienation be discovered and dealt with, 2) special needs be identified, 3) a parish community might develop through involvement, and 4) a basis for future programming be determined. The program should last from two to four years and should address the needs of individuals as well as the corporate parish constituency. It should be structured with special focus on the five areas of emphasis described above.

GOAL I, A.
Special concern is to be shown for minority groups and their cultural needs, including service in native languages where possible.
The coordinator should relate to the Media Center for the provision of resources suitable for the visitation, renewal and evangelization phases of the program.

GOAL I, B.
Visitation should emphasize sensitivity and compassion; discovering alienation and special needs; laying a groundwork for parish community. The use of the vicariate structure for common planning between parishes may be helpful.

GOAL I, C.
This renewal is aimed at forming a parish community, joined together in liturgical celebration and proclaiming the Gospel in their lifestyle. The process builds and networks small groups within the parish. In the light of identified needs, each parish will provide for a variety of styles of prayer and prayer groups; and promote organized prayer experiences open to all members.

GOAL I, E.
A. For the Laity: Programs such as Marriage and Engaged Encounter, the Cursillo, Jubilee Weekends, Charismatic Renewal and the variety of retreats offered at Maggie Valley, the Oratory, McAuley Center at Sacred Heart College, etc. (Such support is offered primarily through the varied networks of communication provided by the Diocese.)
B. Continued development of support groups for priests, deacons and religious women.
C. Special attention be made to the cultural and language needs of minority groups within a parish, including migrants.

GOAL III, C.
Collaboration should be encouraged between Belmont Abbey College and the Presbyteral Council.