

**"Six Diocesan Strategic Goals for the Future:
In Response to the 19th Synod"**

Introduction

Nicknames are often a sign of our affection for other people. Most of us have been tagged with nicknames and many of us have given nicknames to others.

A number of years ago, I gave a nickname to the most special person in my life, my maternal grandmother. The name that I gave her was "Porchy." In late Spring, all during the Summer and early Autumn, my grandmother loved to sit on her front porch in the evenings. She used her porch as a special place of prayer and contemplation. From her front porch she watched the traffic go by. From her front porch she had the opportunity to say hello and offer a kind greeting to passers-by and they likewise to her. From her front porch, she and her neighbors connected. On her front porch she often shared a nut roll and received in return a plate of cookies. But most important of all, from her front porch, "Porchy" connected with others, offered a helping hand to others and most important of all collected the needs of others and spoke about them to God.

While my grandmother has gone to her eternal reward more than 25 years ago, I thought about her name "Porchy" and about the times that I had the pleasure and privilege of sitting with her on her front porch. As I "traveled down memory lane," I also couldn't help but reflect that most of the houses in most of our local neighborhoods were built with front porches which were much more than just appendages to houses. They were the means for people to reach out to others. As I reflect on my grandmother's life, the front porch was one place where she put her faith into action.

As I reflected on "Porchy's" front porch, I thought about the houses that are built today. True, many of them have front porches, but they serve more for decoration or protection from bad weather than for the purpose for which they were originally built. Isn't it true that most people today gather not on the front porch but on decks in the back yard that are often protected by fences, fences which keep our lives private – and secluded.

We can learn an important lesson from our more recent ancestors, but even more so from the earliest disciples of Jesus who were taught by Him. They, in turn, have taught us down through 2000 years that as followers of Jesus we are to maintain contact with each other in faith and in loving service. In a certain sense, they were "front porch people" for Jesus.

To my mind, a great deal is happening in the Church of Pittsburgh as a result of our diocesan synod. In large measure, I believe that the Synod is a reminder that we are connected to each other in the name of Christ and as such we are called to be "front porch people."

Since 1996, we, the Church of Pittsburgh, have been involved in the preparations for, the deliberations in, and the conclusion of, the 19th Diocesan Synod. For those who have been directly involved -- the staff, the various committees, the delegates and

alternates -- the Synod has meant a great deal. Some weeks ago, after the conclusion of the Synod, the faithful of the Church of Pittsburgh had an opportunity to read the results of the Synod in the *Pittsburgh Catholic*. Bishop Wuerl's Post Synodal Reflection addressed the current state of the Church of Pittsburgh. The Statutes of the 19th Diocesan Synod highlighted the particular law that is a part of this local Church. Finally, the recommendations of the diocesan delegates point a clear direction where the Church of Pittsburgh is moving under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Since the Synod concluded, many people have asked the question: "What will happen next as a result of the Synod?" It is my hope, as General Secretary of the diocese to share with you six areas of strategic focus that will be the main agenda for the Church of Pittsburgh and all of our parishes and institutions in the years ahead. The six strategic goals of the diocese are not new. Each one of the strategic goals has, in fact, been an important part of our ministry in the past. However, the demands of the present moment and the needs of the future call us to spotlight as a local Church these important priorities that flow directly from the work of the diocesan synod.

Before detailing for you the six strategic goals of the diocese, it is important to set the stage by taking a look at "where we are" as the Church of Pittsburgh.

Background

Our Diocesan Synod was built on three major themes. The first, "The Universal Call to Holiness" emphasized the need for each one of us to become more like Christ. The second theme, "The Pastoral Care of Faith Communities" underscored the need to reach out in the example of Christ, the Good Shepherd, to God's people who are a part of the Body of Christ, the Church. The third theme, "Manifesting and Extending the Kingdom of God" clearly highlighted our responsibility as Church to live the good news of Jesus, while at the same time, to share that "Good News" with a world that often turns a deaf ear to the word of God and the message of the Church.

Our diocesan synod concluded at the dawn of a new millennium. This Jubilee Year marks a time of renewal, revitalization, and recommitment. The renewal of these days is evidenced by the call of our Holy Father, Pope John Paul II, to take some important steps as a Universal Church in wearing more proudly the Catholic identity that we share as a people born in the waters of baptism. Revitalization in the new millennium bespeaks of our diocesan efforts of ongoing spiritual growth in all of our faith communities—parishes, institutions, and outreach programs. Recommitment in the new millennium is the ongoing renewal of our baptismal promises which leads us as individuals to deepen our relationship with Jesus Christ and to make the words and actions of Jesus more evident in our personal words and deeds.

As we look forward to giving attention to the six strategic areas of focus of the diocese, we also look back ten years ago when the diocese focused attention on five important priorities pertinent to that time in our history: (1) the Parish Reorganization and Revitalization Project; (2) the spiritual renewal of the clergy;

(3) religious education; (4) lay ministry; and, (5) ministry to the elderly.

While the first phase of the Parish Reorganization and Revitalization Project concluded in 1994, the ongoing phases of that renewal and revitalization are being undertaken by each of the parishes in the diocese with the assistance of diocesan staff. Each parish is faced with making decisions about what is the "best use" of facilities, staff, programs, and outreach to the faithful within each community.

The spiritual renewal of the clergy has been enhanced over the course of the last ten years by the number of fall and spring one-day clergy convocations, by the three multi-day convocations held at Oglebay, West Virginia, and by the number of ongoing formation programs available for the academic and spiritual enhancement of the clergy and all of those other programs supported by the diocese to assist clergy in their particular needs.

A great deal of attention in the last ten years has been paid to strengthening our efforts in religious education. Full and careful attention has been given to insure that all religious education programs—preschool, elementary school, middle school, high school, and adult faith formation—are reflective of the beautiful tradition and the life-giving teachings of Christ through our Church.

The emphasis on lay ministry has resulted in the establishment of the Institute for Ministries which helps to prepare so many generous lay people for various ministries exercised in our parishes and institutions. The Church of Pittsburgh has always been very fortunate to have many gifted and generous lay people. The last ten years have reflected a marked increase in the numbers of those who not only express their desire to engage in the ministries of the Church but, through the Institute, are prepared appropriately for particular service in, through and to the Church.

Finally, the ministry to the elderly is important in our diocese because we have more senior citizens than most other areas of our country. In response to this reality, the Church made available to its senior members many programs through the expert staff of Catholic Charities, and other programs of the Church. Also, many parish staffs have become more sensitive to the everyday needs of older persons.

The Sources

In addition to the background which gave birth to our strategic areas of focus, there are a number of important sources which provide a firm foundation to our important goals: (1) writings of our Holy Father, Pope John Paul II; (2) statements by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops; (3) pastoral letters from our Chief Shepherd, Bishop Wuerl; (4) outcomes of our diocesan synod; and, (5) experiences and expertise of the Bishop's Senior Staff.

Among the recent teachings of the Holy Father which gave support to our diocesan strategies are *Ecclesia in America*, the Holy Father's post synodal apostolic exhortation following the Synod of the Americas; *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* which provides a compendium of all that we hold dear to the faith and tradition of our Church; *The General Directory for Catechesis*, which gives strong direction to the ways in which our faith traditions and dogmas are passed on; and *Dies Domini (Observing and Celebrating the Day of the Lord)*, in which the Holy

Father emphasizes the importance of the Eucharist within the context of our Sunday celebrations and how the Eucharist can make Sunday sacred in our lives.

Among the recent statements of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, those which provide a blueprint for diocesan strategies are: *Our Hearts Were Burning within Us* which pays particular attention to the need for adult religious education; *In All Things Charity* which is a millennium statement that underscores the need to live more charitably and act out of a resonant justice; *Go and Make Disciples* which underlines the need for ongoing evangelization; and, *Renewing the Vision* which addresses the need to be respectful of, informed on and involved with the youth and young adults of our Church.

Since becoming our Chief Shepherd in 1988, Bishop Wuerl has written a number of pastoral letters which have not only inspired us but also have given us clear direction where and how we need to walk together on our journey to the kingdom of God. Most recently, his letters *Confronting Racism Today*; *To Walk in the Footsteps of Jesus*; *A Millennium Reflection: What It Means to Be a Catholic*; *God's Good Gift of Life* and *Post Abortion Reconciliation and Healing* speak in practical terms of contemporary challenges which our Church faces in living out Christ's Gospel.

In addition, our diocesan strategies are also shaped by the outcomes of our recent 19th Diocesan Synod – namely by its statutes, the recommendations borne out of the healthy deliberations of the synod delegates and the diocesan bishop's post synodal reflection.

Finally, our strategies are reflective of the experience of the Bishop's Senior Staff, who work with Bishop Wuerl to assist him as one who is entrusted by our Holy Father to teach, lead, and sanctify the Church of Pittsburgh

The Process

With all of this information in mind, the actual strategies came into focus during two important gatherings of the Bishop's Senior Staff. The first was an all-day session in which the Senior Staff examined our strengths and weaknesses as a local Church and the opportunities and threats we face at this time in history as a diocese from three perspectives: (1) from the "cathedra" or the perspective of the bishop in the diocese; (2) from the "choir stalls" representing the pastors and ministers of the Church; and, (3) from the "pew" or the perspective of the laity. From these reflections emerged the six areas of strategic focus for the future: (1) the Eucharist; (2) evangelization; (3) adult faith formation; (4) leadership; (5) youth and young adult ministry; and, (6) stewardship.

The validity of each of these six strategic areas of focus was tested against the synod outcomes. It is important to note that all 41 of the pastoral recommendations from the synod fit into one of these six goals. While stewardship was not an explicit topic at the synod, it is an underlying support for the other five priorities.

Areas of Strategic Focus

1. *The Eucharist*

When Jesus changed the bread and wine at the Last Supper into His Body

and Blood and said, "Do this in memory of me," He set the stage for what was, is, and will always be the most important reality of what it means to be Church – the Eucharist. Particularly, and in this Jubilee year, during which our Holy Father has asked us to pay special attention to the importance of the Eucharist in our lives, we, as the Church of Pittsburgh, are committed to supporting an ongoing emphasis on the Eucharist in the coming years.

The synod document speaks of the need to pay special attention to the Eucharist within the context of the liturgical year: that the Eucharist be a full and worthy celebration preceded by careful preparation and suitable formation on the part of clergy and lay ministers alike; that the Eucharist make full use of Sacred Scripture and the symbols, gestures, and actions that are so much an important part of the tradition of the Church; and most especially that the clergy who are given the important task of preaching engage in ongoing formation programs that will bear fruit in the preaching of God's word which is scripturally based, theologically sound, and applicable to the challenges which Catholics face each day.

2. *Evangelization*

Much has been said recently about the importance of evangelization in the Church. Evangelization, simply stated, is bearing witness to the person of Jesus and His Church and spreading that good news to others. Our Holy Father has advanced our understanding of the evangelization task by his reference to the "new evangelization;" that is reaching out to inactive, marginal and under-evangelized or nominal Catholics.

According to the *General Directory for Catechesis*, evangelization is a continuous and dynamic process of spreading the Gospel to the entire world. Evangelization is urged by charity, bears witness to the Christian life, proclaims the Gospel call to conversion, initiates adults and children into the faith and Christian life through the sacraments, nourishes the gift of communion and continuously underscores mission. (GDC, #48) Parishes do the work of evangelization when they fully implement the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults and the Rite of Christian Initiation of Children. All catechesis of children offers opportunities for enriching the faith formation of parents, grandparents and adults, through Scripture study, explication of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, and reflection on service to the poor and needy.

Christian initiation, which has become a major focus of attention over the course of the last several decades, will continue to be an important element of the strategic focus of evangelization for the coming years. All parishes are encouraged to continue to make use of the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* and the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Children* and to make maximum use of "educating" parents as they prepare for the baptism of their infants in the Church and all other sacramental preparation for their children.

This second strategic area of focus for the diocese also calls for a greater emphasis on hospitality. Parishes need to be places of cordial welcome,

particularly to new immigrants to our region and to minority communities, such as African-Americans and Asian-Americans. At all times we Catholics need to be ecumenically sensitive to our brothers and sisters in Christian faith. We need to increase the opportunities for communication and action with our brothers and sisters of the Jewish faith and the Muslim faith. True evangelization, which leads to conversion to Christ, always results in greater efforts to uphold human rights and help root out the causes of social ills that are a result of racial, ethnic and economic injustice.

3. *Adult Faith Formation*

For a number of years, in many of his talks on religious education, Bishop Wuerl has often made reference to persons who in their elementary and high school years, in the 1960's and 1970's, received a very inadequate understanding of the teachings and traditions of the Church. That was a time of great transition in the Church. Since this particular group of people are now adults, many of whom are parents, a third primary strategic focus for the Church of Pittsburgh in response to the synod is adult faith formation. The goal of adult faith formation is to help people hear God's word with mind and heart. The actual enterprise of adult faith catechesis places significant attention on scripture, theology, and the traditions of the Church. But adult faith formation also involves the heart with opportunities for adults to grow in holiness through spirituality and retreat programs. Adult faith formation based on both the mind and heart is meant to heighten a deeper sense of moral obligation. It must be open to the movement of the Holy Spirit Who transforms our inner lives so that our relationships with the immediate world (our family, workplace, neighborhood, and parish) and our interaction with the larger world (the civic, political, social, and economic communities) are reflective of the presence and person of Christ within us.

The goal of adult faith formation is to lead adults to a deeper knowledge of their faith as well as a greater sense of holiness rooted in a love for God. By advancing the full development of adult faith, we can help to prepare adults to defend their faith and to work ceaselessly for the transformation of our culture.

4. *Leadership*

The fourth major strategy of the diocese is leadership. As an important goal for the future, the Church of Pittsburgh seeks to build on the many leadership development programs initiated in the past. The clergy -- priests and deacons -- will continue to engage in programs which will assist them to promote even more the spiritual well-being of the faithful of our diocesan family. In addition, a number of innovative vocation programs, such as the more recent television spots, seek to invite interested people to give serious consideration to the priesthood and consecrated life.

The Church of Pittsburgh has always been the beneficiary of generous, faith-filled, and dedicated service by women and men in consecrated life. As part of our leadership awareness programs for the future, it is vital that we continue

to invite participation from, consultation with, and service by religious communities. The varying charisms which define and describe these communities help make the Church of Pittsburgh even richer.

The Institute for Ministries, which has been established by our diocese, has done a notable job in helping to prepare lay women and lay men for the ministries of the Church in parish life. These efforts will continue so that the Institute can further prepare more lay people for the ministries of the Church in a competent, effective, and faith-filled manner.

The Church has always enjoyed the benefit of volunteers who expend much time and energy in helping our Church and in particular our parishes to becoming more vibrant. As a part of this fourth area of strategic focus, the diocese wants to continue to accept, respect, and enjoy the benefits of the generous offer of volunteers for the good of the entire Church.

In addition, leadership is demonstrated through the consultative bodies on both diocesan and parish levels. On the parish level, the finance council in conformity with Canon 537 of *the Code of Canon Law*, is to work with the pastor to ensure the continued fiscal stability of the parish and to maintain and build on the trust of those who support the works of the Church financially.

In addition, and in conformity with Statute #17 of the 19th Diocesan Synod, every parish is to have a pastoral council whose purpose is to assist the pastor in establishing a strategic plan for the future. This and other consultative groups such as the finance council make significant contributions to the life of each parish.

Finally, leadership in the Church of Pittsburgh is also exercised on the deanery level. Of critical importance in the next few years is the Deanery Planning Process, which seeks to combine efforts and energy of clergy on the local level so that the faithful may be served pastorally in the best way possible. While the Deanery Planning Process recognizes the decline in the number of clergy, it offers an opportunity for parishes to combine their personnel and leadership resources for the benefit of the larger geographic area of the deanery.

5. Youth and Young Adult Ministry

Recently, more than two million young people from across our globe journeyed as pilgrims to Rome for the World Youth Day celebrated with Pope John Paul II. In doing so they showed their love for both Christ and His Church. The fifth strategic focus of the Church of Pittsburgh is youth and young adult ministry. Based on successful programs within our own diocese and other dioceses throughout our country, the Church of Pittsburgh is energetically and enthusiastically committed to look for effective ways to minister to, with, by and for our youth and young adults.

The strategic programs for youth and young adult ministry for the future, both on the diocesan and parish level, suggest the need for catechetical and

vocation programs. The former seeks to inform youth about faith and the latter seeks to advocate a good understanding of vocation, i.e. God's call to the ordained life, the consecrated life, the married life, and the single life.

The Church is particularly interested that young people come to understand vocation as a call from God and to be responsive to His will for them as married, single, clergy or members of consecrated life and that they faithfully embrace that call. Our goal is to help young people to embrace God's call and serve the Church and her mission.

Not unrelated to vocation programs is Catechesis which has as its goal strong faith formation. Catechetical programs pass on the faith and also provide the forum where young people can express and explore issues within the Church.

Any strategic plan that involves youth and young adults must also carry with it the component of evangelization. Programs which seek to spread the good news of Christ and the Church must be designed to help young people come to know more about Christ and His Church. The goal of evangelization is for young people to feel more connected to the community life of the Church. These efforts build on what is already a natural desire of young people – to be included, accepted and valued as part of the human family. Evangelization and catechetical programs for youth confirm also how important and vital they are to the faith family – the Church.

Certainly, the example of Jesus calls the faithful to words and deeds of justice, peace, and service. Many programs in each of our parishes invite young people to reach out to others in need in the name of Jesus. The Church of Pittsburgh wishes to enhance the opportunities for young people to be involved in justice and peace issues of the Church.

One of the more impressive interventions of our diocesan synod was a plea made by the youth delegate to the synod in the name of the young people of our diocese. What the synod delegates heard in that intervention was the need and desire of young people to be more included in and invited to participate in leadership aspects of the Church, particularly in the areas of ministry. The synod delegates expressed the commitment that the plea of the young not fall on deaf ears in this regard.

Young people in our society today are the "victims" of a number of assaults on their moral integrity. They look to the Church to provide them with some direction in maintaining their commitment to Christ. The Church of Pittsburgh is committed to providing them with that important guidance.

Finally, any strategic plans for greater inclusion of youth and young adults must also be reflected by their active involvement in the public prayer and worship of the Church. Both the message that is sent to young people and their involvement within the context of prayer and worship speak of how integral they are to the Church.

6. *Stewardship*

Finally, the sixth area of strategic focus of the diocese is stewardship. While we may have become more comfortable with the word "steward," there is still a great deal which needs to be done in becoming more comfortable with the concept.

In essence, stewardship involves the contribution of time, talent, and treasure by all members of the Church at both the parish and diocesan level. As was already noted in the strategic focus of leadership, the Church of Pittsburgh with its parishes is rich because of the greater sharing of the personal talents and time of its faithful. The Parish Jubilee Campaign underway in so many of our parishes not only invites the faithful to contribute financially to the church but also to commit their time and talent as well. So much of who we are as the Mystical Body of Christ is reflective of the talents which God has given each person as an individual. It seems only right and just that we seek to return to God through the Church what we have received from God, personally and communally.

In addition, the strategic focus of stewardship must also include the sharing of treasure. A number of leaders in our Church have expressed the hope that stewardship might focus more on the practice of "tithing." It is incumbent on us as a Church to explore a greater appreciation of the notion of "tithing" by comprehensive programs of education. Also, a clearer understanding of the mission of the Church can, in fact, help each of us to be more conscious of the temporal needs of the Church and to respond accordingly so that we can more effectively accomplish the mission of the Church as handed on by Christ, "Go teach all nations. . ."

Finally, stewardship involves accountability that is reflected in the financial policies under which both the diocese and parishes operate. The *Financial Policy Manual*, soon to be published, will provide the diocese and parishes with important information to guide us on the responsible use of financial contributions made to the Church both for the stability of the Church and for the continuation of the work of Jesus through the Church.

Summary

The six areas of strategic focus for the Church of Pittsburgh as determined by the 19th Synod for the foreseeable future are: the Eucharist, evangelization, adult faith formation, leadership, youth and young adult ministry, and stewardship.

These six areas of strategic focus summarize well the fundamental thrusts of the 19th Synod of the Diocese of Pittsburgh. What remains is for each parish, pastor, pastoral council and finance council, to give serious reflection to the implementation of these goals.

Let's be realistic. The clergy, religious and faithful of the Diocese of Pittsburgh are already doing each and every one of these strategic focuses -- every week and in every parish. The question is, how can each parish try to carry out one or a few of them better. How can we look at our efforts and find areas where we can improve. For many years now, the concept of total quality management, or continuous improvement, has energized many of the best corporations and institutions. Can our parishes do the same? I believe the answer is "yes."

Returning to our opening story, these six areas of strategic focus call us to be "front porch people" in helping to build up "the kingdom of God" right here, right now. These six priorities are not only a response to the needs expressed by the delegates of the 19th Synod of the Diocese of Pittsburgh. In an even more important way, they are a response to Jesus' call that we "come and follow" Him.

Over the course of the next months, you will continue to hear much about these strategic areas of focus in the pages of the *Pittsburgh Catholic*, from your pastors and from our Chief Shepherd, Bishop Wuerl.

Each of these priorities calls us to look for better ways for us to become Church. This challenge is certainly not new but it is always made fresh by the ever-abiding presence of the Holy Spirit. It is a challenge from Jesus and re-echoed by His Vicar, Pope John Paul II in *Ecclesia in America* when he wrote: " I invite all the Catholics of America to take an active part in the evangelizing initiatives which the Holy Spirit is stirring in every part of this immense continent." (#76)

The six areas of strategic focus as the Church of Pittsburgh are our response to the stirrings of the Holy Spirit. The time and energy we expend in this effort further seal our lives as disciples of Jesus and "Front Porch People" for Christ and His Church.