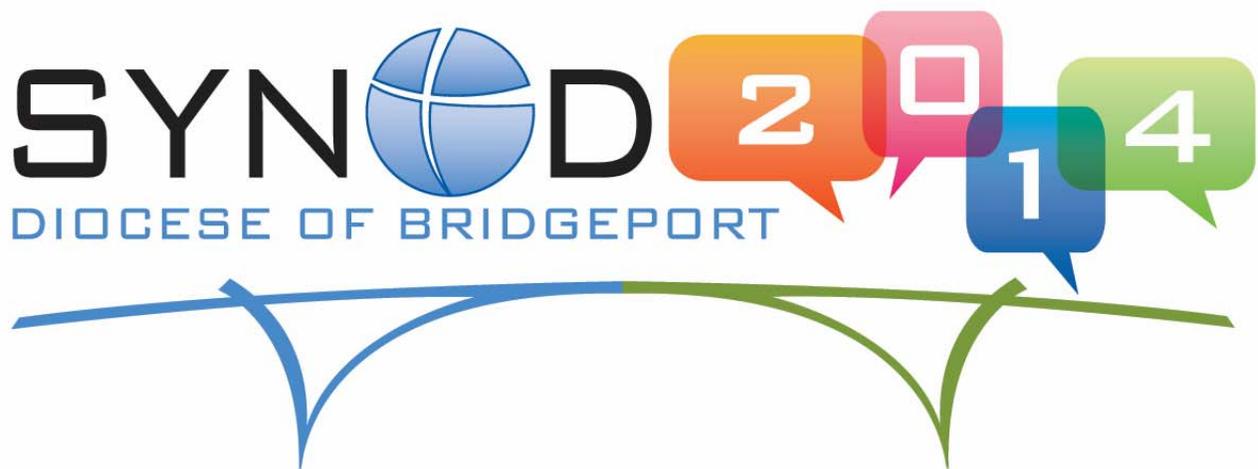


Fourth Synod of the Diocese of  
Bridgeport

# Synodal Summary



September 19, 2015

# Introduction

On Friday, September 19, 2014, Bishop Frank Caggiano signed the official decree opening the Fourth Diocesan Synod at the Vespers Service held at Saint Augustine Cathedral. The next morning, starting at 8 AM, the First General Session of the Synod was opened. The event took place at Saint Catherine of Siena Parish in Trumbull, Connecticut. However, before this memorable weekend took place, a lot of preparations were made. During the Spring and Summer months of 2014, Bishop Caggiano and the Synod Commission members organized listening sessions in each vicariate of the Diocese. Additional sessions were organized for the youth and various ethnic groups to listen to their concerns, comments, current needs and suggestions. These listening sessions, along with online forms, allowed us to collect over four thousand individual remarks. At the same time, each parish, school, institution and interest group was asked to send their representatives to the Synod. Close to four hundred General Delegates, Observers, Theological Experts, Ecumenical Observers, the Synod Commission and various Study Committee members participated in six General Sessions of the Fourth Diocesan Synod.

After many hours of hard work, the four thousand comments were separated into the initial ten areas of interest:

1. Catechesis and Education
2. Clergy and Religious
3. Stewardship
4. Parish Life
5. Evangelization
6. Communications
7. Liturgy and Worship
8. Justice and Charity
9. Youth and Young Adults
10. Leadership

These in turn were pooled together into four major themes that were presented to the Delegates at the First General Session on September 20, 2014. These were:

1. Empower the Young Church
2. Build Up Communities of Faith
3. Foster Evangelical Outreach
4. Promote Works of Charity and Justice

After hearing media presentations on all four themes, the Delegates were asked to express their opinions, comments and suggestion during live discussion at the General Session, as well as to submit their input online.

The Second General Session took place on November 11, 2015. The four major themes presented at the previous session were further discussed, including the input from the Delegates and experts in respective fields. Moreover, a vote was taken and overwhelmingly accepted by the Delegates to extend the work of Synod body for additional two years beyond September 2015. The work of the Synod Delegates will change in these two years and will become an advisory body to the bishop on implementation of the Synod Directives.

On February 7, 2015 the Third General Session took place. It represented an essential change in the works of the Synod. So far, Delegates considered themes of issues pertaining to our Diocese. However, thanks to their comments and work of the Synod Commission, Study Committees and experts, the Delegates were presented with the nine Global Challenges. Theses were:

1. Liturgy and Worship:

Every Catholic is called to FULL, CONSCIOUS, AND ACTIVE PARTICIPATION (see: *Sacrosanctum Concilium* #14, 41, 48) in the worship life of the Church.

- a. We must foster an attitude of welcome and hospitality that should accompany every occasion of prayer and worship.
- b. Special attention must be given to the preparation and delivery of homilies that are relevant, inspirational, engaging and challenging to those who attend Mass and other sacramental celebrations.
- c. The cultural and ethnic diversity of each community needs to be reflected and celebrated in its worship life, as well as in all diocesan events.
- d. Every ministry associated with the celebration of the sacraments must be revitalized.

## 2. Family Life:

There is a need to strengthen and support family life and empower and assist parents to be the primary teachers of the Catholic Faith.

- a. We call for the evangelization of all parents so that they may share with their children their relationship with Jesus and the Church.
- b. Parents must be provided education, formation and ongoing support in their dual roles as parents and the first catechists of their children.
- c. Programs and resources must be made available to help families to strengthen the bonds of unity amongst its members.
- d. Families that are confronting particular stressors, such as financial difficulties, employment issues, discrimination, immigration status, addiction, grieving, and marital breakup, must be afforded effective pastoral care.

## 3. Evangelization:

We must create concrete plans for evangelization in, with and through our parishes, schools, ecclesial movements, and communities.

- a. We call every Catholic to ongoing missionary discipleship.
- b. There is an urgent need to create a variety of strategies to engage those Catholics who are marginalized to participate in the life of the Church, and respect the diversity within our communities of faith.

c. People of good will are invited to be evangelized through our effective witnessing of the Gospel.

#### 4. Social Teachings:

We must understand, share and implement the Social Teachings of the Catholic Church.

a. The Social Teachings must be taught to every member of the Church.

b. There is a need to bring about just change in our society according to the mandate of the Gospel.

#### 5. Service:

Heeding the call of Jesus Christ, we must live the works of charity in daily life, especially to serve those in need.

#### 6. Leadership:

There is a need to continually call, form, and support clergy, religious, and laity in active leadership roles in the life of the Church.

a. We must develop a culture that promotes and supports vocations to the priesthood, diaconate and consecrated life in our Diocese.

b. The ongoing education, formation and support of our clergy, to promote holy and healthy living, and to assist them in their leadership roles, are priorities that must be addressed.

c. Continual efforts must be made to assist Catholics to discern their personal gifts and talents, and share those gifts with the larger community of faith in a spirit of stewardship.

- d. Opportunities and structures must be created to support and assist the ongoing training and formation of lay leaders in our Diocese.

#### 7. Catechesis and Education:

We must renew the ministry of faith formation throughout our Diocese, leading each person to a deepening relationship with the Lord Jesus in and through His Church.

- a. There must be a clear, authentic and faithful teaching of our Catholic faith.
- b. Opportunities for faith formation must be offered in holistic and age-appropriate ways.
  - i. promote knowledge of faith,
  - ii. liturgical education,
  - iii. moral formation,
  - iv. teaching to pray,
  - v. education for community life,
  - vi. missionary initiation (1997 General Directory for Catechesis).
- c. We recognize the need for more effective faith formation for our teenagers and young adults.
- d. Ongoing opportunities must be offered for all the baptized to grow in their prayer life.

#### 8. Stewardship:

There is a need to more effectively expand, manage and share our resources (time, talent and treasure) and better utilize technology and communication in effective and appropriate ways to fulfill our mission in Fairfield County.

- a. We lack strategic and financial planning to support and enhance cooperation among the

various diverse communities in our common mission as a Diocese.

- b. We must find ways to empower the laity as valued contributors and partners in all our faith communities.
- c. There is a need to better use technology and communication in more effective and engaging ways to collaborate and share the faith; recognizing that technology can not replace interpersonal relationships.

#### 9. Faith Communities:

There is a need to strengthen every community of faith within our Diocese, in part by challenging Church leaders to model and foster a culture of collaboration, dialogue, reconciliation and healing.

- a. Opportunities must be created to allow for effective sharing among all diocesan communities in every aspect of ministry and outreach.
- b. Each community of faith must recognize and celebrate the cultural, ethnic and racial diversity of its people and find concrete ways to strengthen unity in every aspect of its life.

The Fourth General Session on March 21, 2015, pivoted Delegates' discussion towards finding solutions to the aforementioned challenges. Four presentations were made to show how other dioceses and institutions dealt with similar challenges. It was truly an inspirational session for the Delegates inviting their creativity in finding, not so much concrete solution, but rather general directions where the post-synodal changes should take place. Furthermore, the Delegates voted and chose five out of nine Global Challenges that will

become a priority during the implementation period.  
These were:

- 1.Liturgy and Worship
- 2.Family Life
- 3.Evangelization
- 4.Leadership
- 5.Catechesis and Education

On May 9, 2015, the Delegates and Observers came together for the Fifth General Session. The discussions during this session concentrated on the initial solutions, canonical issues and the principles of implementation.

The final, Sixth General Session of the Synod took place on May 30, 2015. After studying solutions and practical resolutions at the previous session and the time in between sessions, the Delegates were ready to vote on final synodal recommendations to the Bishop of Bridgeport. The Delegates approved the Mission Statement, the Ten Principles of change and 12 Initiatives and Proposals (including 13 individual strategies). Bishop Caggiano accepted these synodal recommendations of the General Delegates, which are the subject of this document.

## **Mission Statement**

*Our common mission is to foster personal conversion and deepen each disciple's relationship with the Lord Jesus in the community of the Catholic Church.*

In order to accomplish this common mission of the People of God in the Diocese of Bridgeport, we are committed to the process of change both individually and as a diocesan family. This change will have also two aspects: spiritual deepening of our relationship with Christ, as well as creating or reshaping current offices, organizations and institutions to effect a desired outcome. The process of adjusting of our services to the needs and desires of the People of God in Fairfield County in the twenty-first century shall follow certain rules and guidelines in order to present a comprehensive and cohesive result. Therefore, the Delegates of the Fourth Diocesan Synod recommended to the Bishop the following Ten Principles:

## **Ten Principles**

(that will support and animate all that we will do to effect change in our Diocese).

- 1. Principle of Continuity:** To recognize and build upon the good that already exists within the Diocese while discerning ways to bring about substantial and lasting change for our future.
- 2. Principle of Subsidiarity:** The Diocese must not take from the parishes, schools and local communities the decision-making that rightfully belongs to these communities. And at the same time, the Diocese needs to be held accountable for those initiatives that no one parish can do on its own.
- 3. Principle of Accompaniment:** We must recognize, respect and assist each person's individual journey of faith.
- 4. Principle of Sharing and Collaboration:** Collaboration occurs when we agree to do something that is needed, using all of our gifts, talents and positions of authority, while keeping our eye on Christ.
- 5. Evangelical Outreach:** As an essential piece of pastoral planning, each parish and school community is asked to foster a culture of evangelization by making such efforts an intentional part of all parish pastoral plans, and by including

evangelization as an integral component of every plan and function of Diocesan leadership.

6. **Principle of Unity in Diversity:** We must celebrate our cultural and ethnic diversity in every aspect of our ecclesial life. We will also work to build bridges within our faith communities, to other Christian faiths, and among all people of faith.
7. **Principle of Creativity:** The Diocesan Curia, parishes and schools must creatively respond to the changing demographics in Fairfield County and the needs of our people.
8. **Empower the Young Church:** Parishes and Diocesan leadership will be ever reminded to include the young church in all our initiatives, by recognizing that they are not the "church of the future", but are present now in our midst.
9. **Principle of Accountability:** We must hold ourselves accountable to ongoing evaluation of the initiatives and projects we approve by using quantitative and qualitative benchmarks to measure our progress.
10. **Principle of Transparency:** Decision-making on every level must be clear and based upon facts, data, and ongoing communication.

## **Approved Initiatives and Proposals**

On May 30, 2015, at the final General Session of the Synod, General Delegates voted and approved twelve concrete Initiatives and Proposals presented by Bishop Frank Caggiano and various Study Committees that will be implemented immediately or shortly after the Synod Celebration Mass on September 19, 2015. As a result, five permanent organizations are called to existence by means of individual decrees issued by the bishop. They are:

1. The **Catholic Service Corps** of the Diocese of Bridgeport. The purpose of Catholic Service Corps is to engage youth, young adults and indeed all the People of God in the Diocese of Bridgeport in carrying out the mission of the Church and the love of God in tangible ways of service to the poor and

disadvantaged in Fairfield County and beyond. It will come to existence on October 1, 2015.

2. The **Diocesan Leadership Institute** of the Diocese of Bridgeport. The purpose of the Diocesan Leadership Institute is to provide ongoing, systematic formation and support to the clergy, religious and lay leaders in order to assist them in their various pastoral works. Moreover, the Leadership Institute will provide the opportunity for theological, spiritual education and formation to every adult who wishes to deepen his or her Catholic faith and their personal relationship with the Lord. It will come to existence on November 1, 2015.
3. The **Diocesan Council of Religious**. The purpose of the Diocesan Council of Religious is to invite delegates chosen from among religious present in the Diocese of Bridgeport to bring their concerns and viewpoints in service of the larger Church. The Council is also to advise the Bishop about matters pertaining to religious communities within the Diocese. The Diocesan Council of Religious will come to existence on December 1, 2015.
4. The **Diocesan Pastoral Council**. The Diocesan Pastoral Council (canons 511 and 512) consists of members of the Christian faithful in full communion with the Catholic Church: clerics, religious, consecrated men and women, and especially laity. They are to investigate, consider and propose practical conclusions about those things which pertain to pastoral works of the Diocese (*Christus*

*Dominus* 27). The Diocesan Pastoral Council will come to existence on December 1, 2015.

5. The **Diocesan Liturgical Commission**. The Diocesan Liturgical Commission will oversee implementation of diocesan norms for liturgical worship; help revitalize music ministry; help to include youth and young adults in liturgical life of the Church; and support parishes in their welcoming and hospitality ministries. The Diocesan Liturgical Commission will come to existence on this day, that is, September 19, 2015.

These five permanent organizations will be accompanied by additional approved initiatives and proposals that will facilitate change in respective areas of interest. These new organizations and processes will, in a practical way, enable response to the major concerns and desires expressed by the Delegates during the Synod. The following is the list of these additional initiatives.

6. The **Diocesan Strategic Planning Commission**. The competency of the Commission will include: the ongoing reform of the Diocesan Curia, and overseeing the pastoral planning process. It will come to existence in October 2015.
7. A **Comprehensive Pastoral Planning Process** (November 2015) to engage every parish to create a roadmap for its future. Pastoral Planning will provide the priests, deacons, religious, professional staff and lay leaders of each parish the opportunity to engage in ongoing, systematic and comprehensive planning

towards the establishment of each parish's plan for long-term viability and pastoral vitality. The spirit that should animate all such planning is one of servant leadership. The long-term goal for pastoral planning is to create a mechanism by which every aspect of parish life is intentional, missionary driven, and open to periodic evaluation and improvement.

8. A **Presbyteral Assembly** to take place on February 25, 2016. The preparation process for the Assembly will begin in September 2015. Its goal is to draft concrete measures to realize the call of the Synod for priests to live "holy and healthy living." The Assembly will facilitate clergy's discussion on topics of living arrangements, ongoing formation, opportunities for spiritual growth, retirement age, mentoring program for newly ordained and newly incardinated priests, establishment of support groups for the priests, and others.
9. A Task Force for revision of the **Diocesan Sacramental Guidelines** and the **Diocesan Pastoral Book**. These revised documents shall be presented to the bishop for his approval by June 1, 2016.
10. A diocesan pastoral initiative to support and **strengthen couples in their marriage**, as well as to **reach out to divorced and separated Catholics** within the Diocese.
11. The **Family Life Centers** (both virtual and physical). These shall be called into existence in collaboration with Catholic Charities, parishes and other entities. The goal is to provide resources

and support to families to help strengthen the bonds of unity among its members, and also to support families that are confronting particular stressors.

12. A **strategic plan for priestly vocations** to be established by February 25, 2016. In addition, concrete measures shall be enacted towards the fostering of vocations to the diaconate and religious life.

13. A diocesan Task Force, to be established by October 1, 2015, whose competency will be to identify concrete ways to **reform our catechetical methods and programs**. The Task Force will report back to the Diocesan Bishop in eight months and would concentrate on: possible expansion of the catechetical formation to begin at Baptism, models of youth ministry, high school catechetical formation and education, models of faith formation in the parishes, restructuring the Office of Faith Formation, and others.

The practical initiatives mentioned above are by all means not an exhaustive list of the changes and reforms to be implemented after the Synod. Rather, they should be seen as an opening of the doors and charting the path to more suitable response of our Diocese, parishes, school and institutions to the needs of the Catholics. Even though one may have not noticed precise wording as such, nonetheless all these initiatives reflect a deep concern for the evangelization of our county, inviting young people of the Church to take ownership and active roles in her life, promoting justice and peace in the Diocese and beyond, promoting stewardship and care for

the Church, and much more. These initiatives are only a beginning and an invitation.

## **Accountability**

Implementation of the directives of the Fourth Diocesan Synod requires accountability of all of us. First of all, each and every one of us is invited to open his or her heart before God, allowing Him to lead us in the process of spiritual growth. However, we also have an obligation before our brother and sisters in the Faith. In our parishes, we need to create a pastoral plan and review frequently its implementation. Each parish shall also give report on implementation to the Bishop and the Pastoral Planning Office. Bishop Caggiano committed himself to give a report on the progress of post-synodal

implementation to the Diocese as well. For this purpose, the General Delegates of the Fourth Diocesan Synod will meet twice a year for the next two years to hear Bishop's report and to advise him on various issues that might surface during implementation.

May the Good Lord, who inspired and begun this work in us, bring it to fulfillment.

## **In Gratitude**

We wish to conclude with words of gratitude to all who made the Fourth Diocesan Synod Possible: the members of the Bishop's Office and the Diocesan Synod Office. We are grateful to all our General Delegates, Observers and invited guests. We own much debt to the members of Synod

Commission, Study Committees, and numerous advisors. Special thanks to men and women who shared with us their expertise in various sciences and fields of interest. Our gratitude goes to benefactors whose generosity made the synod possible. To the staff and parishioners of Saint Catherine Parish in Trumbull for hosting General Sessions. To all clergy, religious, lay men and women who assisted in the process and prayed for the success of the synod - thank you. Words of gratitude to all who work so hard in preparing Synod Celebration Mass on September 19, 2015.

Finally, and most importantly to our Bishop, Frank J. Caggiano, who initiated and directed us throughout this process. Thank you.