



2nd General Session of Synod:

Building the Bridge to the Future – Delegates Take Actions

On Saturday, November 15, more than 350 General Delegates, Observers, Ecumenical guests, seminarians, and members of the Synod Commission gathered together for the 2nd General Session of the Diocesan Synod at St. Catherine of Siena Parish in Trumbull.

The purpose of this Session was to begin to discern, in a more concrete and detailed manner, the challenges facing our Diocese. The General Delegates took a number of actions during the day-long session.

To begin the day,

1. Delegates unanimously approved a Declaration summarizing the activities of the First General Session on September 20, 2014;
2. In response to a need identified by the study committees, the Delegates unanimously approved the establishment of a new Study Committee on Communications and Technology. This issue cuts across all four previously identified themes of the Synod. The committee will be tasked with examining the formational aspects and uses of technology and will also look at the appropriate and strategic uses of communications to reach the Catholic faithful and people of good will within Fairfield County;
3. The Delegates overwhelmingly approved a resolution to extend the appointment of the General Delegates beyond the formal closing of the Synod in September 2015. The purpose will be to provide the Bishop and the Synod Commission a gathering of people to receive periodic reports and provide feedback on the progress of the implementation of the Synod recommendations. It is anticipated that this body will formally meet twice a year.

Similar to the first session in September, Delegates then heard presentations from each of the four study committees, and had the opportunity to provide feedback through table discussions, floor comments and emailed responses. They also were privileged to hear a discernment presentation from Dr. Joan Marie Kelly, who is on the faculty at Holy Apostles College and Seminary in Cromwell and is an adjunct professor at Sacred Heart University, entitled "The Catholic Church: ONE, HOLY, CATHOLIC, APOSTOLIC".

The four themes announced by Bishop Caggiano in June are: *Empower the Young Church, Build Up Communities of Faith, Foster Evangelical Outreach, and Promote Works of Charity and Justice*. Since the September Synod session, study committees have been meeting regularly to discuss and discern challenges within their respective themes. These study committees are made up of individual General Delegates, Diocesan officials, and local and national experts. Utilizing data received during the September session, feedback and ideas submitted to the Synod office through the listening sessions held across the Diocese, and their own background and areas of interest and expertise, members of the study committees were tasked with coming up with a series of challenges to be presented to the General Delegates.

On November 15, each of the four study committees had a block of time to present those challenges. After the verbal feedback, the General Delegates then “voted” on each one. This was not an effort to find out winners and losers, but an opportunity to discern whether the study committees were moving in the right direction and to “take the temperature” of the General Delegates to see where consensus was beginning to form. Using electronic response devices, Delegates had three options to express their thoughts for each challenge:

- a) Accept the Challenge as presented
- b) Accept the Challenge with modifications
- c) Do not Accept the Challenge

The results of the Delegates responses are available in this article.

If a Delegate accepted the Challenge with modifications, or did not accept the Challenge, they were asked to submit an email clarification. In the days following the 2nd Session, the Synod office received 825 emails with more than 1000 comments or clarifications from the Delegates. These comments and modifications are being analyzed and will help Bishop Caggiano and the Synod Commission begin to synthesize the challenges.

There is a great diversity among the Delegates, as they range in age from 13 to 86 and their comments and feedback spanned the political and theological spectrum. Many of the challenges received overwhelming support, but Delegates struggled to agree with other challenges and sometimes questioned the supporting information provided by the study committees. In particular, issues relating to outreach to the youth and to those who no longer regularly attend Mass, or have left the church, brought about the most discussion and suggested modifications.

As part of the year-long discernment process facing the General Delegates and the Synod Commission, Bishop Caggiano reminded those present “we must also give voice to those who aren’t here”.

One Delegate reminded all present that the Synod also needs to remember those who suffer economically within the Diocese; for example, those who can’t afford to send their children to Catholic schools, or must work 2 or 3 jobs in order to provide basic needs for their families. Another Delegate reminded the Synod Office that the final document must resonate with, and speak to, all of the Diocese

of Bridgeport - “the 17-year-olds, the new Americans, the single parents, the widows, the parents struggling to feed and educate their children, and thosefacing despair or impoverishment of spirit.”

The 3rd General Session of the Synod will take place on February 7.