

Faithful Chronicles

By Father Frank D. Almada

The diocesan information session led by Bishop David Zubik on Tuesday, July 12th, in St. Joseph the Worker Church was a big success. Over 325 enthusiastic parishioners from ten parishes attended. The bishop presented the foundation of *On Mission for the Church Alive!*: the call by Jesus Christ to spread the Gospel to the ends of the earth. This is best exemplified in the Acts of the Apostles. We, the people and clergy of the Church of Pittsburgh, in the 21st century are compelled to act on this command to share the Good News of God's love as much as the Apostles Peter and Paul in the first century. All of us need to "learn Jesus, love Jesus, live Jesus and share Jesus" more.

At the same time, we have to address troubling concerns over the past 15 or more years in western Pennsylvania. These include fewer parishioners (60% decline in the October count of those attending Sunday Mass from 2000 to 2015), fewer priests (today, 230 active priests; projected for 2025, 115), financial woes (half of our 199 parishes are in deficit spending) and too many buildings. *On Mission for the Church Alive!* seeks to address these concerns.

Bishop Zubik emphasized the

value and importance of consultation. This is not a "top down" process. The bishop, the pastors, parish leaders and diocesan staff have to listen to the concerns of the faithful. So in September the diocese will share suggestions for models of new parochial structures. In October there will be parish consultations sessions so that as many parishioners as possible can be heard regarding any future changes. I have tentatively scheduled eight meetings, two in each of our four parishes, during three weeks in October. I'll share the schedule of meetings in a few weeks. Then the results of these consultations, in 21 districts all over the diocese, will be reviewed by the clergy, the regional vicars, and the diocesan staff over the winter. Sometime in early 2018, the bishop will make decisions about new structures for parish life.

The bishop was blunt in addressing "rumors and rumbings" he's heard. No—he has not made decisions about parish changes. He wants to listen to the people before he makes his decisions. Yes—there will be closings of some parishes, churches and schools. But these will be determined through the *On Mission* process over the next two years. Yes—he believes that this process can and will energize our parishes and people to grow the church. Yes—all parishioners have to be

recruiters for more candidates for the priesthood, permanent diaconate, lay ecclesial ministry, and active volunteers. During the session, Dr. Linda Ritzer, of the diocesan Office of the General Secretary, shared with us key criteria for the four areas addressed in *On Mission for the Church Alive!*: missionary territory; pastoral care of the active parishioners; finances and resources; and clergy.

The bishop addressed a range of questions regarding Catholic schools, natural family planning, the secular American culture, recruiting priests from Africa or India, moving priests too quickly, the role of the laity in evangelization, the difficulty of inviting family members who have fallen away from the Catholic faith to return, and the value of sharing feelings as well as facts throughout the *On Mission for the Church Alive!* planning process. Bishop Zubik concluded the session with fervent prayer.

If you would like more information, and the complete list of 21 criteria for growth for *On Mission*, go to the website www.onmissionchurchalive.org. A big thanks to all who attended on July 12th. I welcome your questions and opinions, as we move forward to implement the vision of Christ in growing a more alive church.

Submissions to the bulletin for the Catholic Community in New Castle should be sent to:

Susan Dexter (the Bulletin Editor) at 4ncparishes@comcast.net. Information may also be faxed to 724-658-9024 or mailed to 124 North Beaver Street, New Castle, PA 16101. **Bulletin deadline is: Fridays at Noon** 10 Days before the Sunday on which you wish the article to appear. Parish announcements have priority. NO articles will be accepted by phone or phone message, regardless of length. All articles submitted must be typed or printed legibly, and must include a phone number to allow for fact-checking.

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