

Thursday
April 29, 2010

The Catholic TIMES

Serving the Catholic Community of the Diocese of La Crosse

Pastoral planning meeting refines protocols

By STAN GOULD
Editor

TOMAH – Presented with a fictional scenario at the April 20 pastoral planning meeting at Tomah, members of the steering committee and five subcommittees grappled with the complexities and sensitivities of pastoral planning which will help to refine the protocols.

The scenario called for the assignment of a new pastor at Parish X on the eastern edge of the diocese following the “death” of its pastor. The assignment caused a ripple effect resulting in the proposed merging of parishes A, B and C in the western half of the diocese.

Faced with this hypothetical situation, the pastoral planning committee members tested the previously-developed protocols to see how well they worked.

“We quickly found out that the protocols are in need of continued refinement,” said Ben Nguyen, the diocesan chancellor and chair of the Pastoral Planning Steering Committee. He said that the members realized that we still need to tighten up certain financial protocols and that we need to continue to address personnel issues.

Chris Carstens, the director of the Office of Sacred Worship and the co-chair of the Steering Committee stated that coming up with more questions was the purpose of the meeting.



CT/Jack Socha

Father Thomas Lindner, chair of the Transitions in Parish Life subcommittee and pastor of Newman University Parish, Stevens Point, makes a point during his presentation at the pastoral planning meeting in Tomah April 20.

“This was the objective of the meeting, Carstens said. “We weren’t putting forward a completed and polished plan to demonstrate how well it works on a fictional scenario. On the contrary we wanted to expose some of the holes in the plan or some of the things we just haven’t thought about yet. It did just exactly what we wanted it to do ... to find flaws in the plan.”

The meeting highlighted the complexity of implementing

the plan. The fictional scenario was scrutinized with five topics in mind: finance and incorporation, communications and public awareness, staff development and formation, transitions in parish life, and governance and consultation.

One of the issues that surfaced was that it may not be a good idea to implement the plan during a crisis situation. Andy Gartner, the director of the diocesan Stewardship and De-



velopment office and chair of the Financial and Incorporation Protocols Subcommittee agrees that due to the many complexities of parish life, “any merging of parishes must be planned in well in advance and take into consideration the number of priests in the future. The plan needs to consider the 10 year statistical analysis of the priest situation in the diocese.”

Monsignor Gilles, the diocesan administrator thought the meeting was very useful. “Having a meeting of all the subcommittees helped us refine the protocols and will help us present a more worthy product at a later date to the new bishop.”

The Tomah meeting is part of Phase II of the Pastoral Plan, which has as its stated goal the establishing of practical guidelines for implementation. Initiated by Bishop ListECKI in 2005, the Pastoral Plan is a response to demographic shifts and a declining number of priests. Phase I of the Pastoral Plan concluded in 2008, when Bishop ListECKI gave his approval.