

# **The Ten Commandments of Planning**

Diocesan Research and Planning Office

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Before the Rockford Diocese began *With a Heart Renewed: Parish Consultations Process*, it listened carefully to the advice provided by 47 other dioceses who had already completed planning processes. This advice is so important that it was offered to U.S. bishops at their November 1995 meeting. This advice also applies to planning and consultation at the parish level.

1. *Gather Good Information.* All good decision-making models are rooted in timely, accurate and complete information. There should be routine systems for collecting accurate demographic, financial and attitudinal data, and sharing it with parishioners.

2. *Plan Carefully.* Before launching any planning effort, the leaders must be clear about the goals, the process to be used and the mechanisms of making decisions. These items must be clearly communicated to all people, so that the process is not seen as elitist.

3. *Foster Readiness.* Before decisions are made, people must be provided with information which is intelligible and useful to them. They should also be offered formative experiences which nurture a spirituality in keeping with the Church as the pilgrim people of God.

4. *Communicate Continuously.* This item cannot be emphasized too strongly. Communication is more than an occasional bulletin announcement. Effective communication is a continuous, feedback loop that encourages and seeks feedback. Such feedback both influences the process as it unfolds and ensures that understanding has occurred.

5. *Respect Structures.* Parish pastoral councils are examples of existing structures which should be respected and utilized in implementing any pastoral plan. It is only prudent to build on what already exists rather than to try to create something totally new.

6. *Be Inclusive.* All social, racial, ethnic and age groups should be included in every phase of planning and implementation. This is especially true with the people that are not often highly involved in the Church, e.g. young adults.

7. *Cultivate Collaboration.* Greater openness to sharing resources will enhance the Church, period. Sometimes genuine love of a parish degenerates into a blind parochialism, where one becomes afraid to see the possibilities of working with other groups.

8. *Learn from Mistakes.* The problems facing the Church are complex and will require genuine creativity. If the Church is to move beyond the mere routine, then leaders need to be flexible in their thought patterns and processes. The Church needs to be a learning community which recognizes that, oftentimes, we learn best from our mistakes.

9. *Maintain Fidelity.* The willingness to embrace mistakes does not compromise the need to preserve what has been handed on. The relationship of the head and the body, the centrality of the Eucharist, and other scriptural and theological tenets need to be respected within the planning effort.

10. *Pray Always.* The organized, structured community of the Church is the visible expression of the invisible communion each of us share with the Father through Christ in the Spirit. Prayer must be the mechanism which connects us in all our efforts with the everlasting God.