

New Energies seeks its 'core'

BY MICHAEL C. GABRIELE
Editor

NEWARK — The New Energies Parish Transition Project, which will define the logistics of religious life for 230-plus parishes and 1.3 million parishioners, is moving straight to the “core” of the archdiocese.

A meeting held last week in the Archdiocesan Center initiated the next phase of the New Energies project, a move that will involve 62 parish core groups.

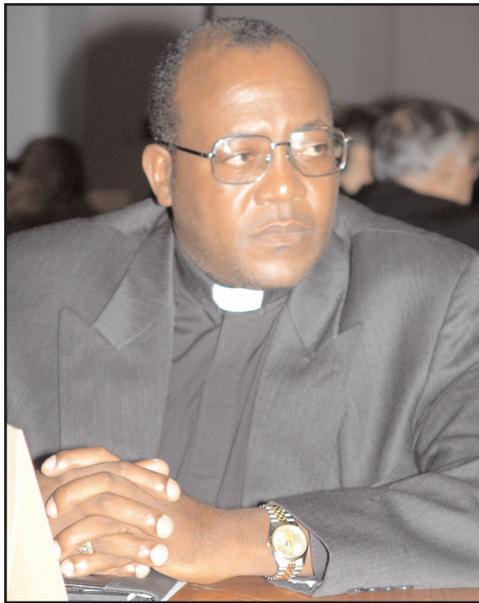
The New Energies project, introduced last year, provides a roadmap for the archdiocese’s near-term profile. The project, which contains 28 guiding principles, addresses the realities of shifting Catholic demographics in urban and suburban communities, evaluates the sustainability of aging facilities, and makes tough choices regarding financial resources and rising costs throughout the archdiocese. A report in the July 27 issue of *The Catholic Advocate* provided a one-year update on the project.

Sixty-two pastors attended the session on Sept. 13 and were instructed to begin the process of developing conversations and suggestions to be submitted to the New Energies task force, which in turn develops recommendations for parishes. The parishes will prepare a response that is presented to the New Energies executive committee, which makes a recommendation to Archbishop John J. Myers.

New Energies Update

Parish core teams, composed of a pastor and four lay people, will generate the parish-wide feedback for the strategic review process. In addition, core teams are encouraged to link with teams from other parishes. Such a linkage (two or more core teams) creates a “cluster” group, which can negotiate alliances between parishes.

Bishop Edgar M. da Cunha, S.D.V., the regional bishop for Essex County, is chairman of the New Energies executive committee. Father Charles P. Granstrand, the pastor of Our Lady of Mercy Parish, Park Ridge, is chairman of the task force, while Msgr. William C. Harms, the



Advocate photo — M. Gabriele

Father Josephat Kalema, the administrator for the Parish of the Transfiguration, urged pastors to share their vision in the New Energies process.

pastor of St. Helen Parish, Westfield, serves as coordinator of the parish transition project. In addition, a dean from each of the four counties (Bergen, Hudson, Essex and Union) in the archdiocese sits on the executive committee.

The Reid Group, Bellevue, WA, serves as the consultant to the archdiocese in implementing the New Energies project. In addition, internal consultants from within the archdiocese also are facilitating the dialogue.

The New Energies project currently is in Cycle 1 of the second round. It’s expected that the executive committee will make final recommendations to Archbishop Myers on mergers, linking and partnerships for this round by May 2006. Cycle 2, which will include 62 parishes, is slated to begin in January 2006, while Cycle 3, involving 66 parishes, is scheduled for launch in September 2006.

While most pastors meeting last week said they were focused on the current challenges they faced, Archbishop Myers offered a broader overview perspective on the situation.

“The life of the Church is not static. There always has been change,” he stated, noting that more than 40 parishes in the archdiocese have closed during the last 50 years due to demographic changes.

In recent statements on the topic of the New

Energies project, Archbishop Myers has stressed the obligations of stewardship on the part of the Church and the need to implement the best options for parishes that are consistent with new financial realities and the changing needs of those who live in the four counties of the archdiocese.

Three pastors, each representing a linked, merged and partnership arrangement—the three models defined for parishes under New Energies—shared their experiences at the meeting. All three launched their respective arrangements under Round One on July 1.

Father Luis P. Gonzalez, the pastor of the linked parishes of Our Lady of Good Counsel and Immaculate Conception, said the process was difficult at first, but now parishioners have come to see the benefits of the arrangement. The two parishes maintain their separate identities and congregations, but are managed by one pastor and one central staff.

Earlier this year, consistent communication work was able to allay the concerns of parishioners. The major fear was that one of the parishes would be closed and that an agenda was being hidden from parishioners, Father Gonzalez recalled.

Father Frank J. Rocchi, the pastor of Good Shepard Parish in Irvington—created through the merger of Immaculate Heart of Mary in Maplewood and St. Paul the Apostle in Irvington—praised the work of the respective “cluster teams” from the former parishes. Father Rocchi said it was the cluster teams that created the necessary dialogue that allowed the merger transition to move forward.

“It was tough,” he admitted. “The change was not easy. Some people were heartbroken. But I felt this is where the Lord was leading us.”

Father Josephat Kalema, OSCO, leading the cooperative partnership between Queen of Angels Parish and the Parish of the Transfiguration (created from the merger of St. Rocco’s and St. Ann’s parishes), offered heartfelt words of advice to pastors regarding the next phase of the New Energies Initiatives.

“We are building the Kingdom of God, not our own kingdoms,” Father Kalema declared. “Pastors have a great role to play.”

Under the partnership model, Queen of Angels and Parish of the Transfiguration cooperatively share significant ministry programs and projects.

Father Kalema listed four imperatives for other pastors to consider: Believe in the process, otherwise parishioners will detect uncertainty and won’t buy into it; have the courage to enthusiastically share your vision of the future; listen to parishioners and respect their views; pray.