

Discussion Questions
for Use by Parish Pastoral Councils and Parish Staffs
in Conjunction with
Bishop Howard J. Hubbard's Keynote
"The Mission of the Contemporary Parish"

1. At the beginning of his keynote, Bishop Hubbard describes many of the challenges facing the church today, both internally and in the wider world. Which do you think is most critical and why? As a church commissioned by Jesus to spread the good news, what steps can we take to address this challenge?
2. What image best captures your own hope for the future church – hospice? resurrection? something else? Why?
3. How is Jesus the focus of our parish's life? How would a newcomer (an alien from another planet?) know that our foundation, our cornerstone is Jesus, that he is the One who draws us toward God and gives us as a community our reason for existing? How can we be more explicit about our centeredness on Jesus—with our children, young adults, those in our neighborhoods? How can we foster each person's love of Jesus and response to his call?
4. Are there ways we can better relate our parish's worship, faith formation, and social services to the mission of Jesus?
5. Bishop Hubbard cites the following characteristics as essential to parishes which are most vibrant: 1) good liturgy and preaching, 2) the ability of the parish to help people deal practically with their life concerns, 3) people's feeling of ownership regarding the parish, 4) an alive quality to the parish. How do we measure up with regard to each of these characteristics? Where are we falling short? What can we do better?
6. How recently have we honestly assessed what is happening in our area and within our parish demographically and whether our programs and services are still appropriate and relevant?
7. (For pastoral councils): How well do the following terms describe our leadership within the parish or cluster: a community of servant leaders, a prayerful community that makes decisions, long-range planners and stewards of the parish's gifts and resources, the leaders of outreach, the ones who help all parishioners to participate in the life of the community and in its decisions?
8. The quote from Fr. Frank DeSiano: "The biggest obstacle to people reconnecting with the parish community is the inability to meet the preordained parish schedule for receiving new members or for linking up with those who have drifted away." How well does that describe us?

9. Bishop Hubbard states that we can learn much from evangelicals about creating an environment of welcome and hospitality; of fostering lively community and giving members a sense of belonging and ownership; of making stewardship of time, talent and treasure a genuine way of life; and of motivating members to engage in outreach to and recruitment of new members. Could our pastoral council or staff spend some time this coming year studying the methods of nearby evangelical churches in these areas and figuring out ways to apply them appropriately to our own situation?
10. The quote from the late Cardinal Hume: “There is always the danger of speaking about and emphasizing what we believe to be wrong with the church, instead of celebrating the good and encouraging one another. There is a further danger of concentrating too much on life within the church, of being too inward-looking.” What are some of the good things happening right now in our church, locally and universally? What could we do to become more outward-looking?
11. Could someone rightly accuse our parish of being too hard-nosed in dealing with people, especially around the celebration of the sacraments? Where have we recognized the “butterfly in the caterpillar, the eagle in an egg, the saint in a sinful human being”?
12. What do you think about Bishop Hubbard’s words regarding convenient Mass schedules and the needs of the entire diocesan community?
13. How is our parish or cluster currently engaged with other churches and religious communities? Does Bishop Hubbard offer us any ideas for future involvement?
14. How well do we strive to acquaint our people with the social teachings of the church and to encourage them to be supportive of those causes which address the needs of the poor and vulnerable?
15. Fr. Timothy Radcliffe is quoted as saying, “The archetypal Christian community was the Last Supper.” What does this statement mean to you in light of your experience of church today?
16. Where are we showing “evangelical daring”? How can it become a charism of our community?