



Members of a subgroup file back to the main hall through the snow, above, after one of their Saturday morning meetings. Below, Robert Kalb makes a point at lunch to Mrs. Peggy Gilman. To right is Miss Kaye Lechleitner.



Text and Photos by Laurence E. Keefe

This time of year, many people have the experience of being snowbound and isolated for several days with large groups of strangers, and often the interaction on these occasions produces lasting bonds of friendship between fellow-sufferers who would not have met otherwise.

Not willing to trust to a fortuitous snowstorm, 23 members of Blessed Sacrament parish isolated themselves in a motel near Victor on the weekend of Feb. 27-28 to hammer out goals and tactics for their Parish Council and to get to know one another better.

For two days and two nights they worked without the distractions of family or outside entertainment, under the expert guidance of Dick Wetzel, a group management specialist from Xerox who has made a profession of teaching executive decision making to businessmen.

The 23 parishioners there constituted most of the leadership of Blessed Sacrament. They included members of the Parish Council and former members, chairmen of the parish's standing committees, all three priests and the staff from parish and school. Jesuit priests took care of the immediate needs of the parish during the weekend.

The idea of the weekend for the two-year-old Parish Council, according to the pastor, Father John Norris, was to arrive at clear-cut goals to guide management of the parish.

After checking in Friday evening at the main desk of the Trenholm East motel, parishioners (all of whom paid their own way) plunged into their first round of meetings. "I didn't give them much time on the schedule for rest, I'm afraid," said Dick Wetzel the next day.

Basic scheme for the weekend was to alternate between general sessions in the main room and subgroup workshops in private rooms, gradually building toward a set of clearly defined goals and tactics to reach them.

"The original idea," said George Walker, Parish Council member, "was a sort of retreat. Then gradually we saw the need for more clearly defining where the parish is going. And we decided to take away the people responsible for running the parish — to make the parish aware that something important was going on."

Results of the time spent in Victor have yet to be voted on by the Parish Council, points out Father Norris, but goals and strategies in five specific areas were reached before everybody went home.

One example of a goal and tactics which was worked out, said Father Norris, was the goal of "the Church as a worshipping and believing community," with four tactics named for achieving this. Small faith groups, working on Bible study and prayer action will be started by the subgroup which proposed them. The deadline proposed for this is Pentecost Sunday, 1972, to be followed by a control and evaluation point a year later. Other tactics set forth are involving youth in planning and celebrating the liturgy; diversification of liturgical celebrations for special groups, to be the responsibility of the parish's liturgy committee; and developing liturgical education geared around the sacraments, a project to be worked on jointly by the parish staff and the liturgy and education committees.

In the area of social action the proposed goal was "fuller commitment to the concerns and the welfare of all the people of God in the southeast area of Rochester." Father Norris points out that this proposal is framed to take in people beyond the parish boundaries, and to turn the concern of the parish outwards.

The one concrete tactic suggested in this area would reactivate the parish's Community Relations committee by appointing a chairman. This committee would then set up a car pool to get people to Mass; visit new parishioners and the infirm; and tie in with area ecumenical organizations.

Other areas in which the group arrived at goals and tactics were the church in education and involvement in the church.

This unique approach to translating general goals into practical action, Dick Wetzel is convinced, is the only answer to many of the church's management problems, and it can provide a tool for involving more parishioners in concrete decisions which must be made every day.