

The Diocesan Paper . . . What One Parish Learned

Just how important is the diocesan newspaper in the life of the Church?

What is its priority in these days when parish finance committees must wrestle with the higher costs that bedevil every budgeteer?

Do all the people who receive the newspaper really read it?

To find out the answers to these questions, Father James Marvin, pastor of St. Ambrose Church in Rochester, the largest parish in the diocese, included the following queries in a census-survey of his parish:

Do you read the diocesan newspaper, the Courier-Journal, regularly, occasionally, seldom, never?

Do you think the Courier-Journal is good, fair, poor, don't know?

"We were surprised by the result of the survey," admits Father Marvin.

First, a very high percentage of those surveyed answered the first question — 89.2. Of these, more than 86 per cent indicated that they read the diocesan newspaper.

Even more illuminating was the response (90.4) to the second question that showed 72.9 per cent liked the newspaper and that only 8.2 per cent criticized it as poor.

Father Marvin explains:

"We put the questions in purposely because we were having difficulty with the Parish Council which was loaded with financial background and which pretty much had decided that cutting cost, money, was their concern.

"They were advising to send the Courier just to those who want to



At left, Father Marvin, pastor, makes a point during an all-day goal-setting session held by leaders of St. Ambrose parish. Purpose of the session was to determine parish priorities in light of special parish census and survey.



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idea of adult education because of what the census said — and they felt they should respond to the census."

St. Ambrose increased its subscriptions to the Courier.

Just what did the census indicate to Father Marvin?

"That the Courier is a good instrument of communication and people want it," stated the pastor, who also is president of the diocesan Priests Council.

But what about paying for it? That can be a problem.

"We do not ask anything for the Courier or for any other special collection," said Father Marvin. "At St. Ambrose we have one collection a week to cover all parish expenses — school, debt reduction, etc. One envelope, period. And since we started this system, our collection has increased.

"We simply told parishioners that all the requests for contributions were embarrassing to them and to us. Now we just remind them once in a while."

Father Marvin sees a deeper import to the whole question, aside from the financial problem or the readability of this particular newspaper.

"In these days instead of drying up an avenue of communication, we decided to explore any avenue of communication possible. We're taking a cost risk but that's what we must do. I have the same attitude about schools — we must support them positively."

Following the survey, the parish recently had an all-day meeting to set goals.

Out of this meeting, attended by the Parish Council and its committees, came the realization that better communications are needed to serve parishioners.

"The pulpit's not enough," said Father Marvin, "and the bulletin certainly isn't enough. We decided we must take advantage of every opportunity. So communications emerged as one of our most important priorities."

Other priorities included youth and drugs, the elderly, Mass attendance.

Acting on these priorities, new avenues of communications have opened up. For instance, the survey indicated that 25 per cent of those in the parish were more than 65 years of age.

"Nothing was being done for them except in crisis situations," said Father Marvin. "There was nothing on a community level."

So, alerted by the census statistics and mobilized by the goal-setting day, the parish took on a new project. Sister Mary Louise, Meffernan, pastoral assistant, began making house-to-house visitations throughout the large parish to establish contact with the elderly, opening up not only new vistas of service but also formulating another step to better communications.

The survey was conducted by Foley-O'Brien Associates of Rochester after Father Marvin concluded that St. Ambrose, already part of a larger census of Northeast Region parishes also should have a survey of the opinions of its parishioners.

In the survey preface, it is explained that Father Marvin "with the assistance of Father Mark Miller, associate pastor" had two survey forms prepared. A survey form for all 18-year and

older adults and another for all 13-year through 17-year youths were distributed by the enumerators. Survey forms were completed by 862 of the approximately 4,100 adult parishioners, a very high sampling, lending strength to the information provided.

And that information showed that the importance of the diocesan newspaper as a communications vehicle outranks any financial difficulty involved.

"As for the Courier," says Father Marvin "we don't feel we have suffered financially. We feel it is an asset to us."

Superintendent Named For Monroe County Jail

By PAT PETRASKE

The filling of the position of superintendent of Monroe County Jail, which has been vacant for one year, gives the correctional facility an on-site supervisor, according to Undersheriff Andrew Meloni.

The appointment of Robert Stanwick, a Rochester native to replace retired Thomas Riley came after consultation with the Corrections Committee of the Judicial Process Commission sponsored by the Genesee Ecumenical Ministries. The main reason for the delay was "there was no one that we knew of who had a correctional background," said Meloni.

Since the merger of the Monroe County jail with the penitentiary two years ago, the staff has been consolidated thrusting the responsibility for various duties on to the undersheriff. "We had a series of talks with Andy (Meloni) about things we felt should be implemented but he just didn't have time to devote to everything," said Father Charles Mulligan, a member of the committee.

Father Mulligan added that "we had a lot of good things going and so we pushed to move off the inertia surrounding the issue." Meloni stated that he had received valuable feedback from the commission, and the request

for a superintendent had been given some time ago.

Stanwick's background includes service as a jail consultant with the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration, the American Correctional Association and the American Bar Association. Prior to his appointment as superintendent, Stanwick was assistant manager of the Professional Division of the National Sheriff's Association.

The new superintendent, who will be immediately "answerable" to the undersheriff, will evaluate existing training programs and develop new ones.

Other priorities formulated by Meloni include centralization of records and creation of new forms, fixing of guidelines and functions of the staffs for security and rehabilitation; review of rules and regulations pertaining to inmates, especially concerning the isolation cells, scheduling of meetings with agencies who work with the jail and establishment of guidelines for incident and infraction hearings and reports.

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