



## Parish Renewal Experience

A man in his 60s recently wrote these reactions to an experience he had at St. James' Church in Johnson City, N.Y.:

"I would recommend this to everyone high school age and up. It was the most rewarding weekend of my life. It made me feel my fellow Catholics are part of me. I was helped by all. I learned that being Catholic means sharing the body of Christ. I am proud to be Catholic."

More than 100 people shared that Parish Renewal Experience with this individual, but not all were in his age bracket. Some were older. Nine, for example, indicated they were over 70 and made these observations:

"Perfectly beautiful weekend." "Very interesting, most worthwhile, recommend it for all ages." "Very moving."

Most were much younger. A great number participated who listed their age as under 30. The following comments from members of that group are particularly significant, since we find many such young adults alienated from the Church or at least not interested:

"When I first came I was completely negative. By the end of the weekend I learned a great deal about myself as a Catholic in the Body of Christ. Strongly recommend it for others."

"Before the weekend I had no real concept of the Catholic religion. I never bothered to find out. Value is immeasurable... so many doubts cleared up..."

Fr. Joseph M. Champlin



Our Church Family

many rough areas to get through, but I would recommend this for everyone."

"For the first time I understand what my Catholicism means. Before I hungered for warmth and never found it. Now the Lord has brought his love to our parish and I'm thrilled."

This Friday night through late Sunday afternoon weekend in March was led by the pastor, Msgr. Peter Owens, assisted by a team of parishioners.

Designed to be conducted in a parish setting by the pastor and/or the local priests, this weekend experience is for all adult parishioners over 18 — single, married, single parent, religious, widowers. Participants gather for a lengthy Friday night session, a 9 a.m. to 10 p.m. program on Saturday and an all day Sunday effort. They return home each night.

The presentations are given by the local priest with brief pump-priming sharing at the end of each by several persons, e.g., a couple, single person, youth or religious.

The main thrust of the Parish Renewal Experience is to give Catholics a greater awareness of their identity, dignity and responsibilities as members of the Body of Christ. The local clergy do a great deal of teaching during it (following a detailed outline prepared by the originator) but after every presentation there is a small group discussion, followed by open, volunteer sharing by the whole group. In addition, the weekend includes several communal experiences of reconciliation and anointing.

Jesuit Father Chuck Gallagher of Worldwide Marriage Encounter fame developed with the aid of several other Catholic leaders this experience which has grown rapidly and been adopted in many parishes and dioceses throughout the country.

The extremely positive feedback comments Msgr. Owens received on those written evaluation forms after that initial Parish Renewal Experience weekend naturally pleased and excited him. But some remarkable spiritual results afterwards — persons returning to Sunday Mass, receiving penance and the Eucharist for the first time in years, asking to be more involved with parish life — gave him a deeper conviction this program has great possibilities for the renewal of our Church.

He already has conducted another weekend, planned additional ones and spurred 30 priests of the diocese to participate in a training session with Father Gallagher and to sponsor the Parish Renewal Experience in their own churches.

## Mid-Life Crisis in Faith

In a superb article in the February 1980 issue of St. Anthony Messenger, "When Teenagers Lose the Faith," Dr. Michael Warren pinpoints an uncomfortable area of parent/teen relationships, i.e. the shaky status of parental faith and its effect on adolescents. Those of us who work with parents in our church are aware of the phenomenon of many parents who want their young adults to embrace a faith they themselves no longer feel, who want them to grow in a faith they stopped growing in long ago, and who want to believe what they are too apathetic even to discuss.

Yet, as Dr. Warren says, "Teen faith development is intimately tied to the way adults practice their faith; and even beyond that, to the way the whole parish community lives its faith. Many of us adults know from friends our own age that halts or blockages in one's religious development occur as much during the middle years as during the early teens. After working with adults in Washington and New York for the past 10 years, I myself am convinced that the most serious problem with religious development is a sort of mid-life numbness of spirit, a closing-off of religious question which is actually the atheism of the religiously half-awake."

To paraphrase Emily Dickenson, there's a sentence you can take your hat off to. Any aware

Dolores Curran



Talks With Parents

Christian adult knows dozens of people who exhibit that "mid-life numbness of spirit" but who are terribly concerned about the visible faith of their young. Why? How can faith be so important in a couple's progeny when they have stopped growing in it themselves?

Or could that be the reason? For a long time, I've suspected a relationship between the concern of some parents over their maturing offspring's faith and the lack of concern over their own wanting faith. To simplify it, the more unsure they are about their own faith, the more desperately they seem to want it for their adolescent.

When I work with parents of teenagers who have slipped away from the pew and ask about their own faith life, they're apt to become defensive. They don't want to talk about that. That's their affair.

What they want to know is why somebody isn't "giving" their adolescent faith.

I'm not implying that all parents who are concerned about their teen's faith have a faith problem themselves. They don't. Good parents constantly examine the faith life of all their children. But they examine their own as well. I'm talking about the parents who invest their faith in job, consumerism, and their teenager's faith behavior rather than in themselves.

Like Dr. Warren, I wish we could stop worrying so much about our collective adolescents' faith behavior and look more closely at that mid-life numbness of spirit in the pew. He writes, "I would encourage parents to pay more attention to the quality of worship in their parishes. What sometimes appears to be a crisis of faith can in fact be a crisis of worship."

Again, he hits it right on the halo. Many parishes have little visible evidence of adult faith, even at Mass. Worship is obligatory, something to get through in as short a time as possible. If a good share of the pews in our parishes are filled with the religiously half-awake, how can we expect our young to be attracted to it?

## Sometimes It's Not Easy to Admit a Magoo

A little of this and some of that...

— What do you say when you are in need of an eraser? Put salt instead of sugar on your cereal? Throw out the baby along with the bath water? According to the 10-year-old, you admit that you made a magoo. She coined the word recently when she started to say, in her usual speedy delivery, that she had made a mistake. Halfway through the word she switched to goof as in "I goofed." It came out sounding like magoo. It's not half bad. Can be used as a noun as above. Or a verb as in "I magooed" and even an adjective as in "it was a magooey day from start to finish."

— I may have come up with a solution for an aunt I know who never manages to get a birthday card out on time to nieces and nephews. I plan to pick out a day at random and send everybody a card. Until then, however, happy birthday Mary, Eve, Ann, Ernest, Sammy and Joshua...

My mom, who has been ill and is now on the

Sarah Child



All in the Family

mend, received enough cards and notes to paper a couple of good sized rooms. Reading through them was gratifying. Our family learned a good many things during this interval, including the fact that many people pray for others, that they believe fervently in that prayer and, most important of all, just how potent those prayers can be. Deo Gratias!

— My favorite travel souvenir (whether it's I doing the traveling or somebody else bringing back a gift) is, of course, a book. Something describing the locale or history of the spot or even a cookbook with area delicacies.

The head of the house who recently attended a conference in Nashville came back with a spiral bound notebook describing Southern dishes. Reading through it is like an adventure story of sorts. There are recipes for Peanut Butter Biscuits, Beneva's Vinegar Pie, Possum Apple Pudding, Lazy Wife Pickles, along with hints on how to take care of onion breath, a toothache and cleaning old marble.

Love Thy Neighbor as Thy Self we are told. I am personally convinced it is the most difficult of all the commandments. I have no problem with the neighbors I know — it's the ones I don't that curl my eyebrows including such types as the sweet young thing who crowds in ahead of everybody at the checkout line, the over friendly store clerk who makes a practice of short changing customers, the officious bank clerk who sneers because somehow my passbook has strawberry jelly on it.

Ah, if only the Lord had narrowed the neighbor category down a little.