

Leadership conference

Keynote speakers offer model to integrate parish ministries

By Teresa A. Parsons

Most of the 225 people who attended the Diocesan Leadership Conference last weekend has a least one thing in common — they were up to their ears in ministry.

Present were eucharistic ministers who also serve parish councils, teach as catechists, run fund raisers, and organize support groups. There were pastoral assistants who visit hospitals, preside at prayer services, preach homilies, and organize the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA).

Virtually all in attendance were people who jumped at the explosion of opportunities for parish ministry which have opened to them since the Second Vatican Council.

Although that has been an exciting process, it has been shared by only a few. In the average parish, a scant 20 percent of members are active beyond attendance at weekend worship. As that minority of volunteers juggles the multiplying demands of burgeoning ministries, parish leaders struggle to coordinate them within a common parish identity.

"Our experience is that there is marvelous ministry going on, but that we all need a way to cope with that," said Father Thomas Sweetser, SJ.

Co-directors of the Chicago-based Parish Evaluation Project, Father Sweetser and Carol M. Holden work as consultants to parishes, dioceses and pastoral ministers. They offer a two-and-a-half-year process of in-depth community evaluation and renewal.

In their keynote presentation Saturday, October 18, at Keuka College, they described their model for forging a successfully integrated parish community from a group of diverse ministries.

Sponsored by the diocesan Office of Parish Services, the conference also featured Sister Mary Benet McKinney, recently elected prioress of the Benedictines of Chicago. She spoke on the conference's theme, "Building the City of God."

Each of the three keynote speakers offered a workshop Saturday afternoon. Diocesan and parish leaders also presented workshops on changing patterns of ministry, the RCIA, young adult ministry, successful meetings and lay ministry.

In his workshop, Father Sweetser offered a portrait of the successful parish.

"A parish is not one community," he said. "Even those with only a couple hundred families are too big. Instead they are a lot of little communities."

Unless a parish links those groups, they will duplicate efforts and eventually, some will burn out. To bridge the gaps between its communities, Father Sweetser suggested, a parish should organize its activities into five main categories or commissions. They would include: worship and spirituality; community building; education; administration; outreach; and at-large or futuring.

The education commission, for instance, would bring school board members together with those active in religious and adult education. Community building would combine the Rosary Society or Men's Club with support groups and scouts. Members of the "at-large" group would be drawn from the average 80 percent of parishioners who are not involved in their parish beyond attending weekend worship. One staff person would serve as a liaison to each of the groups.

Each commission would also be represented on the pastoral (rather than parish) council. Not only is the name change required by canon law, but it also reflects a difference in role and function, according to Father Sweetser.

"A parish council takes care of nitty-gritty administration and deals with concrete issues," he said. "A pastoral council looks at the pastoral vision and tries to further the needs of the parish as a whole."

Whereas a parish council operates through voting and parliamentary procedures, he explained, a pastoral council works by consensus and shared wisdom.

Instead of being chosen through at-large nominations and elections, pastoral council candidates would be nominated from each commission and would be subject to certain criteria. One requirement, Father Sweetser suggested, should be that candidates have at least one year's experience in the area of ministry they represent.

Candidates for all types of ministry should be screened, trained, supported and accountable for their actions, he added.

In parishes starving for new leadership, enforcing such criteria may seem at best a fantasy and at worst a debacle.

But Father Sweetser believes that such fear of failure is often what keeps the same few people involved and excludes new members.

"We're such perfectionists (that) we can't let go of things," he explained. "We don't recognize the theology of failure. Our need to be needed won't let us admit that 'Maybe things could survive without me.'"

In-hall solicitation begins for Thanks Giving Appeal

The annual Thanks Giving Appeal begins this week in parishes throughout the diocese. On Saturday and Sunday, parishes will conduct in-hall solicitation after Masses. The in-hall sessions will continue weekends through November 2.

All parishioners are strongly urged to stop at their parish halls after Mass during the next three weeks to make pledges in support of the various ministries of the diocese. Look for more details on the TGA and the programs it supports in upcoming editions of the Courier-Journal.



Bishop Matthew H. Clark

Along the Way

A familiar place or face comes alive. We see richness, detail and depth we never saw before. This treat speaks to our heart, opens new possibilities and helps us make connections with important dimensions of life. We can't rush away from this new experience. We want to rest quietly and contemplate what is before us. We see new beauty in the colors, textures and shapes, and we realize that because we have been here we'll be more open to beauty wherever we find it.

We have a sense of integrity and peace we have never had before, because we have come to terms with a part of our self-awareness that until now has jangled within us and left us restive. We may have walked away in new freedom from some type of conduct, habit of mind or vision of reality that previously left us troubled and unpeaceful. Or we may finally have had insight into and integrated some part of our story that once caused guilt or anxiety, but which we now realize was normal human experience.

A set of questions, a vexing problem, a search for direction we have together deep inside, and we are blessed with an inner wholeness we have not experienced before. Born of this wholeness are new confidence, inner direction and a sense of vitality. We don't know exactly how, but we rejoice that we can now make sense of a past which seemed so jumbled and enter with a joy a future about which were once so apprehensive.

The three situations mentioned above are examples of conversion. Each involves a change that leaves the person better off than he or she was before the experience. In the first case, that change means eyes to see beyond the surface of reality to its deeper meaning and the capacity somehow to perceive the integrity of God's creation. In the second instance, it is the courage to walk away from conduct or interior dispositions that are destructive — or the insight to know that we'll be free from some reality not when we flee from

it, but when we make it part of our heart. In the third example, it is an unanticipated experience of simplicity and what that says about the relative importance of things, our use of energy, what we need truly and finally to be happy.

In all three cases we are aware that we are in touch with that holy place within us where divine life and human freedom converge. We know of our own yearning and effort, but we also know that there is something more than those here. We have a sense of gift, an experience of gracious compassion, some realization of what patient fidelity is, and we know that God is at work in all of this.

I invite you to spend time with such an experience in your life that comes to you when you read these words. Let it form slowly in your mind and take as much time as you need to enjoy its color and texture. Think about the before and the after, the struggles in between, your own good effort and the gracious presence of God.

Think about the people who loved you then and what their love meant in those days. Remember your prayer at that time and any persons, experiences or events that heightened your awareness of God's presence and your own worth. When I think about moments of conversion in my life, there are two constants in every instance: prayer, however ungenerous or inconsistent it may have been, and the love of friends manifested more in their consistent care than in their words. I wonder what will surface if you take time to remember such moments in your life.

Whatever the answer to that, it's a healthy exercise to remember special moments of growth. They inevitably open our minds and hearts to God's present goodness. They also remind us that even when the human price for conversion is quite high, it is always worth it for the new life it brings. That's a consolation because, if you're anything like me, there's no limit to your desire for more life. Peace to all.

DiMaria Travel FOR THE BEST IN TRAVEL ALWAYS
1521 MONROE AVE. 271-0100

Every Pleasure on Earth... Can be yours to enjoy at sea!

Cruise the Caribbean on the magnificent new ss Costa Riviera of the Costa Line.

February 14-21st — Winter School Break

Includes Air/Sea from Rochester, visiting some of the Caribbean's most exciting ports. Experience gourmet meals, free nightly entertainment, and shop duty free aboard ship or in port. Try your luck in the ships casino!

Join our group. Limited space available. For information call DiMaria Travel, 271-0100.

Ziebart
CAR IMPROVEMENT SPECIALISTS

Protect your entire car and save \$100

Paint Protection Fabric Protection
Rust Protection

COUPON

Splash Guards \$34
Protects doors, lower panels from stones, chips and debris. Spotty, attractive and durable. Professionally installed. Fits most domestics and imports. See Dealer for details.

V.I.P. Car Care NOW \$99
17-step program includes:
• Exterior — high pressure wash
• Professionally applied Liquid Diamond wax
• Interior — upholstery and carpet power vacuum and shampooed
• Plus much more
coupon exp. 12/1/86

Be car smart. Go Ziebart.

VISA or 1505 Lyell Ave. 1663 Penfield Rd.
458-8770 385-3545

EASY-LIFT Cushion Lifting Chair

Combines the elegance of a traditional lounge chair with cushion lifting assistance.

- Power cushion gently lifts you to a standing position
- Simple switch control
- Runs off household current
- Recliner models available
- Variety of colors, models and fabrics
- We bill Medicaid and Medicare

CALL OR STOP BY FOR A FREE DEMONSTRATION

FOSTER MEDICAL 2590 Ridge Rd. W. 227-7860