

Liturgy staff offers parishes an outsider's view of worship

By Teresa A. Parsons

Regardless of how much affection parishioners feel for their church community, it's a rare weekend when someone doesn't find something to complain about at Mass.

The Church of the Resurrection in Fairport is no exception. Some parishioners say the homilies are inspiring. Others say the homilies are boring. Some like lots of music and spontaneity. Others think liturgies are drawn out and the music is overdone. About the only criticism upon which most people seem to agree is that the church needs better ventilation.

In the average parish, that sort of general grumbling is hardly ever put to constructive use. Usually, it's confined to muttered exchanges between neighbors and family members out in the parking lot.

The people at Resurrection, however, took a chance on a different approach. Members of the liturgy committee proposed that the parish invite a team from the diocesan Office of Liturgy to evaluate their weekend Masses, in a process known as the parish Liturgy Evaluation Project.

Now it's one thing to pick apart your own parish's liturgical style. Inviting a team of diocesan liturgical experts to do the same thing is something altogether different.

Despite some reservations, parish leaders at Resurrection agreed to go through with the evaluation, in hopes of gaining a new perspective on the strengths and weaknesses of their Sunday celebrations.

"You're blind to a lot of things you do, both good and bad," explained Gloria Treis, a liturgy committee member. "You'd like to think that everything you do is perfect, but you know it's not."

Imagine a group of people who are thorough enough to note that blessed water was left in the baptismal font, but tactful enough to point out the oversight with a joke about the difference between living water and water with living things in it.

That pretty well sums up the approach of all three members of the liturgy evaluation team, who also comprise three-quarters of the staff at the diocesan liturgy office.

Each member combines parish experience



Jeff Goulding/Courier-Journal

Parishes that contract with the diocesan liturgy office for the Parish Liturgy Evaluation Program receive a comprehensive, serious examination of their worshipping styles. But liturgy office staff members (from left) John Kubiniac, Father Thomas P. Mull, and Susanna Becker admit that they don't really use a white glove or magnifying glass.

with particular areas of liturgical expertise. Both Father Thomas Mull, liturgy office director, and John Kubiniac, associate director for liturgical music, have worked at the diocesan level for five years. Father Mull also oversees liturgical planning at Sacred Heart Cathedral, where he is parochial vicar. Kubiniac is an organist at St. Louis Parish in Pittsford.

The team's newest member is Susanna

Becker, who arrived in the Rochester diocese last September with a degree in liturgy from Notre Dame University and experience in several Long Island-area parishes.

Together, team members examine every facet of a parish's worship experience, from the welcome people are offered on their way into the church to the traffic they encounter on the way out.

The team's purpose is not to pinpoint each and every slip-up and flaw, but rather to help parish leaders and liturgy planners understand the reasons behind the rituals and become more aware of the symbolic impact of their actions.

"We're not there to legislate or to say 'this is what you're supposed to do,'" Kubiniac explained. "For the most part, parishes have found (the evaluation) helpful in pointing out what they're doing that is good."

The team visits parishes by invitation only. Although the consultation is free, the liturgy office requires that the pastor, parish council president, and liturgy committee chairman sign a contract stating that they are willing to take part in the evaluation. The team members also request that their visit be announced to the whole parish.

Nevertheless, they're never quite sure what kind of reception they'll receive.

"Sometimes you get some strange stares from people in the congregation, when they see you sitting there taking down notes," Kubiniac said. "But usually, we receive quite a warm welcome."

Members of the liturgy team observed all four weekend Masses at Resurrection on Saturday and Sunday, January 10 and 11. They talked with musicians, altar servers and members of the congregation. They also asked parishioners to fill out an extensive evaluation form that gauges more general reactions than the team could observe during

a single weekend.

On Monday, February 9, the liturgy team sat down with Resurrection's parish staff, liturgy committee and parish council to offer their report.

Team members praised the congregation's warmth and participation, as well as their rapport with the presider. They also asked a lot of questions.

They wondered, for instance, why the church had a combination sacristy and reconciliation room. A parishioner explained that it was because of limited space in the single multi-purpose building. While he acknowledged that the arrangement met a practical need, Father Mull pointed out that it might unintentionally diminish the importance of the sacrament.

"When there is a place set aside, it says that the community believes that this is important," he added.

More often than not, the team's observations prompt some defensive reactions from parishioners. "We understand that parishes quite often have very good reasons for doing things the way they do," Kubiniac explained. "We just basically say what we see."

On the other hand, parishioners who expect the team members to solve their every dilemma are bound to be disappointed.

Resurrection's liturgy committee hoped that the evaluation would produce a new process for distributing Communion. But instead of a solution, they got suggestions.

"Whether it's an evaluation or a workshop, people will say, 'Tell me what to do,'" Kubiniac said. "I can offer them some things to think about, but I'm not the one who's there day in and day out. They're the ones who are going to have to figure out what works best for them."

That's exactly what Resurrection's liturgy

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Early human life: Ethics & events

March 5 and 7, 1987

The Forum

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Nazareth College of Rochester announces a series of four free lectures, open to the public, designed to explore critical medical and social issues of prenatal and neonatal human life from four ethical viewpoints: Jewish, Protestant, Catholic, and legal.

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| <p>7:30 p.m. Fred Rosner, M.D.
Professor of Medicine, SUNY at Stony Brook, and Director, Department of Medicine, Queens Hospital Center</p> | <p>The Patienthood of the Fetus from a Jewish Ethical Viewpoint</p> |
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Saturday, March 7

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| <p>9:30 a.m. Robert Barry, O.P., Ph.D.
Assistant Professor of Religious Studies, University of Illinois-Urbana</p> | <p>Necessity of Respect for Early Human Life from a Roman Catholic Perspective</p> |
| <p>11 a.m. Patricia King, J.D. Associate Professor of Law, Georgetown University Law Center, Washington, D.C.</p> | <p>The Legal Status of Unborn Human Life</p> |
| <p>1:30 p.m. Stanley Hauerwas, Ph.D. Professor, Divinity School, Duke University Durham, N.C.</p> | <p>Parenting of Unborn Human Life from a Protestant Ethical Viewpoint</p> |

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