

et cetera

Pentecost '88

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Enthusiastic responses from last year's participants and an apparent growth of interest in evangelization among local Catholics prompted local organizers to offer this year's teleconference in two diocesan locations: McQuaid Jesuit High School in Rochester and Notre Dame High School in Elmira. As of last week, more than 300 people had registered to take part throughout the diocese.

Among this year's featured speakers will be Father Alvin Illig, CSP, founder and director of the Paulist National Catholic Evangelization Association, who will present "Mary, Mother of the Lord: the First Evangelizer."

"Parish Census; Preparing for Evangelization" will be the topic of a presentation by William J. Bannon and Sister Susanne Donovan, SC, respectively president and executive vice president of Bannon Associates, a Columbus, Ohio-based firm that develops and implements stewardship campaigns. Among other speakers will be Patricia Barbarnitz, a pastoral associate from a suburban Baltimore parish who will speak on the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA), and Father Joseph M. Champlin, an administrator from the Diocese of Syracuse.

Between presentations, participants at each local site will have the opportunity to phone in questions to the teleconference speakers. Those at the Notre Dame site will also hear local parishioners and groups describe their experiences with evangelization.

Thanks to the inspiration members of St. Ann's in Hornell drew from Pentecost '87, they will have some notable successes to report to their neighbors at Pentecost '88.

In just less than a year, Hornell parishioners have established an evangelization committee with 20 active members. The committee has, in turn, developed a video ministry on local cable television, a group that visits the sick and shut-ins and sends them get-well cards, the beginnings of jail ministry, and a parish library. Through newspaper advertisements, the committee has also invited both the unchurched and fallen-away Catholics in the Hornell area to "worship in the church of your choice" and "come home" to St. Ann's.

Parishioner Larry Jones likened what has happened at St. Ann's to a modern-day equivalent of the miracle of loaves and fishes. "We more or less went after our own parishioners to begin with, figuring that if we did a little, He would multiply our efforts," Jones said. "It has to be one of the most successful things I've ever been involved with."

Jones expected a "nice, churchy day" when

he agreed to attend Pentecost '87 along with three other parish representatives. Instead, they were "staggered" by the statistics reported by pollster George Gallup Jr., a teleconference speaker. Gallup stated that as many as 90 million U.S. residents are considered unchurched. According to a 1985 survey, he added, 24 percent of U.S. Catholics — about 16.5 million people — are not affiliated with a church.

"In a Christian sense, you could almost say we're in the minority," Jones said.

As a convert to Catholicism, Jones observed that the Catholic Church comes across to many of those unchurched millions as a "cold" community. "It's one of the hardest churches to become a part of," he explained. "We're trying to come across as a warm, open-hearted and loving parish."

This year's teleconference participants in the Southern Tier will also hear how members of the Spirituality Committee at St. Mary's, Elmira, plan to follow up their successful renewal by offering new educational opportunities in the fall.

"So many times, you get people all excited about something, and then nothing else happens — it's just dropped," said Linda Savino, parish director of religious education. "We want to take the topics people have said they are interested in and build them right into (this fall's religious-education) program."

Sister Campion Bush, SSJ, has similarly

high hopes for the impact of Pentecost '88 on the Rochester area. As evangelization coordinator for St. Augustine's Parish, she attended last year's gathering in the Southern Tier and was among those who advocated a Rochester site for Pentecost '88.

"I thought (last year's program) represented a broad spectrum of the Church in the United States ... It showed how the Holy Spirit is influencing people to figure out how to (evangelize) in their particular situations," she said. "The whole thing turned me on."

Because the teleconference format allows many people to participate at the relatively low cost of \$20 each, it is well suited to evangelization, which Sister Bush describes as a "grass-roots movement."

An ad hoc committee of local organizers hoped to draw 250 participants to the Rochester site. As of May 11, at least 268 people had registered with two weeks yet to go.

Sister Bush believes the teleconference may mark the beginning of a new era for evangelization efforts in the local Church. "With Pentecost '88 in May and the Billy Graham Crusade next September, more Catholics in the Rochester diocese will be stirred to take an active role as evangelizers," she said. "Don't expect them to do a hard sell ... They are being taught how to extend an invitation to the unchurched. They may just succeed!"

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