

Program shows benefits of giving back to God

By Lee Strong
Staff writer

The figures don't lie.

Fifteen percent. Twenty percent. Forty percent.

Those are the average increases in Sunday collections enjoyed by St. Ambrose, Our Lady of Good Counsel and St. Mark's parishes respectively after each introduced the diocesan sacrificial giving program.

Nor are these results unusual. If anything, they are low. In the Diocese of Syracuse, for example, 45 percent is the average increase reported by 104 parishes that have introduced sacrificial giving. Nationally, more than 1,500 parishes have tried the program, experiencing average increases of between 40 and 45 percent.

Thus far in the Diocese of Rochester, approximately 25 parishes have introduced sacrificial giving. Patrick Sullivan, who coordinates the diocesan program, would like to see more parishes give it a try.

"Without a doubt, the sacrificial giving program is a great way to create an excitement within the parish community that giving back to the Lord is part of our faith commitment," Sullivan said. Central to the program, he added, "is the understanding that everything comes from God and we should show our gratitude by returning a portion to God."

The program used by the Rochester diocese was developed in Syracuse by Monsignor Joseph Champlin in the early 1980s and described in the book, *Sharing Treasure, Time and Talent*. Sacrificial giving first came to Rochester in 1984, when Blessed Sacrament Parish was searching for ways to increase revenues. John Curran, a member of the parish's finance council, heard about Syracuse's program, and met with Monsignor Champlin. Impressed with what he learned about the system, Curran introduced it to his parish.

Curran liked the program's soft-sell approach. Parishioners hear talks on consecutive Sundays from people who practice sacrificial giving. Letters are mailed to parishioners about the program, and reminders about sacrificial giving are printed in the bulletin. But no one is questioned about how much he gives, nor is any pressure put on individuals to participate.

Something else about the program impressed Curran. "The most important thing I drew out of it was the participation of the lay people," he said. "People are more likely to listen to other lay people than to a priest."

Curran recalled one couple with ten children who gave a presentation. "When those people tell you they can do it, you say to yourself, 'If they can do it I can do it,'" he said.

As a result of sacrificial giving, Blessed Sacrament's average collection jumped from approximately \$3,600 per weekend to more than \$6,000, Curran said. In the five years since, collection figures have remained high, ranging between \$6,000-8,000 each weekend.

As important as money is, however, the program calls for a comparable commitment of one's time and talent as well, said Francis Scholtz, former national coordinator of the sacrificial giving program. He linked sacrificial giving to the concept of stewardship, which he defines as "being managers or caretakers of all the gifts God's given us."

"We are only here a short time on Earth, and we are just given these gifts to manage," he explained. "By baptism we are called to share."

Curran said he has seen such sharing surface in non-financial ways at Blessed Sacrament. One parishioner, who happened to be a painter, noticed that a hall and stairway in the church needed painting, so he

did it. Another parishioner has taken on varnishing and general maintenance of the parish's doors. Overall, Curran said, he has seen an increase in the number of people volunteering for parish ministries and activities.

Other parishes heard about the success of sacrificial giving at Blessed Sacrament, and contacted Curran. He and a group of volunteers began giving talks at other parishes. Word of the program eventually reached Sullivan, who had been hired by the diocese to direct the Thanks Giving Appeal and to serve as a consultant to parishes for fundraising efforts.

Sullivan noted that Catholics tend to contribute less to the church than believers in other Christian denominations. On average, Catholics give only 1 percent of their income as compared to members of some other churches, who give as much as 10 percent — the traditional tithing amount. He suggested that if Catholics increased their giving to even 3 or 4 percent, the added money would help eliminate debts and second collections and help parishes afford more services for their people.

The problem, Sullivan said, is that Catholics were never taught to give more. "We in the Catholic faith have never been told what our commitment should have been," he said. "We need to do a better job of educating."

Sacrificial giving relies heavily on biblical counsels to be generous, to share one's wealth with those less fortunate. The Old Testament mentions tithing more than 40 times, Sullivan pointed out. And as the name of the program implies, giving should hurt, he said. The benefit for people who choose to participate is that "they experience not only a greater commitment to their faith, but a whole change in their spirituality and commitment to the Lord," Sullivan concluded.

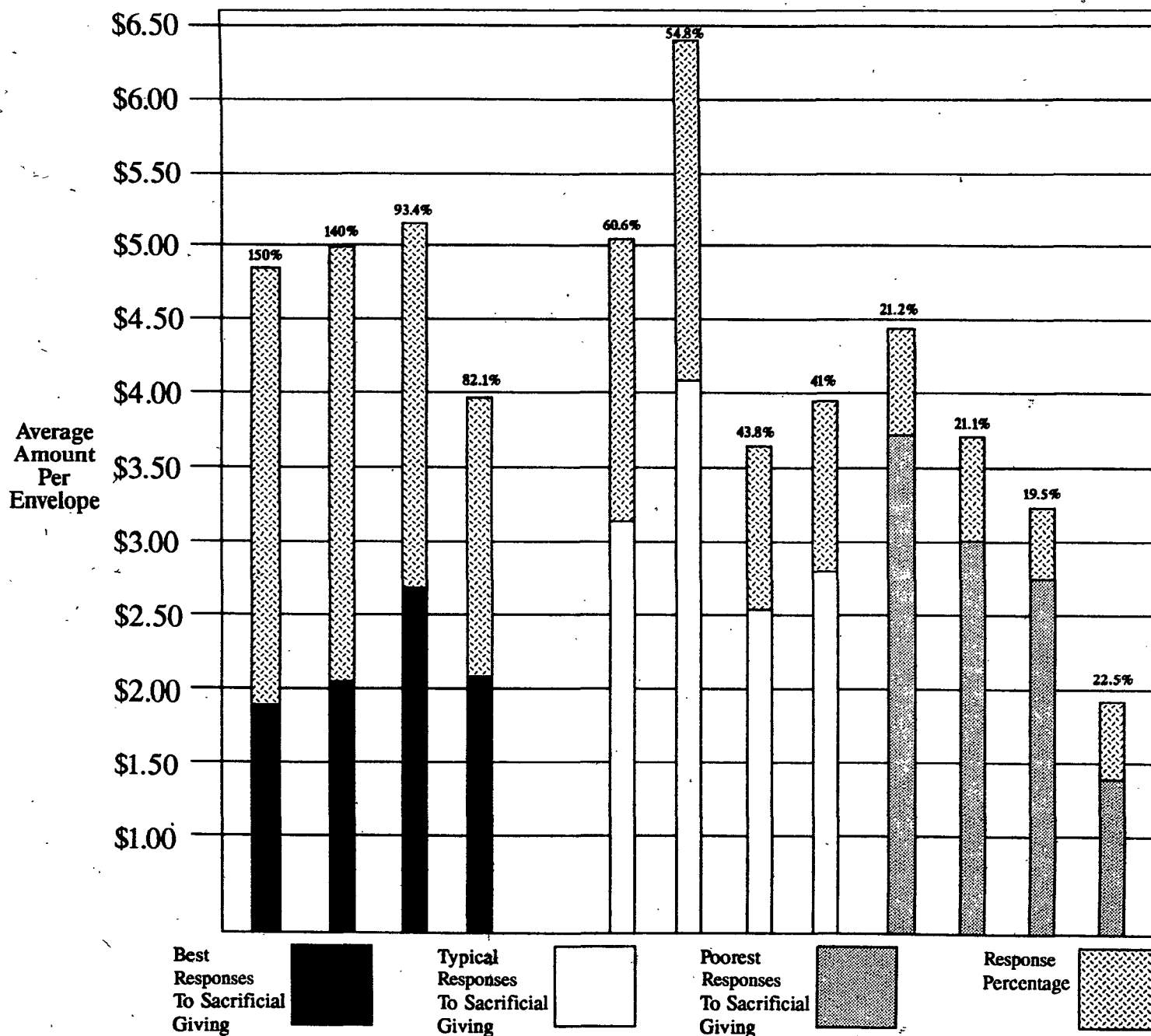
The program's spiritual, scriptural basis was one factor that led Father Louis Sirianni to introduce sacrificial giving at Our Lady of Good Counsel two years ago. "We liked the concepts of the program itself, that it's based on theology rather than financial reasons," he said. He also liked the program "because it was a reliable way to educate the people as to their responsibilities."

The average weekly collection at Good Counsel has since increased by about \$500. Father Sirianni said that volunteering at the parish has also increased, but he was uncertain whether the increase was due to the program. Scholtz pointed out, however, that sacrificial giving frequently builds volunteer activity because its emphasis on giving back to the Lord and trusting in the Lord results in a "difference in attitude. It's a conversion experience."

Scholtz also said that if parishes bring in the program solely to raise money, odds are that its early success will fade because the people have experienced no essential change in attitude. The key factor in changing parish attitudes, he said, is the attitude of the pastor. "Just like lay people need to be converted, priests run into difficulties," Scholtz said. "They've spent so much time in fund raising that that's what they focus on at first." Unless such priests change, their parishioners will turn away from sacrificial giving, he suggested.

Sullivan discourages pastors and parish leaders from undertaking the program if their reasons for trying it are clearly and strictly financial. "The rationale for implementing such a program as sacrificial giving is to share," he said. "We tell a parish when they get into (sacrificial giving), 'Don't make money your priority. Make total time and talent the focus, and treasure will happen.'"

SAMPLES OF FOUR BEST, TYPICAL, AND POOREST RESPONSES TO SACRIFICIAL GIVING BY PARISHES IN DIOCESE OF SYRACUSE IN 1980 AND 1981.



Refugee effort requires more local sponsors

By Lee Strong
Staff writer

Jim Delaney feels mixed emotions these days.

On one hand, the refugee resettlement manager at the Catholic Family Center is pleased with the response thus far to Bishop Matthew H. Clark's August, 1988, call for parishes to sponsor Amerasian refugees and their families.

In the last six months, approximately 31 parishes, groups and even individuals have answered the call. Previously, Delaney pointed out, he has had to struggle to find 30 sponsors in an entire year.

On the other hand, Delaney is uneasy. He knows that by December, 1990, he will be asked to find approximately 119 more sponsors. Delaney is not certain he can find them.

If the U.S. Catholic Conference's Migration and Refugee Services Office calls to say a refugee is waiting and no sponsor has been lined up, "I am at this point prepared to say no," Delaney said. "I suspect it may well happen."

The push for sponsors in the Diocese of Rochester is part of a nationwide effort to resettle Amerasians — children of U.S. servicemen and Vietnamese women. Approximately 8,000 of these refugees, along with an estimated 22,000 family members, are to be resettled in the United States by the end of 1990, the target set by the Amerasian Homecoming Act passed by Congress in December, 1987.

The USCC is one of the agencies directing this resettlement, and the Diocese of Rochester, because of its record of successful resettlement efforts, has been asked to receive 150 cases involving approxi-

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