

Indifference

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this point. Of the six scheduled training sessions in the process, team members have completed three. On September 23, during Bishop Clark's Leadership Day at the Riverside Convention Center, team members will undergo training sessions four and five, and will complete their training with sessions in October and November. Then they will organize education and reflection sessions for parishioners.

Out of these sessions will come reports from each parish about staffing options for the future. These options may mean that parishes will have to share staff, including priests — especially in light of the dwindling numbers of priests available for parish assignments each year. This will involve making people aware of their baptismal call to be ministers of the Gospel, he said.

Meanwhile, some parishes have already begun the process of educating parishioners about Commitment to Ministry. Parish reflection-team members have spoken to parish groups, preached at Masses, offered information sessions and written articles for their parish bulletins.

Mary Ellen Rulison, for example, wrote a column for the bulletin at St. Mary's Parish in Canandaigua. In her piece, she quoted Bishop Matthew H. Clark several times. She did so, she said, to help those parishioners who might be hesitant about what Commitment to Ministry entails to understand that Bishop Clark is behind the effort.

"When you're doing something like this that can raise some eyebrows, it's good to know that the person at the top is supportive and right there with you," she said.

The St. Mary's team has given presentations at Masses and provided a question box for parishioners — although Rulison

admitted that thus far no questions have come in. In addition, parish staff members have included references to Commitment to Ministry in homilies and in talks with parish groups, and the eighth-grade CCD class made a Commitment to Ministry banner that now hangs in the church.

Rulison said the team is looking forward to the leadership day because of the data they will receive "so that when we go from the general to specifics we'll have the information we need."

At St. Francis Parish, Phelps, the team decided to survey parishioners because "we felt as a reflection team that we weren't getting too much response from people in terms of interest," reported reflection-team member Evelyn Scherbyn. Team members were pleased to learn through the five-question survey that 82 percent of the 235 people responding thought that St. Francis, as a parish family, was important to them. Eighty percent said they would continue to attend the parish even if a priest was available only to say Masses, and 56 percent said they would still become involved in parish projects.

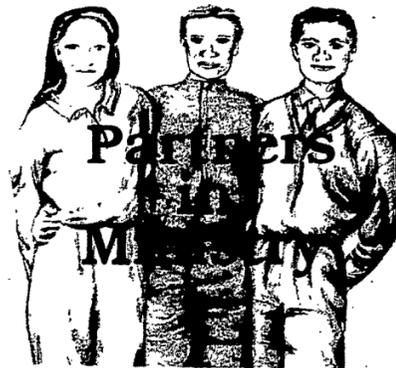
The surveys, Scherbyn said, were intended to not only gauge opinion in the parish, but also to start people thinking about the possible implications for the parish of the declining numbers of priests. "We felt it necessary to get the people of our parish more aware of what we're doing and let them know the thinking of the reflection team," she said.

Joan McGlynn, a reflection-team member from St. Mary of the Hills Parish in Honeoye, said that educating people about the need for parishioner involvement in day-to-day parish affairs is a vital part of the process. "If we get a circuit-rider priest, we've got to be able to run our parish," she said. "The awareness of that is important."

McGlynn also said education is needed to counter fears about the future, particu-

larly about how staffing decisions will be made. She acknowledged that when she first became involved with the process, she thought "that we would be spinning our wheels and then (the diocese) is going to turn around and say, 'That was nice, but this is what's going to happen.'"

Since attending the training sessions, however, McGlynn said she now believes "the diocese is taking an honest effort to let us become involved."



Maddock was similarly concerned about how staffing decisions would ultimately be made, but like McGlynn, he found the training helped to resolve those concerns. "I'd heard the diocese had already decided," he reported. At the sessions, however, he received "satisfactory answers" and is now convinced that the diocese will make a sincere effort to listen to input from the parishes.

"I think that some of the initial skepticism that perhaps the diocese is using this as a ploy to dump on them is decreasing," Deacon Lester said. "I think the people have realized that there is no master plan. I think people have realized that they are co-responsible for developing the future."

As for the seeming apathy toward the

process, Maddock speculated that the reflection teams' efforts will help parishioners realize they need to become involved. "I think that will change when there's more publicity, when there's more involvement of the parish as a whole," he said. Many of the team members acknowledge that they are waiting until after the leadership day to begin more extensive efforts to education parishioners. Maddock suggested that once parish-education sessions are in full swing, parishioners will begin talking to relatives and friends in other parishes and realize that Commitment to Ministry has diocesan-wide implications.

Deacon Lester predicted that the full scope of the Commitment to Ministry Process will become apparent as the teams begin actively directing the parish-education process in the coming months. The nearly 1,000 people currently involved will multiply into the thousands, he said. "Never before have we as a diocese rallied in such an informed way about an issue," he said.

Hargrave, for one, said people had better become aware of what the future holds and not cling to the belief that their parishes will not be affected.

"I really think people think it's something that's going to pass," Hargrave concluded. "I just hope one of these days people are going to wake up and say, 'This is the way it is, and we've got to do something about it.'"

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