

Isaiah 43 mission aids evangelization efforts

By Lee Strong
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — Joyce Haag noticed the first effects of Isaiah 43 just two days after her parish, Rochester's Church of the Annunciation, completed the mission.

At the 5:30 p.m. Mass on Oct. 27, parishioners began to clap spontaneously during one of the songs — something Haag said she had never seen before at the parish.

"There was a great deal of joy," observed Haag, Annunciation's parish council president. "This is the kind of thing we needed to see."

Meanwhile, the parish's pastor, Father Robert O'Neill, was so impressed with the mission program — which attracted more than 200 people a night — that he volunteered to become a member of the national mission team at some point in April or May of next year.

Church of the Annunciation has become the latest parish in the Diocese of Rochester to try the Isaiah 43 mission. That growing list includes such parishes as St. Ann's, Hornell; St. Mary's of the Lake, Watkins Glen; Holy Name of Jesus, Rochester; and St. Vincent DePaul, Churchville.

These parishes, meanwhile, join the more than 300 parishes in the United States that have experienced Isaiah 43 since it was created in 1984.

And Annunciation parishioners also enjoyed the distinction of having Susan Blum, the coordinator of the Florida-based mission program and one of its creators, as part of their two-member mission team.

Blum and her priest-partner traveled to Church of the Annunciation to conduct an all-day retreat Oct. 20 for parishioners who formed the local mission team. The duo also preached at the weekend masses Oct. 20-21 and conducted the Oct. 22-25 mission.

The Isaiah 43 mission consists of four evening sessions, each focusing on a particular theme and incorporating, in some way, one or more of the sacraments.

The goal of the mission is not just renewal for the parish, Blum noted, but to prepare parishioners to share their Catholic faith with others through evangelization.

The focus on the sacraments is, however, a key component of Isaiah 43's approach to evangelization, Blum said.

"We thought it very important that it be sacramentally based," Blum said. "The word 'evangelization' connotes Protestantism, and we want to make sure this is clearly Catholic in orientation."



Above, Isaiah 43 creator Susan Blum addresses parishioners at Rochester's Church of the Annunciation Oct. 25. Below, Blum marks the forehead of Maryrose Onuszkiewicz with blessed oil.



Isaiah 43 was developed specifically to help meet the need for evangelization in the Catholic Church. Blum, a convert, discovered this need in 1979 when she attended a national conference on Catholic evangelization in Washington, D.C.

After she returned from the conference to the Diocese of Miami, she offered to write an article about the conference for the diocesan newspaper. That article — which turned into a three-part series — led to additional articles and eventually to the creation of the *Catholic Evangelist*, which Blum edited during its four-year run from 1982-1986. The magazine achieved a circulation of 31,000 before financial pressures forced it to fold.

Blum, meanwhile, was busy with her own evangelization work. She set up and headed an evangelization committee at her own parish. Working with other people involved in evangelization efforts, she also

began to develop a formal program based upon her experiences.

That program was published as *Mission: Evangelization* in 1984. Blum was soon in demand to speak about the program and evangelization in general. But she soon discovered that many Catholics lacked some of the basics they needed to begin evangelizing.

"It was difficult to train them as evangelizers before they had been evangelized themselves," Blum said.

So in conjunction with three other individuals, Blum developed Isaiah 43 to meet this need. The program includes not only events staged during the mission week, but also six weeks of training for parish evangelization team members prior to the mission, and two follow-up programs conducted by the newly trained parish team members. The follow-up programs are *Coming Alive*, a six-week seminar to build on the experiences of the mission week, and *Share Your Faith*, which provides training in the basic skills needed to evangelize.

One of the strengths of Isaiah 43, Blum said, is that it offers programs both before and after the mission week so that the effects of mission are not lost.

That aspect of Isaiah 43 was one of the reasons Father Elmer Schmidt opted to invite the program to St. Ann's, Hornell, in March of 1988.

"It's not just three days and turn it off and then what's next," Father Schmidt said.

Father Schmidt reported that 250 to 300

people attended each session, and that the program succeeded in motivating parishioners to become more involved in parish activities.

In addition to the preparation and follow-up components of Isaiah 43, Father Schmidt said he appreciated the amount of lay involvement, and in particular the fact that the team included a lay person. "It wasn't all just clerical," he observed.

Lay involvement was also an important element in the program at Holy Name of Jesus Parish, acknowledged Deacon Richard Lombard.

"I think it's important to have a priestly dimension," observed Deacon Lombard, who served on the parish team when Isaiah 43 came to his parish in the spring of 1989. "But I think it's important to have the other person there to add another dimension."

Sister Kathleen Navarra, SSJ, Annunciation's director of evangelization, likewise cited lay involvement as an important element of Isaiah 43 that sets it apart from other programs.

"It was just the basic sacramental theology that so many missions offer," Sister Navarra said. The difference between Isaiah 43 and those other programs, she explained, is that Isaiah 43 requires and encourages lay involvement from parishioners.

Having a lay person on the mission team was also helpful, Sister Navarra said.

"When you hear (Blum's) faith story, it reminds you of incidents in your own life," Sister Navarra said. "The people couldn't seem to get enough of it."

The ideas presented in the mission will help her with her work, Sister Navarra said. Too often, she noted, people believe that evangelization means going door-to-door to preach to people — something most Catholics would find intimidating.

But Isaiah 43 focuses on what Blum described as "gentle evangelization." Such evangelization can include simply talking with friends about one's faith experiences, praising one's parish, or inviting people to come to Mass.

Besides inspiring parishioners and helping to prepare them for evangelization, Isaiah 43 had another positive effect on Annunciation parish, Haag said.

"Our school closed a year ago (June, 1989), and that kind of leaves a hole in the parish," Haag said. "We needed something to pull the parish together."

"(Isaiah 43) produced a feeling of real community," Haag said. "It bought us together."

Liturgy staff offers sacramental support to parishes

By Lee Strong
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — Think of how much eucharistic ministers, lectors, ushers, greeters, cantors and musicians can add to a Mass.

Now imagine what would be lost if none of these ministers were available, or if those available were poorly trained.

The latter scenario might be common among parishes in the Diocese of Rochester were it not for the efforts of the diocesan Office of Liturgy.

The office's staff is responsible not only for offering assistance to the many ministers involved in eucharistic liturgies, but also for providing guidance and training to those involved in all sacramental ministries throughout the diocese.

On a typical day, the staff might help a parish plan an anniversary Mass or special penitential service, meet with a parish's liturgy committee to talk about seasonal planning, compile an evaluation of a parish's liturgies, or answer phone inquiries about such matters as church regulations on remarriage or whether a particular individual can serve as a god-

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parent.

"I think the average parishioner, if they're not actively involved in their parish, would not be in contact with us, but they would be affected by us in what we provide for the parish and parish leadership," observed Susanna Weatherholt, the office's director.

Nevertheless, Weatherholt estimated that 1,000-1,500 people take advantage of the office's services each year.

The Office of Liturgy — which receives more than \$95,000 in Thanks Giving Appeal funds — does that work with a staff consisting of Weatherholt and two part-time staff members: Father Tom Mull and Alison Luedicke. Eileen Messmer serves as the office's full-time secretary.

On a diocesan level, the office either

plans or works with other diocesan offices to design such major celebrations as ordinations and the annual Chrism Mass. The office also serves as a liaison to such national offices as the Federation of Diocesan Liturgical Commissions and the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Commission on Liturgy.

At the parish level, among the office's most popular services are the workshops for liturgical ministers. Those workshops include a two-year pastoral liturgy course and programs designed for specific ministries. Since August of this year, for example, the office has presented four workshops for eucharistic ministers, three for lectors, and two for cantors.

Sessions geared to specific ministries, which are generally held on a Saturday or split over two evening sessions, focus first on the nature and theology of ministry, Weatherholt observed. "Being a minister of any kind is not just a function," she said. "It springs out of (people's) baptism."

The workshops then provide guidance on practical aspects of the particular ministry, Weatherholt said. Thus a session for eucharistic ministers would deal with such

topics as care for the sick, establishing eye contact with communicants, or simply smiling.

Perhaps the most comprehensive service the office provides is the parish Mass evaluation. Member of the liturgy office's staff attend all of a parish's weekend liturgies to assess every aspect of the celebrations. Their assessments include not only evaluations of the various ministers serving during the liturgy, but also congregational participation, and the environment and art in the church.

The results of the evaluation are then provided to the parish to help guide the staff and liturgy committee in improving its celebrations. "Now that Vatican II is more than 25 years old, people are not sure that the changes are really working for them," Weatherholt explained.

In addition to its direct services to parishes, the office's staff works with the diocesan Liturgical Commission as well as the commission's subcommittees on music, and environment and art. The commission is currently developing guidelines for all liturgical ministers, Weatherholt said.