

# Catechetics

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parish could not afford to hire a full-time religious-education director, he noted.

So St. Michael's applied to the diocese for a subsidy to hire a director. This fiscal year, the parish received the subsidy, and in August hired a director, Walter Savaria.

During his first three months in the parish, Savaria has expanded the religious-education program. In addition to the program offered for school children and sacramental preparation, the catechetical program now includes a program for teenagers and adult education.

But Savaria is already beginning to run into conflicts. In January, the parish will begin an RCIA program. Since the parish's adult-education program currently occupies the only time and place available for RCIA, St. Michael's may have to sacrifice its adult-education offerings. "There's only so many nights available," Savaria observed.

And because of its isolation from other parishes, St. Michael's cannot turn to other parishes to provide facilities or to share personnel.

Such is not the case with St. Joseph's in Wayland, which is located in an area containing two schools and six parishes that are close enough to allow cooperative efforts.

Goodrich pointed out that one of the key elements of the entire WICP process is that parishes are, in fact, forced to consider working together. "I can see that will benefit the rural areas because it's hard for each parish to have each kind of program," she said.

Thus, Goodrich observed, parishes that

could not individually afford to hire youth ministers could instead pool their resources to jointly hire a minister.

The four parishes comprising the Cayuga Team Ministry, for example, are able to work around resource limitations because they are clustered together and share a religious-education director, Sister Patricia Flass, SSJ.

"In our cluster," Sister Flass said, "we have a variety of (programs) mainly because we are joined together. None of our four parishes could afford to do this on its own."

"Parishes are going to have to cluster in order to do this," Sister Flass continued. Such clustering would not necessarily require the establishment of a formal cluster like the Cayuga Team Ministry, but could be accomplished by sharing staff and financial resources, she explained. "There's going to have to be some cooperation, or some of these (programs) are not going to be possible," she said.

But when the idea of clustering to share staff gets mentioned in her area, Goodrich said, some small parishes — particularly those that are struggling simply to remain open — begin to fear that they will be dominated by the other, larger parishes. Members of smaller parishes also fear that they will be forced to support programs in which they will not share or exercise control, she said.

"When a cluster comes to mind, the first thing they worry about is how are they going to pay for the schools in Dansville and Wayland," Goodrich said.

"There is a very strong sense of parochialism," Bloomfield acknowledged. Parishioners in small towns tend to identify very strongly with their parishes and local communities, he said, and sometimes they

have difficulty accepting the idea of cooperating with a parish just a few miles away but located in a different town.

"A lot of our parents in our Catholic schools said they will take their children and put them in public schools rather than send them to another Catholic school in another town," Bloomfield noted.

Conversely, parochialism is also cited as one of the strengths of small-town parishes and their catechetical programs, observed Barbara Ayer, religious-education administrator at St. Mary's, Bath.

"There's a sense of commitment people develop when you're all in it together," Ayer said. "We all live in this one little town. We have one Catholic church. We have a real sense of identity as a community and as a church."

"I see the strength of small parishes in that I get to know the parents and the children," Ivers said. "We have small class sizes. When we do a service project — like the kids going to a local nursing home — we need two cars and we can bundle the kids up and just go. You can't do that if you've got 80 kids in the class."

"There is a deep rootedness, a sense of real church," Bloomfield pointed out. "There's a whole sense of history. You hear from people about how their parents or grandparents built this church."

"I find that the people in the small parishes in the rural areas have incredibly strong faith," he continued. "But they are not ready for change because we have not motivated them for change."

St. Mary's in Bath is one parish whose experiences indicate what can happen when people are motivated. The parish school closed in 1987; leaving parishioners with a sense of loss, Ayer acknowledged. Then the new pastor, Father Robert W.

Hammond, decided to use the building for an expanded religious-education program.

That program includes not only the weekend religious-education program, but also an optional weekday program, programs for teenagers, a variety of adult-education programs, and even an uplink to the Catholic Telecommunications Network of America satellite to carry and tape conferences, panel discussions, and other educational programming.

The catechetical program was expanded in part because its focus had shifted from just the children in religious-education classes to the entire parish community, Ayer said.

"We are community oriented," Ayer said. "Instead of just a small group of people, we are serving all the people in the community."

The parish was fortunate in that Father Hammond was able to motivate people to support the expanded program, Ayer said. "Some people say, 'I need the money or I need the resources before I start the program,'" she observed. "We determined the need, targeted the people we wanted to reach, and started the program. Then we educated the people about what we were doing, and they responded."

Nevertheless, Ayer acknowledged that some parishes are simply too small to do this. "Some can't afford it," she said. "That's where clustering will come in for us in the Southern Tier."

Ivers predicted that the WICP will help small parishes fill parishioners' catechetical needs. "For example," she explained, "we have some young adults (at Holy Cross), but not a lot. If we work with other parishes, we could offer some kind of program."

"It really would be wonderful to have a youth minister," she continued. "Maybe that's something we could do as a local area."

Ivers concluded that parishioners in small-town parishes need to recognize that "We're not just small Catholic communities. We're part of the whole Catholic church."

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