

Theme 5: Faith Development & Evangelization

A ISSUE: Bible Study Programs — We recommend that: Each parish, or clusters of parishes, with the support of the diocesan Department of Evangelization and Catechesis and St. Bernard's Institute, establish a systematic and ongoing study of the Bible facilitated by qualified persons which will not only explore the meaning of the Scriptures in their original context but also help the participants apply them to their daily lives.

We make this recommendation because:

1. Many Roman Catholics thirst for Biblical knowledge but have a difficult time finding Bible studies offered by our parishes.

2. A significant number of Roman Catholics have been alienated from the church because of the lack of availability of Scripture study in their own church while finding it readily available in other Christian churches.

3. A deeper understanding of the Bible will help people to understand the Scriptures when preached, to grow personally in their spiritual life, and to be more confident when they share their faith.

B ISSUE: Catholic Schools — We recommend that: Pastors, parishes and the diocesan offices and structures, promote the need for a diocesan Catholic School system and the necessity for cooperation to keep this system affordable.

We make this recommendation because:

1. Catholic schools have done an outstanding job of educating generations of Roman Catholics in the content and practice of their faith but the system will not be able to survive if the cost becomes prohibitive to the average family or to the collective body of parishes.

2. Some individuals and parishes have made Catholic schools less affordable by withdrawing their support when a parish school becomes part of a diocesan school system. To survive, the diocesan Catholic School system must be seen as a shared responsibility of all parishes.

3. In justice, the Catholic schools must pay a fair and living wage to all its teachers and employees.

C ISSUE: Lifelong Religious Education — We recommend that: Parishes, clusters or groups of parishes, with the encouragement

and support of the Department of Evangelization and Catechesis, implement a complete religious education program which focuses on Catholics of all ages and makes creative use of intergenerational programs to involve the whole community in faith formation.

We make this recommendation because:

1. Parishes need to develop resources to meet the needs of post-Confirmation adolescents, young adults, pre-Cana and Post-Cana couples, seniors, singles, parents, families, etc.

2. There is a need to reestablish the family as the primary place for religious formation and parents as primary educators of their children in the faith.

3. Adults whose childhood education was pre-Vatican II may need to be helped to enter an understanding of Vatican II renewal; those born after the Council may need a more thorough grounding in their faith.

D ISSUE: Media for Evangelization and Education — We recommend that: The Diocese of Rochester encourage the Catholic Television Network of America to expand its production and broadcast of religious education programs and explore other possibilities for evangelization and education throughout the diocese.

We make this recommendation because:

1. Other religious denominations with far fewer members have been able to produce and broadcast quality programs and spot announcements.

2. Many people today are geared toward receiving and processing information through the audio and video media.

3. Public programming may be one of the best ways to preach the Good News, to provide information to those beginning to inquire about Catholicism, to teach those who wish to grow in their faith and to reach those who are alienated from the Church.

E ISSUE: Parish Evangelization and Reconciliation — We recommend that: Each parish, with the training and support of the Department of Evangelization and Catechesis, address the questions and respond to the need of alienated and inactive Catholics and the unchurched.

We make this recommendation because:

1. Various strategies need to be planned, such as a "welcome home" program or an "each one bring one" program, to invite alienated Roman Catholics back to active participation. Such programs must provide more than a warm outreach but also a mechanism by which the anger or hurt of the estranged Catholic can be expressed while he or she is moved gently toward reconciliation.

2. Parishes need training to work with the alienated and the unchurched.

3. A core group of well trained volunteers who have grown confident in their faith may be needed to establish one-on-one contact with the unchurched and, perhaps, sponsor them on their faith journey into the Church.

F ISSUE: Small Christian Communities — We recommend that: Parishes, with the help of the Department of Evangelization and Catechesis and Parish Support Services, promote the formation and growth of small Christian communities within the parish made up of families and single persons of all ages who will meet together to pray, to study and share their faith, to eat and celebrate, to reflect on local and global issues, and to reach out to those in need.

We make this recommendation because:

1. Many people today hunger for a sense of belonging that the larger parish cannot fill. Rather than being forced to look elsewhere, a supportive small community can provide a place where they can live their faith, celebrate their lives and serve their brothers and sisters while at the same time energizing the larger community.

2. The personal relationships that small Christian communities foster can enhance healthy faith development and impel the community to reach beyond itself to the wider Church and to the world.

3. Lifelong religious education takes place best in a community that acts out what it professes, models what it teaches, and celebrates what it believes.

G ISSUE: Spiritual Life Committee — We recommend that: Parishes, with the help of the diocesan Parish Support Ministries



and the Department of Evangelization and Catechesis, establish a Spiritual Life Committee to enhance parish spirituality by planning retreats and days of recollection, encouraging the use of renewal programs, scheduling prayer workshops, forming faith support groups, providing for devotions and overseeing the availability of religious materials.

We make this recommendation because:

1. The spiritual aspects of parish life can be forgotten sometimes so it is important to have a group specifically charged with planning spiritual programs and keeping spiritual questions before the parish.

2. Many people long to find people with whom they can share on a deep spiritual level.

3. Renewal programs can provide parishes with a variety of opportunities for spiritual growth and faith sharing.

H ISSUE: Teachings of the Church — We recommend that: Diocesan Department of Evangelization and Catechesis, in cooperation with the parishes, plan and implement a diocesan-wide program to deepen people's understanding of the teachings of the Church particularly in the light of the Second Vatican Council and the new Catechism of the Catholic Church.

We make this recommendation because:

1. Many people remain confused about the teachings of the Church and need further explanation of the teachings of Vatican II, and the resultant changes they wrought in ecclesial life.

2. We wish to ensure that today's generations will be able to pass on the Church's beliefs to future generations.

3. Such a program will help people to feel more comfortable and confident in the teachings of the church before reaching out to others through evangelization.

Theme 6: Racism, Sexism, Poverty, Unemployment, Housing & Health Care

A ISSUE: Advocacy for Social Justice — We recommend that: Parishes and clusters of parishes, with the support and direction of the diocesan Social Ministry Offices, organize comprehensive social justice advocacy programs to study issues, train leaders, and motivate parishioners in taking an active role in the policy-making process of government on the local, state and federal levels.

We make this recommendation because:

1. Rather than complaining about the misuse of tax dollars or the negative influence of political action committees, we as Church must learn how we can shape social policy.

2. The Catholic Church has a very rich social justice tradition, reinforced by the lives of the faithful and the writing of many recent popes, which needs to be better understood by parishioners and legislators alike.

3. In living our faith, we have an obligation to be an advocate for justice.

B ISSUE: Consciousness Raising — We recommend that: All parishes and diocesan Offices develop a carefully planned and comprehensive program to raise our consciousness concerning the implications of our faith on peace and justice issues, including the nonviolent message of Jesus and the relationship between justice and the works of mercy and to act accordingly.

We make this recommendation because:

1. Parishioners need to understand the causes and relationships among racism, sexism, poverty, unemployment, inadequate housing and health care and other forms of discrimination. We also need to understand how these are related to the Gospel.

2. Peace and justice are intimately related. The belief that violence (the willingness to harm another) or war or militarism are acceptable solutions to our problems lies at the root of social "injustice." This belief must be contrasted with Gospel nonviolence.

3. Social justice must play a part in conscience formation and the development of Christian values. We must place ourselves within these issues and grasp their implications for our lives.

C ISSUE: Education to Combat Racism — We recommend that: The Diocese of Rochester, including its administrative offices, parishes, schools, and organizations,



establish a task force to develop a three-year action plan to combat racism that will incorporate our faith perspective and include: reviewing the Catholic school and religious education curriculum; providing adult education for parishioners, home discussion materials for parents and in-service opportunities for teachers and ministers; applying affirmative action in diocesan hiring, etc.

We make this recommendation because:

1. We need education to recognize the ways that we as individuals and as an institution consciously or unconsciously perpetuate attitudes and policies which discriminate against and oppress people.

2. As long as we ignore the problem, racism continues to instill fear and to undercut even our fellow Christians' self-esteem.

3. People have a tendency to separate "church" from "life" so the Church needs to be absolutely clear that racism is incompatible with Christianity.

D ISSUE: Living as an Inclusive Community — We recommend that: Parishes and individuals make every effort to be sure that no person or group remains invisible within the Church community, actively seeking out those whose lifestyle or disabling condition often results in a hiddenness or a non-recognition in the community.

We make this recommendation because:

1. Many people live in great poverty on our city streets or in rural areas and are not noticed and not included in the life of the faith community. Many Catholics are migrant workers who find it difficult to join a faith community for many reasons and are often, then, invisible to the community.

2. In our parishes are refugees, AIDS

patients, linguistic minorities, hearing impaired people, homosexuals and others who are often invisible and who cannot participate in their local parish community without the help of the community.

3. Differences sometimes create an "us-them" mentality: "we" exclude "them." Jesus prayed that "all may be one." Our faith and tradition call us to this same unity.

E ISSUE: Parish Partnership Program — We recommend that: Parishes, with the coordination and support of the diocesan Social Ministry Offices and Parish Support Ministries, develop a program whereby culturally diverse parishes enter into partnership in order to promote mutual understanding, to provide diverse experiences of faith, to plan cooperative activities, and to facilitate the sharing of resources and talents.

We make this recommendation because:

1. Personal involvement with another culture is the surest way to build respect and at the same time dismantle misconceptions and prejudices which distort our treatment of others.

2. We need to be personally aware of the richness of the gifts and the severity of the problems that converge in our ecclesial family (e.g. from isolation to sophistication, from unemployment to crime and safety) as well as the diversity of cultures expressing the life and faith of the local Church.

3. More than just sampling life in another parish, exchanging ideas and sharing personal resources, as faith communities we need to pool our time, talents, and treasures to jointly promote social justice.

F ISSUE: Preaching Peace and Justice — We recommend that: All homilists attend special annual workshops sponsored by the diocese and designed for two purposes: to raise the level of consciousness about peace and justice issues and their essential connection to the Gospel, and to help homilists find creative ways of incorporating regularly and consistently what they have learned in their homilies.

We make this recommendation because:

1. Many homilists, like their congregations, lack first-hand information or experience with social justice or peace issues.

2. Homilists often find it difficult to raise challenging issues in their homilies and need

support, encouragement and instruction on how to do this effectively.

3. By recognizing that social action is rooted in the Gospel, the preacher not only breaks open the whole of the Jesus' teaching but also provides the hearer with a sustaining motive for action.

G ISSUE: Responding to Local Needs — We recommend that: Parishes establish a well-publicized method of regularly listing specific local needs (such as employment opportunities, repairs, shopping, maintenance, transportation, financial help, furniture) in the parish bulletin, newsletter, or on a central bulletin board so that the larger parish community can be educated on such needs and organized to respond while recognizing the dignity of all involved.

We make this recommendation because:

1. Many Synod recommendations suggested that parishioners would respond to needs if they knew of them.

2. Benefits to service providers and receivers are realized in both one-on-one, hands-on service projects and in financial responses to the need. Each response is gift. Each relationship is grace.

3. It is good that Churches respond to local needs out of an understanding of why particular needs exist.

H ISSUE: Role of Women in the Church — We recommend that: Bishop Matthew H. Clark, with the help of Parish Support Ministries, encourage and empower all parishes, Church communities, institutions and agencies to eliminate restrictive gender roles in parish and diocesan ministries, to use language which is deliberately inclusive, and to involve both men and women in decision-making and leadership roles.

We make this recommendation because:

1. Many women feel insulted by and excluded from the Eucharistic liturgy when exclusive language is used in the readings and liturgical prayers.

2. The Church, recognizing its own inadequacies, must take the lead in confronting and alleviating the social sin of sexism.

3. It is too easy for both men and women to fit comfortably into stereotypes; men can teach religious education and women can be ushers.