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Technology

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in 1996.

Most parishioners are already well aware of pastoral planning at the parish level, which is known as "Action Plan A." They may not realize, however, that the Pastoral Center has been going through its own planning process as well. Five key areas — currently in various stages of implementation — are covered under "Action Plan B" of PPNM.

Father Joseph Hart, moderator of the Pastoral Center, said that communication by computer is vital because of the diocese's geographic imperfections: the Pastoral Center, located in Rochester, is tucked in the diocese's northwest corner. The Finger Lakes impede quick access as well.

"You can't drive through (the lakes) and you can't get around them very easily," Father Hart said. "So it makes perfect sense that to tie us closer together, we need to use technology."

Joan Zaia observed that Rochester, compared to other dioceses, is on the cutting edge of this form of computer technology.

"I haven't heard of any diocese that has an intranet to connect all the entities," said Zaia, diocesan director of Information Technology.

"Many other dioceses don't even use e-mail yet," added William Pickett, diocesan director of the Office of Planning.

Zaia's office has increased staff and begun to install new computers and software programs. She said that approximately 35 faith communities — as well as all diocesan Catholic Charities offices and Catholic schools — are now equipped with intranet capacity.

Zaia noted that the intranet project includes 250 installations at a cost of \$1,500 per site for both the program and a compatible computer. Most sites require a new computer to accommodate the new software, she said. The diocese is subsidizing faith communities that cannot afford the full cost.

Zaia said this development should be especially welcome among people from far-reaching parts of the diocese who complain about lack of contact with the Pastoral Center.

"Hopefully our credibility will go up in that we're trying to establish better communication between all of us," Zaia said.

That credibility has already risen with Billie Dietrich, office manager at St. Elizabeth Ann Seton in Hamlin.

"I'd always felt we're disconnected from the diocese," she said. "I was looking forward to this."

Benefits are many

Mark Darling, an Information-Technology specialist who is installing many of the computers, noted that breaking news can be transmitted, within minutes after it occurs, throughout the diocese via intranet.

For example, when Bishop Matthew H. Clark was rushed to a hospital for an ir-

regular heart-beat the morning of Oct. 16, 1998, word did not reach many parishes in the diocese until many hours later, he said.

Zaia said that during orientation, users are urged to check their e-mail and intranet regularly. For the most part, she said, this adjustment quickly becomes a part of the user's daily routine.

"As time goes on, one hopes that's what happens," Zaia said.

Zaia noted that electronic transmission of Pastoral Center news via the intranet will eliminate the need for diocesan centralized mail — a system by which bulk mailings have been issued from the Pastoral Center each Wednesday for several years.

Tioga County, located in the southeast corner of the diocese, was among the first to have new computer hardware and software installed. The addition is welcomed by Marilyn Legault, secretary at St. Margaret Mary Church in Apalachin. She said that centralized mail often didn't arrive at her church until Friday.

Legault said she likes the way that the new software categorizes news from the Pastoral Center by region, allowing her to quickly find information pertinent to Tioga County.

"I can pick and choose," she said.

Legault said that she also uses the intranet's e-mail system and has experienced better communication not only with the diocese, but also with other Tioga County parishes.

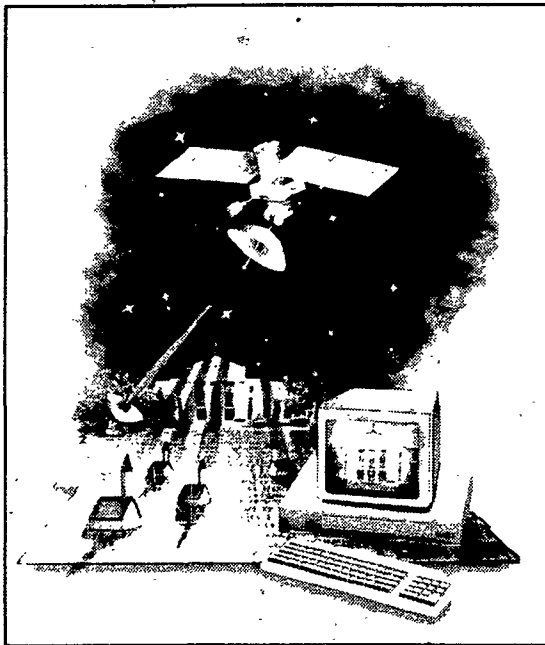
Father Ryan observed that the intranet even allows better communication among the staff at his parish. For example, he said that he can send e-mail messages to staff members from his office or home computer at any time of the day or night, rather than endure a parade of busy signals, handwritten messages and voice mail.

Father Ryan said he handles about 50 e-mail messages per day. He e-mails with others not only on the intranet, but also with parishioners who have their own computers. These options allow him time to dash off individualized notes, from praising a parishioner to criticizing a diocesan policy.

"The nice thing is, you can pat somebody on the back quickly. I guess you can kick them in the pants, too," Father Ryan said.

Father Hart enjoys the intranet's e-mail system as well. He, also, said he averages 50 messages per day.

"You don't have to play telephone tag," Father Hart said.



Father Hart pointed out that benefits of this technology extend to parishioners, though not always directly. For instance, he said, the quicker a pastor can communicate with the Pastoral Center, the faster he can set his schedule and be available for parishioners.

Father Hart said that the diocese is also considering technology that would

allow cameras to be installed at remote locations for teleconferences. This would permit face-to-face contact without the inconvenience of long car rides.

"We can have better geographical representation," Father Hart said.

Another computer-related aspect of Plan B, Pickett noted, was the launching last year of a diocesan Web page (<http://www.dor.org>). Among its offerings, Pickett said, are a calendar of events and extensively detailed updates on the pastoral planning process for each of the planning groups.

Growing pains

With such a new system, Zaia said, there are still kinks to work out. Noting for example, that many parishes' computer modems run through phone lines rather than cables, they sometimes operate slowly. This has no effect on e-mail, but parishioners do struggle with slow transmission of documents that are heavy with graphics.

"We'll figure out a way around it," Zaia said.

Meanwhile, Darling observed that not all potential users have enough experience to adapt quickly to the new technology.

"I have seen 15 to 20 percent of people who were concerned about their ability to learn it," said Darling, who provides orientation when he installs computers and their software.

Suzanne Enes, secretary at St. Philip Neri Church in Rochester, said she had scant knowledge of computers when her parish received one in March. In fact, she was the only person who didn't know how to operate a mouse at a training class offered at the Pastoral Center. The learning process is going slowly, she said, because she's trying to maintain her regular workload as well.

"If you have a job to do, there's not much time left to learn this," she said.

Even so, Enes said that she's glad for the arrival of the diocesan intranet.

"I'm so afraid to let go of the old way, but I've really been anxious to learn for years. I think it's probably time we've done this," she said. "I really do enjoy it."

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