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Retreats

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"In our case I feel very strongly they see us all the time, people in the parish," said Bloise.

"It is important they see us nurtured as well, in mission, not in leadership. I think it sets a good example. Just because you wear a title doesn't mean you've got your spirituality intact."

Bloise worked in West Coast parishes where she helped with missions and developed resources for speakers. Last year at Horseheads she brought in Father Paul Boudreau, a writer for 23rd Publications and *Today's Parish*, and a priest of the Diocese of Norwich, Conn. The parish averaged 500-600 people a night for his four-night mission and "evaluations were phenomenal," Bloise said.

Despite the help of a team, the work proved tiring, and instead of coordinating a mission this Lent, she has pointed people toward St. Mary's Parish in Elmira, where Father Boudreau was to lead a mission March 26-29.

"There was a little bit of disappointment, that's an understatement, that we weren't doing a mission this year," she said. She estimates she spent 222 hours putting last year's mission together.

Parishes come together

Ithaca-area parishes considered a Lenten retreat, but held their first shared mission in this past November, about three weeks before Advent.

"It was terrific," said Catherine Galik, pastoral associate at St. Catherine's Parish. "It exceeded all our expectations in terms of turnout, content and how we worked as parishes."

By the time the planning began, it was either too late to obtain a speaker for Lent this year or the parishioners didn't want to wait that long, she said, her memory uncertain. The November event was shared by St. Catherine's, Holy Cross in Dryden, All Saints in Lansing, Immaculate Conception in Ithaca and St. Anthony's in Groton, which together brought in two friars from the Franciscan Friars Ministry of the Word in Ho-Ho-Kus, N.J.

The friars went to the area colleges and held a general talk each of three nights at St. Catherine's. They also said Mass and delivered a different talk at each parish during the day.

"If it was a mission and nothing else, I'm not sure how valuable it would be," Galik said. "But combined with small faith groups that meet every week or every other week ... then it is a very good thing. I think it has to be part of an ongoing opportunity to share faith in some way."

She said the cluster will continue missions in the fall, because there is less competition for speakers at that time.

Several parish groupings sponsored Lenten missions this year, including Our Lady of the Lakes Catholic Community, which brought in Father McCarthy to St. Januarius Church in Naples March 24. Schuyler Catholic Community brought in speakers from the diocese March 12-15. And Holy Family Catholic Community — St. Mary's in Dansville, Sacred Heart of Jesus in Perkinsville and St. Pius V in Co-hocton — planned to bus parishioners to the community's programs featuring Father Keating March 25-29.

"It's a reality sometimes you have two totally independent communities and one ecclesial reality," said Father Keating. Shared retreats help bring communities together, he said.

While Canandaigua's Notre Dame Retreat House draws 4,200 people as individuals or parish groups throughout the year, according to Father Frederick Brinkmann, CSSR, director, "Lent is a particular time to make a retreat, have a parish mission. Since the Second Vatican Council we've accentuated something to do rather than something to give up."

Renewal, reform of lives, aesthetical



Andrea Dixon/Staff photographer

Marie Sherman listens to Father Marc Montminy, pastor of St. Marie Church in Manchester, N.H., March 14 at Guardian Angels Parish in Henrietta.

theology, prayer, and education about the sacraments and other topics are all themes for Lent, he said.

Father Lawrence Murphy, pastor of Holy Rosary Church in Rochester, noted in a recent bulletin article that he had prayed during a four-day retreat that parishioners would leave "March madness" behind "and let the love and the joy of the Lord take over." He wasn't just talking about the frenzy over college basketball tournaments, he said, but of other worldly events as well.

"Retreat time is a special time to look at the priorities in our lives," he said. "Basically this means to look at our 'whole' selves, to improve our lives that are made up of body and spirit and to realize that both have to be nourished properly."

Holy Rosary, Sacred Heart and Most Precious Blood sponsored Lent Retreat 2001, bringing in Sister Mary Lou Mitchell, SSJ, and Father John Colacino, CPpS.

Why are you here?

Lenten retreats offer plenty to think about.

At St. Mary's Church in Rochester, Grayson Warren Brown repeatedly asked parishioners, "Why are you here?"

He told of a priest who said he could just as well offer "drive-up Communion" and many Catholics would be no less satisfied.

Abraham, Moses and Isaiah did not answer God's call with, "What do you want?" he said. They responded, "Here I am."

The lively African-American speaker managed to get some hearty "Amen's" from his mostly white congregation.

"One of his statements was, 'I've seen many people in church who have been dead for years,'" commented Helen Halligan, St. Mary's music minister. Just as Bishop Fulton J. Sheen understood the dramatic part of proclaiming a message, she said, "Grayson, I think, does, too."

"I think he has pretty much zeroed in on that people must know what they come for is to go out and change the world."

Halligan and choir member Amy Voelkl joined a choir Brown formed to tour England and Scotland last summer. "When you do those concerts, he never does just music," she said. "That's a wonderful part of it and everyone loves it, but he always has a message with everything." She cut her comments short to run and copy some music that Brown wanted everyone to have for that night. "Every day I have to ask what music will he use, and he's not sure. The thing about bringing a person in is it does keep you busy."

The composer's own recordings and publications were on sale during the retreat, the sale of which helped support his ministry. A retreat speaker may charge parishes up to \$2,500, to which offerings contribute.

Father Keating said he encourages con-

gregations to "give a donation that's reasonable for you." The results usually range from \$400 for a week to \$1,200-\$1,400. He recalled a man who wrote a check for \$1,000, and later wrote another for \$1,500. "Something must have been very good for his soul," he laughed, but adding that it helped him understand he should not worry about money.

Last year, Father Keating had placed a notice about his retreats in a package of diocesan mail that goes to all parishes. Michele Bertot, pastoral associate at Holy Name in Greece, responded and invited him.

The parish has fine-tuned its approach over nearly 20 years of offering a Lenten retreat and suited the priest just fine.

"It has a lot of lay leadership and involvement of the team with the prayer-ritual part of it and witnessing," said Joann White, catechetical leader.

Father Keating met once in January with the staff, and they were delighted to be on the same page, Bertot said. He would do the preaching, the staff would plan the prayer response, rituals and music. A few faxes and phone calls later, assignment of veteran team members and the retreat was on. The people involved prayed together before the sessions and gathered to evaluate them each night.

"Mission week for me is a chance to be a little more creative. I enjoy very much the telling of stories that fit into our faith journey as Christians," Bertot said. "God speaks through story. That's how we help each other, telling our stories. Not only stories we hear in Scripture, but the individual stories that happen to us every day and how God is present to us. ... It's a very concentrated time of journeying together."

White added, "To me, mission is something that really helps things travel — our doctrines, our understanding travels from our head to our heart."

A bonus

Among witnesses at Holy Name was Dan Streicher, 17. He spoke one night about how he came to take his faith seriously. He had been going to Catholic school and to church every week. But two years ago his grandfather became seriously ill with spinal meningitis and was hospitalized for two months.

"As soon as I heard about it I was crushed from it," he said. "Every night I would pray to God, read the Bible and say I would change my life if he would grant me this one wish, to save my Grandpa."

After his grandfather, Anthony Brunozi, recovered, Dan recalled, "I sat down and talked to God about starting to change my life and become a developed Catholic." He also spoke of a life-changing youth trip to Kentucky, where poor people gave so much to the youths who were refurbishing their homes.

After his mission talk, Dan said, "A lot of people came up to me." While it hadn't been an emotional talk for him, he said, "A couple of people, older members of the church maybe, related to illnesses."

In fact, according to mission participants, Father Keating himself knelt before Dan and said, "You know we have a shortage of vocations in our church. How about if we offer you a \$100,000 signing bonus."

Father Keating, now living in Saratoga Springs, had been involved in parish mission work full-time since last fall, and is already booked for five of six weeks of Lent next year.

His theme this year was "At Home with Your God."

"I'm convinced that people don't appreciate God's love for them," he said. "I've got some pretty strong convictions, compelling rhetorical and oratorical ways to convey God's love for you and who you are as a child of God."

And if people truly knew where they stood with God, he said, they wouldn't be jealous or competitive, but "just be celebrating living."

Father Keating rounded out his mission

Pope makes Lent retreat

VATICAN CITY (CNS) — Pope John Paul II thanked Cardinal Francis E. George of Chicago for helping him and top Vatican officials strengthen their faith in Christ so they can proclaim him with new vigor.

The pope chose Cardinal George to lead his March 4-10 Lenten retreat in the Redemptoris Mater Chapel of the Apostolic Palace.

Cardinal George, who gave 22 talks to the pope and the heads of Vatican offices, chose as his theme, "A Faith for All Peoples: Conversion, Freedom and Communion in Christ."

He said the retreat revolved around the Liturgy of the Hours and his speeches. Each day ended with recitation of the rosary, eucharistic adoration and Benediction.

His job, he said, was to reflect upon Scripture "to help them deepen their prayer."

In his 25-minute talks, the cardinal moved from reflections on each individual's need for continuing conversion to Christians' responsibility to share the Good News with all men and women.

The pope said Cardinal George gave "stimulating testimony drawn from his rich experience as a missionary and a bishop, which encouraged the application of the reflections to life."

— including Sunday Mass, evening and daily sessions, social hour and confessions — with visiting sick and homebound people. In Dansville and Wayland he visited classrooms.

Betty Howe, who attends St. Lawrence and St. Leo's parishes, didn't miss a night of Father Keating's talks. "I'd think about it all the next day," she said. "You can't wait to come back."

When Holy Name's team passed baskets of blue paper hearts, and asked people to hold a heart and think about someone who needs their love, Howe immediately thought of a certain woman.

"One of my friends in Hilton just had her leg amputated and wasn't expecting it," she said. "I have been praying for her, to get used to having to wear a prosthesis."

Howe herself had just been released after a month in the hospital. "I was pretty sick myself, but when I walked out I was fine. When she did, it wasn't so good," she said.

It was Father Keating and his theme that drew her to Holy Name each night, she said.

Speaking of love, he urged people to affirm others, to compliment them, listen to them and pray for them. No one ever died from an overdose of compliments, he said.

He told many stories, including one about "Fiddler on the Roof" and how Tevye, after many years of marriage and commitment to one another, asks his wife if she loves him. Howe identified with the importance of hearing "I love you."

"It was good to hear that 'you are very special and God loves you very much no matter what you do,' she said. "I was brought up in foster homes and nobody ever told you they loved you."

"When you are a young age, that's when you need people to tell you," she continued. "... I can never hear it enough."

Howe said she's heard "I love you" many times in her 55 years of marriage to her husband, Al. And she's said it many times to their six children. "I tell them it's the most important thing you can give to a person. It's the most important thing you can ever do, to love a person and tell them they're loved."