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PARISH NEWSLETTER
A Service of the Parish Evaluation Project
Milwaukee, Wisconsin

October, 2002
(Same text in an enhanced format
available as an attachment)

A New Approach To An Old Concept

It use to be a staple for every parish, a week-long Mission where people congregated during one week of Lent to hear a talk, participate in a reconciliation service and share some cake and coffee afterwards. Many parishes have gotten out of the habit, but not St. Charles Borromeo and St. Roman's on Milwaukee's Southside. What makes their Mission unique is that it is a collaborative effort involving two parishes and is planned by a group of parish volunteers. Here is how it works:

Starting in the Fall, well before Lent, a special team of organizers is formed. This team of twelve people works out a theme for the Mission, chooses a logo, decides whom to invite as presenters for each night of the Mission and what the schedule for the evenings will be. For instance, the Mission theme for last Lent was R & R – "Restoration and Renewal." The scriptural focus was "the Lord shall stretch out his hands." As a result, outstretched hands became the logo that appeared on all the promotional materials, including banners in the churches, take-home pins, stationery and Mission booklets. The team determined that each of the four nights for the Mission would have a different topic: faith, family, community and hope. The team invited the presenters to give talks and selected parishioners from each parish to give witness talks and lead the prayers each evening.

The March 2002 Mission was a great success. Four to six hundred people attended each evening. The site for each night of the Mission alternated between the two parishes. This in itself was a bonus because people became familiar with each other's parishes, formed new friendships and discovered how much the two parishes had in common.

Building on the enthusiasm generated by the Mission, the planning team arranged for a follow-up retreat for those who wanted to keep the renewal experience going. The retreat took place six weeks after the Mission at a local retreat house. The entire Mission project was arranged and carried out, not by the priests or staffs or Mission presenters, but by the planning team of parishioners. A new group has now been formed for next year's Mission. It includes two "veterans" from last year and ten new people. Could this happen in your parish? It is an excellent way for fostering collaboration between parishes, empowering lay leadership and providing a Lenten experience of renewal. For more information, contact St. Charles Borromeo at azimmer@charlesborromeo.org.

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