



GREAT ENDEAVORS MINED & SHARED

from an International Adult Faith Formation Best Practices Study

#12 - October 2011

A Best Practice: A Week-long Vicariate Mission

This month we look again at another Best Practice: a collaborative event sponsored by nine parishes and a retreat center situated in a northern, suburban vicariate of the archdiocese of Detroit, Michigan.

A Little Background

The Catholic parishes of the archdiocese of Detroit have not been immune to the effects of the downturn in the economy. Several years ago, the archdiocese began to respond to these challenges by embarking on an archdiocesan wide endeavor to analyze church trends, pastoral care, parish budgets, parish membership, and how responsive were parishes to the needs of the faithful.

(<http://www.aodonline.org/AODOnline/Together+In+Faith+12019/Phase+I+18627/TIF1.htm>)

Every region of the archdiocese researched ways to strengthen parish ministry. One of the recommendations was that parishes share resources by reaching out to work with one another more closely.

“Having all vicariate parishes work together on a joint mission aids in the community’s understanding that we are more than just our own parish community.

If we work together we can accomplish more than we can individually.

We are all on the same faith journey; why not do it together and learn from each other?”

- Linda Maccarone, parishioner
St. Therese of Lisieux Parish, Shelby Twp., MI

It was this recommendation that “sparked” an idea for the North Macomb Vicariate. One parish, within the vicariate, had already discussed having a parish mission, but because missions can be costly events that only benefit one parish, discussion evolved into a vicariate-wide mission instead. The vicariate united in planning, promoting, and producing a week-long renewal event purposely entitled *Onward to the Kingdom: Becoming Church*.

Just What is a Vicariate*?

According to one dictionary, a vicariate is “the religious institution under the authority of a vicar.” Of course, that’s rather easy to surmise from the name and the fact that each vicariate has a vicar, but what does this institutional model mean for the people in a vicariate?

Since parishes are better suited, and more inclined to form relationships among other local parishes in their area, the archdiocese of Detroit divided the archdiocese into four regions of four vicariates each. This model has enabled the individual parishes within the archdiocese to form broader, *relational communities*. The North Macomb Vicariate itself is located twenty-five miles northeast of the city of Detroit, Michigan and consists of nine parishes, a retreat center and one parochial school.

* *Vicariates can also be known as abbeys, bishoprics, deaneries, episcopacies, glebes, presbyteries, and vicarships.*

“Mission events are tangible, concrete ways to accomplish taking a step back and looking at ourselves, especially during Lent.”

-Fritzi Bohlmann, Pastoral Associate
St. John Vianney Parish, Shelby Twp. MI

The Planning and Preparation

More than a year prior to the event, representatives from every parish gathered monthly to plan this “first of its kind” mission renewal scheduled for Lent of 2009. The planning committee consisted of pastors, parish staffs, representatives from the archdiocesan offices, and parish volunteers. Every parish had representation on the planning committee, and each person had a “job” to do. Planning so far in advance enabled the committee a greater possibility of finding high-quality presenters.

The committee knew that communication and publicity was crucial to the success of this endeavor.

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Every committee member took the information back to their respective parishes monthly; vicariate representatives kept Parish Pastoral Councils informed. Monthly articles were published in the parish bulletins, the vicariate newsletter, press releases, and the archdiocesan paper.

Nothing was scheduled on parish calendars for that week – no week day masses, no meetings, and no faith formation sessions. Every parish took turns hosting one of the many presentations planned throughout the week.

David Haas, world-wide known composer, and other nationally known speakers were contacted and scheduled months in advance. The mission even had its own logo, prayer and song! Parish communities sang the song at Masses during the weeks preceding the mission; the vicariate prayer was printed on prayer cards and given to each participant; and all written publicity used the specially designed logo.

The committee planned and organized an event that would enhance Lent 2009 for every participant.

A Quick Glance at *Onward to the Kingdom: Becoming Church*

The kick-off began on **Friday** evening with a concert held at the parish with the most seating. World renowned composer David Haas and vocalist



Lori True led the evening with the best of liturgical music! Some of David's well known songs are: *You Are Mine*, *Blest Are They*, and *We Are Called*.

Tickets had been sold in advance at each parish. The price of the ticket included refreshments and a meet-and-greet with David Haas and Lori True after the concert. The concert was for all ages; the children, especially, gained a new appreciation for our liturgical music.

At all the weekend liturgies, on **Saturday and Sunday**, the presiders encouraged their communities to participate in the mission event. During the week, there were evening presentations with nationally known speakers. Each evening, hosted at different parishes, had a specific theme.

On **Monday**, with the theme of *Becoming Church*, Bishop Daniel Flores, auxiliary bishop of Detroit, helped all consider new ways of “becoming church” in the larger context.

Tuesday, which was themed *Jesus' Spirituality as the Norm and Test of our Own*, Dr. Patricia Cooney-Hathaway offered through real, and practical examples, ways to embrace the example of Jesus' behavior and choices.

Dr. Richard Gaillardetz, on **Wednesday**, through the theme *Discipleship: The Primary Christian Vocation*, helped us to “hear the call” in new ways and to become grounded in reality. Each presentation was free, and was followed by a reception hosted by the presenting parish.



The mission came to a close on **Thursday** evening, held at yet another parish, with a Mass of Thanksgiving followed by a reception including music featuring a local band *The Blarney Brothers*. All of the priests and deacons of the vicariate, along with the bishop, presided at the closing liturgy.

In addition to the evening presentations, liturgy was celebrated every morning at different parishes. Morning liturgy was followed by the opportunity to view the video of the previous night's presentation. The week-long experience was likened to a pilgrimage through the vicariate.

Also, mid-week, the entire parish staffs gathered for a morning of reflection and formation followed by lunch. Even though parishes are in close proximity to one another, parish staffs generally only know one another

as a voice over a phone or a listed name in a parish's directory. This gathering provided an opportunity for many to put a face to a name.

North Macomb Vicariate Mission Prayer

Lord of our lives,
hear us as we lift up our
parish Families
each and every individual family
each household, and person
within our vicariate

Look upon us with
compassion and love
as we gather to discover your
will for us.
Fan into flame your Spirit within
our hearts and minds, so that,
hearing the invitation of the
Lord Jesus
to become his very presence
in your world, we may be
recognized by all people
as disciples and friends of the Master,
who not only invites us
but who also leads us onward
to the kingdom.

We pray in the name of
Jesus the Christ, your Son,
who was, who is, and who is to come,
the Lord who lives and reigns
with you in the unity of your
Holy Spirit, great and glorious God
forever, and ever.
Amen.

Composed by Fr. Doc Ortman
Associate Pastor, St. Clement of Rome Parish,
Romeo, Michigan

A large contributing factor to the Mission's success was...

In addition to the outstanding cooperation and collaboration of all involved, there was the overwhelming hospitality of every parish. From the greeters at every door, to those who bid the guests good-night, every parish community exuded warmth and welcome.

Even though all parishes in the vicariate are linked by geographic location, each parish community has its own diversity:

- Some are large
- while others are small
- some are in suburban settings
- several are in a more rural area

The hospitality, however, was universal. Every ministry within the parish was involved: ushers/greeters, music ministry, liturgical ministers, media ministry, parish staffs, as well as fellowship/funeral ministers. Each parish hosted either a breakfast (if they had the morning liturgy) or a light dessert reception for the evenings. It was fun to see what each parish would be serving!

What were some of the effects of this initiative?

It was the depth and vibrancy of this *relational event* that enriched and enthused participants and planners alike. This bonanza event that had brought together talent and culture that comes from many parishes contributing ideas and thoughts convinced one and all to do another mission! The next mission was scheduled for the Lent of 2011.

A Quick Glance at the second Mission, Lent 2011

A year can bring many changes. The vicariate had a new vicar and some parishes had new pastors; however, because of the noted success of the previous mission, the committee had the total support of the "new and old" vicariate leadership for this second endeavor.

Since the "wheel was not broken," the committee put into motion all that had been done in preparation for the previous mission. The structure of the week was also similar to the previous mission with a few tweaks.

David Haas and Lori True were invited back to kick-off the mission with another concert on **Friday** evening.

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A new event was added on **Sunday evening** for high-school teens: A Youth Mass and Concert featuring *Andy Andino* and his renowned band: “*Who Do You Say I Am.*”

On **Monday** evening, Janet Schaeffler, OP and Jim Kiefer spoke to *Being Catholic in a Complicated, Confounding World.*

Tuesday evening featured Santiago Fernandez and Ensemble, Sr. Kathleen Matz, CDP. and John Thorne with the Sacred Heart Gospel Choir who led the participants in *An Evening of Song and Praise*, a very family friendly experience.

Then on **Wednesday** evening, Fr. Richard N. Fragomeni gave a presentation concerning the *21st Century Eucharist: Finding God in a Facebook World.* As with the previous mission, this, too, came to a close on **Thursday** evening with a Mass of Thanksgiving followed with the music of the *Blarney Brothers* and a splendid reception.



Again, liturgy was celebrated every morning at a different parish. These liturgies were followed by the opportunity to view the video of the previous night’s presentation while enjoying a delicious breakfast.

As before, mid-week, parish staffs gathered; but rather than for just a morning of reflection and formation, this time, they had the whole day to be with one another for a day of reflection: *Tables: Coming and Going* with Jim Kiefer, Joanne Peters, OP and Janet Schaeffler, OP. Another difference: the entire faculty of the local parochial school was also in attendance.

“It is the hope of the North Macomb Vicariate Council leadership that *Onward to the Kingdom* will provide participants with opportunities that no single parish could offer on its own. We are bringing to our vicariate some of the most respected and inspirational Roman Catholic speakers and presenters that are available in the United States today, even a composer of popular Mass Songs known world-wide. It will be quite an event and we encourage our parishioners and the entire community to participate.”

- Fr. Jerry Machlik,
North Macomb Vicar, 2007-2010

Some Unique Features

Although many aspects of these two missions could be labeled unique, the following stand out:

- **Staff Days:** Why would the committee schedule a formation day for entire staffs – maintenance staffs, ancillary staffs, school faculties, pastoral staffs, pastors and deacons – in the midst of an already busy week? One of the directives requested in the archdiocesan research project was to discover how successful parishes are in taking care of the needs of their parishioners.

The success of a parish is dependent on **all** its ministers. Time was spent in forming, informing **and affirming** all staffs of their importance to the “workings” of the parish and their parish communities. These staff days were a way to “minister to the ministers.”

- **Co\$t\$:** As mentioned earlier, missions can be costly. By making this a vicariate endeavor, the costs were minimal. Yearly, each parish within the vicariate is assessed a certain amount, dependent on its size, to contribute to the vicariate’s account.

The vicariate was then able to budget a certain portion of its income towards the mission. This amount was supplemented by a concert

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admission fee, the only charge to any of the participants. All other events were free. Each parish absorbed the costs incurred from the receptions. Many parishes tapped their Funeral Luncheon Ministries for assistance.

Individually we are one drop.
Together, we are one ocean.

-Ryunosuke Saturo

- **Sponsors:** Other than the concert admission (which was kept low), all else was free due to the committee's ability to get local businesses within the vicariate to help sponsor both missions. Sponsors were noted in all publications, but for them it wasn't so much about advertisement as it was about building community.
- **Technology:** Both missions were able to make use of recording technology. In southern Michigan, the season of spring is slow to arrive and even with daylight savings, darkness still comes early. Many of our senior citizens do not like to venture out at night and so to be attentive to their needs, every session (other than the morning mass) was video recorded. These recordings were shown after the morning masses to those who were unable to attend the presentation the evening before.

The planning committee tweaked this aspect for the second mission. Instead of depending upon each parish's video committee or person, they were able to "hire" a videographer to be present every day of the mission. Hence, every recording was consistent, and there was no need to worry about hardware compatibility. The videographer went from parish to parish, and was able to make individual DVDs for anyone or any parish that was interested. These recordings provided a visual history as well.
- **More Sharing:** Another vicariate within the archdiocese, as well as the group *We Are the Church Conferences*, were able to host Fr. Richard Fragomeni on another day adjacent to his commitment to the Mission.

➤ **Creative Incentives:**

- Some parishes provided dinner beforehand, busing, and carpooling.
- One of the morning Mass was publicized as an "instructional liturgy" (a teaching Mass) – "Why we do this; why we do that."

A GEM by any other name is still a GEM

One thing that the planning committee became aware of after the second mission was the fact that the term "mission" held different meanings for different people.

- For a particular age group, "mission" brought back memories, and certain expectations.
- For a different age group, "a mission" was something that their grandparents attended and they too had certain opinions.
- There was another group of people that didn't have any history with the word "mission" so they were neither inclined nor intrigued to attend.
- Someone suggested that "had this event been in a different vicariate or community of the archdiocese, it would have been better to bill it as a 'revival.'"

What became apparent to the committee was the need to be more aware of the nuances of naming any future event. Although, these events had been titled *Onward to the Kingdom – Becoming Church*, the term mission did become synonymous with this endeavor. For the next *Onward to the Kingdom* – that's right, another is in the planning – the committee intends to use many terms in order to appeal to the many different people within the vicariate.

"A GEM cannot be polished without friction..."

To finish and rephrase this old Chinese Proverb "...nor a 'mission' perfected without an evaluation."

One of the beauties of this enterprise was the time taken by the planners to evaluate each mission. What became apparent after the first mission, and certainly the second, could be written as "what got you here won't get you there" borrowed from a book, titled the same, written by Marshall Goldsmith.

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As a committee, all knew that it needed to safeguard against being complacent – something that sometimes happens when things go smoothly. In addition to paying special attention to the naming of future *Onward to the Kingdom – Becoming Church* events, the committee realizes

- the importance of keeping the week “fresh and new.” A future mission may need to look different – a different composer; a different format; maybe different timing.
- The committee too may look different – for the second mission, youth ministers were more involved. Maybe some who were neither inclined nor intrigued to attend either mission will join in the planning of the next one.

What was accomplished, and helps to keep the planners energized, was a **relational event**, regardless of its name,

- that allowed people to focus and to interact on some aspects of their spiritual life
- to reflect on how Jesus’ words and example add dimension to their life.

Dear Fr. Jerry,

With thanks and gratitude, bless you for hosting the kick-off David Haas and Lori True concert on March 13. It was truly marvelous and spiritually fulfilling.

The entire *Onward to the Kingdom Mission* was heavenly!

God Bless and Thanks,
A couple from St. Isidore Parish
Shelby Township

Wondering GEM: What have been your experiences of multi-parish collaboration, especially in adult faith formation?

Share what you have tried:

- what has worked
- what you have learned
- your advice for others

Email your experiences to: Janet Schaeffler, OP at jansch@juno.com so that we can continue mining the **GEMS**.



Janet Schaeffler, OP
www.janetschaeffler.com ~ jansch@juno.com

Past issues of **GEMS** are archived at www.janetschaeffler.com.

Additional ideas for Adult Faith Formation Best Practices can be found at www.pastoralplanning.com. Go to Adult Formation: *Nuts & Bolts: Planning and Best Practices for Adult Formation*.