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# The Planning Process Involves Everyone

Janet Schaeffler, OP

**In** preparation for the twenty-fifth anniversary of our parish we designated the parish's twenty-fourth year as a year of heightened spiritual renewal. A week of intensive renewal had been planned for the Lenten season, but we also wanted the entire year to be a year of renewal, with all parish activities and all parish groups focused on a common theme of growth.

We wanted this common theme to come from the experience of the people, to be owned by as many people as possible. Therefore, we went through many steps in the process of deciding on a theme. This process resulted in much learning and growth, as well as ownership for the year ahead.

## Inviting Participation

During the Lenten season preceding the "Year of Parish Renewal," each parishioner, received a letter that included the following request:

*In light of the Year of Parish Renewal, we would like to adopt a focus for the entire year, a theme around which everything we do in every aspect of parish life could revolve.*

*We are seeking your input about this focus or theme. Even more specifically, we are seeking your suggestions as to the directions that our Lenten Week of Renewal will take.*

*We have enclosed a self-addressed, stamped postcard on which you can give us your feedback. We are looking for your response concerning the overall thrust for the entire year and specific areas that you would like to have addressed in the Lenten Week of Renewal. We really need to hear from you; that's why the postcard is stamped. Take a moment today to discuss this with your family and send it back to us by April 15. We are eager to hear from each and every parishioner.*

*The feedback will be collected and organized by the pastoral staff and then shared with those in leadership in the parish. We will be calling a special, one-time meeting in May to discuss the results of this survey and to do the planning for the year ahead.*

The postcard that was enclosed with this letter asked for three responses (some of the responses that were sent in by the parishioners are listed after each statement):

- 1) I would like our parish's overall theme or thrust for the Year of Parish Renewal to be ...
  - Searching for Shalom

- We Are Church in the World
- Getting to Know You, Lord
- Where Is God?
- Jesus as My God and Friend

- 2) Three topics that I would like covered during the Lenten Week of Renewal are ...

- Living Christian Values in Today's World
- Faith as an Answer
- What Does It Mean to Be a Catholic?
- Self-understanding and Growth
- Where Is God When It Hurts?

- 3) Right now, what I need from the parish is . . .

- continued support and the feeling of family, caring, sharing, and enjoying life
- programs to relate positive thinking and faith
- the strength to lead a more compassionate life
- continued friendships

All of the responses on these postcards were prepared for a May meeting of all parish leadership people (an invitation was extended to all parishioners, too). A letter including the following invitation was mailed to all parish groups involved in ministry of any kind:

*As you know, during Lent we invited all parishioners to share their ideas for a theme for next year and for specific topics and areas of interest. Those ideas have been received and collated. We now would like to take a prayerful look at them and try to refine them into some concrete ideas and programs for the coming year.*

*To do this, we invite you to join us for a one-time meeting. We have scheduled this get-together for Tuesday, May 22 from 7:30 p.m. to 9:30 p.m.*

*You are specifically being invited to this meeting because of your leadership and ministerial role within the parish. All parishioners will be invited through an article in the church paper because we do not want anyone who is interested to feel left out, for We Are Church. So feel free to invite your friends and neighbors and bring them along.*

## Setting an Agenda

As we gathered to discuss our Year of Parish Renewal, the agenda for the meeting was designed to help us accomplish some specific goals (selecting an overall theme, setting some directions for particular programs, planning publicity, and setting up committees) as well as generate enthusiasm and commitment for the coming year.

The agenda was as follows:

- 1) Welcoming the participants and explaining the meeting's purpose
- 2) Reviewing what had been done thus far in preparation for our Year of Renewal and what has worked for us in the past:
  - our use of overall themes and goals to focus the energies of the parish
  - our Lenten letter to the parish that asked for people's ideas
- 3) Reflecting on the past and looking forward to the future. Individuals were asked to jot down their responses to the following questions and then to share their ideas in small groups:
  - Have you been aware of our concentrated themes (e.g., We Are Church, We Are Family, and our Advent and Lenten themes for the past few years)?
  - Have these concentrated themes been a help? If yes, how?
  - What do you think are the advantages of a parish renewal for you as an individual? for us as a parish community?
- 4) Refining the parishioners' ideas. The small groups were asked to look at the responses from the parishioners to discern a dominant theme or focus of concern. Then each small group made its report to the full group.
- 5) Finalizing the theme. After a break, each small group was asked to look at the themes just generated and to pretend that they were responsible for finalizing the theme for the coming year.

When each group had given its report, a surprising and exciting unity surfaced, which was finalized into our theme: "In Search of . . ." It captured the feeling of unending journey and challenge that was underlying everyone's sincere desire to grow.
- 6) Planning for the future. The remainder of the meeting was spent brainstorming how to publicize our Year of Renewal and how to reach out to the inactive members of the parish.

Another step of preparation that involved the parish was a contest to design a logo for our theme, a logo that could be used on banners, on stationery, and in advertising of the events of our Year of Renewal. The winning design was done by a dad and his nine-year-old and eleven-year-old sons.

This process of preparation paved the way for a year of involvement and participation because the planning had come from everyone.

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