

From Fr. Michael

In 2008-09 our parish undertook a process of strategic planning. At the conclusion of that work, we had developed a series of broad goals for the church and school to pursue over the next three years. In 2009-10, each ministry area took those goals and established more specific objectives and strategies to advance their mission. Since that time, our staff and volunteers have been working diligently to implement the plan. This summer, I've asked the directors of our various ministries to update us on their progress. This week's update is written by Christine Ducharme and describes the advancements made in the Pastoral Care Ministry.

The ministry of pastoral care at Saint Bart's serves and witnesses as the presence and compassion of Christ in times of need. Pastoral care describes the activities of ministers who are trained to respond to individuals and families with appropriate emotional support and concrete assistance and provide religious and spiritual guidance. It is a theologically informed ministry grounded in the Roman Catholic tradition and guided by the faith community whose goals are to nurture and support people in need. Pastoral care provides healing, sustaining and guiding support in times of change such as: preparation for marriage, parenting and family issues, and support of senior citizens. Pastoral care also provides a pastoral presence during times of crisis and chronic or terminal illness and provides support with funeral planning.

Typically known as a 'silent ministry' the strategic plan indicated that pastoral ministry would do well to increase its visibility within the parish. In 2009 a pastoral care committee (PCC) was formed to address the results of the strategic plan and develop a road map to increase parish participation in the ministry of pastoral care. Programs were added and more parishioners have been served since the implementation of the strategic plan.

The PCC identified four strategic goals: Integration and collaboration, innovation and development, growth in participation and engagement of families and seniors. These four goals were applied to four areas of pastoral ministry: care and support, enrichment, pastoral presence and collaboration. The four goals will be highlighted to illustrate our achievements to date.

Integration and collaboration: Pastoral ministry now regularly posts parish and community pastoral resources in the bulletin and on the website. We collaborate and retain speakers for presentations to marriage and senior ministries and a new outreach ministry to homebound parishioners has been developed in collaboration with the school.

Innovation and development: We created and provided training for five new ministries: marriage enrichment, parish visitors/extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion, a prayer shawl ministry, care giver support group and Lenten faith sharing small groups. In addition a funeral planning guide was written for the parish and a new funeral hospitality rotation was designed and implemented.

Growth and Participation: Over two hundred volunteers were welcomed and trained in the above ministries and we increased the number of overall parishioners being served: all the parish visitors are actively visiting homebound parishioners and we've distributed over thirty prayer shawls. Prayers are continually being added to the prayer chain. The Heart of the Matter senior seminar has been well attended and efforts are currently underway to schedule speakers for the coming year. The funeral planning guide is in its third reprinting.

Engagement of families and seniors: In collaboration with Saint Bart's school teacher, Deb Anderson a pen pal program was developed to connect students with homebound parishioners. The Heart of the Matter senior seminar is looking forward to its third year with a focus on theology and catholic teachings. In addition efforts are underway to create a marriage enrichment ministry with the implementation of informational seminars, small groups and Cana dinners.

One strategic goal that was not addressed was the development of a support program for job loss and for couples in job transition. This was due to a lack of need based on parishioner feedback and the closing of similar programs at area churches due to lack of attendance.

As we move forward pastoral ministry will maintain the overall goals of increasing parishioner involvement in both giving and receiving of pastoral care in the following ways: we will expand existing programs in order to serve more parishioners at more stages and in more ways. We will continue to collaborate with other ministries and with the school. The Heart of the Matter senior seminar will be promoted to the wider western suburban community and the implementation of a marriage enrichment ministry will invite broader parish involvement.

Pastoral ministry depends on the participation and commitment of its committee members for innovation, development and maintenance of ministries and programs. Currently there are positions to serve for two years on the pastoral care committee.

I sincerely thank you for your prayers and support of this important ministry.

Christine Ducharme