

Stories of Success – Stark North Region

As a young parish minister, I often felt isolated in my role as coordinator of religious education and youth ministry. There were many dedicated volunteers and a supportive pastor, parish secretary, and bookkeeper. However, I was the only parish pastoral staff. Fortunately, there was a strong group of collaborative parish ministers in the county. Working together and supporting one another with similar roles at the various parishes was very uplifting.

One important goal of regional pastoral planning is to create, strengthen, and enhance such collaborative efforts in every region of the diocese. Whether in regions of parishes blessed with staff directors of religious education, pastoral ministers, and youth ministers or in regions where parishes rely more heavily on volunteers for such roles, working together can lighten the load of ministry and free up time and resources to focus on other initiatives that otherwise are never realized.

I recently met with the dedicated parish pastoral ministers of the Stark North Region – Holy Spirit, Little Flower and St. Paul. While affirming the ways they have worked together in the past, they also brainstormed ways to expand their collaboration for their benefit and the benefit of the people they serve.

One example is Vacation Bible School. Each parish was no longer able to host their own program of formation for elementary age children during the summer. Working together to plan, secure adult and high school volunteers, and publicize, the region intends to have one Vacation Bible School this summer. They talked of rotating the location each year and possibly looking into a bus to bring participants from each of the two non-hosting parishes. This is a great example of how working together can lighten the load of parishes, parish ministers, and volunteers while offering an enriched experience for the participants.

Another initiative in its infancy stage is the development of a regional evangelization team. Each parish has been asked to send 2-3 members to be a part of the team. Together they will receive formation on evangelization and, through prayer and discernment, articulate concrete steps for promoting evangelization in the region. One example is the possibility of a shared initiative to reach out to non-practicing Catholics or the “nones” in the community.

In Mark’s Gospel story of the feeding of the five thousand with five loaves of bread and two fish (6:34-44), Jesus has the crowd sit in groups on the grass. In offering what they had, trusting in Jesus, and coming together in groups, their needs were cared for abundantly by God, with leftovers. May we have the courage to focus on the abundance of the grace of God working in our Church, which overcomes anything we feel we are lacking on our own.

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