

Dreaming for the Future

Erin K. Butler

How do you capture dreams and, then, make them possible? The Church of the Holy Family in Hebron, CT has taken on a unique approach to turning the dreams of its parishioners into a reality. With a membership of 1,500 families, this church already embodies a strong faith community that shares its commitment to service and social justice with others. Pastor Father Michael Smith, in collaboration with the Parish Council, sought to take parishioners to a higher level in spirituality and service within the community. And so, the dreaming process began.

Father Michael had learned of a “dreaming exercise,” conducted at another parish, where parishioners identified their dreams for the church community and then worked together to achieve their goals. He thought that “dreaming” would be a perfect fit for the involved and engaged parishioners of Church of the Holy Family. “A friend of mine, Monsignor Doug Doussan, shared some aspects of the dreaming process with me. I trust and value his pastoral leadership, so I thought it would be a great approach for the Church of the Holy Family,” said Father Michael Smith.

With a quote from Edward Schillebeeckx as his focus—“What we dream alone remains a dream, but what we dream with others becomes a reality,” Father Michael invited twelve parishioners to form a Stewardship T.E.A.M. (Together Everyone Accomplishes More) to guide the dreaming process with parishioners. He says, “The overall goal is to be specific enough with the dreams so they may become a reality. If we just talk about it, they will not happen. We need to write them down, categorize them, and use the gifts of our community to bring them to fruition. It’s crucial to organize the dreams in a way to work through them while continuously communicating so everyone knows what is happening.”

With this goal, Father Michael introduced the dreaming concept to parishioners on the First Sunday in Advent. Parishioners identified more than 2000 dreams that were collected, carefully sorted, and finally, organized into sixteen categories. These ranged from building issues, such as the need to expand the church facilities, to the desire to work more closely with the parish’s sister church in Haiti, to the vision to create a pastoral center. On the first Sunday of 2007, parishioners were asked to prioritize their dream categories into the direction that was most important for the church.

After the dreams were organized, the Stewardship T.E.A.M. moved into action. “The first goal was to make the dreams as real to the parish as we could. We focused on the need to communicate with the members of the parish, as well as our existing ministries, to share the dreams that were identified, identify those that fit current ministries, and determine ways to help make dreams happen. We recruited members, defined sub-teams, created new ministries as needed, and continue to share as much information with the parish as possible because this process belongs to the parish,” said Dottie Moon, Stewardship Team member. She adds, “Ultimately the goal is to develop actions that move us toward

the long-term dreams... a peaceful and environmentally sound world populated by people of all races and faiths who share love, tolerance and service to others.”

Stewardship T.E.A.M. facilitator, Mark Roser has organized an action plan approach that has generated several short term projects which serve the dreams, help the community, and galvanize the commitment to shared spiritual growth. For example, on a local level, parishioners have already contributed to over a dozen new projects. On another level, Dean Tom Casey, Len and Barbara Tartaglia, and a core of parishioners, have begun to examine how our own parish could promote social justice locally, connect with other Connecticut constituencies to share this mission, and ultimately, pursue more lofty dream of peace in the world. To continue the dreaming process, the parish will celebrate the second Sunday of each month as Spirit Sunday and will hold a Spirit Weekend on May 19 and 20 for all parishioners as well as those interested in learning more about the Church of the Holy Family. The Dreaming Process is being documented in scrapbooks that reflect each dream category and projects will be posted on the parish’s updated website.

As the dreams begin to take shape, Father Michael sees parishioners making a difference and believes this project is exactly what will help parishioners continue to offer their time and talent. “As they dream, I can sense the synergy and the passion they have for bringing God’s love to our community and the greater world. It is encouraging to see their excitement,” said Father Michael. “The dreaming process will never end. Many dreams will be realized but always renewed with time.”

For more information on the Church of the Holy Family, contact the Parish Office at (860) 228-0096 or online at www.church-of-the-holy-family.org.