

# Best Practices Report – Diocese of Fall River

## DESCRIPTION OF PROJECT

The Diocese of Fall River has established an office, and hired a Bilingual Coordinator for this Office, to provide pastoral and outreach services to new immigrants. The primary work of this new office is to identify the location of new immigrant communities, identify their needs, develop the capacity of the local parishes to work with these groups and to raise consciousness overall within the diocese as to the plight of newly arrived and culturally diverse communities.

## THE APPROACH

### *Methods or activities the diocese has taken to address the needs outlined in the diocese's needs assessment:*

The Diocese of Fall River through its new Office and Bi-lingual Coordinator for Immigrant Pastoral Care is presently undertaking – or has already undertaken - the following activities to meet the needs of immigrants:

- Conducting a diocesan-wide needs assessment to determine where the new immigrants are concentrated and to identify their primary needs (with particular attention placed on researching the African presence);
- Targeting parishes that have significant immigrant populations for outreach and educational efforts; (the diocese has begun this initiative by focusing on making the cathedral parish a model of inclusivity).
- Focusing efforts on the Brazilian community, (the largest group of new immigrants to the Fall River Diocese); initiatives in this area include:
  - Providing interim pastoral contact with the Brazilian community in the absence of a Brazilian priest; hiring a Brazilian priest to serve as the primary pastoral contact and diocesan liaison for this population; providing pastoral support during the inculturation process of the new Brazilian priest; identifying a Brazilian Counselor for Catholic Social Services for work with Brazilians on Cape Cod.
- Collaborating in the celebration of National Migration Week (January 2003), including:
  - Assisting the core planning group in the preparation of the liturgical services, and coordinating the reflection team of representatives from Peru, Korea, Philippines, Brazil, Cape Verde and the Azores who shared stories of the gifts they brought to this country and the gifts they received here.
- Directing efforts to provide outreach, leadership training, pastoral activities and dialogue opportunities for ethnic groups in the diocese; efforts include:
  - Participating in the Capeverdean Community Conference – Common Threads III in New Bedford; guiding a program of “Advent and Lenten Reflections” for Elder Portuguese in Fall River and New Bedford; participating in Hispanic Lay Faith Formation Training Weekends; sponsoring two Leadership Training Sessions for Immigrants in January and March with Hispanic, Brazilian and Cambodian participants.
- Collaborating with other agencies (such as Catholic Social Services, Basic Needs Advocates, the Domestic Violence Awareness Project, Driver’s License Coalition and the Disabilities Office) to provide direct services to meet the human and pastoral needs of immigrants.
- Advocating for immigrants on the following issues, (50-60 contacts per month) including:
  - Drivers’ license issues, housing, jobs, health issues, education, insurance issues, courts, supporting immigrant businesses, English as a Second Language, and domestic violence.
- Participating in meetings/ networking of the New England Diocesan Directors of Ethnic Apostolates.

***Challenges or obstacles the diocese has faced in its approach and specific actions the diocese has taken (is taking) to overcome these challenges in order to achieve objectives:***

Environmental challenges to the work of the new office include negative attitudes towards immigrants still very prevalent in Fall River which have been compounded by the tragedy of 9/11 and the fear of terrorism as well as changes in immigration laws which leave very limited options for undocumented peoples. Specific challenges in Fall River include the departure of Fall River's very pro-immigrant bishop to another diocese and uncertainty during the interim. The diocese was also challenged by the unexpected departure of the priest who led the Brazilian apostolate for the diocese. This caused the new coordinator for Immigrant Pastoral Services and Outreach to provide a more active involvement in the Brazilian community at the beginning of her term. There also exists a certain amount of tension and lack of understanding among newcomer groups. The diocese is trying to bridge this by providing opportunities for dialogue and joint leadership training, especially between the Brazilian and Hispanic communities.

**OUTCOME-BASED OBJECTIVES**

***The following is a list of the primary objectives contained within the diocesan action plan and indicators of success for each objective, as well as a list of activities the diocese has employed towards accomplishing each:***

<b>Objectives</b>	<b>Measurements of Success for Each Objective</b>	<b>Milestones / Activities involved in accomplishing the objective</b>
<p>-- A minimum of 4 immigrant communities will increase access to Diocesan outreach/ ministry</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Outreach efforts to the Brazilians, Cape Verdeans, Africans, Cambodians and Hispanics have helped bring these groups into greater inclusion within the Church.</li> <li>2. There has been a multiplicity of the programs and services available for immigrants (particularly the Brazilians and the other above mentioned ethnic groups). These programs and services include: pastoral services, lay faith formation classes, translations services, and direct advocacy.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Providing interim pastoral services to the Brazilian community and hiring a priest to serve as their advocate and direct liaison.</li> <li>2. Participating in the Cape Verdean Community Conference.</li> <li>3. Providing Guided Lenten and Advent Retreat Days for Elder Portuguese.</li> <li>4. Participating in Hispanic Lay Faith Formation Training Weekends.</li> <li>5. Researching the African presence in the diocese.</li> <li>6. Joint leadership training for Hispanic, Brazilian and Cambodians.</li> </ol>
<p>-- Diocesan leaders within parishes will increase awareness and responsiveness to newcomers/ immigrants</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Greater numbers of Brazilians (the largest group of immigrants in Fall River) are participating more fully in the parishes.</li> <li>2. The Diocesan Cathedral is now a model multicultural parish. The process of integration in the cathedral parish is a "work-in-progress" and offers the possibility of a new model of "welcoming" for other parishes.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The Cathedral parish has incorporated Brazilian community, with the Hispanic and Anglo communities in a culturally-sensitive way.</li> <li>2. The Cathedral has established a multicultural Pastoral Team for the parish which includes leaders of the different ethnic communities.</li> <li>3. Plans are underway to "export" the model of inclusion and outreach that has brought about such a success at the cathedral parish to other parishes.</li> </ol>
<p>-- Coordination of pastoral efforts amongst and between ethnic communities will increase.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The opportunities for dialogue and cultural sharing among the Hispanic, Brazilian and Cambodian communities have increased.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The Office sponsored 2 joint leadership training session for Hispanic, Brazilian and Cambodian participants in January and March.</li> </ol>

## **EVALUATION OF HOW NEEDS HAVE BEEN MET:**

### ***Difference this initiative has made in the lives of those whom it is intended to serve:***

Through the establishment of an Office and Bi-lingual Coordinator for Immigrant Pastoral Services and Outreach, the Diocese of Fall River sought to *enhance* and *formalize* the ongoing efforts to reach out to newcomers in Southeastern Massachusetts. The greatest impact of the active presence of a Bi-lingual Coordinator has so far been among the Brazilian and Hispanic communities. Later, the coordinator plans to target the Portuguese, Cape Verdean and Cambodian communities for outreach. The major difference is the beginning of a conversation among peoples of different cultures, economic backgrounds and lived experience in the United States. For the most part, the methodology used has been a grassroots dialogical model of direct contact with immigrant peoples.

### ***Ways in which the project has contributed to increasing the welcoming capacity of the diocese:***

Before the diocese undertook this project and established an office with a permanent coordinator, the educational focus of diversity awareness was not formalized and its initiation relied upon the good will and / or focus of a particular parish priest or group. Establishing an office with a bi-lingual coordinator allowed the diocese to better direct energies, to the needs of new peoples, who bear little resemblance to the former immigrants, particularly with regard to documentation.

### ***Ways in which the diocese plans to build up the work in the future:***

The Coordinator is planning to continue the process of dialogue that she has begun among the ethnic groups. She plans to increase opportunities for conversation among the lay leaders of the respective ethnic communities as to how the values of fostering unity in diversity can best grow. She also intends to continue her outreach and education efforts with the clergy, whose continued support is necessary for the success of many of these initiatives. The goal is to set-up a series of Deanery Meetings on the subject of “welcoming the stranger” and “unity in diversity”. There are also hopes to do a Diocesan High School workshop on the subject as well as to focus attention on the port and the needs of seafarers.

## **CONTACT INFORMATION**

### ***For further information about this project and best practices associated with it, please contact:***

**Sr. Judi Clemens**  
**Coordinator**  
**Immigrant Outreach and Pastoral Services**  
**Diocese of Fall River**  
**P. O. Box 6056**  
**Fall River, MA 02724-0699**  
**508-674-4681 x.109**  
**508-675-2224**  
[\*\*juditeclem@aol.com\*\*](mailto:juditeclem@aol.com)