

Best Practices Report – Diocese of Lansing

DESCRIPTION OF PROJECT

As a core element of its plan, the Diocese of Lansing created a new position -- Coordinator for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Refugees (PCMR Coordinator) -- to better serve the pastoral needs of migrants, refugees, and other newcomers and to facilitate training throughout the diocese. Based in the office of Refugee Services in Catholic Social Services of Lansing/St. Vincent Home, Inc., the PCMR Coordinator is first organizing a campaign to increase awareness in the entire diocese of the needs of migrants and refugees as well as a “Welcome Ambassadors” program whereby the newly trained parish-based Ambassadors will reach out into the community-at-large -- identifying new immigrant and ethnic groups -- and provide outreach, service and pastoral care to them. To further the objectives of its action plan, the diocese has also created a Unity in Diversity Task Force to reinforce the message of “Welcoming the Stranger” through coordinated efforts with diocesan staff and leaders from various ethnic communities.

THE APPROACH

Methods or activities the diocese has taken to address the needs outlined in the diocese’s needs assessment:

The diocese identified a strong disconnect between established parishioners and recent immigrants. The established parishioners’ families originally integrated into the local Catholic Church by joining ethnic parishes. New immigrants are challenged by the loss of “national parishes” which at one time provided connection to their neighborhoods, ethnic groups and communities. In response to the need to help newcomers find community support in their new parishes, the diocese has attempted to reconnect established parishioners with their common experience being immigrants to the United States. The diocese helped to publish a cookbook with recipes from various refugee communities, entitled *A Taste of Freedom*, to strengthen the understanding that refugees come bearing gifts as well as seeking help.

Refugee Services has also developed a curriculum to train Welcome Ambassadors. This follows the train the trainer model whereby the diocese trains the ambassadors who in turn provide training and outreach in their own parishes. The Ambassadors not only welcome immigrants themselves but direct programs to encourage parishioners to identify and provide services for diverse populations.

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:

Unforeseen circumstances have caused some setbacks for the program. Reorganization within diocesan structures initially created some major delays. This is a result of the reassignment of the Unity in Diversity Coordinator’s position to a different supervisor. Loss of staff has caused delays as well. The person filling the Unity in Diversity Coordinator position was diagnosed with a brain tumor and abruptly forced to resign. The challenge now is to reestablish and maintain working relationships with parishes. The Unity in Diversity Task Force and the Welcome Ambassadors program were behind schedule, but they are on track to do the work they set out to do.

| OUTCOME-BASED OBJECTIVES | | |
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| <i>The following is a list of the primary objectives of 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 objective:</i> | | |
| Objectives | Measurements of Success for Each Objective | Milestones / Activities involved in accomplishing the objective |
| Increase conversation on the diocesan level about the importance of immigrants and refugees in the diocese. | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Unity in Diversity Task Force will meet regularly. 2. The Unity in Diversity Task Force will grow to represent an increasingly diverse group. 3. The Unity in Diversity Task Force will provide recommendations, create partnerships, and encourage exchange of best practices on the diocesan level. | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Unity in Diversity Task Force meeting November 5, 2003. 2. Welcoming the Stranger Among Us: Unity in Diversity presentation on 10/23/04 to the Catholic Conference of Lansing |
| Parishes will experience conversion and will identify, assist and build community with migrants and refugees. | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. There will be an increase in requests to the diocese for technical assistance to implement parish projects for welcoming. Eight requests for assistance are expected to be documented. 2. Awareness Campaign success will be noticeable through increased concern for migrants and refugees during VOICES diocesan assessment survey reporting. 3. Refugee Services has established relationships with various parishes, including St. Casimir Catholic Middle School, St Mary's Cathedral, and St. Gerard's Church. | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Awareness Campaign launch in Spring 2004. 2. PCMR Coordinator hired July 2003. 3. VOICES June 2003 provides initial response levels. |
| "Welcome Ambassadors" will integrate message of "Welcoming the Stranger" into parish and school activities. | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Eight parishes will take part in Welcome Ambassador initiative. 2. The children in St. Casimir Catholic Middle School suggested that refugees join them for a weekly, evening social hour and the Volunteer Coordinator is exploring how to make this activity a reality. | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Welcome Ambassador training session 1st quarter of 2004. 2. Unity in Diversity Task Force approved curriculum for six-session Welcome Ambassador training during November 5, 2003 meeting. |
| Parish activities will be held to recognize newcomers. | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Welcome Ambassadors will plan celebrations to mark the beginning of parish initiatives to expand welcoming capacity or efforts. 2. Eight parish and parish school leaders have returned to their parishes and schools to convene their own Unity in Diversity ministries. 3. Creating and convening Unity in Diversity ministries has been encouraged and supports offered. | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Parishes provided "Who Are My Sisters and Brothers?" resources and Migration Week information packets. 2. Two parish DREs adopted Migration Week curriculum. 3. Refugee Services continues work with the parishes towards creating ministries and continues to approach other churches regarding creating Unity in Diversity work. |

EVALUATION OF HOW NEEDS HAVE BEEN MET:

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

Parishes are beginning to adopt additional strategies to be welcoming communities. Diocesan leadership has become much more aware of the need for increased pastoral care. Ethnic leaders have a forum to address the needs of their communities and to provide assistance in shaping the way parishes will implement their individual action plans. The new volunteer coordinator has integrated an aspect of outreach to the Catholic community and has provided information to will help parishes actively seek out migrants and refugees within their communities.

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

The diocese has created new structures to address the concerns of various ethnic populations. The assistance of the Coordinator for PCMR gives parishes a resource to increase their efforts to provide appropriate services and pastoral care for migrants and refugees. The PCMR Coordinator also organizes Parishes Organized to Welcome Refugees (POWR) workshops for parishes that want to be increase their capacity to welcome and provide services to newcomers. The Unity in Diversity Task Force provides a mechanism for accountability on the part of diocesan and parish leaders who commit to making changes to enhance the welcoming capacity of the diocese or parish they serve.

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

The general diocesan Awareness Campaign will be supplemented by additional specific training concerning the message of "Welcoming the Stranger Among Us: Unity in Diversity." The Unity in Diversity Task Force will evaluate diocesan and parish structures over the course of the next year and oversee additional outreach and training for parish leaders and educators attempting to integrate the message of "Welcoming the Stranger" into their activities. In addition, the volunteer supervisor will continue will continue with the approach of education, as well as work on establishing relationships with parishes in the diocese and maintain those valuable relationships over time.

CONTACT INFORMATION

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