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N E W S L E T T E R

*In Christ, through the
shedding of his blood,
we have redemption and
forgiveness of our sins.*

Ephesians 1:7a

What's Next in Parish Ministry?

C.P.P.S. Remains Committed, but Faces Reality Head On

*Jerome Stack, C.P.P.S.,
and Jean Giesige*

Forty C.P.P.S. members came together at the Spiritual Center of Maria Stein from October 16–18 to reflect and pray together, addressing the issue of how best to plan for parish ministry in the future. While they did not make any decisions about future parish commitments, the insights and recommendations that arose

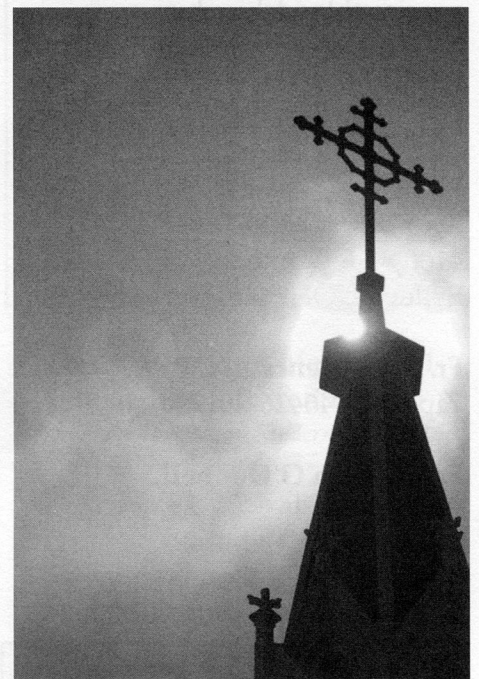
from the discussions will be valuable resources to the provincial council as they make decisions in the future.

The goals of the planning session were:

- To update the members concerning our current personnel resources and parochial commitments.
- To assess our personnel resources and preferences for future ministry.
- To provide information and to offer recommendations to provincial leadership in making decisions concerning our parochial commitments.
- To test the interest and energy for exploring creative models of parish.

The spirit of the meeting moved far beyond the goals, as members were able to discuss and celebrate the unique gifts that the Congregation brings to the parishes it serves. While the subject matter was serious—all acknowledge and accept that there likely will be fewer members available for parish ministry in the future—the Congregation's commitment to and passion for parish ministry remain strong.

"There was a very positive spirit at the meeting," said Fr.



Jeff Kirch, C.P.P.S., a member of the provincial council who is also the provincial secretary.

"Our members, those involved in parochial work, understand that the future is going to require some flexibility, but there was a genuine energy about what the future holds for us. It was evident that most of the members understood the process, they understood the goals—and that facilitated the process. Also, a genuine excitement about how we can do an even
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better job with parochial ministry. What are ideas and strategies for that, especially connected with our own Precious Blood spirituality?"

Fr. Jim Franck, C.P.P.S., is in ministry at St. Edward Church in Newark, Calif. His misgivings about coming to the meeting turned to gratification by its end.

"I came with some hesitancy because I am approaching the end of my ministry and feel a bit of hesitancy about making decisions for people who will be following me," he said. "At the close of the meeting, I felt happy to have been a part of a very committed group who choose to be realistic, imaginative, and hopeful. I enjoyed the information, sharing and camaraderie. I left with a real sense of joy."

Those present were given personnel numbers that show a continuing decline in C.P.P.S. members available for parish ministry. But no one was surprised by those numbers, said Fr. Ken Schnipke, C.P.P.S., a provincial council member who also serves as the province's director of personnel. This was the third such meeting in the past 12 years, and members have grown somewhat accustomed to the new reality.

"The first time we were together and looked at the numbers in 2000, people were shocked. When we met again in 2006, there was still some heavy stuff to deal with. But this time, there was an acceptance: 'this is part of the landscape we live in, how do we

do this the best we can.'"

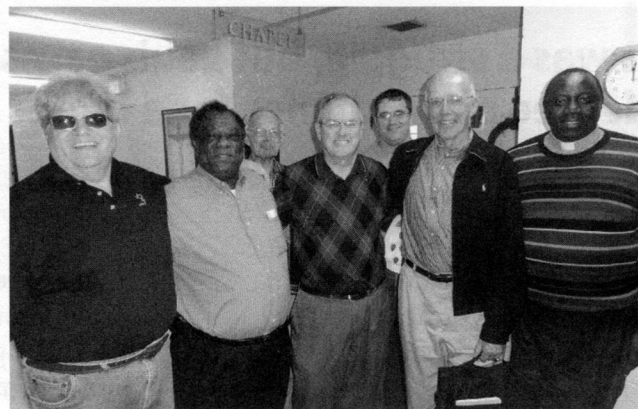
After introductory remarks by Fr. Larry Hemmelgarn, C.P.P.S., provincial director, the first part of the planning session was led by Fr.

Schnipke, who presented information about C.P.P.S. parishes in the context of national statistics and trends.

He noted that 39 members (50 percent of active members) are currently involved in parish ministry in 20 parishes, both urban and rural, single and clustered. About one-fourth of current pastors are likely to retire before 2020, meaning that there will be fewer members available to staff fewer C.P.P.S. parishes.

Sr. Joyce Lehman, president of the C.P.P.S. Sisters of Dayton, was the facilitator for much of the rest of the process. She had facilitated the two previous sessions and is a former director of pastoral planning for the Diocese of Toledo. She guided the members in several small group and plenary discussions.

After a second round of discussions, four focus groups met, addressing the topics of structuring parish ministry, building community, self care, and the C.P.P.S. as missionary. Among the insights shared were the need to affirm unity amid diversity, the possibility of proposing models for cluster ministry to a diocese, the importance of prioritizing



Above, members at the parish ministry meeting included (from left) Fr. Dennis Chriszt, Br. Hugh Henderson, Br. Jerry Schulte, Fr. Ken Pleiman, Matt Keller, Fr. Jim Franck and Fr. Benedict Magabe. Below, Sr. Joyce Lehman, C.P.P.S., who was the meeting's facilitator.

(Photos by Ken Schnipke, C.P.P.S.)

healthy self care, and styles of ministry based on sound principles.

Fr. Schnipke then introduced the issue of the weighted criteria used in making decisions about parish ministry by reviewing past criteria.

A new set of criteria was created, which members then prioritized. The new criteria include:

- We have members who have discerned a willingness to serve at the parish.
- There is compatibility between the needs of the parish and the charism/gifts of the Community, e.g., a preferential option for the poor, need for reconciliation, Hispanic ministry.
- There are parishes which are positive sites for the ministerial training of candidates in formation.
- We will maintain a parochial presence in the urban and rural areas.
- We will maintain a presence in single and cluster parishes.
- The parish is proximate to other C.P.P.S. parishes or ministry sites; there is a geographic cluster of members/Companions, which fosters community life and creates the possibility for a mission house.
- There is compatibility between the pastoral approach/vision of the local bishop and the pastoral approach/vision of the province.
- The parish has historic significance to the province.

Members then engaged in a prayerful discernment process identifying parishes that should be retained by the province. The process also included discernment of member's willingness to serve in parishes and in what capacity, e.g., as pastor, associate, senior associate, or brother.

Fr. Jeff Kirch, who had been designated as the official

"listener" for the process, offered his reflections on the planning session. He noted that the Community seems to be in a liminal or threshold space: a transitional, fluid stage. "We are called to stand in the threshold because our spirituality, our trust in the Blood, grounds us," he said. "How can we be missionary in this liminal stage?"

Fr. Kirch also noted a growing awareness among the members about the needs of the Congregation, in addition to their own needs as ministers. "The conversation seemed to center not just about 'where do I want to go as a minister,' but, 'Where are we being called as a Community, and how can I help?'" he said.

The discussion also explored how to match the needs of parishes with the charism and gifts of the Community, he said. "I heard several conversations about what makes our parishes different from diocesan parishes, and it always boils down to the charism we bring to the community, whether explicit or implicit."

Members noted that it would be helpful to learn more about the parishes where other members serve, Fr. Kirch said.

"I heard a real desire among the members to learn about other parishes. Someone who has ministered only in Mercer County, Ohio, for instance, wants to know what's happening in Whiting or Rensselaer, Ind., and vice versa," he said. "This desire goes beyond common questions like 'how many families do you have? Is there a school?' They have a desire to come to understand parish life

at other places. They feel that it would be helpful to know more about our parishes, for example, through development of parish profiles."

Fr. Schnipke said that he was pleased with the way the members embraced and carried out the tasks set before them at the meeting.

We are called to stand in the threshold because our spirituality, our trust in the Blood, grounds us.

"There was good camaraderie among the members, and a good discussion of how to do parish ministry well," he said. "There was also a genuine concern for the people we serve, for ministers to take care of themselves, and for how this is going to carry the future of the Church forward. We were trying to put it all together in planning for a future that is fluid.

"Members who approached the meeting with trepidation said they left with renewal: they see our future in parish ministry as hopeful, not oppressive. Maybe that's an offshoot of the appreciative discernment that the province has undertaken: we see that ultimately, our future is in God's hands, though we do what we can do. This meeting allowed our members in parish ministry to get together, express where they are in their own lives, and what they see for the future. It was a very trusting process."