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The integration of the family in the mission

P. Antonio Ruiz, C.M.

The following document is an actual example of doing Parish Mission involving the whole family from the pre-mission stage to the actual preaching of the Parish Mission. I offer here two models, one to be used in the Parish Church and the other in the homes of the parishioners. The first one contains a more elaborated pre-mission than the second, though the announcements in the parish bulletins, the focus on praying for its ongoing success in the prayers of the faithful and other means of spreading the news of the mission is the same. In each one the content is different and the method also.

Model one

The Parish Mission begins with its announcement many weeks before. It is planned by the Parish Staff after being recommended by the Parish Council and approved by the Pastor. The family _ children, teenagers and parents _ distribute the pamphlets previously prepared by the youth ministry, to neighbors, people living in the same street, block or apartment complex; outside the subway entrance, outside the supermarkets, etc. Signs can be posted in store windows, in the barbershop, beauty salon malls and other places where people meet. If the PM is taking place in a rural area with migrant workers, then pamphlets are sent to the people in the fields where they work making them aware of the coming parish event. If it is possible, the pre-mission team announces the PM on the radio several times. When the Missionary comes he can go to the station and do it personally.

All this time the parish family as a whole is planning, thinking, talking and praying for the coming PM. The Legion of Mary, the Prayer Groups, the Rosary chain, etc. are all reaching out to the heavens to anoint the Missionary and to fill the Church with the lost sheep, the unchurched, the lukewarm, and the one in need of growth and salvation.

The ACTUAL MISSION begins with songs and praise. Congregational singing is necessary to engage the people and ignite them to be alive, attentive and focused on the missionary effort. The priest enters in procession accompanied by the lector, the parent presenter, the youth and people giving testimonies and the children carrying banners or visual aids to be used during the presentation. The family unit is present from the onset at the PM and stays there participating actively in its different roles pre-assigned by the organizing team. After an Introductory prayer by the Presider, the lector proclaims the Word of God then the missionary introduces the subject _ a family issue _ makes a few points and then he sits down. One or both parents come and address the subject, for example domestic violence. They explain how it can be physical, emotional sexual, verbal, etc. and give instances of them. Then they sit down. A young man, a young lady or both get up and give a witness of how that behavior has affected their lives and how they felt then and now. They point out the scars, it has left on their personalities, fears, insomnia, lack of self-esteem, rejection, anger, etc. They show how this dysfunctional home has an effect in the ordinary growth of their relationships and how easy it is to hide for protection, security and strength into a gang. Children stand up during all this time with visual aids in their hands showing them to the congregation, as the talk unravels. Children may also be included to tell their stories in each case, that adds reality, dramatization, conviction, and touches the people's psyche.

In other cases, the teenagers offer a dramatization or do a live short sketch or present a home movie on domestic violence, the effects of drugs, alcohol or free sex. The children may help in the presentation, using banners, pantomime, dance, showing signs at the same time as the speaker is talking.

The congregation have been made aware of the problem and now it is up to the missionary to tell the people what are we going to do about it. He may explain the process of self-deception about getting help, not now, tomorrow; or I don't have a problem, I can change by myself alone any time I want, I don't need help from anybody. Then he brings God into the picture showing how by surrendering to a higher power we can change our lives. We need the support and the encouragement of others and that is why it is so important to connect them with any of the parish groups, bible class, prayer groups, services, visit to the sick, doing volunteer work in the parish or community, joining any of the Vincentian Family ministries.

The session ends with a joyful song sung by the whole assembly. If the people are multi-cultural or bilingual we sing this or a similar song, We are the Body of Christ.

Other subjects of great interest are family addictions to television, money, the mall, going shopping daily, crazy for sales or just merely going window shopping out of boredom, alcoholism, drugs, teenage violence, gangs, etc.

I like to involve the whole family in the preparation of the prayers, choosing the songs, playing and singing. Congregational singing is the best to make it inclusive. Have them praise God with their hands and body motions. Have a leader of music in front of the people singing, raising his hands, clapping, and showing the movements he wants the congregation to follow. The children can be great animators. Make sure they enjoy what they are doing.

Model two

This model takes place in the homes of the parishioners. You start with a team of two or three people. They are already converted and enthusiastic about sharing their faith with others. The head of the household invites his Catholic neighbors to his home and the priest convenes those assembled with the Mass. Those invited may be family members of friends also. The team explains that by reason of their baptism they are called to bring the Good News to others. The following weeks, instead of the Mass the session starts with praise, songs or the rosary. Then they use "Catecismo Ilustrado" Enseñanzas Católicas Esenciales, Catholic Book Publishing Co. N.Y. This is a question and answer catechism, easy to follow. It is simple, clear, short and manageable. A member of the team asks the question to the adults present and they also ask him questions. The purpose of this process is to learn the adequate answers related to fundamental truths of our salvation, in a way that is systematic, not improvised, and progressive. It follows the instruction of John Paul II in "Catechesi Tradendae, 21": "The Christian Catechesis must deal with essentials, without any claim to tackle all disputed questions or to transform itself into theological research or scientific exegesis; it must nevertheless be sufficiently complete, not stopping short at the initial proclamation of the Christian mystery such as we have in the kerygma; it must be an integral Christian initiation, open to all the other factors of Christian Life." They also use "Manual para el Católico de Hoy," with "Referencias al Catecismo de la Iglesia Católica," Liguori Publications. The teenagers and the older children can be present during the session. If they are rowdy and do not follow the process they can be taken to another room, and a team

member teaches them bible stories and other things suitable to their capacity. The same method question and answer may be followed here also.

It is very important to finish with a prayer where the needs of the people are clearly expressed and raised to God. It is easy for the people to pray in this fashion because everyone has concrete needs for themselves and for others, related to their health, pain, sorrows, family problems, work, the children's school, future aspirations, etc. The team makes sure that everyone has a chance to say something, either in the form of prayer of petition or thanksgiving. There is no rush. They finish with a song and the kiss of peace.

In this process of evangelizing, the un-churched begin to ask the team, how can I baptize my child? I would like to have my marriage blessed in the Church; how can Lupita make her First Communion? I have a pregnant girl, we have no money to carry the baby, pay for the hospital and care for the child. The mother is too young. How can the Church help us? These and other questions are answered by the lay missionaries who refer them to various Parish, Diocesan and Community Resources.

In this model of doing PM the team becomes a link between the Parish and the people, bringing them not only the Gospel of Jesus, but informing them of the many services available to them. Working in this fashion, they show that the Church cares for their whole person not just their souls, they build community and establish bonds of friendship. You can have an ongoing evangelization going on in your parish being done by these parish cells. After the mission is finished in this home, one of the members of the household teams up with an existing member and the process continues in another home, being first introduced by the presence of the Priest and the Mass.

To form the team, two or three people willing and able to do it, they need to have an initial conversion and a period of formation. This is done by sending people to make the Cursillo, the Life in the Spirit Seminar, the Marriage Encounter, or any type of retreat where the people find themselves face to face with God and their final destiny, and are energized to go out into the world and change it.

In a time where there is a shortage of Missionary priests, this model can be very well utilized to have the laity do their part in the evangelization process in a way that is non-threatening, practical, uses the peoples' resources, time and talents. These lay missionaries, once you make them feel important, they become enthusiastic, loyal, and willing to do it.

Looking up to the 21st century this last model becomes a powerful tool in the hands of the laity under the umbrella of the Pastor or the Associate Pastor.