

# Our Sunday Visitor

## Offertory Solutions Division

### Newsletters, State of the Parish Reports key to developing vibrant community

The challenge of communicating to parishioners changes frequently and the solution to keeping them informed on community events, parish news and finances varies from one parish to the next. Yet in spite of new technologies, the tried-and-true method of printed newsletters helps foster a vibrant parish community.

Sister Catherine Jane, affectionately called "Sister Katie" by the parishioners of St. Rose of Lima Parish in Eddystone, PA, has been publishing the "Heavenly News" parish newsletter since 1997. And with the help of a small group of volunteers from the parish, the newsletter has grown substantially.

"It was one single sheet of paper. We ran off, folded and mailed out or hand-delivered it to every parish member," said Sister Katie. The parish has grown, "in leaps and bounds these last ten years" and now includes more than 4100 members and 1600 families.

As the newsletter grew in popularity they started adding more content. "From the comments of how well it was received we started adding a page or two. Then as our parish grew we began to add certain sections dealing with different activities and groups within the parish.

"It is hard to believe looking at the beautiful work done by [OSV] from our humble beginnings how it has grown. We still have a staff of eight or nine parish people who meet four times a year, talk and pray about each issue then come together to make it happen," added Sister Katie.

The print-and-mail State of the Parish Report service from OSV takes the custom content provided by parishes and creates an engaging newsletter that shares the parish message. St. Rose's newsletter was born from the need to communicate with both parishioners in the pew and those who can't participate at the church.

"I saw a need to reach out to our homebound and let them be a part of what was happening in the parish because they were the one who laid the foundation, and we even today are building on their faith and love for St. Rose's here," said Sister Katie.

Sister Katie, now in her Golden Jubilee of religious service and her 22nd year at St. Rose's, uses the newsletter as a tool for outreach, stewardship, and to encompass what the parish community is all about. And according to Sister Katie it's always done with the element of faith, highlighting the work that

God has done in St. Rose's.

It's the dedication to serving the community that keeps the Heavenly News popular.

"We always place some of the extra copies in the vestibule for visitors, and on more than one occasion people come to register and say they would like to be part of a parish that cares so much about all ages and all people. They say we are a welcoming parish even before they become one of us," said Sister Katie. "When I take Communion to our homebound, many times they are reading and re-reading the newsletter," she added.

### Newsletters facilitate communications, engage parishioners in mission

"The newsletter gives you a chance to go more in-depth on issues. You can have questions and answers about stewardship. You can have ministries and what they're about. You can have people give their lay witness story," said Jim Kelley, Director of Stewardship and Development for the Diocese of Charlotte. "One of the top eight things that the most effective parish stewardship groups were doing was communicating effectively -- and newsletters were found to be the most effective way to do that," he added.

According to Dr. Chuck Zech, Professor of Economics at Villanova University's Center for the Study of Church Management, every parish should have a newsletter to share the state of the parish.

"Parish newsletters are an invaluable tool in reaching parishioners. A parish newsletter sent to every home in the parish allows the parish to develop a longer story about stewardship. Our numbers show that parishes that have newsletters receive 23% more treasure, 21% more volunteer time, 12% more of our spirituality measure, and 23% more of our outreach measure," said Zech. "So parish newsletters are really invaluable at getting the stewardship message across and making sure stewardship is an effective tool in the parish."

Parishes are using newsletters to engage parishioners in the mission of the church, to share ministry activities and to celebrate their accomplishments.

"[OSV] has enhanced our newsletter beyond words, your dedication to your mission has enriched our parish, all of us, because your mission is like our own," added Sister Katie.