

History of Retreats at St. Mary Parish, Defiance

In 1980-82 four Parish Retreats were held. The format of these retreats were developed at St Michael the Archangel Parish in Findlay, Ohio. The first retreats were for men and women. The fourth one was for men only. 121 people were involved in these first retreats.

Following these four retreats, various other opportunities for spiritual growth and renewal took place at the parish. The Diocesan commitment to *RENEW* was a major reason why the parish retreats were first suspended. *RENEW* small groups were held in homes throughout the parish and diocese from the fall of 1982 through the fall of 1984.

A number of *Marriage Encounters* were sponsored by the parish in the 1980's, and were held at the Yokefellow House.

Parish Missions were held annually beginning in 1988. These Missions generally began with a presentation by the speaker/director at the weekend liturgies and continued for three or four consecutive evenings. The Missions typically were held in Lent and usually drew healthy crowds between 125-350.

Days of Retreat and Evenings of Reflection were also held throughout the 1980's and 1990's.

In 1994 it was decided that a more intensive experience than the Parish Missions or Evenings of Reflection should be offered. Various models were studied; primarily Christ Renews His Parish, and the Findlay Model which we first adapted for our use in the 1980's.

In March of 1995 six people attended a retreat at St Michael in Findlay, and four people attended a retreat at St Rose in Lima, which had been offering its own adaptation of the Findlay model.

These ten people, were joined by more than 15 others who had made the Parish Retreats here in the '80's and together they formed the team of the November 1995 Parish Retreat. This format has remained the basis of our St. Mary Parish retreat through the first decade of the new millennium.

The Parish Retreat retains as its primary focus, the desire to lead people into a more deep and personal relationship with Jesus, through prayer, the sacraments, and developing mature and appropriate relationships with other members in the parish. Other aspects of importance involve the inclusion of young parish members in order to form them for future parish leadership, and a desire to encourage more men to deepen their relationship with the Lord and to participate more actively in the parish and its ministries.

Some aspects of the Parish Retreat that are unique to our parish include:

- The Saturday evening focus on Small Group Faith Sharing.
- Invitation to Stewardship and greater involvement in ministry of the parish.
- The intentional inclusion of all RCIA candidates and their sponsors.
- Integration of the Retreat Eucharistic Liturgy with the Parish Weekend Liturgy.
- The purposeful role of a co-leader to shadow the leader in preparing to lead the next years retreat and for modeling both male and female leadership in the church.
- A Retreat FOCUS Team serves to give overall direction to the Parish Retreat in choosing each years leaders, and in considering recommendations for significant changes in the weekend and in the Reunion Gathering.

The St Mary Parish Retreat has become a model for other parishes in the area. Parishioners of St. Patrick in Bryan, the Parishes in Paulding and Payne, and St Aloysius in Bowling Green have all attended retreats here in order to bring this model of spiritual renewal to their own parishes.

From 1995 through 2008, 20 Parish Retreats have been held involving over 415 different people as team members and retreatants. Many of that number have continued to be involved as team members, serving meals, praying in the chapel and in various ways.