

St. John the Evangelist Parish, Fenton, Michigan

Growing pains don't hurt a bit at St. John the Evangelist parish in Fenton, Michigan. For administrators Tricia Jorgensen and Lisa Lucido, managing a bustling parish office that registers ten to fifteen new families per month is just a part of their routine. With ParishSOFT software to make that routine easier, St. John sets high standards for proactive parish management.

The ParishSOFT MailMerge and reporting utilities have saved hours of administrative work at St. John. In preparation for a recent anniversary celebration, ParishSOFT Reports produced a list of major anniversary dates from the Family Directory database for members who had been married for 20 or more years. Personal Mass invitations for each couple were created in Microsoft Word in just minutes using MailMerge. Address labels were printed from ParishSOFT Reports, and the staff quickly had all the items in a major event under control. ParishSOFT utilities allowed the event administrators to spend time on the special touches that made this celebration memorable: pew reservations, brunch, a papal blessing, and photos of each couple to take home.

Jorgensen, who manages the time and talent database, has seen St. John's ministry scheduling evolve from a three-ring binder and diskette system to a cleaner, faster automated procedure. "Before ParishSOFT, I had to pull the disk for altar servers, put it in the computer, open and update the file, and then repeat all of this for eucharistic ministers and readers," said Jorgensen. "Then I had to manually create a legible schedule in Word to distribute to the ministers. Now I open the Time & Talent Module and schedule ministers for all the masses with a few mouse clicks." The ministry schedule report, available in ParishSOFT Reports, no longer needs to be typed in Word. Because the Time & Talent Module shares data with the member records in the Family Directory, minister information does not need to be retyped into the system every time Jorgensen adds a new minister or generates a new ministry schedule. For the record, Jorgensen still has her three-ring ministry binder near her computer — perhaps her personal tribute to the technology archives.

St. John is tackling the registration and



LISA LUCIDO (ON THE PHONE) AND TRICIA JORGENSEN (RIGHT) SCHEDULE ONE OF MANY BAPTISMS IN THE ST. JOHN — FENTON PARISH OFFICE.

database challenges common to all churches. Adult members may not realize that they need to transfer memberships when they move; or they may not even know that a formal registration process exists. Often, members are active in one parish but are registered in another. "People feel that they can just come to church, and that's wonderful," said Lucido, "but, as a parish, we need to include these people in our census and parish mailings to give them the full benefits of being part of a parish family." Regular bulletin messages encourage parishioners to update their registration statuses using a mini-form, printed right in the bulletin, or with a visit or call to the parish office.

"New registrations are easy with ParishSOFT," said Lucido. "New members are happy to complete the ParishSOFT registration form that we provide them. Some families are even registering because they are *planning* to move to Fenton from other areas — they don't even have local home addresses yet."

When it comes to managing their existing membership records, proactive data collection methods, including ParishSOFT MailMerge letters to all families and ongoing data cleanup efforts, make St. John a model of good parish database management. Long-time parishioners who have not formally registered or notified the parish office of changes to

their member information are contacted by phone and asked to verify addresses, birth and anniversary dates, and member names. This effort has been well-received by members, particularly those long-time members who don't take kindly to seeing a registration form after they've been attending for years. Jorgensen and Lucido recommend choosing a sensitive approach to mailings and especially to phone calls. The member reaction to hearing, "... I'm sorry, but you're not showing up in the computer," is best avoided while handling database accuracy checks.

Results of this member database cleanup have made a real difference at St. John. Family and member information in ParishSOFT is more accurate than ever. And parish census data better reflect the actual registered membership. Census records have gone from 3,300 registered families prior to the cleanup to 3,132 (and growing) as of early April 2002. Lucido and Jorgensen now report parish census statistics directly from ParishSOFT reports with a new level of confidence in the numbers.

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