

REJUVENATING A PARISH COUNCIL

The following ideas for membership and program development in a parish council are offered by Michelle Stapleton, president of Blessed Sacrament Council of Catholic Women, Martinsville, New Jersey. Blessed Sacrament's experience is the subject of an article that appears in the January/February 2005 issue of Catholic Woman magazine. Michelle had many ideas to share with NCCW members.

Organization

- Have the board of officers and commission chairs meet separately from the monthly membership and program meetings.
- Don't bog down the program meetings with planning details or you will bore or discourage guests and new members.
- Buddy up people and create co-chairs: The gets more involved, trains new folks, and makes it less overwhelming to take on a bigger role
- Have officers hold positions for 2 years so you don't lose momentum.
- Keep minutes from meetings and distribute to board members so you keep projects moving forward.

Be welcoming

- Use name tags and set up a greeting table for all meetings.
- Use e-mail so you can easily stay in touch with both members and guests from meetings.
- Develop a welcome package for new members: letter, calendar, brochure, NCCW info, etc.
- Assign people to greet and meet all guests, follow up, and thank them for coming (even if via e-mail).

Survey your membership

- We distribute a detailed survey each spring and tally the results for readout in May. Then we set our calendar for the following year based on that feedback.
- In the fall, we distribute a Volunteer Sheet for everyone to fill out, where they can read a brief description of all programs and see where we needed help. They circle what they'd like to do and then the results are tallied and distributed to all committee chairs.

Attracting younger women

- Two new ministries that have brought in many young women: Children's Ministry (Sunday school program for ages 1-Kindergarten during 10:30 Mass) and Little Praisers (45 minute Christian music and movement class for ages 1-Kindergarten on Wed mornings).
- Partnered with K of C for Parish Picnic: CCW created a carnival geared towards younger children and were in charge of publicity. It rained but we moved indoors and had a great turnout.

Other lessons

- Publicity is very important: e-mail reminders help, flyers in the bulletin, nice posters, brochure, and calendar in neighboring churches.
- Encourage members to invite their friends from neighboring parishes.
- Recognize team efforts, for example, a cocktail party with photo slide show and announcement of volunteers for each ministry.
- Spiritual component is critical! Ladies feel like they can't get this from any of their other activities. We start meetings with unique prayer service each month and often sing a song or two.