

Archbishop's Annual Appeal to launch Feb. 7-8

Freshly invigorated with a new name and a restructured program, the Archbishop's Annual Appeal is set to launch in parishes Feb. 7-8 with the theme "Do everything for the glory of God."

"We have a very streamlined program ahead of us," Archbishop Edwin F. O'Brien said to those gathered at the Catholic Center Jan. 29 for one of 10 training sessions offered on the new program.

The name change for the former Archbishop's Lenten Appeal came after pastors and laity expressed concerns about taking time in Lent to focus their energies on the liturgy. According to Melanie Torsella, manager of the fall offertory and annual appeal programs, the archdiocese also wanted to make it clear that the appeal lasts throughout the year and is not just offered during Lent.

The appeal will kick off Feb. 7-8 with announcement weekend. At each Mass, pastors or pastoral life directors will talk to parishioners about the appeal, which has a goal of raising \$7 million in 2009 to support parishes, outreach ministries, special programs and services. An insert will be placed in each parish bulletin and some 150,000 direct mail pieces were already sent, according to Ms. Torsella.

Since the appeal was launched in 1992, more than \$64 million has been collected, according to Ms. Torsella. The money people donate supports hundreds of thousands of Catholic individuals and their families, 154 parishes, eight parish missions and 87 Catholic schools.

The way the appeal is set up in the archdiocese, a rebate policy enables each parish to receive 25 percent to funds collected from its parishioners. Once the parish goal is achieved, parishes receive 50 percent of any additional funds received.

The archdiocese hired William Bannon, president of Bannon Associates, who has consulted with several other Catholic communities, to successfully implement this year's appeal. Best practices were reviewed in seven dioceses and archdioceses

when developing the new strategy.

One significant change to the appeal, according to Mr. Bannon, is that specific brochures for each parish, which came at an “astronomical cost,” were not printed. Instead, a single brochure was created, which cut down on both costs and confusion.

Another important aspect of this year’s appeal will be the in-pew component. While the archdiocese had focused in previous years on a direct mail campaign, which yielded a 15-percent participation rate, according to Ms. Torsella, it’s also necessary to make a “face-to-face” appeal.

Envelopes will be distributed directly to each household in the pew, and the pastors or pastoral life directors will make a direct appeal to parishioners to help support the appeal. This has worked successfully in other areas and reaches those who are not on the parish roster or archdiocesan census lists.

Ten training sessions, including one in Spanish, on how to implement the new program were held across the archdiocese, with the archbishop attending nearly every meeting. He also audio recorded a special homily in both English and Spanish for the appeal, which will be played at every parish on commitment weekend, Feb. 14-15. During this weekend, pastors and pastoral life directors will introduce the homily and ask for support for the campaign.

“We’re not asking people to empty their wallets; we’re asking for a reasonable gift,” said Ms. Torsella. “This really does make an impact (on our archdiocese). We have a lot to be thankful for and this is a great way to give thanks by giving back.”

The archbishop lauded Patrick Madden, executive director of development for the archdiocese, and his associates for their work in implementing the new program. He also spoke of how it’s “the people who make the church.”

“Hopefully our new system will enable us to do what we do in better measure,” he said.