

Communication audit will put everyone in the know

St. Mary, Annapolis, is in the final stages of selecting a consultant to perform an internal communication audit.

Much like a financial audit that examines fiscal practices, the communication audit will look at the ways in which people communicate.

"We're like a small city at St. Mary's, we have so many constituencies," said Steve Linhard, chief administrative officer of St. Mary. The church, which has two schools, has 82 ministries and 240 employees.

Father John Kingsbury, C.Ss.R., pastor, said the communication audit, aimed at internal communications, will address "how are we talking to each other, and are we getting the information we need? I'm trying to get a united front so we're all saying the same thing, agreeing with policies, and using those policies."

Mr. Linhard noted that just the schools alone have to communicate among parents, alumni, faculty and staff, students, and the parish - and that doesn't include giving a message to the larger community surrounding the school and parish.

The parish has a variety of electronic newsletters and e-mail, but a pertinent e-mail may not be read by everyone who needs to know the information. For example, Mr. Linhard said, if a building is going to be closed because of construction, what is the best way to let everyone know?

Father Kingsbury said he hopes the audit will help develop "a consistent voice among ourselves as to what is our policy, so you don't go to one person and say, 'Is this the policy' and then you go to someone else who says, 'That's the policy.' "

He feels that outside eyes and outside knowledge of the best ways to communicate will give the parish a fresh view.

"They'll see stuff that walks right by your eyes because it's there every day and we

don't see it," he said.

The parish already has taken some steps to streamline operations. It has a chief administrative officer and a senior staff of eight key people.

"Who do you get to coordinate this whole mess?" said Father Kingsbury, laughing, as he described the role of chief administrative officer - an idea gleaned from another parish.

And every fundraising initiative must go through an advancement council.

Father Kingsbury pushed for that after one Sunday Mass when there were two collections and three groups raising funds. He didn't want parishioners being asked for money five times.

"No one should have to go through that gauntlet just to worship," he said with a laugh.

He's excited that the audit, which is expected to be completed by March, will improve communications even more.

"I've very hopeful on this," he said. "I love when you go through something and it just tweaks it."