

New program nurtures priest leadership skills

Two years into his pastorate, Father Dale Picarella realized he wanted to improve his management and leadership skills for the good of St. Philip Neri in Linthicum.

“The issue is how to manage personnel and how to create vision and keep the parish focused on vision,” said Father Picarella, now seven years as pastor of the Anne Arundel County parish. “The pastor doesn’t do it alone. He’s the driver, working in harmony with the staff. That’s the leadership I was lacking, helping the staff to grow and holding everyone accountable in the sense of problem-solving and encouraging them.”

Father Picarella is one of 35 priests of the Archdiocese of Baltimore who have recently begun a two-year leadership program called “Good Leaders, Good Shepherds.” It’s exactly what Father Picarella was looking for to strengthen his role as pastor.

“To be effective in developing leadership skills will help us in the spiritual dimensions of our priesthood,” said Father Picarella, who has taken other leadership workshops in recent years. “It will free us to be more effective shepherds.”

Father Bill Dickinson, national director for the Pennsylvania-based Catholic Leadership Institute that runs the program, said participating priests will study a wide range of topics such as creating vision, setting goals, facilitating team dynamics and time management. The program runs for 29 days, with the archdiocese paying half the expenses, priests paying a fourth and parishes covering the remaining fourth.

“The purpose is to develop and introduce leadership skill sets so the priest in the parish can have more confidence in how he’s leading,” Father Dickinson explained. “We are there to support their governing office in the priesthood of Jesus Christ.”

Building fraternity is a major component of the program, Father Dickinson said, as is helping priests better facilitate discipleship in the lives of their parishioners so they

are more engaged in the quality of parish life.

Nearly 2,000 priests in 63 dioceses have participated in “Good Leaders, Good Shepherds.” The Church Leadership Institute has also offered a version of the program for bishops. Archbishop Edwin F. O’Brien, Bishop Mitchell T. Rozanski and Bishop Denis J. Madden have participated.

“What makes it effective is that it takes leadership and immerses it in our Catholic tradition, canons, Scriptures and documents,” Father Dickinson said.

Monsignor James Hannon, associate director of the division of clergy personnel for the archdiocese, said “Good Leaders, Good Shepherds” gives priests an opportunity to “build bonds of mutual respect among priests.”

Priests will benefit by having a deeper understanding of how they work with others, how others perceive them and how they perceive others, Monsignor Hannon said.

“I think the Archdiocese of Baltimore is gifted with good priests who have the good of those whom they serve at heart,” said Monsignor Hannon, noting that participating priests have already attended a four-day introductory session.

“It will be a great blessing to us if we can build on the already-good efforts that have been made in the past,” he said, “and seek to work together so that the good of our archdiocese is supported and maintained into the future.”