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Time for Others

Careers wait as young adults opt to spend time helping needy San Diegans.



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Computer System Brings Parish Record-Keeping Out of Dark Ages

By KIM CAMPBELL
The Southern Cross

SAN DIEGO — When historians study the European Dark Ages, the only written records they have are parish records. Much of European history, for a span of hundreds of years, is based on these Church records. Today, parish records remain a vital repository, not only of the history of its people, but of the faith life of the parish.

Today, parishes keep computerized records, but the spreadsheets are rarely compatible with other parish records, and generating reports involves many steps and the re-entering of data. Omnidata, a company in Westlake Village, has developed PCS (Parish Computer System), a Microsoft Windows-based program, which integrates the many types of parish records. To date, 14 local parishes have adopted PCS, making record-keeping easier and enabling them to use the data to better serve the faithful.

"The records a parish keeps are threefold," explains Kathleen Hoverter, administrative assistant for The Immaculata Parish. Parishes keep sacramental, parishioner census and financial records, she says.

"It is vital that parishes keep records of all of the sacraments" parishioners celebrate, says Hoverter. "If someone was baptized (at The Immaculata) 25 years ago, ... we have to be able to provide copies of the baptismal record, they can't be married in

the Church without it," she says. The PCS system doesn't take the place of the hand-written book of sacraments signed by the bishop, but it makes the retrieval of such records more efficient. Parishes also keep records of donations and contributions.

With the PCS program, donation information is posted to both the census and the financial records, says Hoverter, sparing a duplication of effort in generating reports. With most of the older parish computer systems, parishioner data was in a separate program from the financial information. "This new PCS enables parishes to submit their annual end-of-the-year report to the diocese without having any extra steps," says Hoverter. "The data is generated for us over the fiscal year; it really does save a lot of work," she continues.

Not only are the census and financial records integrated with PCS, but the program is also compatible

with the diocese. This makes submitting reports to the diocese much easier, says Cyndi Peart, office manager and bookkeeper for Queen of Angels Parish in Alpine. One of the biggest reports a parish makes is on the Annual Catholic Appeal pledges. Prior to implementing PCS, Peart says reconciling parish records with the diocesan records was a daunting task, involving page after page of computer paper reports which had to be checked, entry by entry. This year, it took her less than an hour to reconcile the computerized data, which she then copied to a disk to submit to the diocese.

Mike Torretti, business manager of St. Mary Parish in Escondido, says the program also helps the parish in terms of stewardship. "Once you enter data, you can pull up all kinds of different reports regarding stewardship," says Torretti. "For instance, you can pull up list of all the eucharistic ministers," from the list

of all parishioners.

Queen of Angels utilizes the PCS program's capabilities to personalize their small faith groups. Peart prints out information for the leaders, including participants' addresses, phone numbers, names of children and birthdays. This helps leaders keep track of information on the 28 or so families in their group.

Torretti, Peart and Hoverter are unanimous in recommending PCS to other parishes. Peart says the training classes she attended were great, and that Omnidata also provides ongoing support. "Any person familiar with [Microsoft] Windows applications would be able to use it with no problem," says Peart.

Torretti says that Omnidata recently launched the next phase of the program, which allows the parish school and religious education programs to integrate the same program so that each can interchange data readily.

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