

Fall Changes = Opportunities for Outreach

Consider the following ways to capitalize on fall changes in your community:

Back2School Dinner *for Teachers* - The end of the year is no time for an appreciation dinner for teachers who are just as anxious to get out as the students. So why not host an appreciation dinner the week before school starts? This is typically a time when teachers are already putting in full days getting ready and too busy to make dinner. Why not enlist teens and parents to volunteer in serving a dinner with some light entertainment for the teachers before the school season starts? Many parents and teens would be grateful for a casual setting to get better acquainted with their teachers. The event can be enhanced with an inspirational speaker from your church or some young voices of appreciation to let the teachers know how important their work is. What better contact point for the parish with teachers, school administrators and parents than an evening of appreciation.

Friday Night Lights - Friday is a night when little is going on in most churches. It is also the last chance for students to catch up on homework assignments so that they can enjoy the weekend. All the parish needs is room with some lights. Better yet, add a few computers connected to the internet and maybe one printer. College students are perfect volunteers for this program since they are unwinding from their own week of studies and may be open to do a good deed before going out for the evening.

Back2School Shopping Spree - Returning to school represents a tremendous expense for many parents each August. It is not uncommon to hear parents lament over how few school clothes still fit their children by the end of summer. Many families can't afford the supplies, sneakers, new clothing and haircuts. Why not create a temporary school supply with basic supplies for families in need. The parish can contact local schools in the summer to ascertain what supplies are required and then organize them in the temporary store by school and class. This saves the family considerably in time, gas and money. A box can be left out on the counter for those who care to donate. During store hours the pastor or parish outreach volunteers can be present to mingle and see to any other needs that may be present. And why not enlist parishioners and other local stylists to do free haircuts? The event can be publicized at the end of May and a collection can be taken up before vacationers leave for the summer. Some basic supplies can be acquired throughout the year at significant discounts.

5th Quarter Action - This is a post-game alternative for all teens that provides a casual setting for youth to socialize on a Friday or Saturday night from 9pm to midnight. A parish hall is a perfect setting. Table-tennis, Wii sports and Guitar Hero competitions with pizza and snacks make this an easy set up. Teens can be invited during halftime by parish volunteers. This kind of safe social space is especially needed in small town or rural communities where the sidewalks roll up at 9pm.

After-school Care - In the midst of new school demands, life just keeps happening for parents. Some work and some have their own parents in need of constant care. What if your parish provided respite care on just one day of the week at the parish. You might even find out which days the local schools have scheduled their teacher conference days and simply offer a day care alternative for those days each year. This service can be staffed with the help of a team of grandparents, stay-at-home parents and teens.

After-school care can be specified as a support for parents that cannot get the time off. Sometimes these parents are unable to take a day off or cannot leave work at 3pm to make scheduled doctor appointments. Some parents have to take children and siblings along to such appointments. Parents who are caring for their own parents will also find this especially helpful. And imagine the opportunity that this provides to children who need help with homework. Eventually the program can grow to include structured activities, faith formation for young parishioners, snacks and cooperative games. This is also an opportunity for homeschooling families to develop a social network for their children at church.

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Contact the Office of Parish Life for more great outreach strategies at 847-5531 or parishlife@buffalodiocese.org