

Artfully Done

On a mission from Belleville to Rockville Centre by Bob Kloos

Sometimes Beacon Street goes out of town. Our mission is mobile. Ninety-five percent of our programs are within a two-hour drive from the office. But there are times when clients far away make us an offer we dare not refuse.

This year we returned to The Shrine of Our Lady of the Snows just across the river from St. Louis MO in Belleville IL. For the sixth year in a row we were asked to present three mini-retreats to Confirmation candidates from surrounding schools. These 2 1/2 hour sessions were attended by as many as 400 and as few as 100 students at a time with teachers and bus drivers along side. Steve Rico made us an ensemble and brought his guitar so the total of 1,000 eighth-grade students would have some songs to remember.

No sooner did we return from the Gateway to the West than I headed off to the Big Apple. The Diocese of Rockville Centre, asked Beacon Street to return for a World Youth Day weekend celebration. This time the music was waiting for me when I arrived. Jaime Rickert agreed to join me for a session with 250 high school students in Melville on Long Island. Jaime is an accomplished musician, a veteran in mission ministry, and a performer with the former Fountain Square Fools for a decade or so. He is also a good friend.

Ninety minutes in front of a church packed with teenagers is more than some ministers want to manage. But that is precisely the venue that has honed Beacon Street into the mission machine that it is.

Kids are no less worthy of the Word of God than any church congregation. They hunger for it, in all its authenticity. And they prefer it comes from people who not only preach it, but also exude it, show it on their face, and announce it in a personal and practical way. They want the best the presenter has to offer. But then, who wouldn't? And why would any minister settle for less than a best effort?

A church full of eighth-graders will also let the minister know how things are going during the program. Their attention is an immediate indicator of just how "on target" things are. Restlessness is a sure

sign that it's time for the minister to "gear up" or raise the tempo a notch or bring the examples a little closer to home. Adults will often have the same complaints about a presentation, but they are often too polite (or too tired) to show their dissatisfaction. Glaze should not be mistaken for praise.

Beacon Street's mission is to proclaim the Gospel using the performing arts. The purpose of art is to slow down the eye. Our story and song, and the drama we use in all aspects of our presentation do indeed slow down the eye. The result is a focus that may be able to distinguish more this time than last. A focus that may prompt this person or that to make some connections never made before, and come to new understanding.

Near the end of both the Belleville and Rockville programs, we "slowed" the groups into prayer using melodies from Taizé, a community of Christian brothers in France. We taught a simple refrain in four parts that blended into angelic splendor. Above all this lovely Spirit, Beacon Street offered some words that attempted to express concerns that filled the minds and hearts of those present. It lasted only five minutes, and it was followed by only thirty seconds of silence. But make no mistake, it was good prayer. And the "Amen" that followed the silence was enthusiastic and appreciative.

