

Friendship with Christ: The goal of evangelization

By John Valenti

The Church's vision for evangelization was summarized well by Pope Paul VI:



John Valenti

"The task of evangelizing all people constitutes an essential mission and our deepest identity; the Church exists in order to evangelize" ("On Evangelization in the Modern World").

Evangelization is the incorporation of new members into the Church and ongoing faith formation. It is an entrance into a friendship with Christ which humanizes mankind and the world.

According to a recent survey released by the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, Catholics account for nearly one-quarter of U.S. adults. Nevertheless, former Catholics outnumber Catholic converts by roughly four to one, and approximately one in 10 adults are former Catholics. Overall, one-third of those who were raised Catholic have left the Church.

Some speculate that Catholics have left the Church because of poor religious instruction. That is one explanation. But if our adult Catholics suffer from religious illiteracy, another question is "Why should anyone be interested in religion or anything else which does not effectively communicate the positive aspects of participation?"

Bishop Robert Vasa of the Diocese of Baker, Ore., stated, "Without an evangelized heart, without falling in love with Christ—which is really what it means to be evangelized—the practice of the faith redounds to duty and obligation. There is only a slim possibility of persevering in the practice of a faith that is viewed primarily or exclusively this way."

Auxiliary Bishop Salvatore Cordileone of the Diocese of San Diego echoed the sentiments: "The need for better catechesis and ongoing adult formation is widely acknowledged. To keep our people in the Church, their Catholic identity must result from deep love for and cultural connection with their faith tradition. ... If they don't, and if they are unhooked from this deep-seated Catholic identity, then it is not surprising if they go elsewhere to find it."

Some helpful questions we might ask of ourselves and our parishes are:

- Is lifelong adult faith formation at the core of your planning and resources?
- Are catechetical efforts placed within the context of evangelizing the baptized?
- Are programs centered on conversion to Christ and our Catholic faith?
- Does your parish promote evangelization and adult formation through renewal programs and hospitality?
- Does the parish reach out to inactive Catholics and newcomers of various ethnicities?
- Do you encourage training and leadership development for the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults and other adult faith coordinators?

The work of evangelization and adult faith formation is never done. Both require a lifelong process of ongoing faith development. We also need Catholics to evangelize and animate our Catholic faith. The challenge is to make adult faith formation and evangelization a priority.

(John Valenti is the associate director for evangelization and catechesis for the archdiocese's Office of Catholic Education.) †

Photo by Mary Ann Wyand



Tyler James, a Special Religious Education participant at St. Simon the Apostle Parish in Indianapolis, holds his baptismal candle as Father Daniel Staublin, pastor of St. Malachy Parish in Brownsburg, watches with Tyler's parents, Dr. Nettie Viera and Richard James, during the archdiocesan SPRED Mass on April 27 at St. Mark the Evangelist Church in Indianapolis.

'A direct line to God'

SPRED program catechizes people with developmental disabilities

By Mary Ann Wyand

Ten-year-old Tyler James was excited about his baptism during the archdiocesan Special Religious Education program Mass on April 27 at St. Mark the Evangelist Church in Indianapolis.

Tyler participates in the SPRED Group at St. Simon the Apostle Parish in Indianapolis, and his parents, Dr. Nettie Viera and Richard James, were hopeful that he would understand the meaning of the sacrament.

Smiling, Tyler asked questions as Father Daniel Staublin guided him through the rite of baptism. He was curious about the baptismal font, held very still when the holy water was poured on his head, joyfully accepted the lit candle that represents the light of Christ, and said "thank you" to the priest.

His parents were overjoyed that their son, who has developmental disabilities, was able to be received into the Church.

As pastor of St. Malachy Parish in Brownsburg, Father Staublin enjoys participating in the archdiocesan SPRED ministry of faith sharing and symbolic catechesis, which prepares people with special needs to receive the sacraments of

baptism, reconciliation and the Eucharist.

During his homily at the SPRED Mass, Father Staublin reminded everyone that Jesus will always be with us.

"No matter where we wander, Jesus is always in the crowd, always with us," Father Staublin said. "He sent his Spirit to be with us. So every time we might feel like we're a little lost or

a little alone or we're not sure where we are, all we have to do is look through the eyes of faith and that Spirit of God will show itself, usually in other people. Maybe it's our Mom or Dad or brothers or sisters or the people we live with. God is always there, and it is that Spirit that we receive in baptism, ... that Spirit and presence of God that is always with us. So we don't have to be afraid. We don't have to be alone."

—Roni Wyld

Father George Plaster, pastor of St. Mark Parish, ministered to people with developmental disabilities at the former St. Vincent New Hope in Indianapolis for 10 years and celebrated Mass there weekly when he served as a hospital chaplain.

He said the SPRED Mass "brings back memories" because he got to see some old friends who used to live at New Hope.

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'Our [SPRED] friends have such a deep faith. They are so honest and open and trusting. They know that God loves them. They will tell you that God loves you.'

Adult faith formation programs helps Catholics evangelize

By John Shaughnessy

Lynn Hansen remembers how desperate the woman was, how she longed to embrace a faith that could make a difference in her life.

As Hansen listened to the woman share her story and her struggles, the director of religious education at St. John the Apostle Parish in Bloomington saw the connection to her own search for faith—and how Catholics led Hansen to the Church and to the feeling that she had "finally made it home."

For Hansen, born into a Presbyterian family, there was a defining moment from her childhood when her mother was struggling for her life in a Catholic hospital.

"I was too young to go to my mom's room so I had to stay in the waiting room with my younger brother," she recalls. "There was a statue of St. Francis in the waiting room. This [religious] sister came over and asked me if I was OK. She asked if I knew who that statue was. She told me that St. Francis is watching over me and

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Submitted photo



During an adult faith formation event on April 24 at St. Bartholomew Parish in Columbus, Kathy Davis-Shanks, right, a pastoral associate at the parish, speaks with, from left, Greg Andrews, who was received into the full communion of the Church at the parish at the Easter Vigil; Isabel Hernandez, a member of the parish; and her husband, Enrique Hernandez, who was also received into the full communion of the Church during the Easter Vigil.

25 Ways to Evangelize



Prayer

- † Pray every day that God will inspire all members of the Church to proclaim the Gospel in their thoughts, words and deeds wherever they live and work.
- † Pray for courage, wisdom and opportunities to evangelize.
- † Pray in public when you are eating at a restaurant. Don't be shy to let people see you make the Sign of the Cross.
- † Pray with your children or grandchildren.
- † Pray for priests, deacons, religious and the lay faithful proclaiming the Gospel in "the missions," i.e., in lands where the Church does not yet exist.



Everyday Life

- † Ask God to help you accept your daily crosses willingly and with a smile. Approaching our ordinary annoyances in this way may very well make others turn their heads, raise their eyebrows and ask you why you're different.
- † Make your home for those who you welcome there a faith-filled place by displaying religious objects (crucifixes, pictures of the saints, etc.) in prominent locations.
- † Show sincere care for another person.
- † Be a bearer of Good News.
- † Do your best, with the grace that God provides, in your vocation and in your career.

Study and Renewal

- † Read the Bible every day.
- † Read the *U.S. Catechism for Adults*. Better yet, start a study group at your parish.
- † Learn more about your faith through programs at your parish, books, the Internet and Catholic radio or television.
- † Renew your faith by getting involved in Cursillo, going on a retreat or experiencing a Christ Renews His Parish weekend in your faith community.
- † Build up a home library of Catholic pamphlets, books, recordings, videos and DVDs, and share them with people who could benefit from them.



Works of Charity

- † Support missionaries with financial contributions.
- † Help a neighbor in need by bringing them meals when they are sick or are bringing home a new baby and help them with yard work or shoveling sidewalks and driveways.
- † Volunteer at a soup kitchen, homeless shelter, crisis pregnancy center or local chapter of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul.
- † Visit the sick or help with a jail ministry, "for I was ... ill and you cared for me, a prisoner and you visited me" (Mt 25:36).
- † "Your light must shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your heavenly Father" (Mt 5:16).

Speaking and Listening

- † After renewing your faith or learning more about it, be willing to speak about it when faith matters come up in conversations with friends, relatives or co-workers.
- † When appropriate, tell others a story about how your faith in Christ has made a real and positive difference in your life.
- † "Always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope, but do it with gentleness and reverence" (1 Pt 3:15).
- † Listen attentively and compassionately to co-workers who talk with you about personal or family problems. If appropriate, offer to pray for them and/or with them.
- † If a friend, relative or co-worker tells you about something good that has happened in his or her life, say with simplicity and with a smile on your face, "Thanks be to God" or "Praise God."



SPRED

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"It was very heartwarming," Father Plaster said of the liturgy attended by about 170 SPRED friends, family members, catechists and guests. "The people's faith is very sincere," he said. "It's really an honor to be able to host this special liturgy. I believe those who are called to this ministry [as volunteer catechists] must receive many graces and blessings so they're able to help people who are in need of special religious education."

St. Mark parishioner Mike Risch, who has Down syndrome, enjoys participating in SPRED liturgies, retreats, faith-sharing groups and social activities. He helped with the Mass as a hospitality minister.

"It made me happy," Risch said, to welcome people to his parish and watch as Tyler was baptized in the Catholic faith.

Looking at his small, gold crucifix pin on his tie, Risch said, "I like to wear it for Jesus."

Twelve parishes in central and

southern Indiana host SPRED Groups.

St. Paul Parish in Tell City has offered this ministry for 30 years.

St. Malachy Parish in Brownsburg and St. Pius X Parish in Indianapolis began SPRED Groups 10 years ago.

St. Louis Parish in Batesville, St. Thomas More Parish in Mooresville and the Richmond Catholic Community also host SPRED Groups.

In Indianapolis, people with developmental disabilities may also participate in SPRED at St. Andrew the Apostle, St. Monica, Holy Spirit, St. Luke the Evangelist, St. Mark the Evangelist and St. Simon the Apostle parishes.

Roni Wyld, coordinator of the 10-year-old SPRED ministry for the archdiocesan Office of Catholic Education, said the program provides faith sharing, symbolic catechesis and sacramental preparation for children from age 6 and adults.

"People with developmental disabilities have all different levels of abilities," Wyld explained. "We celebrate our friends' abilities. ... We pair them with [volunteer] companions and use symbolic catechesis. We start with symbols from everyday life and proceed from that. We meet with our friends at the parishes twice a month through the school year. We have a reading from the Gospels, share a faith message with every person and use motions with songs."

During liturgies, she said, "we slow the Mass down a little bit so it's easier for people to stay with us."

Wyld said she feels the presence of the Holy Spirit in this beautiful, inclusive ministry for the multifaceted body of Christ.

"Our [SPRED] friends have such a deep faith," she said. "They are so honest and open and trusting. They know that God loves them. They will tell you that God loves you. They will tell you that they love you. They bring you into their world of purity and holiness. It's like a direct line to God."

SPRED participants enjoy sharing their faith, Wyld said, and know how to

Photos by Mary Ann Wyland



St. Monica parishioner and SPRED participant Linda Palmer of Indianapolis brings the offertory gifts to Father Daniel Staublin, principal celebrant, during the archdiocesan SPRED Mass on April 27 at St. Mark the Evangelist Church in Indianapolis. Father George Plaster, pastor of St. Mark Parish, and Father Gerald Kirkhoff, pastor of St. Pius X Parish in Indianapolis, were concelebrants. Benedictine Sister Mary Emma Jochum, director of religious education at St. Paul Parish in Tell City, said Father Joseph Kern was responsible for starting the first SPRED ministry in the archdiocese at the Tell City parish 30 years ago. Roni Wyld, SPRED coordinator, watches Palmer.



St. Mark the Evangelist parishioner and SPRED participant Mike Risch of Indianapolis welcomes people to St. Mark Church on April 27 for the archdiocesan SPRED Mass. St. Mark parishioner and SPRED participant John McGee, left, also hands out liturgy guides.

evangelize others. They invite their friends with developmental disabilities to SPRED Group activities, and many of their guests later join the Church.

Wyld hopes more parishes will begin SPRED Groups to serve people of all ages with special religious education needs.

"We all have disabilities," she said.

"Some of us just wear them on the outside. Some of us

have them on the inside. This is the family of God. This is the body of Christ. ... Every single person has a gift to share. It doesn't matter about their ability or disability."

St. Pius X parishioners Joe and Jan Stetzel of Indianapolis are grateful that their 36-year-old daughter, Jenny, is able to participate in the SPRED ministry.



St. Luke the Evangelist parishioner and SPRED participant Chris Foy, from left, dances with St. Monica parishioner and SPRED participant John Lorton, St. Pius X pastoral associate Beth Reitz, St. Monica parishioner and SPRED participant Jackie Wilson, and St. Monica parishioner and catechist Ken Blankenberger, all of Indianapolis, during the April 12 dinner dance at the Marten House in Indianapolis. The fundraiser benefited the archdiocesan Special Religious Education program.

"I think children and adults with special needs are so close to God anyway," Jan Stetzel said, "but helping them understand and appreciate their faith is so important."

(For information about the archdiocesan SPRED program, call Roni Wyld at 317-236-1448 or 800-382-9836, ext. 1448.) †

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he'll always watch over me."

There were also the times as an adult when Catholics influenced her, from the devout faith of a dentist she worked for to the caring example of her neighbors who were Catholic.

"There was something drawing me constantly to becoming a Catholic," Hansen, 53, recalls. "When I was 44, all the pieces fell into place. I think it was the Holy Spirit telling me it was time."

Hansen shares her own story of becoming a Catholic to show the different ways that Catholics can help draw others to the faith. She notes that adult faith formation programs can be effective in evangelization.

"Obviously, the more one knows about a subject, the more comfortable and confident one will be in discussing that subject with others," Hansen says. "What seems more important than comfort and perhaps even more important than confidence, however, is desire. I think a good adult faith formation program can pique interest and thus stimulate desire—the desire to know Jesus and the fullness of his truth as well as the desire to spread

the Good News."

The leaders of adult faith formation programs in the archdiocese realize that process can take time.

"At first, people aren't willing to open up, but once you get them to do it, it makes it easier to share their faith with others," says Barbara Black, the pastoral associate at Sacred Heart of Jesus Parish in Terre Haute and the director of religious education at St. Benedict Parish in Terre Haute.

Black has seen the power of small faith-sharing groups at Sacred Heart Parish in the past 10 years.

"Some of them had the courage to get up and give 'witness' talks to the community," Black says.

"This Lent, we had retreats once a week. When we were getting near the end, they wanted to keep meeting because it was filling a need. We had one person who came who was not Catholic. One of the people took her under her wing and fostered her. We're hoping she might come into the Church next year."

Even as Catholics become more

comfortable in evangelizing, they shouldn't press people to join the faith, say the leaders of these programs.

"Be positive and open-minded," advises Kathy Davis-Shanks, a pastoral associate in charge of adult faith formation and pastoral care at St. Bartholomew Parish in Columbus. "Be loving and kind because that

'I think a good adult faith formation program can pique interest and thus stimulate desire—the desire to know Jesus and the fullness of his truth as well as the desire to spread the Good News.'

—Lynn Hansen

opens the door for a much better conversation. Actions speak volumes, too."

Black and Hansen agree.

"Once you see them opening up, you have to help them, but give them time," Black says. "A lot of it is just the work of the Holy Spirit. We offer what we can and trust the Spirit to do the rest."

Hansen recalls the space and the care that Catholics gave her as she tried to decide to join the faith.

"If it wasn't right for me, they were still praying for me," Hansen says.

She uses that same approach as she guides people involved in the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults programs.

"I see a little bit of myself in them," she

says. "I see the longing, the confusion, the hunger and the thirst, and the frustration. I tell them they're on the right path. It's normal to have questions, to be a little bit scared, a little bit confused. When I finally came into the Church, I finally made it home."

She helped create the same feeling of home in the Church for the woman who is mentioned at the beginning of this story, the woman struggling to find a faith she could embrace.

"She spoke carefully at first, but was very open and honest about her past and her struggle," Hansen says. "As truths were revealed to her and old ideas disproved, she began to blossom. Since she came into full communion with the Church, she has taken on a variety of tasks in and around the parish as well as evangelizing to all she encounters in her daily work. She truly let Jesus into her heart and soul. You can actually see him in her."

For Hansen, it's just continuing the work of others who led her to become a Catholic.

"It's very life-giving to me," she says. "That's what we're called to do. There are many ways to do that. You don't have to go in the middle of town and preach. Invite them to church with you. Invite them to other functions. Don't hide your faith. Just live it." †

'Love in action'

All Catholics are called to evangelize in their everyday lives

By Leslie Lynch
Special to The Criterion



Leslie Lynch

Evangelization. The word, all by itself, provokes anxiety in many Catholics. We may conjure up images of going forth in pairs to knock on doors or hand out religious tracts on street corners. If this is our frame of reference, it is no surprise that many Catholics do not feel an urge to "evangelize."

Coming to terms

According to the *American Heritage Dictionary*, to evangelize means to spread the Gospel. Note that responsibility for conversion is not assigned to the evangelizer. But the expectation of action of some sort is. The evangelizer is simply the worker who labors to fulfill Christ's mission.

The good news, especially for those of us who are shy or introverted, is that the Catholic Church does not require a "soapbox" approach to evangelization.

The Church provides open arms, room for questions and searching, and a place of solace and comfort for those in pain. The Church takes seriously Jesus' challenge to feed the hungry, to care for those in need, without attaching a condition of

conversion.

The Church encourages us to follow the model of St. Francis of Assisi, who, when asked to demonstrate his preaching method, went about his daily business of interacting with others in a spirit of love and humility. When one of his followers expressed disappointment about his lack of "preaching," St. Francis said, "Go forth and preach the Gospel—and when necessary, use words."

Most of us are comfortable with this approach. We use our time, talents and treasure to serve our families, our parishes and our communities. We pitch in to help those who have experienced misfortune or tragedy. We volunteer at soup kitchens, as catechists, as lay ministers.

This is, indeed, "preaching the Gospel," and we each must examine our conscience daily to see what more we can do: a smile, a kind word, an angry retort reined in, engaging in a new—and possibly uncomfortable—act of charity, saying "yes" to the Holy Spirit's nudging to attend a retreat, living our vocation with fidelity and perseverance, forgiving those who have wronged us, and forgiving ourselves.

We are charged to continue our own conversion through an ongoing practice of evaluating our motives and actions, of examining our consciences.

Building a base of knowledge

Let's carry this a step further. This step may be uncomfortable for some of us.

Do we share our faith freely in our social situations outside our families and our parishes? Are we comfortable with speaking to non-Catholics or, for that matter, Catholics outside of Church settings, about matters of faith? Does



In this file photo, Holy Trinity parishioner Barbara Piere of Edinburgh helps Lilia Perez improve her English language skills during a class at the parish in 2004. A key part of evangelization is seeing the presence of God in others and acting in a loving way toward them.

peer pressure intimidate us, causing us to hesitate or keep our opinion private? If so, perhaps an inadequate understanding of our own faith is a culprit. As adults, we are obliged to further our faith formation. Beyond weekly Mass, do we take advantage of parish programs such as Bible study, catechism study and faith-sharing groups? How about deanery programs or local retreat centers?

Myriads of programs are available, many at little or no cost. Our Church wants to minister to us, and that's an avenue of evangelization in its own right.

But if we don't ask, if we don't seek to deepen our understanding, we risk hampering our spiritual growth with youthful memories of our faith that may be immature or even skewed.

If we don't take responsibility for our continuing faith formation, we set ourselves up to fall victim to beliefs that the Church rejects as flawed. We need to know enough about our own faith to stand firm when faced with erroneous tenets.

Bloom where you are planted

Another way of looking at evangelization is the old adage to "bloom where you are planted." God has given us gifts and passions, and has placed us in different circles of people where we have a singular sphere of influence. Our distinctive ways of interacting, our own view of the world—these cannot be duplicated and are gifts that we are called to use in God's service.

Even if we are in an environment where God is not apparent, we are charged to bring our witness, our light, our values into it. We may never know the end result of

our stone dropped into a still pond, but the ripples go on and on.

Evangelization calls each of us to look at others through the eyes of God, to see Jesus in those around us and to minister to the needs of those whose paths intersect ours—and to do so without judging them.

If we keep in mind that evangelization is God-focused and God-serving, it becomes much clearer and much easier to accomplish. We allow ourselves to be the tool he uses to touch others in a way we may never know or understand to allow God to touch that person's soul and ours.

Evangelization is a loving response to God's goodness to us, and we embrace it by way of respectful dialogue (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, #856). We plant the seed, nurture it or harvest the fruit—whatever role God has given to us.

In any case, the Holy Spirit does the work and the person involved is the only one who can accept or reject the challenge of conversion. Keep in mind that the conversion sought by God in any given situation may well be our own!

Jesus challenges us to step out of our comfort zone. At times, this requires courage and sacrifice, but mostly it requires fidelity to God. Evangelization is at the core of the two great commandments of our faith—to love God with all our heart, soul and might, and to love our neighbor as ourselves. How, then, can we not share the Gospel?

Evangelization is simply another word for love—love in action.

(Leslie Lynch is a member of St. Mary Parish in Lanesville.) †

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In this file photo, Our Lady of the Greenwood parishioners Brittany and Ariel Doucette and their 1-year-old daughter, Anastasia, of Indianapolis enjoy family time in their home in 2005. Often, we can share the Gospel most effectively with those people, such as friends and relatives, that God has placed in our lives.