



2024 Evangelization Supplement

An outreach of hope and love: Mother of three works to lead inner-city youths to Christ

By John Shaughnessy

Life is sometimes touched with moments that give us more than we hoped for.

Catherine Ord experienced such a moment as she led a group of teenagers and young adults from Vagabond Missions in Indianapolis on a camping trip to the Indiana Dunes National Park last summer.

For many of the teenagers, the trip gave them an up-close view of the wonders of nature that they hadn't seen before, including the stunning sand dunes and the vastness of Lake Michigan. It was also a momentary escape from the reality of the struggles and challenges of their lives—of being from broken homes, of growing up poor, of living in neighborhoods marked by violence, of needing someone to believe in them.

Ord—a 41-year-old mother of three—also wanted to bring the youths closer to God on the trip, so she shared parts of her Catholic faith with them and gave them journals to write down their thoughts about life and God—which led to the moment that gave her more than she hoped for.

One of the youths approached Ord and asked if she could share her thoughts with the group.

“She reflected on how much she had doubted that God could love her or was present in her life,” Ord recalls. “Yet, just through this experience of being part of this group, she said she was able to see that God did love her and he was real.”

“Those are big moments that you don't normally get to hear young people articulate. She had been struggling and had a lot of different things going on in her home life. So, for her to be able to get away, have some silence and have

some perspective was really a beautiful confirmation for me that the Lord is working through all the many people who are showing up to be there for her and the others.”

‘The way we live out our faith’

Ord has been leading that effort on the near east side of Indianapolis for the past two years as the area director of Vagabond Missions, a national Catholic organization that strives to “share the Gospel with inner-city teenagers,” to bring Christ to “people outside the walls of the Church.”

Working from the bases of St. Philip Neri Parish and Arsenal Technical High School, Ord primarily reaches out to students from the Indianapolis Public Schools.

“We're here to serve a group of people who are in so much need of knowing Jesus is in their lives,” she says. “We want to create a pathway for those kids who might be more on the margins or who might be struggling and really need to know Jesus because they don't have any family bringing that hope into their life.”

She shares the telling story of one of the youths in the group.

“I was driving her home,” Ord recalls. “She had just been kicked out of her house, so we were grabbing her stuff and trying to find her a new place to live. She said she keeps making the same mistakes over and over and everyone in her life has given up on her. She feels the only place she feels love is with this community that we've built up. As a mom, my heart just breaks for the experiences she's had and also knowing she is still struggling.”

That leads to another story about the kind of challenges the youths in the group face—and Ord's commitment to them.

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During a recent weekend retreat at the archdiocese's Catholic Youth Organization's Camp Ramasa in Brown County, the group from Vagabond Missions in Indianapolis also participated in a Saturday evening Mass at St. Agnes Church in Nashville. Here, the group poses for a photo outside the church. (Submitted photo)

Evangelizing through the tradition of the family Sunday dinner

By Anita Bardo

When we talk about traditions, we often think about customs, practices and stories from the past that are handed on through generations.



In the Catholic faith, our traditions hold a rich history that has been passed down over time. Growing up, these traditions were taught to us, such as going to Mass, saying our prayers and learning how to behave in church. These practices are important as they connect us to our heritage and help us carry on the values of our faith.

I can remember attending first holy Communion and confirmation classes where I learned about these traditions of faith. I found it valuable to learn and understand the significance of these sacraments in my religious journey.

In my family, traditions are highly valued, especially our “Sunday Dinner” tradition. We always eat together at the same time around the same table without question. It's a special time where we pray together and engage in meaningful conversations about our week. This tradition has created strong bonds and beautiful memories that I

cherish dearly.

Maintaining a timeless tradition, my family—including the extended members, children and grandchildren—continues to uphold the practice of gathering for a weekly Sunday dinner. Every Sunday, my mother ensures this event takes place consistently at the same time.

An incredible aspect of this tradition is our circle time before the meal, where each member, from the youngest to the oldest, joins in raising their hands for the familiar prayer, thanking the Lord for the food we are about to eat: “Bless us, O Lord and these thy gifts, which we are about to receive from thy bounty, through Christ our Lord. Amen.” My dad included this beautiful addition, “Whether we eat or drink, let it all be for the glory and honor of God. Amen.”

This is a chance for us to pause and think about our words before we eat. It brings us joy, and gratitude for our togetherness. As our family gathers for a meal or a special occasion, bonds strengthen, communication improves and love never fails.

The time spent sharing about our highlights and challenges from the past week, as well as our plans for the upcoming week, is a way for our family to connect and support each other through talking, listening and offering prayers.

This, to me, is family evangelizing. It helps us to strengthen our bond and show how we care for one another as we navigate through the week ahead.

Building stronger families involves investing more in each other and our communities by being authentically ourselves.

While it may be challenging to discuss someone's personal journey, forming strong relationships is crucial. By being genuine and open in our interactions, we can create a foundation of trust and mutual support within our families. These connections help us navigate life's ups and downs together, encouraging strength and love within our family units.

“Sunday Dinners” are not very common these days, but they are important for families. Spending time together and talking about our week is a special time for us to connect. Teaching our children about the value of family and sharing meals together—just as Jesus did with the Apostles—is a form of evangelization worth passing down through generations.

In this Evangelization Supplement, we'll look at evangelization within families, as well as in parishes and through apostolates.

(Anita Bardo is coordinator of the archdiocesan Office of Evangelization and Discipleship.) †



Parents place trust in God's help in passing faith on to children

By Sean Gallagher

"You have asked to have your child baptized. In doing so, you are accepting the responsibility of training him/her in the practice of the faith. It will be your duty to bring him/her up to keep God's commandments as Christ taught us, by loving God and our neighbor.

"Do you clearly understand what you are undertaking?"

These words are part of the Church's Rite of Baptism for One Child and reflect the Church's belief that the family is a privileged place of evangelization.

Parents who bring children to the Church for baptism listen to this frank description of the duty they're taking on to pass the faith on to their children and respond to the question.

Two archdiocesan families who spoke recently with *The Criterion* have had this question put to them 10 times in the baptism of their children.

In the intervening 11 years since the oldest of the children was baptized, they've learned a lot about what it means to train their children in the practice of the faith and how to keep God's commandments. In the process, they've found that they've grown in their own faith as well.

An invitation to trust God

Andy and Rachel Miller, members of St. Barnabas Parish in Indianapolis, are the parents of Tobias, 10, Blaise, 8, and Silas, 5. Patrick and Meagan Verhiley, members of St. Jude Parish in Indianapolis, are the parents of Erin, 11, John Paul, 10, Rocco, 8, Louis, 7, Damian, 4, James, 2, and Teresa Clare, 2 months.

Looking back on the question from the Rite of Baptism, Andy and Rachel felt from the start that it was not so much a heavy burden placed on their shoulders as it was an invitation to place their trust in God.

"I knew very clearly that my duty was to not think I had it all figured out," Andy said. "My duty was to ask God every day to reveal to me how to love and train his children that he entrusted me to care for."

"Teaching the faith to children constantly changes and evolves with many variables," Rachel added. "A conversation or model in one situation may not work under different circumstances. Ultimately, I entrust my kids first to Jesus and allow him, as the ultimate teacher, to bear fruit."

Both families make the practice of the faith an integral part of their daily lives. They pray together at home in the morning, at meals and at bedtime, at their parish churches and at adoration chapels.

They also help their children see the blessings and challenges of daily family life from the perspective of their faith.

"With five boys between the ages of 2 and 9, you can imagine we practice forgiveness quite a bit," Patrick said. "As the children have gotten older, we have talked a lot about the importance of relationships with others, especially with those who are difficult to get along with or those different from ourselves.

"We explain to the older kids that to be Catholic means treating everyone with respect and trying to see the good within them."

'To love and nurture kids in their faith'

While Andy takes seriously his duty to form his sons in the faith, he has been impressed by the witness of Gospel values they have given to him.

Once Tobias helped reconcile his two younger brothers when there was a dispute between them. Another time, Blaise on his own visited a neighbor whose husband had died to see how she was doing—Blaise was 5 at the time. And once, when Andy was going to take a splinter out of Silas' foot, his son asked him to pray the Hail Mary with him first.

"I can't make these things up," Andy said. "The love, patience, understanding, care, affection, tenderness and curiosity of these children blow me away."

For her part, Rachel has learned that caring for her own faith is vital to passing it on to her children.

"In order to love and nurture the kids in their faith, I need to model and do the spiritual work myself," she said. "For me, this means time away from the home in the form of annual retreats."

Patrick spoke of the value of his children's youthful enthusiasm for the faith.

"When the children ask questions, it reveals a certain curiosity about them that we may not have anymore," he said. "Sometimes there are routines that we have created, and their excitement for it sometimes reminds us to stick to the routines even when we may not want to do it. Their enthusiasm for aspects of the faith is contagious."

'We rely on his graces to guide us'

That youthful enthusiasm can also be a challenge to the parents.

"Our children oftentimes make us better people



The Verhiley family poses on May 5 at St. Jude Church in Indianapolis. They are, from left, in the front row, Damian, Louis, Rocco and John Paul. In the back row, James, Meagan, Erin, Patrick and Teresa Clare. (Submitted photo)

because they have a way of holding us accountable to the things in life that are most important," Meagan said. "For me, my faith has most come alive ... as a parent than ever before."

This continual nurturing of their own faith and their children's faith will remain an important task for both sets of parents in the years to come as their young children enter their teenage years.

"The older we get, the more we realize that it takes a village," Patrick said. "We are surrounded by amazing priests, parish and school staff, teachers, coaches and friends who help guide us and assist us in raising our kids in the faith."

"It's truly humbling to admit how fast the years seem to be going," Rachel said. "Each season brings new excitement and also new difficulties. The choices that we make today are already shaping those next seasons.

"My hope is that creating an environment of trust in simple conversations now will remain open and grow as more complex conversations arise. Through it all, it helps to remember that our kids are entrusted to God, and we rely on his graces to guide us through."

Living 'a Christ-like life'

Both sets of parents see their parish communities as integral in carrying out their task of evangelizing their children. They also view their families as real embodiments of the domestic Church.

Patrick in particular looks to a description of the early Church in the Acts of the Apostles: "They devoted themselves to the teaching of the Apostles and to the communal life, to the breaking of the bread and to the prayers. ... All who believed were together and had all things in common" (Acts 2:42, 44).

"We seek to experience the generosity of God and also to practice being generous with each other in our actions and our words," Patrick said. "We are our own little community. We pray together, eat meals together, we recognize we each have certain gifts and that we use those gifts for the betterment of the whole."

Both sets of parents also recognize that the ideals of the life of the Church can be hard to live out at times.

"The Church is a wonderful idea operated by sinful and broken people who I believe are all trying their best, just like we are in our family," said Andy. "We have ideals, but we are not perfect."

Each day in the life of the family is one more opportunity, though, for each member to work with the help of God's grace to live out those ideals better than they did the day before.



Andy and Rachel Miller pose on April 27 at St. Barnabas Parish in Indianapolis with their three sons, Tobias, left, Blaise and Silas. (Photo by Sean Gallagher)

"In our domestic Church, we first seek to live a Christ-like life with each other," Rachel said. "It becomes a practice field where we are constantly learning to love more and growing in faith. At times, the work bears fruit and we are able to name the graces more easily than others."

"All of this is a process and a challenge to practice," Meagan noted. "It's a daily conversion and we have to recommit each day. It's hard to have a prayer life, to be Christ-like, to give our time and talents. There are times when it is easy, and times that are really challenging." †



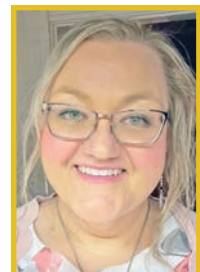
Parishes find creative ways to ‘evangelize naturally’ in local communities

By Natalie Hoefler

Parishes are called to evangelize—spread the good news of Christ—within their local community.

That call, though, is not accomplished by an “entity.” And it cannot be the sole work of the pastor or a team of people.

“We’re all called to be priest, prophet and king,” says Melissa Fronckowiak, director of faith formation, communications and youth ministry at St. Gabriel Parish in Connersville and St. Bridget of Ireland Parish in Liberty.



Melissa Fronckowiak

“So, what does that mean in terms of spreading the Gospel?”

The answer is wider, easier and more natural than just the door-to-door or preaching-on-the-corner approach.

This article looks at how St. Bridget, St. Gabriel and

St. Therese of the Infant Jesus (Little Flower) Parish in Indianapolis help parishioners—to use Fronckowiak’s words—“evangelize naturally.”

‘Beacons of hope in the community’

In 2019, the same year St. Bridget and St. Gabriel were linked, a two-fold campaign began. The first aspect was physical, raising funds for three building projects on St. Gabriel’s campus. The effort was called Building a Beacon of Hope.

The second portion of the campaign affected both parishes: a spiritual campaign called Being a Beacon of Hope in Our Community.

“It’s also about us going out into the community and fostering the idea of bringing the light of Christ to others and welcoming the community to our campuses in a way that allows the light of Christ to shine,” Fronckowiak explains. “It’s being people who make others say, ‘I see this person has joy, and I want that. How do I get that?’ And for us, that’s the Catholic Church and our parishes.”

One way that members of the two parishes are invited to “go out into the community” is through a card ministry.

“They make cards and send them to everyone on our prayer list—and there are people on the list from all over the country and in the military,” says Fronckowiak. “We try to get their contact information at least once a month to send them a card. If there’s a specific known issue, the card is made personal. Otherwise, it’s just uplifting messages and Scripture.”

Members of St. Gabriel figuratively “go out into the community” by inviting specific people in the community to dinner. The parish is one of five Connersville faith communities that offers a meal to those in need on an assigned Sunday.

“A church group, the youth group or a school group will host it, or a group of families,” Fronckowiak says.

“One thing our parish does differently from the other churches, we pray with [those being served] before the meal, and we sit with them and eat and build those relationships. I’ve seen people there who eventually joined RCIA [Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults] or came to church.”

A unique effort started by a group of parishioners at St. Bridget takes a different shape—the shape of a cross.

Each month, they attach prayer cards with the parish address to pocket-size wooden crosses. The final products are offered to parishioners on the first Sunday of the month.

“Some fill up a basket with them and give them to a local business to make them available,” says Fronckowiak. “Parishioners can give them out to people in the community and say, ‘I feel called to give this to you. You don’t have to come to Mass—this is just for your comfort.’ It’s that tangible handing over the peace of Christ.”

The goal for the linked parishes is to help the members become “evangelizing disciples,” says Fronckowiak.

“It’s not so much parishioners having to go out and preach, but giving them tools so they can evangelize naturally and be those beacons of hope in the community.”

‘We want people to see Christ in us’

Fronckowiak noted that the word evangelization “is, unfortunately, not popular. People picture in their mind the people that stand on a corner and preach.”

Cindy Woods of St. Therese of the Infant Jesus (Little Flower) Parish in Indianapolis agrees with her assessment.

That’s why, when the parish formed an evangelization team with Woods as the chair, “We called it the Invite Commission, so it doesn’t sound as scary,” she says.

The commission was formed to “encourage and equip Little Flower parishioners to invite the unchurched, reconnect former Catholics, and share the good news by personally responding to Jesus’ invitation to ‘Follow me’ ” (Mt 16:24), according to its mission statement.

To accomplish this mission, the Invite Commission is split into two parts: an outreach group and a faith formation group.

“We knew if we [and fellow parishioners] were going to evangelize and talk about the faith, we had to know about our faith,” says Woods of the faith formation aspect.

Through that group, the parish offered a 27-week ChristLife program to parishioners two years in a row. ChristLife “equips Catholics for the essential work of evangelization so that all people might personally encounter Jesus Christ and be transformed into his missionary disciples,” according to the organization’s website.

The faith formation group also coordinates Bible studies and offers learning opportunities through Ascension Press and Formed, a Catholic subscription site.

The outreach portion of the Invite Commission provides opportunities for the parish to interact with and help the local community as a means of actively sharing Christ with others.

For instance, the parish hosts a neighborhood gathering on National Night Out in August, a national effort to build safer communities by getting to know local residents.

“We advertise to attract our neighbors

to the event,” says Woods. “We have free food, drinks, singers, food trucks and free school supplies. We pass out Catholic materials, walk around and just talk to people. We want people to see Christ in us.”

The group also hosts a neighborhood food drive for nearby Shepherd Community Church of the Nazarene to support its Saturday Morning Food Pantry and Shepherd Kitchen.

“Hungry is hungry, and they have the means to serve a lot of [local] people in need,” says Woods.

“They drop off a big bus at our church, and people from the parish and the neighborhood bring food, hygiene products, pet food. We really pack the bus!”

Ideas and opportunities abound for inviting neighbors to witness Christ at the parish, she adds. Neighborhood movie nights, a cookout with free school supplies, inviting parishioners to make and “anonymously” distribute Easter baskets and Christmas ornaments throughout the neighborhood with the parish’s Mass times—these are just a few of the events the outreach group has initiated.

Even the parish’s summer festival is seen as an opportunity to evangelize through “inviting.”

“The Invite Commission has a table at both entrances at the festival,” says Woods. “We offer people a chain with a crucifix, and most say yes. We ask if we can pray for them and would they like more information on Little Flower. This year, we’ll have rosaries and other free Catholic stuff. The whole interaction takes only 10 to 15 seconds.”

Woods is thankful for the creation of the Invite Commission and the support it receives from Father Robert Gilday, the parish’s pastor.

“We really feel like the Holy Spirit is leading us,” she says.

“How do we know if we do any good? We don’t. We can’t look at it like numbers. You never know which person was touched and who you made a difference to.” †



Members of St. Gabriel Parish in Connersville prepare a dinner to be shared with those in need in the local community in this photo from March 2023. While it is a charitable effort, it also serves as an opportunity to evangelize, sharing Christ’s love and good news as the parishioners eat with those being served. (Submitted photo)



Terre Haute Deanery Catholics ‘share love of Jesus’ through St. Paul Street Evangelization

By Natalie Hoefler

Ten years ago, Joan Caldwell felt a call to share with others about Christ and the truth and beauty of the Catholic faith. But her parish at the time did not have an evangelization team.

So, she “waited for the Holy Spirit to give some guidance.”

Then she saw a YouTube video about the Catholic apostolate St. Paul Street Evangelization (SPSE).



Joan Caldwell

“It looked so peaceful and non-confrontational,” says Caldwell, who is now a member of St. Patrick Parish in Terre Haute. “I thought, ‘This is something I can do.’”

What started as a group of volunteers from one parish now includes seven members from four parishes in the Terre Haute Deanery: Annunciation Parish in Brazil, Sacred Heart Parish in Clinton, and St. Patrick and St. Joseph University parishes, both in Terre Haute.

Together, through the “peaceful and non-confrontational” St. Paul Street Evangelization method, they help share the good news throughout the deanery.

Listing, praying, giving ‘a word of hope’

That method involves members going to a public location, setting up a table with rosaries, Miraculous Medals, copies of the New Testament and pamphlets, and engaging with passers-by.

“We just started out sitting in front of St. Joseph’s [University Parish] food pantry and handing out rosaries and talking to people and praying with people and just being a presence,” says Caldwell.

Now on any given day that “presence” might be found at the food pantry, the soup kitchen at St. Benedict Parish or on the Indiana State University (ISU) campus—all in Terre Haute—and at local festivals.

The items on the table are “used as

an approach to get people talking about where they are with God,” Caldwell explains.

Initially, she expected to have to do “a lot of explaining the faith. And you do get more of that on the ISU campus—but there isn’t usually a time where someone doesn’t come thank us for our presence there,” she notes.

“But when you’re sitting in front of the food pantry or soup kitchen, it’s more about listening to people’s story, praying with them, giving them a word of hope. It’s about connecting with people and being Christ to them and planting seeds.”

Each time a team goes out, they pray “before, during and after,” says Caldwell. “We ask for our Blessed Mother to be with us, and St. Paul.”

Then it’s a matter of being friendly and engaging with those who pass by.

“We might start with a simple question, like, ‘Would you like a rosary?’” Caldwell says. “If they say yes, then we might say, ‘Did you know it’s an ancient form of prayer?’ or ‘Do you have any questions about what we believe, because there’s a lot of misconceptions out there.’”

“We get them talking, then we let the Holy Spirit guide us.”

‘Any Catholic who loves Jesus can do this’

Caldwell says that, while training is available from SPSE, it is not necessary.

She recalls one time when a team member who was supposed to join her had to cancel. So, she asked a friend to “just come sit at the table with me.” The friend reluctantly agreed.

“I stepped off to the side to talk and pray with a young man who found out he had terminal cancer,” Caldwell recalls. “When I finished and came back to the table, she was talking to some children and passing out rosaries.”

“She said, ‘I thought this was going to be difficult, but it’s so easy—it’s just being friendly.’”

“Any Catholic who loves Jesus can do this.”

Caldwell finds this form of evangelizing “rewarding,” and says it’s



Paul Conches of St. Joseph University Parish in Terre Haute smiles outside of the soup kitchen at St. Patrick Parish in Terre Haute, ready to share the love of Christ to others through St. Paul Street Evangelization. (Submitted photo)

been “wonderful to be able to work together with people from other parishes.”

Even more members would be a gift, she adds.

“Evangelization is so clearly needed, and it’s so important to have our Catholic presence out there,” says Caldwell.

“We’re planting seeds, and we leave it up to God to grow those seeds. We’re not there to argue, but to share the love of Jesus with this culture that really needs it.”

(For more information on St. Paul Street Evangelization, go to streetevangelization.com. For more information about the team in the Terre Haute Deanery, go to tinyurl.com/TerreHauteSPSE or call St. Patrick Parish in Terre Haute at 812-232-8518 and leave a message for Joan Caldwell. For a list of other SPSE teams in Indiana, go to streetevangelization.com/locations.) †

‘They make it cool to love Jesus’: Young adults reach out to youths, leading them closer to God

By John Shaughnessy

The question from the curious children made Cassidy Leonardo smile.

The middle-school students wanted to know what was so important for her to

leave her home and family in California to come to Indiana.

The question gave her just the opening she wanted.

“I told them I felt called by the Lord to serve them and talk to them about the faith and show them who the Lord is,” says the 23-year-old Leonardo. “That intrigued them, and that led to more conversations about the faith.”

Her answer also shows the deep commitment she has as a member of NET (National Evangelization Teams) Ministries, the Minnesota-based organization that strives to help young Catholics “follow Christ and embrace a life of community in the Church.”

During the 2022-23 school year, Leonardo was part of a NET team that served four parishes in the New Albany Deanery: St. Joseph in Corydon, St. Mary in Lanesville, and

St. Augustine and Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, both in Jeffersonville. This year, she is the supervisor for the NET teams for these four parishes, plus a team for St. Simon the Apostle Parish in Indianapolis.

“A lot of my experience last year was connecting with middle-school students,” Leonardo says. “This year, team members go and eat lunch with them at least once a week. We meet with them to have Bible studies, watch videos about the faith, and continue to just walk with them on their journey.”

Leonardo recalls a one-on-one moment that shows the difference that her approach made to a sixth-grade girl.

“Her mom dropped her off at a coffee shop,” Leonardo recalls. “She was really open about where she was in her faith. She started sharing the different struggles she was having. I told her that the Lord is with her, that he’s still there in the midst of her struggles—and that we can continue to pray to him about the struggles we have. It was a really good connection. I could see she saw that God is with her in her struggles—and also in the good moments.”

That one-on-one approach is a great blessing that the NET missionaries provide, according to the parish youth leaders they work with in the New Albany Deanery.

‘Their zeal for the faith is contagious’

“One thing that is the shining star for their ministry is they’re very intentional in meeting the youths. ‘How is your day?’ ‘How have you been doing since we met?’” says Katie Warren, the

director of youth ministry at St. Joseph in Corydon and St. Mary in Lanesville.

“When you’re trying to build a ministry to help youth grow in their faith and make that connection to the Lord, it’s important to have people investing in them, talking to them and answering their questions.”

“Another great thing about the NET missionaries is they’re young. They love Jesus, and they make it cool to love Jesus. Their zeal for the faith is contagious.”

Kyle Naugle also appreciates the efforts of the NET missionaries in his work as the coordinator of youth ministry for St. Augustine and Most Sacred Heart of Jesus parishes in the Catholic community of Jeffersonville.

“One of the best things of having the NET team members is them being the extra hands and feet in the mission here,” Naugle says. “I’m new here, and they’ve been able

to reach a lot of the youth who I haven’t had a chance to encounter yet. It’s made it a lot easier to reach youth that maybe me alone wouldn’t be able to reach.”

One experience shows that impact.

“We had a youth show up at youth night. She was lost, and she had no idea if she was in the right spot,” Naugle recalls. “The missionaries were able to invest time in her, meet with her, have coffee with her, just kind of talk about life with her. Now, she’s become one of my most involved students. It’s been really cool to see her growth and her willingness to try something new and come out of her comfort zone. And her family is involved, too.”

“One of the things I appreciate about them is not only do they work with the youth, but they’re also working with the families. That youth’s mom now makes baked goods for the youth group and comes to a lot of the evenings. The whole family has gotten involved just based on their interactions with a couple of the NET missionaries.”

‘All we’re trying to do is plant seeds of faith’

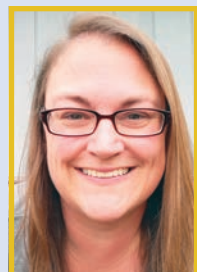
Leonardo says the NET missionaries strive to help youths in their search for what’s true in their lives.

“You see that all the youth are just

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Cassidy Leonardo



Katie Warren



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“Over Thanksgiving break, one of the houses of the girls didn’t have heat, and none of the shelters were open,” she says. “There was a baby in the family. They ended up coming and staying at my family’s house for three days while we were working with social services to get the heat back.”

During that weekend, the readings for Mass included Matthew 25: 35-40, the Gospel reading in which Christ shares that when people feed the hungry and clothe the naked, they’re doing these acts for him as well.

“My daughter who is 11 squeezed my hand and said, ‘That’s what we’re doing this weekend.’ It’s so nice for her to see that what we’re doing as a family is saying yes to God,” Ord says. “That’s made a big difference for me. You want your kids to be in heaven and love God.”

Ord’s husband Chris and their three children—11, 9 and 6—are integral parts of her efforts, too.

“The only reason I’m able to say ‘yes’ and continue to do well in this mission is it’s really a whole family mission,” Ord says. “My husband volunteers with me, my kids are very active. They prepare events and attend events. They know the teens I work with by name, and they’re praying for them. Everyone has bought into this idea that the way we live out our faith is loving our neighbor.

“I feel my kids are seeing their faith alive and active in our home. They’re also getting a chance of evangelizing at a young age.”

Trying to follow in Christ’s footsteps

One overriding goal connects everything Ord is trying to do with the group—including her family’s

commitment, the camping trip to Indiana Dunes, and a recent retreat at the archdiocese’s Catholic Youth Organization’s Camp Rancho Framasa in Brown County—a weekend that included archery, canoeing and exploring the topic of “who Jesus is in our lives.”

“My biggest goal is that we’re able to provide a safe place for young people to discover who God is in their lives and to re-discover their own dignity as a child of God,” she says.

Egypt Moorehead, a member of the group, knows the difference that Ord and Vagabond Missions have made in her life, from providing experiences like the recent camp retreat to sharing her faith.

“The weekend was a great experience,” says Moorehead, who just turned 20. “I loved it. We did archery, canoeing and the high ropes. We went to Mass, and we did prayer through the weekend. Every night ended with our main focus on Jesus, on God.”

“I’m in the process of being accepted into the Church, thanks to Miss Catherine. I love the fact that she’s working with teenagers and young adults to get us closer to God and to help us try to find who we truly are. She got me to get closer to God.”

Toward that hope, Ord has also worked to establish a permanent place for the group to meet, a goal that is in the process of being achieved with the Vagabond Mission Youth Center on Indianapolis’ near east side, which was blessed by Archbishop Charles C. Thompson on May 13.

Ord views it as another step forward in following the path of Christ’s life on Earth.

“The way that Jesus ministered to people was he went out and met them where they were and loved them and walked with them and showed truth into their lives,” Ord says.

“Very few of these young people have an adult in their lives that’s listening to them, that’s present to them, that’s showing them the unconditional love that God has for



Catherine Ord smiles with her husband Chris in a recent photo. (Submitted photo)

them. A lot of them have never heard that or felt the love of God in their life. When we’re able to show that in big ways and be that consistent adult in their life, it’s really rewarding for both of us.”

(For more information about Vagabond Missions in Indianapolis or to offer assistance in any way, visit the website, www.vagabondmissions.com/indy.) †

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seeking the Lord, even if they don’t know what they’re seeking,” she says.

“The big thing I experience is that a lot of the youth feel they are alone in some aspect. They want a sense of belonging.

“I tell them they’re never alone because they have the Lord, they have a place to belong in the Church, and they are part of the body of Christ. My goal is for them to just remember the Lord is with them, to continue to draw closer to him, and to strengthen their relationship with him.”

She acknowledges that building relationships with the students—and having them grow deeper in a relationship with God—is sometimes challenging.

“Everyone is in a different place in their relationship with God,” she says. “Some have a really strong desire to grow in their faith or lead others closer to their faith. Some still have their walls up, but they’ll listen. We try to meet them where they are and take those little steps to bringing them to the Lord. All we’re trying to do is plant seeds of faith and trusting the Lord will cultivate them in his time.”

She has seen how that approach has deepened her own faith during her two years with NET.

“It helps me see God in the day-to-day life. A lot of what I’ve learned is to trust in the Lord, to trust in what he has in store for me.

“It’s been really beautiful to see the growth in the communities we’ve been working in. The opportunity to help them discover who they are—and discover who the Lord is—is really beautiful, too.”

(For more information about NET Ministries, visit the website, www.netusa.org.) †



High school youths from St. Joseph Parish in Corydon and St. Mary Parish in Lanesville join together with NET missionaries on Sunday evenings for faith discussions, fellowship, food and eucharistic adoration. Here, the connection between the youths and the young adult missionaries shows as they play a game of Uno. (Submitted photo)