By Theresa Inoue

Jesus replied, “The first is this: ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ The second is this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these.’ (Mk 12:29-31).

Love God and love your neighbor: these are the greatest commandments of the Christian faith.

The archdiocesan Office of Evangelization hosted an evangelization workshop at the end of October. L’Alto Catholic Institute president Tim Glemkowski and Father Todd Riebe, pastor of the Christ the King Parish in Indianapolis, both discussed evangelization at the service of love.

In Glemkowski’s primary address, he identified one root cause behind a lack of contemporary evangelization: a lack of contemporary love. Were we to truly understand the immense gift of the faith, and then to live as we are called to love, we would effectively proclaim the Good News to everyone we encounter.

Glemkowski translated love into a concrete calling: our vocations are founded upon the discovery of freedom, hope and joy sourced from God’s truth. Equipped with powerful tools for Christian renewal, we introduce restoration into a world that desperately craves real love.

Glemkowski proposed a question: “Do we care more about avoiding the awkwardness of evangelization than we do about loving our neighbors?”

It was in that moment that I realized for the first time my selfishness in keeping Jesus to myself because of my own pride, manifesting in avoiding the awkwardness of approaching the topic with others and in not wanting to “impose” on others by proclaiming the Gospel. He reminded the participants of the difference faith is supposed to make in our lives. I know that I am better off because of my relationship with Christ; why should I hide others from knowing Jesus like I do?

Both Glemkowski and Father Riebe shared personal stories regarding individuals in their own lives who desired to hear about and be invited into the faith. In each of their shared experiences, there was expressed remorse and regret in not providing that opportunity for others.

Father Riebe discussed a non-Catholic neighbor who simply desired an invitation to Mass—only an invitation to...

This neighbor had for years witnessed the Riebe family’s weekly departure for Sunday morning Mass, and she longed to be invited too. It was not until she approached her final days that she asked to be received into the Church, telling Father Riebe of her long-ago secret desire for a welcome.

I often struggle with the notion that people are simply turned off by the Gospel, but that is a lie on my own part. We can definitively pinpoint the desire to know and to love Christ in each of our hearts, despite the drive of the evil one to keep our witness confined inside.

We as the Catholic Church remember the souls of the faithful departed each November. Only weeks ago, I traveled home for the funeral of a close uncle. While I still needed to grieve over the loss, I did not despair because of my hope in the resurrection. I have hope that Christ will keep true to his promise, that if we live a committed faith to him, by his grace we will be called among the saints.

While I am continuing to pray for my uncle, in the meantime I can assure you that he lived a life of discipleship to our Lord. He suffered immensely in the weeks before his death, but he radiated joy, knowing that he ran his race in faith. In his life on Earth, my uncle was better off because of his relationship with Christ. Because he lived a life committed to our Lord, I pray and hope that he is rejoicing among the saints in heaven.

Reflecting on his life, I saw that my uncle heard and shared the Good News in word and deed, followed the footsteps of Christ, and maintained joy in the Christian faith, despite his suffering.

And so we circle back to the question: Do we love enough? Do we love enough to challenge the fear of awkwardness to share the Good News? Do we love enough to share the hope and joy found in Christ? Do we love enough to invite our neighbors, family and friends into the life of the Blessed Trinity? Do we love enough to evangelize?

If and when we forget, let us remember the very call of Christ to love God and our neighbor.

As we close this month of All Souls, let us continue to pray for those who have gone before us. But at the same time, let us proclaim the Good News to the living. Let us continue to foster a place of encounter with Christ Jesus, our Savior!

(Theresa Inoue is an Echo Apprentice in the archdiocesan Secretariat for Worship and Evangelization. She can be reached at this address: inoue@archindy.org)
Christmas video and door-to-door outreach capture heart of parish evangelization efforts: We welcome you.

By John Shaughnessy

With the Advent and Christmas seasons approaching, Jonathan Helt wanted to create a special message to entice non-Christians and fallen-away Catholics to come to his parish church at this time of year.

So the 37-year-old father of four put together one-a-minute video for his parish that features “O Come, All Ye Faithful” playing as the following message is heard:

“This Christmas Season
Come Home
To Jesus
And His Church.
We Welcome You
With Open Arms
And Open Hearts.
Come Home
To the Catholic Church.”

The video ends with an image of Helt’s home church in the Terre Haute Deanery—Sacred Heart in Clinton. The closing image also provides the parish’s address and phone number.

“It will be worth it if it brings even just one person into a relationship with Christ,” Helt says. “I want as many people in his Church—that he founded—to know the peace and love that he offers.”

Helt’s video is just one way that he and other individuals and groups in parishes across the archdiocese are making grassroots efforts of evangelization—hoping to bring more people into the Catholic faith.

Helt is also working to start a parish evangelization team at all times.

“Initially, what I’d like to have is for each parishioner to have more fellowship. Then I’d like to extend it to fallen-away Catholics. And as you see the love of our parish spreading outward, maybe it will draw new Catholics and Protestants to that light and that love. I urge other parishes to do the same.”

“I want people to know Jesus”

If evangelizing sounds frightening to you or out of your comfort zone, you’re not alone.

Gwen O’Connor understands that feeling. “It’s a little scary for me because I’m not good at making small talk,” she says. O’Connor, a member of St. Philip Neri Parish in Indianapolis.

She and four other people from the parish have been going door-to-door in the neighborhood around the church, inviting people to Mass and different parish events.

“We’ve gone out about eight times on a Sunday afternoon within the past year,” she says. “We go in pairs when we can. We’ll knock on the door, introduce ourselves, tell them we’re from St. Philip’s down the street, and ask them if they have a church home.”

“They share a flyer that has a list of parish activities and the archdiocesan Office of Evangelization’s card “Catholic Faith, 10 Things We Want You to Know.” Sometimes, they also offer small crucifixes.

“People really like that,” O’Connor says. “It’s a symbol of who we are.

“People are mostly friendly. Sometimes, we get into a conversation.

And we come across some sad situations at times. Sometimes, we ask if we could pray for them or someone in their family.

When we’re done, we pray for them in the church.”

As far as she knows, no one has come to the church because of their efforts, but that hasn’t stopped their group.

“Only God can get their hearts,” O’Connor says. “We just keep doing what we’re doing and letting them know we are there. I want people to know Jesus. That’s the most important thing in life.”

“I was hungry for more”

Edy Ballard’s invitations to help people discover the beauty of the Catholic faith were a testimony to how deeply those emotions that the crisis has brought up in his parishioners. Their reaction nonetheless reflected their faith.

The passion and outrage expressed were a testimony to how deeply many people love the Church,” he said. “I am saddened to see the number of churchgoers that are their children and grandchildren have either already walked away from the Church.”

“You can, in a personal way, start to walk away from the Church. So, in one sense, I was encouraged to see how much people love the Church.”

Being present to parishioners as they expressed their strong feelings is a necessary part of evangelization in any difficult situation, Father Farrell said.

“If you don’t meet people where they are in suffering, you can’t bring the Gospel to them,” he said. “Prior to evangelization is being with the people where they are. How do I bring the Gospel to them? If I’m not willing to listen to them, hear them out, see what’s going on in their lives?”

Father Todd Riebe, pastor of the King Parish, did this at a personal level with several parishioners who were angry with Church leaders about the abuse crisis.

One of them was Chris Herschfeld. He said learning of the decades-long instances of abuse reported by a Pennsylvania grand jury in August “hit me right at the core.”

Herschfeld was angered by the actions of priest abusers, of Church leaders who mishandled abuse claims, and even how allegations of abuse were handled at times in the archdiocese.

Father Riebe met with Herschfeld personally and in a small group to talk about the crisis in the holy hour at Christ the King. He did, and he offered a prayer.

“I expressed that I’m angry about the volume of the incidents, and how they’ve been handled,” Herschfeld said. “But I first prayed for the brothers, the healing of the Church and the honorable priests who probably lack support right now given what’s going on.

Although Father Riebe has been in contact with people who are distancing themselves from the Church in response to the crisis, most of those he has spoken with continue to practice their faith, even in the midst of deep feelings this challenging time has caused.

“The experience has taught me how resilient Catholics are,” Father Riebe said. “In spite of the failings of priests and (see LISTENING, page 10)
Pastors speak on role of priests, parish teams in evangelization

By Natalie Hoeter

Those who know Scripture know there are 10 commandments in the Old Testament. But in the New Testament, Jesus offers one final command, a command so crucial that he chose it as his final words on Earth: “Go and make disciples” (Mt 28:19).

Priests embrace these commands in a special way, both to evangelize their parish members, and then to encourage and equip their parishioners in evangelizing the local community and beyond. After all, Christ’s command was for all Christians, not just shepherds.

Recently, the archdiocesan Office of Evangelization conducted a survey of nine parish priests in central and southern Indiana regarding evangelization. “Each of our pastors bears at least some responsibility for every soul in his parish territory,” said archdiocesan director of catechesis Ken Ogorek. But he also notes the importance of “parishioners being involved in evangelization efforts. It’s not just the pastor’s responsibility.”

To that end, the archdiocesan Office of Catechesis is creating a booklet designed to help parishes form evangelization teams.

Information about the booklet will be shared at the end of this article, after highlighting the priests’ response to two of the survey questions: what the priests surveyed are currently doing in terms of evangelization, and what traits the respondents recommend members of a parish evangelization team have.

Priest’s role is “comparable to a conductor”

Among the nine priests, efforts to evangelize ranged from within their parish to the local community, and even as far as a radio station’s airwaves will allow.

Several of the priests made a comment similar to that of Father John McCaslin, pastor of St. Simon the Apostle Parish in Indianapolis, that “as pastor, I am the first evangelizer of the parish.”

Another way to both catechize and evangelize is radio. Both Father Hollowell and Father Thomas Kovatch, pastor of St. Charles Borromeos Parish in Bloomington, noted that they use this medium to spread the Gospel.

Father Kovatch pointed out that his parish owns Bloomington’s WCYI 104.1 FM, which airs programming through the Relevant Radio Catholic network. And Father Hollowell hosts “Fr. Hollowell & Friends,” which airs on another Relevant Radio channel, W281BG 104.1 FM out of Knighteville, on Tuesdays at 4 p.m., Fridays at 2:30 p.m. and Saturdays at noon.

While he is not evangelizing on the airwaves, Father Dustin Boehm, pastor of St. Gabriel Parish in Connersville and St. Bridget of Ireland in Liberty, has led his parishioners in evangelization efforts on the ground, creating means of connection between parishioners and the community in several ways.

In 2014, he began an annual “Novena of Rosaries” walk—praying the rosary while processing in Connersville’s city park for nine consecutive Sundays—as a witness to the community in response to the community’s opioid crisis.

He noted that “many of the social events are geared to getting people on the campus in order to encounter and connect with the neighbors of the area.” And through a grant, parishioners can be reimbursed up to $50 for performing a random act of kindness in their community.

“Open arms’ and not a ‘baseball bat’

To help priests in spreading the Good News to all who live in their parish boundaries, “We feel strongly that every parish ought to have an evangelization team of some sort,” said Ogorek.

So the priests surveyed were asked for input on what type of people such a team should include.

The responses primarily held three themes: people who are joyful, people who are welcoming, and people who are on fire for their faith.

On that last point, Father Robert Robeson, pastor of Holy Name of Jesus Parish in Beech Grove, noted that team members should be “deeply rooted in a relationship with Christ and Mary. If there is no commitment to Christ, it really won’t matter how great the team members’ social skills are.”

That being said, he added that team members should not be “afraid to evangelize,” he said, “people who like people and who want to form relationships with others.”

Father Riebe’s comments were similar. He said the team should consist of “people who are on fire for their faith,” but who also must evangelize “with open arms” and not a “baseball bat.”

In addition to being “joyful and inviting,” Father Eric John said the members need to know the message they are proclaiming “with a steady and firm conviction.”

The pastor of Our Lady of Perpetual Help Parish in New Albany went on to say that there can be no “ambiguity for an evangelization team, but rather practical efforts to move from vision to action.”

To maximize that action, there should be a “discernment and inventory of the charisms of the team [members],” said Father Sengole Thomas, administrator of St. Michael Parish in Cannelton and St. Pius V Parish in Troy.

“Recognizing the different gifts the Lord has provided will allow for a strong unity of the members and the ability to reach out with fuller potential,” he added.

Another helpful component for an evangelization team to accomplish is to identify who the highest potential is for it to have members of “a wide demographic with a variety of stages of life, including someone who can speak intelligently about youth culture, in addition to speaking to youths themselves,” said Father Daniel Bedel, pastor of St. Margaret Mary and St. Patrick parishes in Terre Haute.

Father John Hollowell, pastor of Annunciation Parish in Brazil and St. Paul the Apostle Parish in Greencastle, is shown teaching an online religious education class for students in grades 7-12 in his parishes. (Submitted photo)

Four magic bullet

Ogorek notes that parish evangelization efforts cannot rely on a fad or trend.

“There are resources and programs that can be helpful,” he said. “But there’s no magic bullet. Programs come and go. New resources come all the time. No one program or kit is likely to help an evangelization and discipleship effort put down deep roots in a parish.

“You need a core group of people who are going to help shepherd an ongoing process.”

In addition to getting a group, said Ogorek, parishes also need “tools that people call ‘spiritual multiplicity’—the power of a small angel of people spending a finite amount of time together helping each other grow in discipleship, with the understanding that at a certain point, each of them will gather a small group around them, helping them grow in discipleship, and so on, and so on, and so on.”

Such ideas and tips will be put forth in a booklet the Office of Catechesis is developing to help parishes with evangelization. It is expected to be completed next spring, and will be sent to each pastor and to each person on an evangelization contact list the office maintains. (See below for how to be added to this list.)

“Our intent is to provide a brief, practical document that will help people hit the ground running with parish evangelization efforts,” said Ogorek.

“I’m not a fan of big, thick binders that end up as a door stop. There will be substance—people need to know what evangelization is and be formed to some degree.

“We want people within six months of getting this resource to start diving into some serious discipleship and evangelization efforts.”

(Anyone wishing to be added to the Office of Catechesis’ list to regularly receive information about evangelization in general, including the upcoming booklet, can email evangelization@archindy.org.)
“When Christ gave his great commission, he didn’t say, ‘Somebody go make disciples.’ You have to take the great commission personally: ‘Biff, go and make disciples, Ann, go and make disciples.’ The great commission is the prism through which we see our purpose as Christians.”

And these weren’t just any words of Christ, but his last words, and “last words have weight,” Glemkowski said. Likewise, the last words of the Mass have weight, and they mirror the last words of Christ.

“At the end of Mass, the dispersal is so important to the Church,” he noted. “After being reminded of the love of God through the love of Jesus, we are sent to take that love into the world.” The end of Mass is just the beginning.”

‘Baby giraffes with wobbly legs’

But how do we go about evangelizing, spreading the Good News memorialized in the Mass? Glemkowski answered the question on two fronts: parish evangelization, and personal evangelization.

At the parish level, evangelization should not be “silo-ed” into one commission because “it won’t bear fruit,” Glemkowski said. “When a parish’s real goal is to evangelize in all they do, that’s what they become successful … It shouldn’t be one of the things we do, but all we do … All programs and ministries should have some strategic part in that.”

In practical terms, he likened the evangelization process to a baseball diamond that starts at home base, creates believers at first base, then believers at second base. From there, people are equipped with more tools to reinforce a personal relationship with Christ, which leads to becoming a disciple at second base. From there, people are equipped with more knowledge to help them reach third base—being a missionary disciple.

“We think someone is on fire after being baptized at the Easter Vigil or after a retreat, so now they’ll become involved in the parish and we’re done,” Glemkowski said. “But they’re like baby giraffes with wobbly legs. We need to help them grow spiritually.”

To do that, he said, parishes need to encourage newly evangelized or re-evangelized Catholics to frequent the sacraments and to develop a personal prayer life to continue growing in their relationship with Christ. And they need to provide opportunities to accomplish this.

“Every parish should have perpetual adoration if they want their evangelization to be a success, and more opportunities for confession,” Glemkowski advised.

And the evangelized “need to have it explained to them that the Church must bear fruit, that their relationship with Christ isn’t just about them,” he added.

‘Be relatable’

Once disciples have been fully evangelized and catechized at the parish level, they are ready to become evangelizers themselves.

To accomplish this, said Glemkowski, Catholics need to learn the “art of accompaniment.”

He offered an example he called “growth by multiplication.”

“Say you have three people meet for one year to help one other spiritually,” he said. “Then after a year, each person goes out and starts a new group of three, and so on. It becomes exponential.”

What is Glemkowski’s advice to personal evangelizers to begin in their process? It’s simpler than one might think.

“Every day,” he said. “Frequent the sacraments. If people recognize the Holy Spirit in you, you’ll have an impact. Holiness is attractive.”

This is not to say evangelizers must be perfect.

“The best way to build trust with someone is to be relatable,” Glemkowski said. “Remain close to Christ and he will make you who you need to be.”

He also cautioned evangelizers to be aware of others’ spiritual wounds.

“Not all trust that the Church is a good thing,” he noted. “Sometimes you won’t be the best person to bring someone back, but keep praying.”

The surest way to evangelize, Glemkowski said, is to “share your story. Share with them a time in your life when you felt like the sinful woman [who was about to be stoned], that you knew you needed a savior, and that you found there was one, and he is Christ, and he loves each of us more than we can possibly know.”

‘Just an invitation’

Father Todd Riebe, pastor of Christ the King Parish in Indianapolis, gave a reflection during the workshop. His personal story drove home the importance of the simplest of evangelization: inviting someone to Mass.

He spoke of how, when growing up, his family would “pile into the car” and head off to Mass every Sunday morning. And every Sunday morning a neighbor was there on her porch. She would wave to them, and they would wave back.

Decades later, Father Riebe visited her in the hospital shortly before she died. She shared the memory of waving to his family every Sunday morning, and how she had longed each time that they would stop and invite her to Mass.

“Just an invitation.”

That message stuck with Deacon Russell Woodard, parish life coordinator of Holy Trinity Parish in Edinburgh.

“It really made people aware of saying to a co-worker or other people around them that, ‘If you want to go to church with me, you’re more than welcome,’ ” he said.

“It’s in the little things we do in our daily lives. We need to be open to the Holy Spirit, and when an opportunity presents itself, speak to that neighbor or co-worker. Find out if they go to a church, and if not tell them that they’re always welcome to join you, and that Jesus came and if not tell them that you’re always welcome to join you, and that Jesus came...”