



PEM's free online newsletter for parish ministers and leaders in evangelization

PAULIST EVANGELIZATION MINISTRIES

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Evangelization Exchange

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Family therapist and Jewish Rabbi Edwin Friedman observed in his posthumously published book, *A Failure of Nerve*, that “People can’t hear you unless they are moving toward you, which means that as long as you are in a pursuing or rescuing position, your message will never catch up, no matter how eloquently or repeatedly you articulate your ideas.” This observation offers a challenge to those who know the Catholic faith but who rely on strictly Catholic language when seeking to share that faith with those for whom the Catholic faith is foreign. Do we need a “new” language to appeal to seekers? Yes, successful efforts to reach out to seekers and those who are marginalized rely on an ability to speak about faith in a language that appeals to the cultural and human questions and longings so many have in this contemporary age. This is an important part of our ministry of reaching out at Paulist Evangelization Ministries. Fr. Frank DeSiano, CSP, is offering an online course/discussion (see below) on this needed skill that can draw people towards us, and he also addresses the issue in his book, *Mission America*.



As Lent approaches, may the season be a time of deepened faith and increased commitment to share that faith with others.

We always appreciate hearing from you and would be happy to publish your stories about how you or your parish is carrying out the mission of evangelization.

Joyfully,
Fr. Tony Krisak, Editor

Evangelization Teams, Part 5 Can They Work? Frank DeSiano, CSP



Another organization issue with evangelization teams arises with where it begins its ministry.

So broad and elaborated are Catholic ideas about evangelization that teams can simply be spinning as to know where to begin. Depending on the diagnostic (i.e., what issues we need to tackle first), teams can be overwhelmed.

I have a slightly unorthodox perspective on this, at least in terms of a lot of general Catholic thinking. Why? Because most Catholics instinctively say that evangelization has to begin with ourselves—

unless we are evangelized, we cannot evangelize other people. This certainly is a logical and theologically sound principle, but I think it’s a trap that teams need to evade as much as possible.

What, after all, does it mean to “evangelize Catholics”? The assumption, first of all, is that we are not evangelized, and this theory spills over in a variety of ways. “They just come to church on Sunday, they’re not really committed.” “They really don’t have a personal relationship with Jesus.” Or “They’ve been catechized but not evangelized.”

All of this may, of course, be true, but it may also be slipping into the discussion a very specific notion of evangelization as a litmus test, and then



concluding that most people don't pass that litmus test. And what should the test be? Should we have an idea of "evangelized Catholic" that would, in fact, exclude most of the generations that lived before us? Should we be describing behavior that, in reality, only a small percentage of Catholics can live up to?

Once an evangelization team gets into these issues, it has stepped onto fly-paper from which it cannot escape. Further, it begins to send a message to fellow parishioners that reads like this: "We are evangelized, but you are not. You need to be evangelized." Such a message will, I guarantee it, upend any evangelization effort, no matter how gifted the leaders.

Of course Catholics need to be evangelized—more. But that is different from the assumption that Catholics have not been evangelized (at all). Evangelization teams should support all efforts to lead the entire parish into deeper relationship with God in faith. So if a parish will undertake a program like Christ Renews His Parish, or Living the Eucharist, teams should surely support that.

But teams cannot be co-opted into an unending project of somehow seeming to make Catholics perfect, or perfect disciples, or clones of Evangelicals, or something of that sort. It is not possible and it will not work. And it will divert the energy of the team away from what it can do, into what it cannot do.

Catholics cannot evangelize until they are evangelized, but Catholics are being evangelized in the process of their Catholic living. Evangelization deepens that process. The parish has many resources for this deepening, from the liturgy committee to the catechetical team.

Catholics are evangelized enough, however, to begin reaching out to people who have no faith, or who have stopped being involved in their faith. This is what an evangelization team can do for its parish: provide some outward, invitational, and compassionate outreach beyond the regular Catholics. Unless Catholics see their parish actually reaching beyond its membership, they have no picture of what they have to offer others. And they have no picture of a mission-based church—which is what we are supposed to be.

Organizationally, evangelization teams are far better off focusing on those who are not present and what the parish can do to extend its name, its welcome, its acceptance, and its invitation to these folks. Of course, if a parish is totally dysfunctional, that's one thing. But most parishes are not. Most have suitable liturgies, sincere parish ministers, and parishioners who see themselves involved in Jesus' Kingdom, even if this appears subtle at times.

To further the discipleship of the parish is an excellent thing. Evangelization teams should certainly support that. But undertaking that project as a first step—that's just cyanide!

Fr. Frank DeSiano, CSP, is the President of Paulist Evangelization Ministries and the author of numerous books and resources on evangelization, including *Awakening Faith* and *Seeking Christ*.

Paulist Prison Ministries serves the spiritual and religious needs of Catholic inmates in our nation's prisons, as well as other inmates seeking to know about the Catholic faith and way of life. To learn how you can help support prisoners through Paulist Prison Ministries, go to <http://www.pemdc.org/ministries/donate-prison-ministries.aspx>.



Training for Easter by Magdalena Gutierrez



Here comes Lent again, that beautiful time of the year that puts us more deeply in touch with Jesus Christ, his love, his teachings and his heroic actions to save us. Where would we be without the help of Lent? How else could we understand the seriousness of his sacrifice and how to receive his grace to pass into the resurrection? There is no Easter without Lent.

As evangelizers we are called to be torches lighting the way for our brothers and communicating the words of encouragement that motivate them to continue in their decision to approach God. If we only dedicate ourselves to receive well those who come to our parishes during Lent, there is enough work for everyone. As evangelizers, what goals are we going to choose, how are we going to plan?

First let's review some basic responsibilities of the evangelizer. The Church, the Body of Christ, exists to evangelize, that is, to preach and teach, to be the channel of the gift of grace, to reconcile sinners with God and to perpetuate Christ's sacrifice in the Mass (*Evangeliu Nuntiandi* n. 14).

1. Preach
2. Teach
3. Be a channel of grace
4. Reconcile with God
5. Perpetuate Christ's sacrifice in the Mass

Look at this list and realize that the Holy Spirit is strengthening you in what he is going to ask of you. We already know how to share the Good News of the Kingdom, and participate of the opportunities to teach, we have been channels of grace, we reconcile ourselves with God, and above all, we perpetuate the sacrifice of Christ at Mass. The question now is how will we prepare to give

what we have already received? Let us pray! And how can we take advantage of the traditional Lenten practices to evangelize? Let us pray!

Once prepared and having offered to God in prayer our services, let us consider in what ways would our "customers" come to us. Remember there will be baptized, inactive or sporadic, and traditional Catholics, many of them needing to understand the most basic elements of our faith, and others doubting the possibility of forgiveness. What excitement, what anticipation, what honor to be ambassadors for Christ this Lent! What surprises await us! And no doubt there will be moments of sadness when we see that some are still not able to receive all the grace available, offered with the best intentions of our heart. But courage, because we are planting and the harvest is in God's hands! Tip: Print the list of basic responsibilities and start your brainstorming. Dream again and visualize the possibilities of God's grace working in you!



After praying now let us each consider what will be our goal this Lent. Because we are also going to look for a way to get closer to God in these days (Are we not?) and to reconcile any lack of faith or trust that has pulled us away from Him. Where is your Achilles heel, where has apathy or bitterness infiltrated you? In what areas do you need help to grow? What if while working on your own spiritual training before Easter you can help others who are in a similar situation?

I leave you with this thought: if the Constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium* on the liturgy (34) teaches that the rites should be simple, accessible to

people's power of comprehension and normally not requiring much explanation, what would be your brief explanation of how you perpetuate Christ's sacrifice in the Mass?

Happy Paschal preparations!

"May Lent be for every Christian a renewed experience of God's love given to us in Christ, a love that each day we, in turn, must "re-give" to our neighbor, especially to the one who suffers

most and is in need. Only in this way will we be able to participate fully in the joy of Easter." - *Pope Benedict XVI, Lent 2007*

Magdalena Gutierrez is the former Coordinator of Evangelization and Hispanic RCIA for the Archdiocese of Washington. She lives in the Washington, DC area and is working as an RCIA and evangelization consultant. She contributes a periodic column about evangelization to Evangelization Exchange.

This article may be found in Spanish at <http://www.pemdc.org/ee0212-gutierrez-espanol>.

Forming Teens and Finding Solutions by Amy Hoyer



Keeping high school teens engaged and connected in a parish is a daunting task. Providing meaningful opportunities for high school teens to learn in a church setting is even more challenging. Classroom model learning doesn't work and the availability of qualified youth leaders is slim. Though acceptance of Lay Ecclesial Ministers in the Catholic Church is growing, their availability seems to be shrinking.

Our archdiocesan director of adolescent and youth ministry recently told me that our diocese had twenty-two faith formation leadership positions open in the past year. Eleven of those positions were filled. Our parish was one left with an opening so we had to get creative in our approach to provide programming for high school teens. To our surprise, our creativity is working and the teens are benefitting in ways we could not have imagined.

Our faith formation program for high school teens includes a Confirmation component. Each month, teens are invited and expected to participate in a large group learning experience, be an active member of a small group and attend a Confirmation session if the teen is a junior in high

school and wishes to be confirmed.

Large group sessions last about an hour and half and cover a wide variety of topics. This year we were able to offer Vallimar Jansen, this year's NCYC emcee who presented "I Don't Get Anything Out of Mass!" and a mission titled, "Called and Sent," given by Fr. Frank DeSiano, OSP. Other topics presented included "God's Grace in Dying" where one of our priests shared his story about living with terminal pancreatic cancer and another, "Acts of Kindness all Year Long" provided an introduction into Catholic Social Justice teaching taught by our pastor. That session included a reminder of our moral responsibility to be aware of the needs of others everyday, not just around Thanksgiving and Christmas. We had three panelists share how their Catholic faith influences the work they do for a non-profit organization, as an immigration attorney and as a co-founder of a



homeless shelter. Ten large group opportunities were scheduled and teens are expected to attend

seven.

Small group sessions include reflecting on the Sunday Gospel readings and doing a group book study. They are led by catechists/youth leaders who get to know the teens and spend as much or as little time as needed to be meaningful mentors and teachers. Small group sessions are scheduled but many small groups opt to get together beyond their scheduled time.



Our Confirmation Program and our High School Youth Group that we call “Retreat Team” both offer ongoing formation for

our teens. Confirmation sessions are scheduled monthly and are also part of our Confirmation Retreat experience that kicks off the Confirmation process. Retreat Team is our group of Confirmed teens, high school seniors, who want to stay active. Most of our Confirmed teens choose to be part of Retreat Team. Currently we have 27 active participants that get together each week. The Retreat Team hosts the Confirmation Retreat, puts on retreats for other parishes and helps with youth activities in our parish. They are also invited to attend large group learning experiences, are included in the fun, games, and service opportunities that are also scheduled throughout the year.

Our program is far from perfect and it requires a

lot of communication between our Confirmation Coordinator, Retreat Team Leader, Small Group Leaders and the Director of Faith Formation, not to mention parents and teens. We have to work collaboratively and stay in close communication. One of the benefits of working in a team is that it gives our teens opportunities to make connections with several adults who all have different personalities and styles of leadership. It also offers us an opportunity to run a dynamic program. We can’t get locked into a “this is the way we’ve always done it” way of thinking so we can problem solve, make changes and address needs as they arise in both short term and long range planning.

We all have a place in building God’s Kingdom right here right now. At St. Patrick Parish the task is up to many individuals who care about our teens and the future Church. It is a wise person who believes that our youth are the Church here and now, and they are worth our time and commitment. Our young Church has so much to offer and by investing our time in our teens, we, too, can learn so much.

Amy Hoyer has been the Director of Faith Formation at St. Patrick Parish in Cedar Falls, Iowa, for thirteen years. She was born in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, and realized her calling, to be an Iowan, when she married Todd, her husband of 30 years. Together they raised five sons and a daughter, Grace, and through the years have opened their home to numerous foster children. She earned a BA in the Study of Religion and continues to be formed through *Illuminare: Ministry to Ministers* at the Benedictine Center of St. Paul’s Monastery, St. Paul, Minnesota. She loves spending time with family, friends, her dog, and riding her motorcycle.

For Catechists, RCIA Ministers, Evangelizers—All Who Want to Share Their Faith

From Feb 20 to Mar 18, we are offering an online course/discussion for helping people share their faith in a way that appeals to contemporary seekers today, based on Fr. Frank’s book *Consider Becoming a Catholic*. The book and course provide important and helpful directions in the area of sharing faith today, addressing how we can present our faith, the person of Jesus, the Holy Spirit, and our life as a Church, to people in a cogent and powerful way. Learn more and register at www.pemdc.org/considerbecomingcatholic.aspx.

The Pilgrimage of Truth and Peace in Assisi by Tom Ryan CSP



I traveled from Rome with a group from 18 different countries composed of Eastern and Western Christians, Muslims, and a Jew for the day of reflection, dialogue and prayer for peace and justice in the world held in Assisi, Italy on October 27 under the motto "Pilgrims of Truth, Pilgrims of Peace."

The gathering of a large crowd there was in commemoration of the 25th anniversary of a similar event in Assisi convoked by Blessed John Paul II in 1986. This day began in the Basilica of Santa Maria degli Angeli with "Testimonies for Peace", each one about five minutes in length, delivered by ten of the 176 people representing not only the world's religions, but all people of good will, everyone seeking the truth. A sampling of the kinds of statements that were made:



from left to right, Rev. Dr. Fykse Tveit, General Secretary, World Council of Churches; His Eminence Norvan Zakaryan, Primate Archbishop of the Armenian Diocese in France; His Grace Dr. Rowan Douglas Williams, Archbishop of Canterbury; His Holiness Bartholomew I, Ecumenical Patriarch

Cardinal Peter Turkson greeted the representatives of churches and world religions with the words "We are gathered here aware of a common call to live together in peace, a deep yearning that throbs incessantly in our hearts. The

indefatigable search for that desire's attainment makes us fellow travelers."

He expressed the hope that all present would "recommit ourselves today, with the endowments of reason and the gifts of faith, to becoming ever

more pilgrims of truth and making our world a place of ever greater peace."

Rabbi David Rosen, International Director of Interreligious Affairs for the American Jewish Committee, picked up on the theme of pilgrimage, asserting that by definition it is much more than a journey: "The Biblical concept of ascent was both literal and spiritual. It was literal because one came up the Judean mountains to Jerusalem, to the Holy Temple. However, the physical symbolism sought to imbue a state of mind in the pilgrim's consciousness of spiritual ascent, of being ever closer to God.... This vision of pilgrimage, of ascent, is central to the prophetic vision of the establishment of the Kingdom of Heaven on earth—the messianic vision of universal peace."

His eminence Norvan Zakarian, primate of the Armenian Apostolic Church in France, addressed the question of religious difference: "Religious differences cannot and must not constitute a cause of conflict. The common search for peace on the part of all believers is more often a factor holding the promise of unity between people."

Ja-Seung, president of the Jogye Order in Korean Buddhism affirmed this, saying, "You and I do not exist as separate individuals; rather, we are all intricately connected with each other.



Ja-Seung, president of the Jogye Order, Korean Buddhism, presenting his Testimony for Peace

Buddhism offers insight into this truth through the doctrine of Dependent Origination.... We must accept our cultural differences and overcome

cultural conflicts through mutual understanding and spiritual growth.”

Dr. Kyai Muzadi, the General Secretary of the International Conference of Islamic Scholars, acknowledged that the presence of religions on this earth is to strengthen the values of peace and world progress, but the reality is that many human problems on the planet in fact originate from people who belong to a religion—because of “a lack of holistic understanding of the teachings of religion..., as well as non-religious interests that piggy-back religious teachings and use religion as a motive for non-religious objectives. Interests beyond religious goals may be political, economic and cultural or other non-religious interests that are made to seem religious.”

Acharya Shri Goswami, a Hindu representative, asked “Why have we not come closer to where we wanted to be 25 years after Pope John Paul started us on today’s pilgrimage? Are we missing the inward part of the journey? Dialogue will be a futile exercise unless we undertake it with humility, forbearance, and the desire to respect the ‘other’. This will empower us to say ‘no’ to injustice of any kind.”

Prof. Wande Abimbola, spokesperson of Ifu and Yoruba Religion, took it a step further: “To respect our fellow men and women is not enough. We need also to develop a profound respect for nature. Unless and until nature, our Mother, is given her due regard and honor in our thoughts and actions, human beings cannot find the true peace and tranquilly which we are all looking for. If we continue on the same path of disrespect and destruction of nature on which we have trodden for centuries, that path can only lead to disaster.”

Prof. Julia Kristeva, a representative of Humanists, struck a positive note in observing that “the meeting of our diversities here in Assisi witnesses that the hypothesis of destruction is not the only one possible.”

Rev. Dr. Olaf Fykse Tveit, Secretary General of the World Council of Churches, reflected how the search for justice and peace for all who live in Jerusalem is a microcosm of how, world-wide, “we are accountable to God and to one another for the peace in our time and for what we say and do not say to achieve it.”

The archbishop of Canterbury, Dr. Rowan Williams described the commonality that brought everyone



Archbishop of Canterbury,
Dr. Rowan Williams,
presenting his
Testimony for Peace

together: “All people of faith have in common the conviction that we are not ultimately strangers to each other. And if we are not strangers, we must sooner or later find a way to embody that mutual recognition in truth and lasting relationships of friendship. We are here today to declare our passionate determination to persuade our world that human beings do not have to be strangers, and that recognition is as possible as it is necessary because of our universal relation to God.

Thomas Ryan, CSP, directs the Paulist North American Office for Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations in Washington, DC.

Why Jesus and Religion Are Like Two Peas in a Pod

Rev. Robert Barron

Father Robert Barron is the founder of the global ministry, *Word on Fire*, and the Francis Cardinal George Professor of Faith and Culture at University of St. Mary of the Lake in Mundelein. He is the creator of a new ten part documentary series called "Catholicism" currently airing on PBS stations and EWTN. Learn more at www.WordonFire.org

Every once in a while, a video unexpectedly becomes an internet sensation, garnering attention all over the place and spreading like wildfire through the virtual world. Just this past week, a phenomenon of this type has emerged in the form of a slickly produced video of a twenty-something-year-old man in a leather jacket half rapping, half speaking a poem about Jesus and religion—more specifically how the former came to abolish the latter. Incredibly, this five-minute video (without much musical or visual enhancement) featuring a single person offering a not very sophisticated argument, as of today has garnered upward of 12 million views! A student of mine at the seminary first clued me in to the video, but then, through the Word on Fire website and Facebook page, I was flooded with requests to comment on it. So here goes.

What the young man in the video is presenting is a simplistic and radical form of evangelicalism whose intellectual roots are in the thought of Martin Luther. Luther famously held that justification (or salvation) takes place through grace alone accepted in faith, and not from good works of any kind. To rely on liturgy or sacraments or moral effort for salvation, Luther thought, amounted to a pathetic “works righteousness,” which he sharply contrasted to the “alien righteousness” that comes, not from us, but from Christ. This basic theological perspective led Luther (at least in some texts) to demonize many elements of ecclesial life as distractions from the grace offered through Jesus, and this is why we find, even to this day in many evangelical

Protestant churches, a muting of the liturgical, the sacramental, the institutional, etc. These things constitute the “religion” that many evangelicals are against. And what the young man in the video learned from his evangelical teachers is that Jesus himself stood against these same “religious” distractions in his own day—which is why the Lord criticized the Pharisees for their fussy legalism and why he promised to tear down the Temple in Jerusalem.

Now Luther’s theological theory had enormous implications culturally and politically as well. The freedom that Luther declared from church law and institution soon morphed in the minds of many into a call for freedom from what were taken to be repressive political laws, traditions and institutions. One of Luther’s earliest and most provocative texts was titled *The Freedom of a Christian*, and it is no accident whatsoever that “freedom” became the most powerful and explosive word in the modern political lexicon. Indeed, our own country, which proudly bears the title “the land of the free,” was born in a great act of revolutionary anti-institutionalism—which goes a long way toward explaining why this young man’s video is getting such great play in America.

Well what does a Catholic make of all of this? Not much, as it turns out. In his theology of



justification by grace alone, Luther conveniently overlooked a plethora of biblical texts, including many from St. Paul, whom he claimed as his principle inspiration. In the parable of the sheep and goats from Matthew 25, it is clear that salvation is dependent, not primarily on faith, but on the quality of our love, especially toward those who are weakest and poorest. The same Paul who spoke of justification through faith also said, “If I have faith enough to move the mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.” And the same Paul who experienced the risen Jesus in an intensely personal moment of conversion also spoke eloquently and often of becoming a member of Jesus’ “mystical body,” which is the church. In short, the Bible drives a wedge neither between faith and love nor between individual salvation and ecclesial belonging. Further, the same Jesus who railed against the hypocritical legalism of the Pharisees also said, “I have come not to abolish the law but to fulfill it.” And the same Jesus who threatened to tear down the Temple in Jerusalem also promised “in three days to rebuild it.” The point is this: Jesus certainly criticized—even bitterly so—the corruptions in the institutional religion of his time, but he by no means called for its wholesale dismantling. He was, in point of fact,

a loyal, observant, law-abiding Jew. What he affected was a transfiguration of the best of that classical Israelite religion—Temple, law, priesthood, sacrifice, covenant, etc.—into the institutions, sacraments, practices and structures of his Mystical Body, the Church.

If the young rapper in the video is against the corruptions of institutional religion up and down the ages, then he’s got an ally in me. Finding them is like shooting fish in a barrel and criticizing them is as easy as being against rotten eggs. But if he is advocating an individualist spirituality that ignores the thousands of ties that bind believers to one another through sacrament, practice and institutional belonging, and if he’s calling for a theology that divorces Jesus from his Body, the Church, then he’s got an opponent in me. Lots of New Age devotees today want spirituality without religion, and lots of evangelicals want Jesus without religion. Both end up with abstractions. But the one thing Jesus is not is an abstraction. Rather, he is a spiritual power who makes himself available precisely in the dense institutional particularity of his mystical body across space and time. Jesus didn’t come to abolish religion, he came to fulfill it.

Paulist Evangelization Ministries Advisory Board Vision of Evangelization

Paulist Evangelization Ministries thanks the members of the Advisory Board for their service. Msgr. W. Ronald Jameson, Rev. Eduardo Montemayor, and Mrs. Terry Modica completed their terms at the January 2012 meeting. Beginning their terms at the same meeting were Mr. Tom Quinlan, Ms. Michelle Montes, and Dr. Lucia Murphy. Our outgoing Advisory Board members share their vision of evangelization over the next two years.



Terry Modica, Executive Director of Good News Ministries, gnm.org: For evangelization to be successful, we must first evangelize the

evangelizers, those who are regular, church-going Catholics, perhaps even actively involved in parish life, but who do not realize that they are called by virtue of their baptism to continue the mission Christ began. They need to feel empowered to

evangelize, which begins when they learn that they give testimony in the way faith affects their daily lives and difficulties, then sharing their faith when others ask about it. And the place to fulfill this mission is wherever they go and encounter others, including in those virtual meeting spaces created by modern technology.



Fr. Eduardo Montemayor,
 Director of Evangelization for the Diocese of Corpus Christi: In the next two years, I pray that the XIII General Assembly of the Synod of

Bishops, on The New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith, births forth the fruit of guidance that can readily translate to evangelization on the ground. The Church urgently needs leadership and pastoral creativity in the practical application and implementation in the formation of clergy and laity on the local level, who will creatively and diligently work to evangelize and form God's people in their

parishes, so that they will be equipped to in turn evangelize the society around them.

Msgr. W. Ronald Jameson, Rector, St. Matthew's Cathedral, Archdiocese of Washington: Recently we read at Mass the Gospel passage about the importance of pouring new wine into new wineskins. It reminded me about evangelization. The message of evangelization is not new. However, we need to look at new ways to get that message of God's love understood by more and more people. We need to utilize new methods of social communication. As our Holy Father has said, we need to re-propose that message to life-long Catholics as well as those who have not yet heard the message. Same message, new methods to communicate it, and groups like PEM assisting with excellent resources.



Amazing God in the Diocese of Albany

Jeanne Schrempf

Amazing God is a three year evangelization and spiritual renewal plan and initiative that grew out of the vision of Bishop Howard Hubbard and pastoral leaders in the Diocese of Albany. Its goal is to offer each person in our upstate New York diocese an opportunity to know and deepen their relationship with Jesus Christ and to connect with and return to the Catholic Church if they are inactive, unchurched, or have left due to the effects of pastoral planning, scandal, hurt, or indifference.

As many other dioceses have done across the country, Albany began a pastoral planning process in 2007 that led to a reconfiguration of parishes

and an assessment and redirection of resources due to the realities it faced in fewer clergy, shifting population, aging structures, a decrease in active parish participation, and a growing secular culture. The process named **"Called to Be Church"**

aligned parishes in local planning groups (LPG's) to focus on the mission of the parish in areas of evangelization, catechesis, prayer and worship, social concerns, and administration. From this



opportunity for prayer, catechesis, discussion, and collaboration came recommendations for the present and future of these parishes and the diocese. After receiving these cluster plans and dialogue with pastoral leadership groups, the Bishop announced a new pastoral plan for the Diocese of Albany in 2009. Since that time the number of parishes has been reduced from 163 to 128, all parishes are involved in new models of collaboration and linkage, new models of staffing have emerged, and we are learning to “Be Church” in new ways.

Throughout the process, Bishop Hubbard called for a renewed understanding and commitment to evangelization. He took every opportunity offered to him to speak or write about this essential mission of the Church. In so many words he was saying that we had been under construction for the past 3 years, it was time to put aside the hard hats and construction tools, that it was time to live the mission. He evoked great concern and sadness for those who had left the Church because their parish was closed or merged or had been hurt by the church.

With the Bishop’s assistance, we built a Task Force for Evangelization that would help to make this a priority throughout the Diocese. 25 people from parish and diocesan leadership met with him in December 2009 to begin this process. After listening to his vision and brainstorming what were essential aspects, we divided into three task groups: diocesan vision and events, best practices, and communication and technology. In March 2010, the Task Force presented Bishop Hubbard with our plan: *Amazing God* - a three year initiative with the themes *God is Love*, *The Heart of Christ*, and *Filled with the Spirit*. The committees were expanded to include parish evangelization training, reconciliation, diocesan-wide retreat, and art and environment.

Preparation: Spring – Advent 2010

The first and very significant step as we began to prepare for *Amazing God* was to communicate the vision and “sell” the plan to diocesan and parish leadership and in turn the people of our diocese. There is a cost in time, energy, and resources in pastoral planning and it was evident, especially among the clergy, that there was pastoral planning fatigue and apathy towards anything new – especially from the Diocese. To communicate the vision, listen to people, and begin to market *Amazing God*, the Task Force went out to many different regions of the Diocese for listening sessions and focus groups. We heard that many people were ready for the mission, believed it was time for a diocesan wide spiritual renewal initiative, and were very concerned for those in their families, neighborhoods and work - especially younger adults and young families - who either stopped attending Church or who were only culturally Catholic.

The three year plan that we presented to the chancery staff included the hiring of a coordinator and program money for three years. We were disappointed to learn that due to the financial limitations of the diocese, the funding for this initiative was limited. We wrote for a three year grant to a local foundation and knew that this was the work of the Spirit when we received enough funding to hire a coordinator and begin this plan.

The work of the first year included the following:

- The hiring of an *Amazing God* coordinator
- Identifying an evangelization contact in each parish
- Meeting with priests and other parish leaders to explore ideas for including reconciliation into *Amazing God*
- Writing and producing a diocesan wide DVD retreat for the first year theme “God is Love”.

- Holding an evangelization leadership conference sponsored by RCL/Benziger “*The Evolving Local Church: Skills for Evangelizing Leaders*”
- Selecting a graphic as the **Amazing God** logo for use with communication
- Writing an original Amazing God prayer and printing prayer cards for parishes
- Exploring the beginning of an **Amazing God** website
- Planning and presenting a celebrative “kick off” on June 7 for **Amazing God** with Bishop Hubbard and Father Frank DeSiano, csp in our newly renovated Cathedral.

Year I God is Love: Fall 2010 – Spring 2011

- All diocesan events carried the **God is Love** theme: the Diocesan Autumn Gathering, the Hesburgh lecture, Spring Enrichment, and events sponsored by diocesan offices.
- A **God is Love** DVD retreat with Bishop Hubbard and witnesses was produced and distributed to all parishes, schools, and institutions and placed on the **Amazing God** website with a facilitators guide
- **Landings** was chosen as the outreach program to the inactive and unchurched. **Landings International** trained ten parishes and a diocesan team.
- Parishes were encouraged to offer creative outreach during Advent/Christmas and Lent/Easter
- A “**Tool Box**” for Evangelization was begun as a website resource
- ”Best Practices” from local parishes and throughout the country were gathered and shared with parishes
- The annual retreat for parish catechetical and youth ministry leaders featured Lee Nagel on the theme **God is Love**.
- Fr. Allan Deck, SJ and John and Theresa Boucher spoke on the theme and evangelization at Spring Enrichment in May 2011
- Parishes offered catechesis on **God is Love** from the Old Testament and the sacrament of Baptism.

- Father Frank DeSiano, CSP, offered an evangelization leaders training at St. Mary’s of the Lake, Lake George in the summer of 2011.



Year II The Heart of Christ: Fall 2011 – Spring 2012

- Goal of having an evangelization contact in all parishes is almost completed
- **The Heart of Christ** DVD retreat is produced and distributed with on line facilitation guide. Seven aspects of the **Heart of Christ** are explored through the words of Bishop Hubbard and a variety of witnesses
- Rev. Richard Fragomeni offered an unforgettable keynote on the **Heart of Christ** at the Autumn Diocesan Gathering. All workshop sessions break open this theme.
- An artistic sculpture of the logo was designed and crafted for use at major diocesan events
- The **James Seeley Award** was created in memory of one of the original **Amazing God** Task Force members and given to the person or parish who best witnessed the goals of evangelization. This first annual award was given to Rev. Bob Longobucco, pastor of two parishes and chair of **Amazing God’s** “Diocesan Vision and Special Events committee.
- Parish secretaries and administrators were invited to regional luncheons to affirm their evangelical ministerial role
- **Landings** training was presented in the northern and southern parts of the diocese.
- The scripture theme of the Gospels and the sacramental theme of the Eucharist have been

the dominant parish and diocesan adult faith formation themes for the year.

- The annual retreat for parish catechetical and youth ministry leaders featured Rev. Anthony Ciorra on the theme *The Heart of Christ*.
- Parish evangelization team training offered was in January and will be given in May.
- Parish evangelization teams are taking advantage of online training and resourcing
- Many parishes are planning programs around the *Heart of Christ* retreat and Fr. Robert Barron's **Catholicism**
- Rev. James Martin, sj will keynote Spring Enrichment in May 2012 on the theme **The Heart of Christ** and Rev. Frank Desiderio csp will speak on forgiveness and reconciliation
- Parishes and youth ministry groups are planning service projects to be "the Heart of Christ" in the community
- Rev. John Hurley will give second summer training workshop for parish evangelization leaders.
- Best Practices committees offering assistance in assessing parish evangelization efforts and recommending areas to enhance
- Diocesan Vision and Special events beginning planning for diocesan wide celebration in 2013.

In conclusion

We are at the midway point in a three year process and will make a more complete report when *Amazing God* concludes. Although this was constructed as a three year initiative, Bishop Hubbard wisely reminded us that it really does not conclude in 2013. In many ways this is a prelude to embracing evangelization as the central mission of the Church forever. The learning curve has

been great and we have not met some of our original objectives. Evangelization, however, is more of a household word in our diocese. Young people and adults are taking the risk to share their faith more intentionally. Life in our diocese is viewed a bit more through the lens of evangelization and we are happy to be on the road. We are deeply grateful for the mentoring of the Paulist Community and for the incredible resources and training that they continue to offer.

The Amazing God retreat and website may be accessed at www.amazinggodrcda.org

Amazing God
 Open our hearts to live our faith fully
 And share it freely with others.
 Give us the courage to imitate you
 For you are love.
 Fill us with Your Spirit
 That we may reflect the compassion
 Present in the heart of Your Son
 And may the eagerness to share our faith
 Bring a transformation to our diocese and the world.
 Mary, Mother of the church
 Intercede with your Son
 To bring about in each of us
 A renewed enthusiasm for our faith.
 We ask this through your Son,
 Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior. Amen.

Jeanne Schrempf has been the Director: for the Office of Evangelization, Catechesis and Family Life in the Diocese of Albany for 19 years, and for the five years previous to that she was the Associate Director. She is on the Amazing God Task Force and serves as Chairperson of the Parish Evangelization Committee.

**2011 Christmas Carol Festival Impacts
Evangelization in 2012
by John Boucher**



Between 5,500-5,600 children, youth, and adults gathered in 19 area parishes for the 2011 “Christmas Carol Festival,” which has grown each year since its inception in 2007. In 2009, the total participants in the Festival were 1,500. Thus, 2011 showed a growth of 266% in two years. The *Monitor*, newspaper and website of the Catholic diocese, provided over 6,000 newsprint sized four-page carol lyric sheets to parishes for free. For the first time ever, more than 75% of parishes provided follow-up for participants with invitations for events around Christmas as well as into the new year: “Three Kings” and “Little Christmas” celebrations, “Mardi Gras,” “Jesus in January,” various parish adult faith formation programs, “Living the Eucharist,” “Wafer Suppers,” family religious education programs, “Catholics Returning Home,” and parish retreats. Christmas can indeed last the whole year!

Below are links to articles, photo galleries, a professional Youtube video, and a new “Christmas Carol Festivals” Facebook page.

“Christmas Carol Festivals to abound in diocese”

<http://www.trentonmonitor.com/main.asp?SectionID=4&SubsectionID=88&ArticleID=2804>

“Joy to World:” Christmas Carol Festivals provide a fun, meaningful way to prepare for the season"

www.trentonmonitor.com/m/Articles.aspx?ArticleID=2943

First Christmas Carol Festival from Sacred Heart Parish in Mount Holly, NJ (2011)

http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=DbZZ_-GWXQE

“Like” Christmas Carol Festival—Diocese of Trenton Facebook page! SEE MANY MORE photos, videos, cartoons, links, and quotes at www.facebook.com/christmascarolfestival

**Coming Online
Paulist Evangelization Ministries**



Catholic Speakers Online is a series of online webinars hosted by PNCEA. These presentations, four or five per year, provide evangelization ministers and leaders with information and training in areas of parish-based evangelization. See more info and get link for registration below on these upcoming CSO presentations on Thursdays from 3:00-4:00 pm ET (unless otherwise indicated):

February 9, 2012, Rev. William Graham on **Catholic Perspectives on Sexuality**. Registration at www.pemdc.org/csograham.aspx.

April 19, 2012, Sally Mews on **Welcoming Returning and Reconnecting Catholics**. Registration at www.pemdc.org/csomews.aspx.

Featured Resource
Awakening Faith



Parishes across the United States talk about the effectiveness of **Awakening Faith: Reconnecting with your Catholic Faith** for helping Catholics awaken a faith that is deep in their hearts. We know that many Catholics do not practice regularly—not because they have no faith, but because of a lack of priorities. View an introductory video at <http://www.pemdc.org/multimedia/default.aspx?id=6>

You can invite and challenge these Catholics to reconnect with their faith through Awakening Faith, an easy-to-use, inexpensive, discussion-based program used in thousands of parishes. Order your materials today at <http://www.pemdc.org/awakeningfaithresources/>

Take advantage of **Free Shipping**
with Promotion Code **AF2012**
thru all 29 days of February!

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