

origins

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Rekindling the Spirit of Mission in Parishes

Father Lewinski

In an April 6 address at the annual meeting of the Pontifical Mission Societies in the United States, Father Ronald Lewinski spoke about the need to rekindle the spirit of mission in parishes. Speaking in Seattle, Father Lewinski, pastor of St. Mary of the Annunciation Church in Mundelein, Ill., in the Chicago Archdiocese, said that “what makes the missionary vocation more difficult today is that the mission field is no longer defined by geographic borders.” Traditionally, the mission field was defined as the Third World and other foreign places, he said, but today the mission field is “woven into the fabric of our homeland” and includes the eco-

“We have to open our eyes and ears and recognize that the missionary territory is in our backyard.”

nomic sector, the technological world, the cultural life of the larger community and can be found among the homeless, the unemployed, the undocumented and the disenfranchised. Father Lewinski discussed nine areas where rekindling the spirit of mission in parishes could take place: preaching, bold witness, the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, providing opportunities for mission, celebrating the global church, increasing contacts with missionaries, introducing youth to mission, bringing together those who have a missionary spirit and returning to the Eucharist to hear the call to mission. The Pontifical Mission Societies consist of the Society for the Propagation of the Faith, the Holy Childhood Association, the Society of St. Peter Apostle, and the Missionary Union of Priests and Religious. Their purpose is to promote a universal missionary spirit among all Catholics. Father Lewinski’s address follows.

my first experience of mission was in 1965 when as a college seminarian I volunteered to spend the summer with the Glenmary Home Missioners in Scottsville, Ky. After a week of orientation at Glenmary headquarters in Cincinnati, I was sent on mission with Herb Essig, another seminarian, to the Glenmary parish in Franklin, Ky., where we met Glenmary missionary Father Raymond Berthiaume.

Father Ray drove Herb and me to the mission in Scottsville, some 25 miles from

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“Parishes must be open to experiment and welcome experiences which may be unfamiliar,” the archbishop of Dublin, Ireland, said in a 2007 address titled, “The Parish: A New Mission Field.”

Speaking in Melbourne, Australia, Archbishop Diarmuid Martin said there is no one model of how a parish should be run because there are so many different types of parishes, noting that in his diocese some parishes have very high levels of practice and attendance while others have very low levels.

He explained that renewal in the church “is never just a process about committees and working groups. ... It involves a community ... entering into the mystery of the Word made flesh in order to see how we can sanctify the world around us.”

The archbishop said, “Most of my generation has probably had a love-hate relationship with the church,” but the church is where his generation learned the “wonderful forgiveness of Jesus”; he said it is vital to make parishes welcoming places so that young people also receive this message.

He said parish structures must be realigned to meet the needs of the faithful: “A single parish may not have the capacity and the variety of resources that are needed to respond to the varying and new spiritual needs of people,” so resources must be shared among parishes.

The primate of Ireland said “some would love to attribute the decline in Mass attendance to liberal theological positions,” but in his diocese Mass attendance is highest in the more liberal areas.

(Archbishop Martin’s address appeared in Origins, Vol. 37, No. 14, the edition dated Sept. 13, 2007.)

“The challenge for an evangelizing parish is to create an environment of real hospitality strong enough to overcome the innate tendency, the default drive of many

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Franklin. There was no church on the site, only two trailers; one was designated for use as a chapel, the other as our home. What I wasn’t prepared for was Father Ray’s charge to us:

“Young men, the church has never had a permanent presence in Allen County. So it’s all yours. See what you can do. I’ll see you in a week.”

With that he left us on our own to figure out for ourselves how we would exercise our mission that summer.

Coming from a well-established Polish-American parish on the South Side of Chicago where Catholicism was as common as the air we breathed, finding myself on a hilltop in Kentucky where there was only a handful of Catholics was disarming to say the least.

My fellow novice missionary and I decided that our first course of action would be to canvass the area by visiting all the homes we could to let people know that the Catholic Church had arrived. We were excited about getting started. What we weren’t prepared for were doors that were slammed in our faces with the words, “We don’t welcome papists here, boys. We’re Christians.”

Since that first mission experience, I’ve had many doors slammed in my face — at least figuratively — by those who claim the name Christian. The Gospel is good news, but it is also bittersweet because it inevitably requires a change of heart if we are going to live for the kingdom Jesus preached.

The first lesson I learned was not to take my faith and my church for granted. Ever since that Scottsville experience I’ve pondered again and again, What does it mean for me to be a missionary in this place at this time? What is the compelling message I have to share? While the heart of the message remains the same, the missionary field is always changing. And so the way I respond continually changes as well.

A priest for 39 years, I have tried to transform parishioners into missionaries. Sometimes they’ve put me to shame by the generosity of their own missionary zeal. At other times the

parishioners themselves have been the mission field. This has become more and more true.

With the questions Catholics ask and by the requests they make, especially on the occasion of funerals and weddings, I often feel like I am in unevangelized territory, a foreign land. I take to heart the words of Pope Benedict in “The Word of the Lord” when he says, “We cannot keep to ourselves the words of eternal life given to us in our encounter with Jesus Christ: They are meant for everyone, for every man and woman. Everyone today, whether he or she knows it or not, needs this message” (*Verbum Domini*, 91).

Identifying the Mission Field

What makes the missionary vocation more difficult today is that the mission field is no longer defined by geographic borders. While we might have defined mission territory as remote, Third World and foreign, today the mission field is woven into the fabric of our homeland. Today the mission field is the economic sector, the technological world, the social, political and cultural life of the larger community. Science and technology have become the new idols.

The mission field is among the immigrant groups struggling for acceptance and a decent life. The mission field is among the homeless, the unemployed, the undocumented and the disenfranchised — all who live in the communities we call home. We are sent as missionaries into a society that wants to be green and preserve the forest but opts for a culture of death when it comes to saving the unborn. These contradictions, human needs in society stake out the fields that are ripe for a new band of missionaries.

So what does it mean to say that we have to rekindle the missionary spirit in our communities? It means that we have to open our eyes and ears and recognize that the missionary territory is in our backyard. It means that we cannot preach a private faith that has no connection to the society in which we live and work. We have to commit ourselves to the reform which the Gospel demands for the

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sake of the kingdom. Difficult work! We have to be ready for it.

That's why I'm sure Pope Paul VI said in *Evangelii Nuntiandi* that "the church is an evangelizer but she begins by being evangelized herself" (No. 15). The parish is called to mission, but it begins by welcoming the word afresh and hearing the call to mission with greater urgency. Perhaps the hardest conversion is moving from a religious view that is only concerned about one's personal salvation to a spiritual vision by which I know myself to be in solidarity with the body of Christ, a man or woman sent on mission for others (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, No. 9, and Phil 2:3-7).

So how can we be more missionary in parish life?

The first step is to know who you are talking to. When I knocked on doors in Scottsville, Ky., I learned pretty quickly where I stood with the community. I heard their assumptions and prejudices. I observed their behavior and values. I learned their history and their culture.

After getting over the first few weeks of slammed doors, my fellow seminarian and I courageously advertised an open house at the Catholic trailers. We broke the ice with our neighbors over cold lemonade and cookies. That was the second step in our missionary education: building trust.

I wonder if I were to go door to door around my parish today what kind of reaction I would receive. My hunch is that many people would have already closed the door to the church and any institutional form of religion before I ever knocked. Mass attendance is low. There are fewer church weddings. Religious vocations are few. Parents are no longer choosing Catholic schools for their children.

Listening to so many voices in the community, I hear cries of emptiness, a lack of meaning or direction, loneliness and even hopelessness. Individuals are not looking to the church for answers. Young adults are telling us that we aren't speaking their language.

The invitation of Jesus to a new way of life has lost its appeal. Relativism, secularism, excessive individualism and a narcissistic culture have made hearing God's word more difficult and building community hard to achieve. We don't help the situation much if our preaching and our liturgies are lifeless and parish goals have more to do with maintaining old buildings than celebrating God's gifts and creating new avenues for ministry.

This is the state of the union. And it's a fine line between those in the pews and those outside the pews. We are all influenced by the

culture in which we live. And while there is much in our U.S. culture for which we can be proud, there are some values that are simply not compatible with the Gospel.

Nevertheless, in spite of what could be a grim spiritual picture, the faith is alive and God's people are hungry for more of what God has to offer. Rekindling the missionary spirit begins with fanning into flame the gift of faith that our Catholic sisters and brothers hold dormant in their hearts.

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There's a passage in *Redemptoris Missio* that describes what I see every day in my parish:

"Our times are both momentous and fascinating. While on the one hand people seem to be pursuing material prosperity and to be sinking ever deeper into consumerism and materialism, on the other hand we are witnessing a desperate search for meaning, the need for an inner life, and a desire to learn new forms and methods of meditation and prayer. Not only in cultures with strong religious elements but also in secularized societies, the spiritual dimension of life is being sought after as an antidote to dehumanization" (*Redemptoris Missio*, 38).

This, of course, is the work of the new evangelization. As Pope Benedict XVI describes it, it's a ministry of repropounding the Gospel. It's telling the good news of Jesus in a way that leaves hearers thinking they just heard the Gospel for the first time. If we want to reawaken the missionary spirit in our parishes, the new evangelization will have to go hand in hand with rekindling the missionary spirit.

Where Do We Begin?

The first thing we ought to do is to ask ourselves why we have parishes in the first place. Every parish develops its own identity relative to its demographics. Its ministries need to address specific needs.

However, the point I would like to make is a simple one: The parish is not an end in itself.

ecclesial communities to close in on themselves and huddle together in homogeneous groups," Jesuit Father Allan Figueroa Deck said in a 2009 keynote address at the annual convention of the National Federation of Priests' Councils in San Antonio.

Father Deck, executive director of the U.S. bishops' Secretariat of Cultural Diversity in the Church, said the word "evangelization" often is used in church circles to mean mere outreach, but evangelization includes at least four fundamental components: an encounter with the living God (ongoing conversion), the inculturation of the Gospel message, transformative action on behalf of justice and peace, and ecumenism and interreligious dialogue.

He said that a "lingering clericalism that distracts and discourages laity in their God-given calling to serve" and the presence of ideological extremes in the church can hinder parishes' efforts to evangelize.

Father Deck cited a number of obstacles to achieving a truly evangelizing church community, including a lack of "regard for the role women play in the church" and an "unhealthy polarization of thought" among some Catholics.

He said that "neither so-called conservative nor progressive/liberal responses" can adequately address "the wide gamut of circumstances that characterizes a multicultural, multigenerational church."

He said, "The key to a successful parish is precisely what is always was: creating the conditions whereby many diverse groups experience a sense of real belonging."

*("The Evangelizing Parish" appeared in *Origins*, Vol. 39, No. 5, the edition dated June 11, 2009.)*

*"There is as great a need as ever for missionaries," the U.S. bishops said in their 2005 statement titled "Teaching the Spirit of Mission *Ad Gentes*:"*

Continuing Pentecost Today," which they adopted during their spring meeting in Chicago.

"All Catholics, by reason of their incorporation into the church at baptism, should fully participate and cooperate in Christ's ongoing mission 'to the nations,'" said the bishops.

They called on "everyone with teaching roles to guide the faithful toward a renewed fervor in spreading the good news by witness and word."

Rich opportunities for teaching about mission in the parish were cited, and the bishops said "seminaries and Catholic theological centers especially should weave the idea of authentic world mission into the core of their teaching ministry."

Mission, the bishops said, never is "an imposition upon the free will of another; it is an invitation to know Christ or to know him better, and it is made in a spirit of respect toward others."

Interreligious relations were one special question the bishops discussed. They said, "We always invite others to the Catholic faith," and "we also strive to understand — and value — what is positive in their beliefs."

Twinning relationships between U.S. parishes and parishes in other nations also were presented by the bishops as a way that "whole parishes become more missionary."

(The statement appeared in Origins, Vol. 35, No. 7, the edition dated June 30, 2005.)

"I would say that [the] issue of responding to the alienated, the fallen away and the unchurched continues to be the No. 1 challenge confronting our church and the parish," Bishop Howard J. Hubbard of Albany, N.Y., said in a 2005 speech in New York to the annual Diocesan Leadership Symposium sponsored by the New-York-based National Pastoral Life Center. Bishop Hubbard added, "The critical question, however, is how do we respond effectively

It's meant to be a greenhouse that grows disciples. It's meant to be a mission school preparing missionaries for service in the world.

I'm not satisfied with a parish that boasts 75 ministries, publishes a 40-page bulletin each week and has the best coffee and doughnuts in town for hospitality if somehow these entry points do not activate the missionary vocation. More parish activity does not necessarily make a more mission-minded parish. The litmus test is whether a parish understands itself to be a missionary community. In "The Word of the Lord," Pope Benedict tells us, "Missionary outreach is a clear sign of the maturity of an ecclesial community" (No. 95) (cf. *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 15).

On the positive side of things, let me say that I believe our Catholics are concerned about those in need and continue to be generous in serving the needs of others. I am always amazed by the welcome and generous response to the annual mission appeal. And the more descriptive the missionary is about his/her work, the more successful the collection.

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There's something in those mission talks that touches the sleeping missionary inside each of us. Every year following that missionary appeal I have parishioners asking, "What can I do closer to home?" Encountering a missionary is the best catechesis and incentive for growing new missionaries.

Young adults today are very interested in the global picture. Many have traveled far and wide or at least feel globally connected through technology. The church's social doctrine is very appealing to young adults and is a ready entry point for greater engagement. They want to serve in meaningful ways and they aren't afraid of getting their hands dirty.

The Archdiocese of Chicago established Amate House as a volunteer Christian service organization for young adults who live in community and work in various mission opportunities around the archdiocese. There

are three houses with a total of 33 committed college graduates serving the poor and the needy.

Since its founding in 1984, 806 young adults have served one to two years at Amate House. A total of 75 percent of those who worked with Amate House stay in human services. Four have become priests. Six have become religious sisters. Some who have become attorneys or doctors continue to carry over their missionary spirit into their professional life.

The Jesuit Volunteer Corps and the Peace Corps are examples of young adults in service to others. There's a waiting list of missionary wannabes. What are we waiting for?

The other group of parishioners we often overlook are retirees who have no intention of being assigned a rocking chair on the front porch. They are ready for a new adventure, a new career. Many have longed to be of greater service to the church and the Gospel. Do we need an Amate House for retirees?

What are some practical steps we can take to rekindle the missionary spirit?

First of all, don't presume that the faithful who gather each Sunday don't already have an intuitive sense of mission. In preparation for this talk I asked our parish's director of mission to do some grassroots research on what people think about their mission as the baptized. Some answered very simply. For example, "The mission is to make Jesus a part of our everyday living." Or another said, "The mission is to spread the Gospel, the good news of Jesus. Who is he? Why did he come? How do we come to believe and live through his body, his Catholic Church?"

And when asked "What does it mean to you when you hear that your pastor would like to rekindle the missionary spirit in the parish," one respondent answered, "It sounds like the pastor feels the need to reignite the spiritual flame in the parish. He wants people to give a darn and to feel pulsed to speak up, stand up, jump up and not give up. Feel the need. Pay it forward."

My grassroots research tells me that there are potential missionaries ready for the call. I'm concerned that we do not raise the bar high enough for fear that parishioners will say, "There's no way I can do that." But we have to state our hopes and expectations. It's true that not everyone can go to Haiti or Nigeria on mission but someone can. If we don't give that person a mission opportunity, they will find it at the megachurch down the street and not return to the parish.

We also need to take an incremental approach to mission engagement. We need to think of mission education and engagement

as a step-by-step process. The first step into mission for some may be taking a box of groceries to a food pantry. The second step may be talking to a recipient at the food pantry. The third step may be working one night at the food pantry or adjacent soup kitchen. The fourth step may be answering the question of a guest at the soup kitchen who asks, "Why are you doing all of this?"

The point is that most people don't feel ready for total immersion into mission. But if we take an incremental approach we will see parishioners grow stronger and more confident with each step they take. I'd love to see parishes and our diocesan mission offices provide some concrete suggestions for this.

Practical Examples of Rekindling Mission Spirit

1. Preaching. The first and most obvious step is to use our preaching as a catalyst for engendering a missionary spirit. In "The Word of the Lord," Pope Benedict says:

"[The homily] should lead to an understanding of the mystery being celebrated, serve as a summons to mission and prepare the assembly for the profession of faith, the universal prayer and the eucharistic liturgy. ... Generic and abstract homilies that obscure the directness of God's word should be avoided as well as useless digressions that risk drawing greater attention to the preacher than to the heart of the Gospel message. The faithful should be able to perceive clearly that the preacher has a compelling desire to present Christ, who must stand at the center of every homily" (*Verbum Domini*, 59).

Preaching that only soothes the soul with pious thoughts but never goes beyond that hampers the work of forming missionaries. Pope Benedict cautions us: "It is not a matter of preaching a word of consolation but rather a word that disrupts, that calls to conversion and that opens the way to an encounter with the one through whom a new humanity flows" (No. 93).

I get the impression as I listen to some preaching that it is intended for individual consumption and fails to acknowledge Christ's mandate to live as one and to wash the feet of all. Pope Benedict again says, "One must avoid the risk of an individualistic approach and remember that God's word is given to us precisely to build communion, to unite us in the truth along our path to God" (*Verbum Domini*, 86).

Pope Benedict's warning to avoid abstract preaching and teaching is important. Because if we are going to train missionaries we need to be clear about what the message is that we

are being sent to proclaim. Our message is not a call to just be nice. It's not a philosophy of life that binds us together and holds us accountable; it is the person of Jesus Christ. So when we walk away from the altar because we are uninterested, it's not turning our back on a philosophy but the person of Christ, who issued the invitation to come and eat.

Pope Paul VI taught us in *Evangelii Nuntiandi* that "the good news proclaimed by the witnesses of life sooner or later has to be proclaimed by the word of life. There is no true evangelization unless the name, the teaching, the life, the promises, the kingdom and the mystery of Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God, are proclaimed" (No. 22).

"The parish is not an end in itself. It's meant to be a greenhouse that grows disciples. It's meant to be a mission school preparing missionaries for service in the world."

In talking to many Catholics about being missionary, I find that many tend to be too timid about being an evangelizer or to take concrete measures to spread the good news. You will hear many say, "I can be a good missionary if I just give good example at work or in the neighborhood." Yes, of course.

But when a neighbor is thirsty for living water and is in the habit of filling his/her bucket out of a toxic well, at what point do you say, "Stop, drink living water, Jesus the Christ!?" Am I more inclined to give a psychological answer to the problem? Do I only communicate a philosophy of life or do I introduce my neighbor to the living Christ? We Catholics need better formation in how to effectively communicate Christ.

We have to ask ourselves what's the difference between humanitarianism and mission? There's nothing wrong with humanitarianism. But we Christians go one step further in giving the reason for our hope, the compelling motivation behind our love (cf. 1 Pt 3:15). In calling people to mission, we're not trying to promote do-goodism or a volunteerism that one accepts if one has nothing else to do. We preach a vocation and mission that is rooted in being one with Christ and his mission.

2. Bold Witness. In addition to preaching and teaching, our parishes need to provide a bold witness. Most parishes are doing good things. The problem is no one knows about them.

and constructively?" Bishop Hubbard's speech reflected upon "the mission of the parish at the outset of the new millennium."

He said that "the search for meaning — what does it mean to be human — is the religious question of the day, and young people in particular are asking it."

However, he commented, "we can help people connect or reconnect with the parish and the church only insofar as we have befriended and loved them. ... The challenge of evangelization is that it's not so much a lack of programs or resources that is at the heart of the problem, but a lack of relationships."

Bishop Hubbard stressed "the centrality of Jesus for the parish's mission," but said, "at times, unfortunately, it seems that the person of Jesus gets lost in translation."

He said that parishioners today "must learn how to enter the mystery of Jesus, seeing how his life, his words, his temptations, his choices, his facing death and his overcoming death related to the demands of the day, to the needs of God's people and to the fears of our contemporary world and society."

Bishop Hubbard presented four characteristics of successful parishes: good liturgy and preaching; an ability to help people deal practically with their life concerns; a feeling of ownership on the part of people; an alive quality to the parish.

In a quality parish, all four must be present and inter-related with one another, he said.

Bishop Hubbard discussed parish councils, collaboration among parishes, the ecumenical dimension of the contemporary parish, polarization and the need for a new civility, the parish's commitment to social justice and other matters.

*("The Mission of the Contemporary Parish," appeared in *Origins*, Vol. 34, No. 31, the edition dated Jan. 20, 2005.)*

A few years ago I was given a grant to study 12 parishes around the United States. The goal was to find parishes that were strong and vibrant, exemplary and effective Catholic parishes. One parish was in Houston. St. Cecilia is an active parish where there was a growing number of Hispanic immigrants coming to worship. Parishioners welcomed them but wanted to find a better way to integrate the newcomers into the parish.

The parish was blessed with a significant number of medical professionals. So they decided to pool their talents and open a well-baby clinic. As you might imagine, many local residents objected to the idea. With perseverance, the project went forward.

I was present at a parish orientation for prospective new parishioners. After the pastor spoke about the well-baby clinic, I asked a young couple sitting next to me, "Do you think you will be getting involved in the clinic?" They answered, "No, not us." I asked, "Are you opposed to the idea?" They responded, "Oh, no! In fact that's why we are here. We wanted to belong to a parish that stood for something." It was the bold witness of the parish that drew this young couple into its community life.

I found another example of bold witness at St. James Cathedral in Seattle. At the time of my parish study there were apartments surrounding the cathedral which were being gentrified and turned into condos. However, there were residents in those apartments who had lived there for years and couldn't afford to live there any longer under the new condo conversion.

St. James Cathedral parish was blessed with many attorneys. They got together and took the matter into their hands, fighting with city hall on behalf of longtime residents. Word spread throughout the Seattle area. The cathedral parish was respected for its bold witness.

One of the conclusions I came to in my study of parishes was that wherever there was a strong and bold witness, the liturgy was also strong and vibrant. And parishioners were inspired to mission by the example of that bold witness.

Why would anyone want to belong to your parish? What does your parish stand for? What difference does it make to the larger community? Is there a bold witness calling parishioners to mission?

3. Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults. Paragraph 75 in the RCIA outlines four major components to the catechumenate period: 1) catechesis; 2) becoming familiar with the Christian life by association with the community; 3) prayer, worship, liturgical rites; 4) introduction to the apostolic life and mission of the church.

Catechumens preparing for initiation into the Catholic Church are expected to apprentice with a veteran Catholic in learning the mission of the church. This is not a matter of doing a "service project" as we often ask our *confirmandi* to do. This is intended to be a hands-on learning experience of how to be a missionary.

"It's true that not everyone can go to Haiti or Nigeria on mission but someone can. If we don't give that person a mission opportunity, they will find it at the mega-church down the street and not return to the parish."

The National Catechetical Directory speaks about the catechumenal paradigm as the primary model for all catechesis. It says, "The baptismal catechumenate is the source of inspiration for all catechesis" (No. 35, D). Where we are falling short with the RCIA is when it comes to offering a mission apprenticeship, and we don't have our mission school in order.

4. Providing opportunities for mission. It's not enough to preach and teach about being missionary unless we also provide some direction for where parishioners can channel their missionary zeal. Mission destinations may be within the parish and beyond the parish. There ought to be a wide range of options so that there are opportunities for the confident and assertive as well as for the more timid or shy. Let the opportunities stretch and challenge.

At St. Mary we are trying to better broker the possibilities for mission by establishing a new ministry we call the parish mission director, who is someone who is familiar with all kinds of oppor-

tunities for exercising one's mission vocation. These are parish opportunities and options outside the parish.

The mission director can provide an orientation for mission and establish an incremental mission engagement. Someone may call and say, "I'm ready to do something. I can give two hours a week." I refer them to our mission director, who can help that individual's discernment for mission. We could all improve our parish websites for coordinating mission initiatives more effectively.

5. Celebrating the global church. While mission can be as close as the pew behind you, it's an awareness of the global church that teaches parishioners that the church and their vocation are bigger than their own parish.

Look around your parish church and its vestibule or gathering area. What do you see that tells you that you belong to something bigger than your own parish? In our suburban church there are three tapestries that hang over the main doors of the church above the baptismal font. They come from South Africa and are easily identified as African art.

At a town hall meeting someone asked, "Why do we have African art in our church when we don't have African parishioners?" Before I could answer the question, a parishioner stood up and said, "I love those tapestries. When our family leaves Mass on Sunday I often point to them and say to my children, 'Remember now, we belong to something bigger than St. Mary's. Our Catholic family includes every continent and so Jesus wants us to serve the world in his name.'"

What about the music in your parish? The selection of devotional art? Are there posters or information screens inviting and enticing parishioners to learn and share beyond our borders? Do you celebrate the diversity within your parish? Does the preaching include concerns beyond your own town?

6. Increase contact with missionaries. There's no better way to get fired up for mission than to hear a missionary's story. When the annual Propagation of the Faith appeal is made every year, we ought to consider arranging to have the visiting missionary meet with parishioners outside Mass. How about keeping in touch with a missionary? Can we Skype or blog to further our missionary

connections?

How about adopting a sharing parish like the small mission church in Scottsville, Ky.? It's not a matter of choosing one option to feel that we've satisfied our mission responsibilities. Let there be multiple options for mission. Can you envision a mission abroad where you send parishioners as well as financial aid? And remember there is a mutuality expected here. We have much to learn and receive from those with whom we have a missionary relationship.

7. Introduce youth to mission. Begin young. Frassati Catholic Academy opened its doors for the first time in August 2010. It is the first regional Catholic middle school of the Archdiocese of Chicago. The school is named after Blessed Pier Giorgio Frassati, who was a faithful disciple, fun-loving friend and a great athlete. In his own way he became a missionary to the poor and infirm without leaving home. He lived in Turin, Italy, and died in 1925 at the age of 24 from polio, which he presumably contracted from one of his sick friends.

We chose him as our school's patron because we were convinced that we need more appealing models for youth of Christian discipleship. At Frassati Catholic Academy we're committed to promoting mission: 1) We've chosen a patron, Blessed Pier Giorgio Frassati, who embodies for youth what a young missionary looks like; 2) we are in the process of developing a three-year incremental plan for mission engagement; 3) every Friday we hold an assembly and invite someone to speak about their mission in the world.

In preparation for celebrating Pier Giorgio's birthday on April 6, we invited our students to write an essay on what Pier Giorgio means to them and how Pier Giorgio inspires them to mission. A young boy wrote:

"The spirit of Pier Giorgio inspires me to follow and live the beatitudes no matter what others may say or think. His strength of character demonstrates that no matter what your station in life may be, you can help. Not always with money, but with your spirit and time. Pier Giorgio was blessed with the will and determination to share his love of God and especially the beatitudes. His gift of putting others before himself was

an astounding lesson that he continues to teach today. His example shows me that the volunteering I have done in the past is something I need to continue all my life."

An eighth-grade girl said: "Pier Giorgio Frassati inspires me to not get frustrated or depressed at the dysfunctional world around me. His life nearly shouts at me, 'Get up and stop being lazy! This world needs help, and you're the one to change it.'"

See what our youth are capable of! If our youth are going to become missionaries, we have to get them started now. Let's not forget we have the Holy Childhood Association to help us.

8. Bring together those who have a missionary heart and witness a missionary spirit. Thanks to the work of the Holy Spirit, the exercise of mission is not limited to whatever the pastor might suggest.

"If we do not help the faithful to see the intimate connection between Eucharist and mission, we risk becoming humanitarians cut off from our spiritual roots as disciples."

We have a dentist, for example, who just returned from mission work in Nigeria. We have parishioners who give their time to Catholic Charities to help the poor and elderly manage their benefits and budgets. We have a group of young moms who provide meals, transportation and baby-sitting for families in crisis. Listen to the stories of these people. Support them with prayer and affirmation. Offer their witness as an example to inspire others.

9. Returning to the Eucharist to hear the call to mission and to be formed by the Master himself.

Preaching on the Scriptures is essential. But preaching on the liturgy is also essential for the formation of missionaries. We need a stronger mystagogical catechesis that flows from the Eucharist, which is the wellspring for mission. At the turn of the millennium Pope John Paul II said:

"Entering into communion with Christ in the memorial of his Pasch also means sensing the duty to be a missionary of the event made present in that rite. The dismissal at the end of Mass is a charge given to Christians inviting them to work for the spread of the Gospel and the imbuing of society with Christian values" (*Mane Nobiscum Domine*, 25).

In a similar vein Pope John Paul II wrote in *Dies Domini*:

"For the faithful who have understood the meaning of what they have done, the eucharistic celebration does not stop at the church door. ... Once the assembly disperses, Christ's disciples return to their everyday surroundings with the commitment to make their whole life a gift, a spiritual sacrifice pleasing to God (cf. Rom 12:1). They feel indebted to their brothers and sisters because of what they have received in the celebration, not unlike the disciples of Emmaus once they had recognized the risen Christ 'in the breaking of the bread' (cf. Lk 24:30-32) felt the need to return immediately to share with their brothers and sisters the joy of meeting the Lord (cf. Lk 24:33-35)" (No. 45).

Our eucharistic piety continues to be weighted in the direction of an individual relationship with Christ and the personal benefit of receiving the Eucharist. This is good and certainly part of our tradition. But so too, as Pope John Paul II tells us, is the call to mission that comes from the Eucharist.

To be a eucharistic people means we take the self-emptying love we have encountered at the altar and extend that love by being bread broken and wine poured out for others. If we do not help the faithful to see the intimate connection between Eucharist and mission, we risk becoming humanitarians cut off from our spiritual roots as disciples.

Are there any signs of hope that we are making any progress?

Yes. There are plenty of signs that the faithful are catching the spirit of mission. I love to tell the story of a bridal couple at their wedding rehearsal. After leading them through the usual routine choreography for the wedding liturgy, the bride and groom asked me, "Father, at what point will we take up the collection?" I told them that we don't usually do that at a wedding.

I asked them what their intention was. They told me, "Father, we realize

that our marriage is not just about us. As a Christian married couple our vocation is to the world. And so as the first act of our married life we would like to contribute to a needy mission of your choosing.”

I was also touched by a young server, who after serving a funeral Mass, came to me with the \$10 the funeral director had given him and said: “Father, I’ve been watching the terrible destruction in Japan. Could you help me find a way of getting this \$10 to where it can help someone in Japan?”

I asked him, “Don’t you want to use the money for something you need?” The young boy answered, “Father, I’ll serve other funerals. But right now the people in Japan need this money more than I do.”

Two simple anecdotes but genuine expressions of being for others, which, of course, lies at the heart of mission.

We have parishioners who travel on business around the world and have been touched by the church alive but sometimes struggling in every corner of the earth. They’ve come home to share their stories about discovering new dimensions to their faith. What can these business travelers teach us? Can they be missionaries on these trips? I have been inspired by the generous and humble gestures that some of these business travelers have learned to make on their visits.

We can help to develop their sense of mission by gathering these international business travelers for dialogue and prayer. We can also move them a little further by asking them how their positions of power can influence the decisions that are made in boardrooms affecting millions globally.

It’s been a number of years now since I knocked on doors in Scottsville, Ky., announcing the presence of the Catholic Church in Allen County. But the lessons I learned at an impressionable age have influenced my zeal for mission for almost four decades.

The few seeds I planted were only a beginning. Others came and watered those seeds. The two trailers are gone, and there is a newly dedicated church where Catholics gather for Mass every Sunday. Christ the King parish is still the only Catholic church in Allen County. The growth has been slow. But in speaking with the pastor, Glenmary

Father Dennis Holly, I learned that the doors are not slamming quite as hard or as frequently in the face of Catholics in Allen County. The Catholic Church is accepted now. And the mission continues. ■

The Catholics We Are Becoming

Father Couturier, OFM Cap

Young adults in America are “largely uninterested in institutional religion,” Capuchin Franciscan Father David Couturier said April 10 in a keynote address at the annual meeting of the Conference for Pastoral Planning and Council Development at the Catholic Theological Union in Chicago. Father Couturier, director of pastoral planning for the Archdiocese of Boston, said these young adults are, “by most accounts, the most religiously unaffiliated generation in the history of the world,” and the church must face whether it “can develop appropriate grounding institutions that help this fast-paced generation of young adults negotiate family and work in the ‘hot, flat and crowded’ conditions of the new global economy.” If the church in the U.S. cannot meet the needs of this group, it “will continue becoming a church of consistently nonpracticing Catholics for whom the institutional church is largely tangential to the high task of developing character in today’s turbulent world of family, love and business.” He stressed the importance of measuring “Catholic well-being,” which he described as “the sense that Catholics have that Catholicism is working for them, the satisfaction they feel in being Catholic and the assurance they have that their church is responsive to their needs and their implicit understanding of the mission of the church.” He described some efforts being undertaken in the Boston Archdiocese to measure Catholic well-being there. Father Couturier’s keynote address follows.

As pastoral planners, we are the ones designated in the church to look out at the horizon, off into the distance to see the challenges emerging and the oppor-

tunities cresting for the community of faith. We are the ones charged with pointing out the changing social and cultural landscape so that our pastoral leaders and ministers can serve God’s people in a more effective way.

While forecasting is not yet a solid (nor well-funded) practice in the Catholic Church, we know that the American Catholic experience is constantly changing. The geography of faith transforms from one generation to the next. From the earliest days of “priestless churches” to our now-growing practice of “multiple-parish pastoring,” we are a community that regularly, if reluctantly, adapts to the myriad of social, cultural and ecclesial forces that shape us as a Catholic community.

Tonight, as we look out over the horizon of American Catholicism, we see some sites that are familiar to us and some sites that are strange. We see continuity and difference, and both offer us challenge and opportunity. Let’s focus on that horizon.

On the Horizon

When Catholics are surveyed, they show an amazing level of continuity in their beliefs over time. Whether rich or poor, young or old, urban or suburban, liberal or conservative, Catholics continue to believe in the resurrection of Jesus, the Lord’s true presence in the Eucharist and other sacraments. They continue to hold that Mary is the mother of God, that God is especially present to the poor, and that prayer and charity are important in our everyday life.¹

However they practice their faith, regularly or irregularly, with high or low devotion, Catholics tend to hold on tightly to their core beliefs, and it is these core beliefs that are the critical markers that Catholics use to define their Catholic identity. Catholics like being Catholic, and for the majority they remain Catholic and identify themselves as Catholics sometimes despite what Catholic clergy and fellow parishioners do or don’t do.²

But as we look out at the horizon tonight we know there are disturbing signs starting to appear. We are beginning to lose a large number of Catholics. In fact, the Pew research on religious affiliation indicates that Catholicism in America is showing the greatest net losses when it comes to the number

of people identifying with the religion they grew up in. While nearly one in three Americans (31 percent) was raised Catholic, today less than one in four (24 percent) identifies as Catholic.³

In this 2008 survey, one-third of the respondents who say they were raised as Catholic no longer describe themselves as Catholic. We can see the scope of this trend if we put it in national terms. Roughly 10 percent of all Americans are former Catholics.

We would feel the difference this hemorrhaging makes if it were not for the now-steady influx of immigrants, largely but not exclusively Latino, who have kept the overall percentage of the population that identifies as Catholic relatively stable (at 25 percent). It is important to note that Latinos account for nearly half (45 percent) of all Catholics ages 18-29.⁴

What else do we know?

Even with their strong adherence to their core beliefs, there are equally strong indications that Catholics are changing dramatically in the way they practice their faith.

Research indicates that Catholics are diverging, sometimes dramatically, on their attitudes toward church practice: how frequently one should attend Mass, on issues of sexual morality, on abortion and homosexuality, on the discipline that only celibate men can become priests and over the church's involvement in activities directed toward social justice.⁵

Researchers are telling us that Catholics are developing a complex relationship between their Catholic identity, on the one hand, and the way they understand what it means to practice their identity in the traffic of daily life, on the other. They are changing their mind and their behavior when it comes to the moral authority of the hierarchy and their commitment to the institutional church and its policies and regulations.⁶

If creedal beliefs were the only measuring tool we used to understand the Catholics we are becoming, we would have a relatively simple message to tell. Namely,

—Catholics “are happy to be Catholic. They’re proud to be Catholic. They like being Catholic.”⁷

—When Catholics are asked what is important in being Catholic, they con-

fidently name four things — the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, the Eucharist, helping the poor and Mary as the mother of God.⁸

—This continuity of belief transcends a whole host of cultural and social variables. It is as true in our so-called emerging “minority” communities as it is and was in our more traditional and long-standing communities across the country.

“Researchers are telling us that Catholics are developing a complex relationship between their Catholic identity, on the one hand, and the way they understand what it means to practice their identity in the traffic of daily life, on the other.”

But something is indeed changing. Catholics are rethinking the way they understand the task of religion, the way they take up their roles in the faith and the way they apportion authority within the community.

Changes in Task, Role and Authority

American Catholics have always found various ways of being Catholic, diverse forms of being authentically American and faithfully Catholic, often with a blend and a mixture that worried the hierarchy here and in Rome. American Catholics have always had a penchant for the practical when they faced questions about how to live their American and Catholic lives. As James O'Toole reminds us in his latest book *The Faithful: A History of Catholics in America*:

“Catholics have been changing from the very beginning. Their experience has been varied, not uniform or monolithic. No one experience has been more authentic or defining than all others.”⁹

Today, once again, Catholics are trying to negotiate what they have always tried to negotiate — love and family, jobs and careers, sickness and health, greed and generosity. But they do so in a postmodern and some would suggest a

post-Christian era, using whatever pastoral tools and ecclesial institutions that are at hand. Catholics are changing, and so are the church institutions on which they have depended. The question we face is whether Catholics and their institutions are changing or “becoming” in the same direction, with the same vision and toward similar ends.

As we look back at the founding generation of Catholic builders in America, we see a time when Catholics and their institutions seemed to be developing or “becoming” in the same direction and for the same purposes.

Looking back to our builder generation, we see a powerful legacy of a unified mission and strong institutions. Our Catholic ancestors came to this country (largely) as immigrants with a twofold purpose: to defend the faith in an alien land and to move a generation of Catholics up and out of disadvantage as quickly as possible. And they built powerful institutions to accomplish those twin tasks.

They built strong neighborhood churches and the largest and most successful private school network the world had ever known. They created a vast complex of hospitals, orphanages and charitable associations, the most effective network of private charity the world had ever seen, one that ministered to millions of Americans every year.

The builder generation left the boomer generation that followed it with a powerful set of institutions, from parochial schools to first-rate universities in which to hone the life skills and character-shaping virtues needed for developmental tasks of pursuing careers, dating and marrying spouses, raising families, building communities and serving the public.

No more powerful symbol of the builder generation's achievement can be found than in the fact that six of the nine Supreme Court justices today are Catholic! I think our ancestors would have been stunned and would be enormously proud that this accomplishment is replicated each and every day around the country by countless Catholics succeeding and thriving in every industry and not-for-profit endeavor imaginable. The Catholics we have become is due in large measure to the supporting institutions we created to scale the heights of social and economic prejudice that

were pressed against us.

If Catholics demonstrated a cooperative spirit with the clergy during the time of expansion, it was because they felt they could call on Catholic institutions to give them the spiritual skills and theological support to do what needed to be done as good Catholics and authentic Americans in the tricky world of American commerce. They knew that Catholic institutions were enabling and emboldening them to engage and even to succeed at the pioneering and progressive tempers of the time in a way that didn't outpace or undermine their fundamental creedal beliefs. They trusted that the clergy understood the times in which they lived.

We became a successful generation of Catholics well integrated into the business and politics of the major industrial power because the Catholic Church provided grounding institutions precisely at the moment when Catholics needed them most.¹⁰ The church was present concretely and institutionally present, with religious and clergy leading the way when young people were making their decisions on what career or vocation to pursue, who and when to marry, and how to raise a family. The church provided a sense of well-being and projected an image of itself as a confident and helpful institution.

The builder generation created the institutional sources of support and stability that allowed the boomer generation to succeed and thrive in the complex and competitive environment of the mid- to late-20th-century world of capitalism.

If the task of the builder generation was to defend the faith and move a generation up and out of disadvantage, the task of the boomer generation was a bit different. It was to sustain the faith handed on to it and extend it with the advantages of an advanced democratic society. The boomer generation faced the enviable challenge of keeping the faith, building community across (old) divides and practicing justice in a new world of freedom, opportunity and economic possibilities.

The builder generation became American Catholics by using the institutions of the faith to establish a foothold and a claim on the American dream, enduring enormous hardships in the process. The boomer generation,

for its part, tried to become American Catholics by using their inherited faith to expand freedom, opportunity and economic possibilities.

Using the language and the images of Vatican II, boomers created their own very practical template of assimilation and accommodation. Freedom, opportunity and economic possibility would be achieved in the Catholic community across its incredibly diverse social, cultural, ethnic and ideological differences if we learned how to abide comfortably enough with our ritual and formational differences. The gamble was that we could live civilly with one another if we tolerated one another's preferences and styles of religious involvement. After the Second Vatican Council, this meant the creation of seven different "cultures of Catholic living."

"We became a successful generation of Catholics well integrated into the business and politics of the major industrial power because the Catholic Church provided grounding institutions precisely at the moment when Catholics needed them most."

These seven cultures represented distinct ways of practicing the faith, each one a sincere attempt at being faithfully Catholic and authentically American. Whether essentialist or existentialist, communally oriented or behavioral, whether motivated by God's liberation of the poor or hoping, as a neo-essentialist, for a restoration of basic principles and order, or whether one comes to the church steeped in today's professional culture, each of these orientations took up the lingering task of the boomer generation — to sustain the faith within the rules of an expanding democratic spirit and an emerging economic empire.¹¹

A New Landscape, A New Generation

If there is a major difference between the situation of the builder and boomer generations and that of the new gen-

eration of emerging adults (ages 22-40), which is 50.7 percent of the adult population today, it may be this — our strong Catholic institutions of support are out of sync with the developmental needs of this younger generation of Catholic adults.

We have before us a generation of young adults who are negotiating life and faith in a wholly different way, a generation for whom the polarizing debates that set the builders and boomers adrift are no longer interesting or practical. This is a generation that is being forced by the new and untested rules of economic engagement to delay their decisions and commitments about careers, love and family well beyond the time that the church is structurally able to engage them.

This generation has a new set of challenges in front of them which has to do with two overwhelming realities: the reinvention of work in America and the rules (and rising fears) governing the "new economy."¹²

Landscapes and seascapes change when the plates underneath shift ever so slightly. The recent tsunami that hit Japan with such brutal force, killing tens of thousands and consuming whole villages in the process, was the result of a slight shift of tectonic plates underground. It raised sea levels and ate up coastlines in a matter of minutes. The horizon in Japan looks markedly different today because of the earthquake and ensuing tsunami.

Similarly, the landscape of young adulthood is changing. That landscape is being rearranged by economic forces which we rarely study and even more rarely critique.¹³ We have already moved as a society from a largely relational culture that places a priority on family and faith to a new global work culture that places a premium on work and one's career above all else. The landscape for young adults is changing in two significant ways:

1. Time. The new economy demands more and more of our time, energy and attention. The ubiquity of technology makes us constantly available for work, and the boundaries between work and life are constantly blurred.

I was talking recently with an experienced and enthusiastic youth minister who was discussing how difficult it was to maintain a youth ministry program.

It wasn't a matter of means or motivation. The parish had an ample supply of both. It boiled down to a matter of time.

"Young people just don't have time," this youth minister told me. Their time is consumed by "sports and AP [advanced placement] classes," all designed to give the promise to young students of a leg up and an advantage to succeed in the highly competitive world of the marketplace today.

2. Desire. The new economy profoundly changes the nature of our desiring. Whereas a classical economy reminded people, as St. Augustine once put it so profoundly, "our hearts are restless until they rest in thee, O God," our new economy deftly "commodifies" our desire. It materializes our desires and turns them into products to be bought and sold. Our new economy substitutes the "infinity of goods" for the "infinity of God," leaving us ever more restless, rootless and uncertain.

Young people are watching as old economic rules (and by *old* I mean those of just a few years ago) are reworked with greater demands and fewer guarantees. A college education and even a master's degree are no longer sure bets for employment in America.

With jobs and careers becoming more and more of a gamble, young people are putting off significant commitments. They are delaying decisions about love, marriage, family, career and settling down well into their 30s. (This year's "State of Our Unions" report out of the Marriage Project at the University of Virginia suggests that marriage is even more vulnerable in the heartland of America, in the conservative middle part of our country than it is on the so-called elite — liberal — coasts.)¹⁴

There are new rules on the super cyberhighway. On that roadway one lives and breathes uncertainty, diversity, fluidity and continuous searching.¹⁵

Here is where we come in. Most of the important decisions of the America we have become and of the Catholics we are becoming — those about sexuality, marriage, friends, careers and children — are happening out of the reach of our congregations because most of our formational programs generally have a shelf life that lasts only to confirmation and not much beyond.¹⁶

Because our institutions of support may no longer match up to the devel-

opmental tasks of our young adults, this generation is choosing to devise a more "improvisational" style of religious and social engagement in almost everything they do.¹⁷ They are not interested in the polarized debates that occupied the minds and pulpits of the builders and the boomers. And so, the "Catholics we are becoming" is less cerebral and less ideological and more improvisational than builders and boomers can understand or categorize.

"We have already moved as a society from a largely relational culture that places a priority on family and faith to a new global work culture that places a premium on work and one's career above all else."

This generation of emerging young adults is largely uninterested in institutional religion. They are, by most accounts, the most religiously unaffiliated generation in the history of the world. They simply don't see how religion helps them get by in the turbulent world of modern life, love and business. They probably would agree with John Wayne, who once said, "I don't much like God when he gets under a roof!"

Our challenge is a whole lot more complex than just moving "from maintenance to mission." The question we must face is whether the church can develop appropriate grounding institutions that help this fast-paced generation of young adults negotiate family and work in the "hot, flat and crowded" conditions of the new global economy.¹⁸

If we cannot do this and do it quickly, then this generation will underscore and make chronic what is already true about us — we have become and will continue becoming a church of consistently nonpracticing Catholics, for whom the institutional church is largely tangential to the high task of developing character in today's turbulent world of family, love and business.¹⁹

How can we as pastoral planners find out how well our church initiatives are responding to the needs of this emerging

population of young adults and influence the church we are becoming? This is a question that has been underneath my own practice as the director of pastoral planning in the Archdiocese of Boston.

Why are we fast becoming a church of chronically nonpracticing Catholics? I am suggesting here that the answer lies in the ordinary Catholic's sense of "Catholic well-being," the sense that Catholics have that Catholicism is working for them, the satisfaction they feel in being Catholic and the assurance they have that their church is responsive to their needs and their implicit understanding of the mission of the church.

What distinguishes the builder generation's experience of the institutional church and that of succeeding generations revolves around this experience of well-being. The builder generation knew and trusted that the clergy understood and respected their challenges in the new world. They knew the clergy sympathized with their struggles and would respond with appropriate institutions and initiatives to support their progress.

The builder generation was happy to be Catholic and confident in the health of their parish communities and their capacity to respond appropriately to the needs of the times. Their confidence was confirmed in the great expansion of parishes, parochial schools and church hospitals during the early part of the 20th century most of all. But this confidence in ecclesial responsiveness started to wobble in the last days of the builder generation and in the period of the boomer generation, and it has more or less collapsed for the generation of young adults that succeeds them.

Are Catholics today confident that their parishes understand the challenges facing them and can respond appropriately and effectively to their pastoral needs? Do they believe their parishes are healthy enough to engage the tough spiritual challenges that arise in the lives of Catholics today?

Clearly we are becoming a church of consistently nonpracticing Catholics, but until we understand the connection between the felt sense of well-being and practice, we will make no difference and have little influence on the Catholics we are becoming.

Measures of Catholic Well-Being

The issue of Catholic well-being is not

an insignificant one in the Archdiocese of Boston, where I serve as the director of pastoral planning. In the past decade we have dealt with three major crises that created a “perfect storm” of pastoral pain for laity and clergy alike. As you all know, Boston became the epicenter of the clergy sexual abuse scandal that caused overwhelming and justifiable feelings of rage, disgust, anger, mistrust, cynicism, and betrayal in and against the church.

Not all those feelings have gone away. They are within reach, as we find out every time a new revelation of sexual abuse anywhere in the world points back to the crimes and failures of bishops and priests here and around the country. One 20-year old in Boston was recently quoted, accurately I think, by the New York Times, “The church here is still reeling from it.”

But, this scandal was followed by two aftershocks. The first aftershock was the reconfiguration of parishes when the archdiocese closed 60 parishes. Without judging the motives or the work of those involved, it was clear that the timing could not have been worse. Many Catholics who had stayed with the church and found comfort and solace in their local parishes during the time of the scandal in 2002 found themselves debating and in competition over the survival of their parishes just a year or two later. Boston Catholics have described it to me as playing “Survivor Island” with other Catholics, voting each other off the island. The consequences of the reconfiguration, however well intentioned, have been deep and painful.

A once-friendly rivalry for excellence between parishes turned ugly and led to protests, vigils and sit-ins that have lasted six years or more and costs the archdiocese tens of thousands of dollars to litigate in church and civil courts. While many Catholics understood the need to close parishes and adjusted well to new places of worship, there is no doubt that the pace and style of the reconfiguration process exacerbated the hard feelings and anger of the sexual abuse scandal and made Cardinal O’Malley’s ministry of healing and the restoration of credibility all the more difficult.

Recently, Boston University conducted a study of Boston priests to see how they were doing after the sexual abuse scandal and the reconfiguration

of parishes.²⁰ The study indicated that many of our priests are experiencing a posttraumatic stress, a kind of stress that some have said is comparable to that experienced by the men and women of Oklahoma City after their terrorist attack.

“The first aftershock was the reconfiguration of parishes when the archdiocese closed 60 parishes. ... Boston Catholics have described it to me as playing ‘Survivor Island’ with other Catholics, voting each other off the island.”

The third calamity in our perfect storm has been the financial crisis that is not tied directly to the sexual abuse scandal but to the result of other factors, not least of which is the drop in church attendance, now at 16.5 percent of all Catholics going to church. An infrastructure of parishes and church institutions built for 50 percent-70 percent participation now has to get by on the resources provided by a little more than 15 percent of church attendees.

The cardinal has announced a balanced budget for the first time in eight years, no small feat in a time of increased suspicion, mistrust, great recession and steep decline in church attendance.

All of this to suggest that what is needed now is a strong assessment of how Catholics are doing and how they are faring in this turbulent time. It is not enough to answer how Catholics are believing — more so, because studies indicate that Catholic beliefs hold firm over time and culture. What is changing is the way Catholics experience church, how they see and perceive the well-being of their Catholic experience.

The pertinent question today is not “how are our beliefs holding up?” but “how are Catholics doing?” and “how are they faring?” And “how conducive are our Catholic institutions for the transformative work of faith in the post-modern world?”

As pastoral planners, we build our efforts on the presupposition that our

people are emotionally, spiritually, organizationally and socially strong enough to engage the processes of organizational change that are needed in the church today.

What we are looking to develop now is an instrument of Catholic well-being, a tool that will help us understand whether Catholic life in all its dimensions is getting better or worse. It would be an instrument that could track the sense of feeling good or positive about being Catholic but also of being in a church community that is functioning effectively.

We are looking for a barometer of Catholic satisfaction with life in the church and a measurement of the quality of Catholic experience across several aspects of pastoral life. We need to know how and whether our work and our institutions are meeting the needs of our people today, whether they are seen as pastorally healthy, effective and helpful in meeting the concerns of the faithful. We are looking for an instrument of satisfaction and quality of Catholic life across several dimensions.

Once we know how Catholics are experiencing their Catholic lives, then we may be able to pursue the risk factors to Catholic well-being, those things that threaten the ongoing practice of Catholic faith.

I remember the research that Dean Hoge did on the risk factors facing the newly ordained.²¹ They revolved not around creeds or doctrines but around their experience of authority, isolation and misunderstanding in the church. We need to know more about the well-being of our clergy, of our lay ecclesial ministers and of ordinary Catholics sitting in the pews.

Beyond that, we need to know the factors that promote positive change in Catholic well-being across the generations, and we need to understand the protective factors that might be instituted in high-risk parishes, those communities that for various reasons threaten a positive experience of church.

In the Archdiocese of Boston we are developing several instruments that will help us know how Catholics are doing and how they are faring in their experience of church life. It is a work in progress.

At this point, we are developing three distinct instruments.

The first is a straightforward Thirty-Second Survey. Based on the National Promoter Index, we look to understand basic parishioner loyalty. We ask the question, “How likely is it that you would recommend your parish to a friend, neighbor or colleague?” Consistent with national standards, we would learn how deep parishioner satisfaction or attachment to their parish is. The higher the score the more likely is the feeling of positive connection to the parish.

“An infrastructure of parishes and church institutions built for 50 percent-70 percent participation now has to get by on the resources provided by a little more than 15 percent of church attendees.”

To go more deeply, we have constructed a second survey, the Catholic Well-Being Scale. We reviewed and learned from the work of psychologists and sociologists who have already constructed effective religious and spiritual well-being scales.²² We are experimenting with similar questions and approaches to theirs but directed more precisely to the issue of Catholic well-being in parish settings.

We do this because of our understanding that Catholic well-being is always contextual. Stated somewhat theologically and ecclesialogically, we might say that the cross can only be borne or endured within the community of faith. Outside the church, the cross is simply nightmare and existential chaos.

In this survey we may learn more precisely what it is about church experience that fosters a sense of well-being. We pose statements like:

- “I feel my parish cares about me.”
- “I don’t find liturgy (Mass) in my parish inspiring or satisfying.”
- “I believe my parish is concerned about my problems.”

We ask Catholics their level of agreement or disagreement with statements like those above. We hope to discriminate between the experiences of men and women, and distinguish the generations of Catholics living out their faith.

A third survey is being launched that should help us determine the connection between parishioner satisfaction and parish health. With the aid of a new tool called Logic Manager, we are developing tolerance levels for our sacramental indexes, our baptism-to-funeral ratios and our financial stress index that will help us track parish health and parish distress over time. We hope to track the connection between a Catholic sense of well-being and indications of parish distress.

We are looking for how Catholics are experiencing their institutions — are they inspiring and motivating; are they supportive and helpful? Are the institutions on which Catholics depend today able to provide basic pastoral services, especially to the emerging generation of young adults? Are our Catholic institutions and initiatives on a trajectory of health or distress?

Conclusion

We have been asking a complex question — what kind of Catholics are we becoming? Sociologically, we know that we are becoming a more culturally diverse community, and if nothing dramatic changes, we will become a much smaller ecclesial presence in America. The trajectories of church attendance rates indicate smaller Catholic communities into the future. But the rate could be more severe if we don’t attend to the connection that exists between a sense of well-being and institutions that address the concerns we have.

The builder generation recognized that Catholic institutions supported and furthered their concerns. The boomer generation accommodated as best they could to the freedom and opportunities that came into sight in their time.

Today’s emerging adults need a chance to see a clearer connection between their challenges and the ministries of the church. The question is not about their beliefs as about the way their faith is practiced.

We need instruments that help us understand how Catholics are doing and how well our institutions and our programs are motivating and inspiring Catholics in the practice of their faith.

We are at the beginning of a new line of research that we hope will help us plan more efficiently and minister more effectively to the Catholics we are becoming.

Notes

- ¹ William V. D’Antonio, et al., *American Catholics Today: New Realities of Their Faith and Their Church* (Lanham, Md.: The Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2007), p. 23-29.
- ² *Ibid.*, p. 142-143.
- ³ “The U.S. Religious Landscape Survey,” Pew Research Center Publications, Feb. 25, 2008, <http://pewresearch.org/pubs/743/united-states-religion>.
- ⁴ *Ibid.*
- ⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 25.
- ⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 141-154.
- ⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 20.
- ⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 4.
- ⁹ James M. O’Toole, *The Faithful: A History of Catholics in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), p. 3.
- ¹⁰ This is the thesis that Robert Wuthnow develops in *After the Baby Boomers: How Twenty and Thirty Somethings Are Shaping the Future of American Religion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).
- ¹¹ David B. Couturier, “The Ecclesial Conversion” in *The Four Conversions: A Spirituality of Transformation*, (South Bend, Ind.: The Victoria Press, 2008).
- ¹² David B. Couturier, “The Reinvention of Work in Religious Communities of Men,” *New Theology Review* 11:3 (August 1998), pp. 22-35.
- ¹³ David B. Couturier, *The Fraternal Economy: A Pastoral Psychology of Franciscan Economics* (South Bend, Ind.: Cloverdale Books, 2007).
- ¹⁴ W. Bradford Wilcox, “When Marriage Disappears,” The Marriage Project, University of Virginia, 2010, www.statefourunions.org.
- ¹⁵ Wuthnow, p. xvi.
- ¹⁶ Programs like Renew and Arise are filling a void in adult formation but cannot keep pace with the needs of a younger generation of Catholic adults.
- ¹⁷ Cf. Wuthnow for a further description of this “improvisational” style of young adulthood.
- ¹⁸ Thomas L. Friedman, *Hot, Flat and Crowded* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008).
- ¹⁹ N.T. Wright, *After You Believe: Why Christian Character Matters* (New York: Harper One, 2010).
- ²⁰ The study was conducted by James Burns, PhD, and Brian McCorkle of the Danielsen Institute of Boston University.
- ²¹ David B. Couturier, “Priestly Formation, Dean Hoge and the First Wisdom of Sociology,” *Seminary Journal* (December 2009).
- ²² We are using the work of Bufford, Paloutzian and Ellison for our experiment and acknowledge our indebtedness to their original research. We refer readers to their seminal experiments in this field. Cf. R.K. Bufford, R.F. Paloutzian and C.W. Ellison, “Norms for the Spiritual Well-Being Scale,” *Journal of Psychology and Theology* (1991), 19, p. 56-70. ■

Discussion

Between Pope and Astronauts at Space Station

Benedict XVI and Astronauts

Pope Benedict XVI reached out to outer space to ask astronauts how their unique perspective from the frontier of the universe makes them think about difficult

questions back on Earth. In a video hookup May 21 between the Vatican and the International Space Station in orbit around the Earth, Pope Benedict asked the astronauts how science can help in the pursuit of peace and the need to protect a fragile planet. Seated at a desk in front of a video screen, the pope could see the 12 astronauts huddled before the camera and trying not to float away from lack of gravity inside the station. The group included space station crew and members of the final mission of the U.S. shuttle Endeavour. The pope asked questions of five astronauts. His first question dealt with violence and war, and was addressed to the Endeavour mission commander, U.S. astronaut Mark Kelly, whose wife, Arizona Rep. Gabrielle Giffords, was still recovering after being critically injured in a shooting in January. In Italian, the pope asked Italian astronaut Paolo Nespoli how he was handling the recent death of his mother while he was at the space station, and the pope offered his prayers to Nespoli and his family. Nespoli thanked the pope for his prayers and said he was glad he was able to speak with his mother before she died. The discussion between the pope and the astronauts follows.

Dear astronauts, I am very happy to have this extraordinary opportunity to converse with you during your mission. I am especially grateful to be able to speak to so many of you as both crews are present on the space station at this time.

Humanity is experiencing a period of extremely rapid progress in the fields of scientific knowledge and technical applications. In a sense, you are our representatives — spearheading humanity's exploration of new spaces and possibilities for our future, going beyond the limitations of our everyday existence.

We all admire your courage as well as the discipline and commitment with which you prepared yourselves for this mission. We are convinced you are inspired by noble ideals and that you intend placing the results of your research and endeavors at the disposal of all humanity and for the common good.

This conversation gives me the chance to express my own admiration and appreciation to you and to all those

who collaborate in making your mission possible, and to add my heartfelt encouragement to bring it to a safe and successful conclusion.

But this is a conversation, so I must not be the only one doing the talking. I am very curious to hear you tell me about your experiences and your reflections. If you don't mind, I would like to ask you a few questions.

1. From the space station you have a very different view of the Earth. You fly over different continents and nations several times a day. I think it must be obvious to you how we all live together on one Earth and how absurd it is that we fight and kill each other.

I know that Mark Kelly's wife was a victim of a serious attack, and I hope her health continues to improve. When you are contemplating the Earth from up there, do you ever wonder about the way nations and people live together down here or about how science can contribute to the cause of peace?

Mark Kelly, USA: Well, thank you for the kind words, Your Holiness, and thank you for mentioning my wife, Gabby. It's a very good question: We fly over most of the world and you don't see borders, but at the same time we realize that people fight with each other and there is a lot of violence in this world and it's really an unfortunate thing.

Usually, people fight over many different things. As we've seen in the Middle East right now, it's somewhat for democracy in certain areas, but usually people fight for resources. And it's interesting in space ... on Earth people often fight for energy; in space we use solar power, and we have fuel cells on the space station. You know, the science and the technology that we put into the space station to develop a solar power capability gives us pretty much an unlimited amount of energy. And if those technologies could be adapted more on Earth, we could possibly reduce some of that violence.

2. One of the themes I often return to in my discourses concerns the responsibility we all have toward the future of our planet. I recall the serious risks facing the environment and the survival of future generations. Scientists tell us we have to be careful and from an ethical point of view we must develop our con-

sciences as well.

From your extraordinary observation point, how do you see the situation on Earth? Do you see signs or phenomena to which we need to be more attentive?

Ron Garan, USA: Well, Your Holiness, it's a great honor to speak with you, and you're right: It really is an extraordinary vantage point we have up here. On the one hand we can see how indescribably beautiful the planet that we have been given is, but on the other hand we can really clearly see how fragile it is.

Just the atmosphere, for instance: The atmosphere when viewed from space is paper thin, and to think that this paper-thin layer is all that separates every living thing from the vacuum of space and is all that protects us is really a sobering thought.

You know, it seems to us that it's just incredible to view the Earth hanging in the blackness of space and to think that we are all on this together, riding through this beautiful fragile oasis through the universe; it really fills us with a lot of hope to think that all of us on board this incredible orbiting space station that was built by the many nations of our international partnership. To accomplish this tremendous feat in orbit, I think, you know, that just shows that by working together and by cooperating we can overcome many of the problems that face our planet; we could solve many of the challenges that face the inhabitants of our planet. It really is a wonderful place to live and work, and it's a wonderful place to view our beautiful Earth.

3. The experience you are having right now is both extraordinary and very important — even if you must eventually come back down to Earth like all the rest of us.

When you do return, you will be much admired and treated like heroes who speak and act with authority. You will be asked to talk about your experiences. What will be the most important messages you would like to convey — to young people especially — who will live in a world strongly influenced by your experiences and discoveries?

Mike Finchke, USA: Your Holiness, as my colleagues have indicated, we can look down and see our beautiful planet Earth that God has made, and it is the most beautiful planet in the whole solar

system. However, if we look up, we can see the rest of the universe, and the rest of the universe is out there for us to go explore.

And the International Space Station is just one symbol, one example of what human beings can do when we work together constructively. So our message, I think, one of our many messages but I think one of our most important messages, is to let the children of the planet know, the young people know, that there is a whole universe for us to go explore. And when we do it together, there is nothing that we cannot accomplish.

4. Space exploration is a fascinating scientific adventure. I know that you have been installing new equipment to further scientific research and the study of radiation coming from outer space. But I think it is also an adventure of the human spirit, a powerful stimulus to reflect on the origins and on the destiny of the universe and humanity.

Believers often look up at the limitless heavens and, meditating on the Creator of it all, they are struck by the mystery of his greatness. That is why the medal I gave Robert (Vittori) as a sign of my own participation in your mission represents the creation of man as painted by Michelangelo on the Sistine Chapel ceiling. In the midst of your intense work and research, do you ever stop and reflect like this — perhaps even to say a prayer to the Creator? Or will it be easier for you to think about these things once you have returned to Earth?

Roberto Vittori, Italy: Your Holiness,

to live on board of the International Space Station, to work as an astronaut on the shuttle Soyuz of the station, is extremely intense. But we all have an opportunity when the nights come to look down on Earth: Our planet, the blue planet, is beautiful.

Blue is the color of our planet, blue is the color of the sky, blue is also the color of the Italian Air Force, the organization that gave me the opportunity to then join the Italian Space Agency and the European Space Agency.

When we have a moment to look down, beauty, which is the three-dimensional effect of the beauty of the planet is capturing our heart, is capturing my heart. And I do pray: I do pray for me, for our families, for our future.

I took with me the coin, and I allow this coin to float in front of me to demonstrate lack of gravity. I shall thank you very much for this opportunity and I'd like to allow this coin to float to my friend and colleague Paolo: He will make return to Earth on the Soyuz. I brought it with me to space, and he will take it down to Earth to then give it back to you.

5. *La mia ultima domanda è per Paolo. Caro Paolo, so che nei giorni scorsi la tua mamma ti ha lasciato e quando fra pochi giorni tornerai a casa non la troverai più ad aspettarti. Tutti ti siamo stati vicini, anche io ho pregato per lei. ... Come hai vissuto questo tempo di dolore? Nella vostra Stazione vi sentite lontani e isolati e soffrite un senso di separazione, o vi sentite uniti fra voi e*

inseriti in una comunità che vi accompagna con attenzione e affetto?

Paolo Nespoli, Italy: Santo Padre, ho sentito le sue preghiere, le vostre preghiere arrivare fino qua su: è vero, siamo fuori da questo mondo, orbitiamo intorno alla Terra ed abbiamo un punto di vantaggio per guardare la Terra e per sentire tutto quello che ci sta attorno. I miei colleghi qui, a bordo della Stazione — Dimitri, Kelly, Ron, Alexander e Andrei — mi sono stati vicini in questo momento importante per me, molto intenso, così come i miei fratelli, le mie sorelle, le mie zie, i miei cugini, i miei parenti sono stati vicini a mia madre negli ultimi momenti. Sono grato di tutto questo. Mi sono sentito lontano ma anche molto vicino, e sicuramente il pensiero di sentire tutti voi vicino a me, uniti in questo momento, è stato di estremo sollievo. Ringrazio anche l'Agenzia spaziale europea e l'Agenzia spaziale americana che hanno messo a disposizione le risorse affinché io abbia potuto parlare con lei negli ultimi momenti.

Dear astronauts, I thank you warmly for this wonderful opportunity to meet and dialogue with you. You have helped me and many other people to reflect together on important issues that regard the future of humanity. I wish you the very best for your work and for the success of your great mission at the service of science, international collaboration, authentic progress and for peace in the world. I will continue to follow you in my thoughts and prayers, and I willingly impart my apostolic blessing. ■

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June 16-17

National Faith, Justice and Civic Learning Conference. Sponsor: Campus Compact, a national coalition of college and university presidents committed to fulfilling the civic purposes of higher education. DePaul University. Chicago, Ill. <http://nfjcl.depaul.edu>

June 19-21

Interfaith Worker Justice National Conference. Theme: "Forging the Flame of Justice." Includes June 18-19 theological symposium on economic justice. DePaul University Student Center. Chicago, Ill. www.iwj.org

June 19-24

Rome Seminar for Catholic University Trustees, Administrators and Faculty Leaders: "U.S. Catholic Higher Education in a Global Context." Sponsor: Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities. Lay Centre at Foyer Unitas. Rome, Italy. www.accunet.org

*June 20-23

Collegeville Conference on Music, Liturgy and the Arts. Sponsor: St. John's School of Theology-Seminary, The Liturgical Press and St. John's Music Department. Theme: "Implementing the New Missal: Anxiety, Renewal, Opportunity." St. John's University. Collegeville, Minn. jyoung@csbsju.edu

June 22-24

Annual Catholic Media Convention. Sponsor: Catholic Press Association of the U.S. and Canada. Theme: "Celebrating 100 Years of Reporting the Good News." Wyndham Grand Pittsburgh Hotel. Pittsburgh, Pa. www.catholicpress.org

June 23-25

Annual National Right to Life Convention. Hyatt Regency Jacksonville Riverfront. Jacksonville, Fla. www.NRLConvention.com

*July 11-13

Annual Summer Conference on Addictions: "Addictions Ministry and Compassion Fatigue: Caring for the Mind, Body and Soul." Sponsor: Guest House. Boston Marriott Newton Hotel. Newton, Mass. www.guesthouseinstitute.org

*signifies new entry

On File

Bishop Daniel R. Jenky of Peoria, Ill., presented Pope Benedict XVI with two thick volumes about the life of Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen at the end of the pope's weekly general audience May 25. The books — totaling close to 2,000 pages — are the *positio*, the official position paper, outlining why the Catholic Church should recognize Archbishop Sheen as a saint. Archbishop Sheen, who was born in Illinois in 1895 and died in New York in 1979, was an Emmy-winning televangelist. His program, "Life Is Worth Living," aired in the United States from 1951 to 1957. The archbishop was host of "The Catholic Hour" radio program for 22 years before beginning his television career, wrote several popular books and traveled the world speaking and preaching once his TV program went off the air. The Congregation for Saints' Causes will study the *positio* and if congregation members agree, they will recommend that the pope officially declare that the archbishop lived the Christian virtues in a heroic way.

Pope Benedict XVI has named Msgr. Mikael Mouradian, who is superior of the Convent of Notre Dame in Bzommar, Lebanon, as the new bishop of the Eparchy of Our Lady of Nareg in New York for Armenian Catholics. Bishop-designate Mouradian, who was born in Lebanon, succeeds Bishop Manuel Batakian, who is 81. The New York-based eparchy serves about 25,000 Armenian Catholics in the United States

and about 10,000 in Canada. The eparchy was formed as an exarchate in 1981. In 2005, Pope Benedict raised it to an eparchy. Dioceses in Eastern Catholic churches are called eparchies.

The Salesians of St. John Bosco removed two European members from their duties after it was discovered one belonged to a pro-pedophilia organization and another made remarks defending pedophilia. The Salesian headquarters in Rome said a Dutch priest identified only as Father "B" and the superior of the Salesians in the Netherlands, Father Herman Spronck, had both been suspended. "The Belgium-Holland province officially announced that Father B no longer has permission to carry out any pastoral activity and that Father Spronck has been relieved of his office as delegate," the congregation said in a May 23 press release. The Salesian provincial of Belgium-Holland, Father Jos Claes, said that to the Salesians' "great surprise," Father "B" was a member of a Dutch-based association that advocates legalizing sexual relations between an adult and child. Father Claes said the association is "not compatible with our Salesian identity" and "we therefore condemn the membership and the opinions of Father van B." The province set up a committee to collect information about Father "B's" actions and statements, Father Claes said, and a committee report "will be sent to the superiors of the Salesian congregation in Rome."