

A Convocation Reflection

[On this past November 30th and December 1st almost 800 parishioners from the dioceses of Fargo and Crookston attended a Convocation of Lay Leaders centered on the theme of re-igniting the fires of faith in the lives of our parishes and culture. St. Leo's and St. Thomas parishes had 9 parishioners attend this event. This week Tony Roth offers this reflection about the Convocation:]

Dear Fellow parishioners,

About 6 months ago I was parked outside the church when out of the corner of my eye I saw a black streak coming at me. I recognized it immediately as Father Ermer out for a drive on his bike and he had zoned in on me as a target. Father Ermer has a certain look on his face when he has something on his mind. I saw that on his face that day, stopping by my car, he smiled and then after some pleasantries he told me about the Convocation, although he didn't go into much detail. He asked me if I would want to participate. I said, "Well I'm not sure, I am quite busy, I will have to think about it." In my mind, I thought, "Great another thing on my plate." The one big word that I heard was, "Evangelization". And that is where it sat for a month. Then about the time that we were getting ready for school and religious education he again approached me and asked if I had given it much thought and if I was willing to participate. It had crept into my mind at times, with the word "Evangelization" at the forefront. Like most people my age, my schedule was already quite full with job, family, church activities, sports, etc. I told him I could do it if it didn't take up a lot of time. Father had mentioned that he was choosing people he felt would be right for the role and help in a new Evangelization within the church.

There was that word again, Evangelization. I grew up in the 80's and 90's with the huge TV Evangelists; such as Jerry Falwell, Pat Robertson, Billy Graham and others. To me, they had formed my image of Evangelization. I saw Evangelization as a Triangle; one corner of it were those television Evangelists, the second corner it would be the clergy in my life, and other church leaders, and on the third corner it was the people who would come to my door to find out if I had found Christ. I never considered myself as part of that triangle, or really considered it my job to be part of it. Some of those people I considered, weird, to use Monsignor Richter's word. He was one of the keynote speakers at the convocation. (You can watch all the Convocation speakers online at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SONn8LXjFS0>. I really suggest you try it.)

So I found myself at the Convocation and I was kind of in awe of the situation. I have become used to the falling numbers of people at church over the years. I have become used to hearing, from family and friends, the excuses for not coming to church. Here I was at the Convocation and it was packed, there ended up being close to 800 people there, all anxious to find ways to bring the Good News of Christ to their friends and neighbors. After listening to the speakers and talking with other attendees and also praying on it at home, **I have decided that Evangelization is more than a triangle, but may be an infinite star with many points and I have my place on one of those points.** It is my job as a follower and believer in Christ to spread his Good Word.

How to share my Love of Christ can be a problem, not just for me but for many people, I believe. I keep coming back to a memory. When I was a kid, I and many of my friends had discussions about our fathers. "My Dad is stronger than your Dad, or My Dad can beat up your Dad." Kids were always sticking up for their parents, or at least that is what I remember. For many of my friends that faded as they grew up. For me it didn't. I have always been proud of my parents, even when I was at an age when maybe that wasn't so popular. When I was in eighth grade my Social Studies teacher asked the question, "Who is your hero?" Around the class he went, the majority of heroes listed were sports figures, but a few presidents were also mentioned, and an astronaut or two, but that was about it.

When it was my turn I stood up and said, "My Dad is my hero." The teacher laughed a little, and then quite a few of the other students laughed and the teacher said, "When I said hero, I meant someone important." I looked at the teacher and looked around the room at the other students, some of whom were close friends, and then with a crackling voice said, "He is important, and if you knew him, you would think so too.", and I sat down, my face burning. I will remember that day until the day that I die. It is burned in my memory.

Thinking of that memory makes me think of Christ. I was willing to face down a room full of kids and a teacher to defend my father. I should be able to stand forth and declare my Love of Christ and tell people, "If you only knew him!" **That is the true mission of Evangelization, share your love of him and his message.** It doesn't have to be hard, embarrassing or weird. In this day of social media, I think, we find it easy to share just about everything, except our religion and belief in Christ. **That is what I brought out of the Convocation, let Christ work through you to share what you know and love about him.**

I believe that is the goal of all of us who love Christ, to get others to know him and love him. To say to those we know, "If you only knew him." My part in this is to show the small ways that Christ influences and carries me through the hard times, laughs with me during the good and listens to me when I find it hard to talk. I will be praying to Christ to open my mind for those moments in my life when I meet others that will allow God's words to lay, in their mind, like seeds on fertile ground.