

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 Anna and Casey Garman offer this reflection about the Convocation:]

As Father Ermer has previously shared, I, along with several other members of our parish, recently had the opportunity and privilege to attend the Convocation of Parish Leaders: Evangelizing Missionary Disciples. It was a wake up call to me to stop covertly living my faith and to more actively share and celebrate the one thing that has constantly sustained me throughout my life – my relationship with Christ and my Catholic faith.

The Convocation reminded me how blessed I am to have been given the gift of faith, but more so, that there are so many who others who have not received this gift, or who have lost their way. We are all innately aware that there exists a great void in our culture, and in the quiet or painful or still moments of our lives, we all have, or will, come to the realization that something is missing. That great void and sense of loss has guided me personally to look for a deeper answer than what the world can offer me. The void has only one remedy, a relationship with Christ. At the Convocation, I discovered that I need to be unafraid to share this truth with those in need of hearing it.

There were two points that really stuck with me from the Convocation:

- 1) **It's MY job (and yours!) to evangelize i.e. help others meet, or return to, Christ.** How? By witnessing to Christ by how we live our lives and freely talking about what we love. As one speaker shared, our faith in Christ is countercultural, but not strange. We don't have to feel strange, or embarrassed, or fearful to share our love for and relationship with Christ, either through how we live or what we talk about. It is stranger NOT to talk about one of the things that is most important in our lives. We talk freely about our spouses, our children, our friends, our jobs, our hobbies, and countless other things we love, but often whisper in secret, in close knit circles, if at all, about our love for God and His son, Jesus. It's not weird to know and love Christ, and it's ok to talk about it (despite what our culture may have led us to believe). In fact, we should WANT to share Christ's love and how it has comforted us, strengthened us, and changed us. We all need the gentle reminder that's it's ok to talk about Jesus.
- 2) **Evangelization is not meant to be difficult or complicated.** Most modern evangelization is not achieved by preaching from the street corner, shouting from the rooftops, or going to some distant land to teach indigenous people about Christ. It is as simple as greeting a stranger with a smile, offering assistance to someone in need, saying we will pray for a sick or hurting loved one (or stranger), living a life so well that others may see our joy and question how we have it, or being willing and ready to talk about Christ if the opportunity presents itself. We need to be willing to be spiritually available to others, share ourselves, and connect. We need to be willing to take risks in asking or talking about spirituality with others. Our witness is stronger than our words could ever be. But if the situation calls for words, we must be ready; but not in a judgmental, preachy way. Our conversations must be natural, loving, and inviting.

How does our parish continue the work of evangelization that the Convocation asked us to re-ignite in our world? We must first focus on our **own** need for conversion and see and assist the spiritual needs **within our own parish**. We will then be able to seamlessly evangelize what we have learned and what we have grown to love. A great amount of parishioners and Catholics, in general, need better catechesis on the faith, need the "rules and regulations" of the Catholic church explained so they may hopefully see Christ's love for them behind the answers and inspire a deeper relationship with Him. Gone are the days when people had faith just because their families and friends did. People now need better explanations and a fuller understanding of why we do the things we do. It is up to each of us to search out those explanations, but maybe we need more programs or formats within our parish to address these issues. However, those with questions or misunderstandings must make an effort to be a part of them. Armed with a better understanding of our faith, we may just find what we all really desire...the knowledge that we are loved, accepted, held, and have infinite worth. We will then not be able to stop ourselves from sharing that discovery with others.