

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 Sue Knoll offers this reflection about the Convocation.]

The word “evangelization” is not a new word. The Merriam-Webster dictionary has a very short definition- “to preach the Gospel”. The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) tells us that the “*New Evangelization*” invites each Catholic to renew their relationship with Jesus Christ and his Church.

The Convocation that our group from St. Leo's and St. Thomas attended at the end of November was a gathering of people from the Fargo and Crookston Diocese with the intention of praying together, listening to great talks, and taking time to be “evangelized” ourselves. We might have felt like we left with more questions than answers but that's not a bad thing, right?

How can we grow our own faith? How can we make the faith more rich and alive for others in our parishes? in our families? in our community and the world? What do I have to offer my family, my friends and my community? How can I help people to renew and deepen their relationship with Jesus Christ and his Church?

As I participated in the Convocation, I focused (maybe a little selfishly) on three things- how to renew my own relationship with Christ and his Church, how to help and encourage my family to do the same, and how to continue to “grow the faith” at St. Leo's.

For myself, I decided on the word “intentional”. I want to be more intentional when I am praying, when I am reading Scripture, when I attend Mass, when I interact with other people. Just showing up is not enough! I need to make my faith more vibrant and real if I hope to help others do the same. And hopefully and humbly, I want to be able to take the time to hear God speaking to me. Holy moments are just waiting to happen!

For my family and friends, I want them to see me confident in talking about my Catholic faith and in living it. I want to see every relationship as a new possibility. I want to be inviting and engaging, ready for the opportunity to share the wonders of our Catholic faith, not afraid to defend Church teachings, but most of all to be able to share God's absolutely unending love and mercy.

I am blest to have a great “Church family” here at St. Leo's that is also touched by the parish of St. Thomas. Being involved in the Religious Education of our young people and in the celebration of the Holy Eucharist each weekend makes my faith stretch and grow every day. I am so happy to see our students every Wed. night. It is our opportunity as a parish to educate and encourage the gift of faith in their lives. In the tremendous busy-ness of our lives, it is often hard to prioritize. We try to do as many things as we can- and we want to help our children do the same. G. K. Chesterton said, “The most extraordinary thing in the world is an ordinary man and an ordinary woman and their ordinary children.” I think we always long to be extraordinary- the smartest, richest, most famous, etc. but in reality, we are already extraordinary. God made each of us in his own image and likeness but we are unique and never duplicated.

And I want to help our parish “make every Sunday matter”. We need to be welcoming faces as we come together to celebrate the great love of God and to receive the Body and Blood of Christ, not out of a sense of obligation, but humbly, and with gratitude. We need to come together, young and old, to share in this mystery so that we can take it out to those who are not with us at Mass. And we need to consistently help our children experience, with reverence and awe, the beauty of the Mass.

So, I am excited to see what comes next as we become “New Evangelization” Parishes at St. Leo's and St. Thomas. The possibilities could be life-changing!