

**Reaching Out:**

In my first article to the parish a month ago, I talked about the Church and that we obviously live in a different society than we did 30 or 50 years ago. Years ago our society fostered basic Jewish-Christian values, and almost like osmosis, people (even if they were not intentionally religious or went to church), picked up a fundamental moral code of behavior simply by how our culture and society operated.

Back then, our culture helped in passing on the faith and growing the church, simply by how society functioned. There has been a lot of research on what helped grow faith in our society, and basically there were six institutions that helped churches do this. The six institutions were: 1) Neighborhoods, 2) Extended Families, 3) Catholic Schools, 4) Public Schools, 5) Parishes, and 6) The Entertainment Industry. Obviously those six institutions still exist today, but not the way they did 50 or 75 years ago.

Years ago, both the way neighborhoods and extended families operated helped pass faith onto others, almost without even trying. Back when I was growing up, if I was five blocks away from home, everybody in my neighborhood knew who I was, so that if I did something inappropriate, news traveled back to my parents. Today in our highly independent society, that close neighborhood interconnection is gone. So is the large dependent extended family where everyone in the family supported everyone else, and lived around each other, and helped teach our faith tradition. If mom and dad were not skilled at being good Catholics, chances were that someone else in the family took over that role. Today, that's not the case. This factor might not be as widespread in the Shepherd and Irishtown community as in other demographic areas.

We still of course have both public and private schools, but those too have changed dramatically. I attended the public schools in Detroit, but years ago if you went to Catholic School, chances were you had religious sisters or brothers teaching you. They had an investment in passing faith onto others because it was the core of their spiritual life. Today we still have Catholic schools, and the teachers are excellent instructors, but they may not know more than most people do when it comes to "teaching" religion.

We still have parishes, but years ago when ethnic groups came to this country and felt alienated in the American society, they gravitated to the parish as a place to feel safe. For many families, it was the center of everything they did. How times have changed.

Finally, the entertainment industry is a big factor in the decline of religion and faith. Whereas many years ago the entertainment industry portrayed a moral and "Ten Commandments" type of behavior, that simply isn't the case today, and both TV and the movies portray faith and religion as non-essential and archaic.

My point is, society helped us pass faith onto others, and since our culture isn't helping us doing it anymore, we have a lot more work to do as baptized Catholics.

Up until roughly 50 or 75 years ago, children in the U.S. grew up in a society that formed an envelope around them that embodied and reinforced Judeo-Christian values and fostered what can be called a Christian lifestyle. They picked up, almost absorbed, a way of life and style of living that grew into adulthood and the participation in a Catholic-Christian Parish.

After World War II, we experienced unprecedented social mobility, the population explosion, the breakup of neighborhoods, growth of suburbia, and the development of a pluralistic society. Nothing bad happened in and of itself. The world simply changed as it always does. The problem was there was no longer a protective and formative envelope surrounding young people and influencing them toward a specific way of life.

Today's generation will not only experience a society with diminished positive reinforcement toward Christian living, but also experience strong cultural forces opposed to living according to those values.

As a result of this, the Church is talking a lot about evangelization and outreach, both to those who have left the church and the practice of the faith, and to those who have never heard the beauty of the Good News, simply because our society doesn't help promote it anymore. Before we can share our faith with people, we simply need to build trust and relationships with them. We need to create a feeling of belonging and feeling safe, in a culture which feels anything but safe.

Last week Fr. Bill Rutkowski and I had lunch and we talked about the evangelization needs of the church. He mentioned a vital element to the Catholic concept of evangelization; that we all are responsible for it. It's not the work of the bishops or priests alone, or any one particular group of people within the parish, but the responsibility belongs to every baptized Catholic. How will we evangelize this week?

**Discipleship in Action:**

Thank you to Mary and Harold Moeggenborg and Ed and Marilyn Lorenz, who last Sunday after coffee and donuts, were able to give a family in need a ride to the bus station in Alma. They came into the hall just as we were getting ready to leave (we were the last ones in the hall), and since I'm new here, I asked Mary, Harold, Ed, and Marilyn who had a truck big enough to move three family members, a dog, and four suitcases, down to Alma. They volunteered on the spot and Ed and Marilyn were headed that way anyway. As one who does not believe in coincidences, God put them all in that same spot at just the right time. Blessings to you for your kindness and ministry to those in our community in need. Thanks too to Don Moeggenberg for rescuing two little kittens from St. Patrick last week. St. Francis is smiling on you!

**Scripture Today:**

It is reported that when Pope Saint John the XXIII was asked, "What should we be doing when Jesus comes again?" he replied, "Look busy." This was the same Pope who when asked how many people worked in the Vatican, said: "About half."

While we may find this humorous (Pope John had a great sense of humor), we should not miss the importance of good Pope John's message. Perhaps the pope had in mind today's parable about the good and faithful servant verses the foolish one. Jesus is telling us to be attentive and ever-watchful for the Lord's return.

When the Lord comes again, we do not want to be caught being idle – that is, not living a faith-filled life. Christian procrastinator groups, if they ever get around to forming, will be in big trouble.

Self-indulgence is much easier and a whole lot more fun than self-discipline. Perhaps you have seen the commercial where the person eats one piece of kale or does one push-up, or grills one asparagus spear or buys one strawberry. It is a not-so-subtle message that self-discipline requires much more of us.

So does living a *faith*-disciplined life. It is easy to slip and slide off the trail that ultimately leads us to the kingdom of heaven. We cannot get by with a quick word or two from Scripture, an absent-minded prayer tossed toward the heavens, or a minimalist approach to stewardship.

If we take living a life pleasing to God seriously, then we know in our hearts that we must immerse ourselves in God's words, be consistent in our conversations with Jesus, and offer ourselves as models of good and faithful stewards.

Let us make no mistake. Much has been entrusted to us; much is demanded of us. The task of helping to build up the kingdom of God on earth has been entrusted to us by our Savior. It is an awesome and, yes, overwhelming responsibility.

We are to break open and share the great mystery of God's love with all who will listen. We are to break open the mystery of God's love found in the exodus experience described in our first reading. We are to break open the mystery of God's love found in Abraham's journey of faith in our second reading. We are to break open the mystery of God's love witnessed in the prudent servant "found busy," as Pope Saint John the XXIII would say. The world cannot afford for us to be idle as we await the Lord's return. There is no time to waste. Let's get busy.