

Next week some 240 of you will be getting a letter from me. If one spouse in a household is not Catholic I've sent you a letter asking if he or she would like to become a member of the Catholic Church. I've tried to be as diplomatic as possible. I know it can be a sensitive issue. But this is an invitation, not an accusation or condemnation. I hope that my letter conveys that. It's certainly the spirit in which it was sent.

I'm sending these letters out because I don't want someone, someday, when asked why he or she didn't become a Catholic, to say, "Because no one asked me." I know there are non-Catholics here today. I'm inviting each of you to explore Catholicism. The RCIA is starting up its weekly Thursday night meetings on September 16th. (The RCIA is the process or journey by which non-Catholics learn and discern if God is calling them to be Catholic). This is the perfect time to start and check things out. You can drop at any time if it doesn't seem right.

For many years Damian Bastasini has led the RCIA with great dedication, but he retired in June. And I have decided that I will now personally lead and teach the Thursday night RCIA program at Holy Family. Why have I done this? Because evangelization is at the center of the Church's mission. Jesus Christ founded the Catholic Church 2,000 years ago to evangelize, that is, "to share our knowledge and love of Jesus with others, that we might all be one with and in Him now and in eternity." While we are on earth this journey to Christ is always a journey of faith – where much is not yet seen. In our second reading from Hebrews we heard, "By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance; he went out not knowing where he was to go . . . and [those who followed God in faith] acknowledged themselves to be strangers and aliens on earth, for those who speak thus show that they are seeking a homeland." That is still the case for us. God is calling us to come to Himself by faith. Heaven is our true homeland.

To provide that way to heaven is the Church's mission – the mission Jesus gave the first Apostles and their successors long ago when He told them after the resurrection to "Go . . . and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you." (Matt 28:19-20) That is why I want to lead the RCIA, and why I have made evangelization, the sharing of our faith with others, a top priority at Holy Family. It might be that this idea of evangelizing troubles some of you. You might have memories of evangelists in your past who did you damage. Or you might have too narrow an idea of what evangelization can look like. I don't intend evangelization to be coercive, or high pressure intimidation. But at its heart evangelization is not an option for a Christian. Jesus sent us out with His good news. He doesn't have a backup plan. We're it. If we don't spread the Word who will?

There are two basic types of churches and parishes. One type is the "Maintenance" parish. It tries to maintain what the current parishioners already have. It's a service model for spiritual consumers. We go to such a parish to get our spiritual needs met. And certainly if the parish is not filling us spiritually there is a problem. But there is also a problem with this model. What we are about is not just filling our needs. As Christians we're also about filling the needs that others have for Christ. We can't just take – we have to give to grow. Part of the need we have as Christians is precisely to give of our faith! And this leads to the second conception of a church or parish – the "Missionary" church. That is a church and people who want to share what they have with others. That is what we need to be to be faithful to Christ's great commandment.

What does that look like? Remember Abraham and Sarah from Hebrews. We are all on a journey in life – toward death. We are strangers and aliens here – and all too many of us feel that. Jesus came and died to save us from that alienation and offer us eternal life. How many still do not know that good news and have not experienced it?

Think of faith as a beautiful, fruit-bearing plant. Only God has the seeds of this plant – think of the parables of the Sower and the mustard seed. We human beings can't produce this plant from scratch. But the gardeners among know that another way to start a plant is from a "cutting," cutting a part off of

an already existing plant and sticking that into the ground. That is what we can do with our faith. We can take a “cutting” from our faith and give it to another, by our witnessing to it.

That is where you come in. I want all of us in some way to have the heart of an evangelist. To do that, here is your assignment. I have asked 240 people to consider joining the Catholic Church. I want each of you to ask -- just one. Think! Has there been someone in your family, among your friends, or at work -- who has expressed any interest in, or admiration for, Catholicism? Maybe it was during the “Catholics Come Home” campaign -- maybe at some other time. I’m not asking you to make a cold call. I’m asking you to act, if there is someone you already know who just MIGHT say “Yes” if he or she received an invitation from a Catholic friend.

All you have to say is, “By the way, the classes for those who want to explore becoming Catholic are starting in September. I can find out more if you are interested in looking into it. (And I can go with you the first time if you’d like).” That’s all. I’m not asking you to ask a second time. You don’t need to force an answer. Just extend a friendly invitation. And suddenly you’ve become an evangelist.

The truth is that if our own personal faith is to endure it has to grow. And it grows by sharing it.

Remember, we only get to keep forever that which we give away on earth. To share the faith with someone SOMEHOW is not optional for a Catholic Christian. It’s at the center of our faith. It’s who were meant to be. It’s our own way to happiness.