

ENGAGING THE SPIRIT

Planting seeds through small synod evangelization efforts

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I waited for the bulk of people to leave after 4:30 p.m. Mass before approaching my pastor.

"Father, we have some extra postcards," I said. "Can I leave them in the pews?"

He took one, looked at both sides of the card and commented that it turned out beautifully before giving me permission to put one at the end of every pew. The last time he had seen the postcard, it was still under construction, with notes and scribbles in the margins of the draft.

My husband and I split the stack of postcards and walked up and down the aisles, dropping a card in each pew. One side of the card featured an artsy picture of the outside of the church I had taken after Tenebrae last Holy Week. The other side included a Christmas greeting and listed the dates and times of the communal penance service and Christmas Masses.

Earlier that day, we mailed postcards to people affiliated with the parish but who haven't shown up in the records lately. The plan was for postcards to arrive about a week before Christmas, putting the information right in their hands. Maybe the postcard would be tossed into a pile of junk mail. But

I prayerfully envisioned people sticking it to their fridge with a magnet so they would see the picture of the church every time they'd open the door to grab a beverage or some holiday party leftovers, and they would decide to come to church.

The effort was the first big project for our parish synod evangelization team and its goal to reach out to inactive parishioners and invite them to participate again. The synod implementation team had assigned us a few projects starting in the new year, but our small, mighty evangelization team was eager to start sooner and quickly brainstormed a concept for the postcards.

The church is most full at Christmas and Easter, so we thought it would be good to let people know the schedule for communal penance and Christmas

Mass times. I borrowed the idea from Father Rick Holy, pastor at St. Edward in Lowell.

I wrote a story in

December of 2017 about Father Holy buying 500 Christmas cards imprinted with parish information and Christmas Mass times. He encouraged parishioners to take the cards and mail them to families who have been away from the Church. It was part of an effort to evangelize.

Evangelization is one of eight ecclesial areas of focus for the synod. Bishop Donald J. Hying encouraged all parishes to incorporate evangelization into their synod implementation plan.

"The central mission of the Church is to proclaim the Gospel to every creature," Bishop Hying wrote

in his 2016 pastoral letter
introducing the synod.

“Evangelization” sounds intimidating. It makes me think of walking up to strangers or knocking on doors and talking to them about God. That approach can work well for some people. But evangelizing can take on other forms.

You can talk to your family and friends about how God is working in your life. You can post pictures on social media of your church or of your volunteer efforts. Maybe on a saint's feast day, you can mention what the day is to your co-workers and talk about something great the saint did with his or

her life.

All of those small actions are ways to evangelize. Our parish evangelization team agreed that if even one person came to church or to the communal penance service because of our postcards, then it was worth the effort.

For more ideas on how to evangelize or how to help your parish meet its synod goals, visit gary-synod.com.

To tell us how your parish is following the Holy Spirit's lead in this synod process, contact Vanessa Negrete at vnegrete@dcgary.org or 769-9292, ext. 246.



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