

STORIES OF FAITH:
EVANGELIZATION THROUGH NARRATIVE

A professional project submitted to the Theological School of
Drew University in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree,
Doctor of Ministry

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ABSTRACT

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As a Roman Catholic deacon and a former newspaper reporter, I was called in 2013 to a new ministry in the Archdiocese of Newark. Archbishop John J. Myers asked that I edit *New Jersey Catholic*, a new monthly magazine to educate and inspire the 1.2 million parishioners in the archdiocese to better practice and share their faith.

The principle way of carrying out the magazine's mission is to showcase stories of lay Catholics practicing the Gospel by their daily lives. The hope is that by telling such stories, readers might see the value of their own stories and – invigorated – live and promote Catholicism. The magazine also includes other local feature stories, catechetical resources, and practical columns by experts on how readers can implement the faith in specific situations in marriage, family life and the work place.

I began this ministry one month before the Drew summer colloquium and, at the suggestion of my mentors, Drs. Daniel Kroger and Kathryn Stoner-Lasala, it became the focus of my D.Min. project in practical ministry.

The research, based on a model by Hester and Walker-Jones, involved discerning whether the magazine's pastoral goals would be better served by changing the model of a

top-down editor's defining and selecting stories for publication to a model where readers would suggest the stories from their faith experience.

During four research sessions at three parishes and a Catholic university, the lay advisory committee and I observed and recorded stories told by forty-nine participants. The depth of the narratives was moving. Using evaluation models proposed by Savage and Presnell, it was clear the parishioners/students grew in awareness of the power their personal stories lent to practicing the Gospel and how those stories also inspired others. At the same time, lay advisory committee members – who had performed the exercise earlier – were transformed by the sessions.

The richer narratives also provided ideas – and sources – for magazine stories: the new life taken on at Easter Vigil after celebrating the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults; the support found in a ministry to bereaved parents; the individual witness of those who returned to active faith practice after a period of drift. With the possibility of institutionalizing this process, the list is sure to grow.

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PREFACE

A successful Doctor of Ministry research project is not a solo undertaking. In fact, working with a select laity team who will help identify the focus of research, help plan, execute and evaluate it and remain in reflective theological dialogue with the leader/researcher, is a requirement of the postmodern narrative approach. The team should be persons of maturity, faith and sound judgment. Key to the process is the Lay Advisory Committee.¹

In inviting parishioners to serve on the Lay Advisory Committee, I attempted to seek couples who embody the above qualities and who represented a range of ages and experiences. They are:

Eugene Morris, a retired Essex County Police officer, and Louise Morris, a retired elementary school teacher. They have been parishioners since 2001.

Mike and Adele Santo, the parents of two children, have been parishioners since 2001. Mike is an optomechanical engineer and Adele is a paraprofessional who assists special needs pupils in an elementary school. Mike plays guitar in the church ensemble.

Katy and Art Petitt, the parents of two sons, run a Cartridge World franchise. Parishioners since 1983, they coordinate the hospitality ministry at all weekend Masses. Art is also a lector.

Robert and Rosemary Taibi, the parents of two sons, have been parishioners since 1993. Robert is a computer analyst and Rosemary is a pre-Kindergarten teacher. She also serves as an Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion.

Their support in developing the project, attending and auditing the research sessions, evaluating what we heard and keeping me on track was everything I could have

¹ Carl Savage and William Presnell, *Narrative Research in Ministry: A Postmodern Research Approach for Faith Communities* (Louisville, KY: Warren E. Oates Institute, 2008), 77.

hoped for – and more. I also credit and thank my family for their feed-back and encouragement: Nadine, my wife; our children, Alfred and Jeng; Brian and Monique; Matthew and Annie; Maria and Jon. In gratitude, I especially acknowledge Marian C. Frank, my mother, whose scholarships have been an amazing and inspiring gift to her children and grandchildren. The support of the Archdiocese of Newark, my employer and the publisher of *New Jersey Catholic*, was critical and I am particularly grateful to Archbishops John J. Myers and Bernard A. Hebda and Communications Director James Goodness. Fr. Timothy Dowling, the pastor of St. Ann, was equally affirming.

To the students at Seton Hall University and the parishioners of St. Rose of Lima in Short Hills, St. Joseph in Bogota and St. Philomena in Livingston, I am grateful for your participation and remain humbled by the extraordinary stories you told. Without all of you, this project would not have been possible.

Finally, I thank my mentors, Dr. Daniel H. Kroger and Dr. Kathryn Stoner-Lasala for helping me find my way through the occasional fog and especially for the illumination they provided that led to and guided this project, for which any errors are of my making.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND MINISTERIAL CONTEXT

Where commuters once hurried to and from trains, all is dark and quiet.

Not even the nonstop roar of diesel engines, coming from the herd of monster machines clearing what was once the World Trade Center, seeps from what is now called

Ground Zero into the PATH station far below.

And the flashlights that pierce the blackness play across an eerie scene that mixes the catastrophe of Sept. 11 with reminders of life before that terrible Tuesday—like rows of liquor bottles awaiting the next round in a commuter bar, and bags of snacks neatly stacked at a newsstand that 60,000 people once passed every day.

With water that had flooded the station now pumped out, three newspaper reporters yesterday were the first outsiders to get an extensive look around.



Fig. 1: *The Star-Ledger* front page, Nov. 15, 2008

As the group entered through ramps on Barclay Street...daylight streamed through a gaping hole punched into the heart of the eight-story U.S. Custom House by steel beams from the North Tower...Here and there were the hulks of cars, their interiors gutted.

"This was burning for days," said firefighter John O'Connell of Rescue Co. 3 in the Bronx.

Then after walking deeper into the basement, the group finally emerged onto the mezzanine, one level above the PATH tracks. Flashlights picked up the stainless steel of the empty turnstiles and now-quiet pay telephones. They also illuminated the huge plastic sheets of advertising that once ringed the walls and now hang like stalactites, melted from the heat of the fire.

In the Commuter Bar, bottles of scotch, rye and gin stand neatly arranged on their shelves just below the pennants of sports teams strung along the ceiling. But just outside, a mountain of debris now fills the chasm where escalators once whisked people to and from a concourse ringed by some 50 stores.

The rubble not only cuts the mezzanine in half but cascades a level below, to the platforms, enveloping four of the seven cars of the lone PATH train that remains behind on Track 3, about 70 feet below the street. Some of the cars' windows are missing....Otherwise it seems ready to pull away....

Later, after the group returned to the bright sun and the din of the machinery working the site....All around are reminders of what was and what is....Then there was Don, a welder from Montreal. On a break, he was using his torch on a steel beam, unsuccessfully trying to cut out a cross.

"For a lady from Boston," he explained shyly to a passing deacon, who was handed a yellow crayon to draw a pattern for him to trace with his torch. "Her husband was on one of the planes."¹

In a thirty-year career in the newspaper business I estimate that I have had some 6,000 by-lines and covered some major stories that – besides countless fires, floods, murders, official corruption and political triumphs and falls – included the restoration of the Statue of Liberty and the string of oil spills that polluted New York Harbor in 1990.

But not even the 1993 bombing of the World Trade Center, which killed six, affected me personally as much as 9/11. I had been writing about the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey almost my entire time at *The Star-Ledger*, New Jersey's largest newspaper. In my career there I became intimately acquainted with the agency that not only built and ran the World Trade Center, with its 110-story Twin Towers, but also runs Newark, LaGuardia and Kennedy airports, seaport terminals in both states, the PATH rail line, the George Washington and Bayonne bridges and the Lincoln and Holland tunnels. I not only had reporter-source relationships with executives of the agency but also its cops, managers and employees. I accompanied the painters who hung from riggings to coat bridge cables and the television mast atop the North Tower some 1,600-feet above Manhattan. After midnight I journeyed with the gang that tightened the bolts holding the rings of the PATH tubes in place far below the Hudson River and the maintenance crews that scrubbed exhaust soot from the tiles in the Holland and Lincoln tunnels with a truck-mounted toothbrush-like contraption. And I knew the World Trade Center intimately, having documented its history and written on aspects as mundane as its

¹ Al Frank, "Under Ground Zero: Debris ruins a train but spares a bar shelf," *The Star-Ledger*, Nov. 15, 2001, 1.

vast fleet of elevators to how it recycled mountains of paper and kept acres of windows sparkling.

So I was benumbed as I watched the towers crumble on a television in our Newark office. In the aftermath, I was shattered to learn eight people I knew were among those who perished that terrible day.

The story that introduces this dissertation was part of an unsuccessful effort to exorcise a miasma that haunted me for months after 9/11. Feeling I had covered everything about the Port Authority *ad nauseam*, in July 2001 I had asked to transfer to a new beat from the one that had consumed me all those years. Although my editor had agreed, all bets were off after 9/11. It was not until February 2003 before I was able to fully regain my stride with a new beat in a bureau away from the main newsroom.

The Ground Zero story is an appropriate metaphor for the evolution that eventually brought me to the Doctor of Ministry program at Drew University and the project that I will describe later.

The deacon in the last paragraph is a reference to myself, something I thought was important to obliquely insert. In the still smoldering and acrid Gehenna that was all around on that November afternoon, the steel worker was fumbling as he attempted to find the cross that every Christian knows is how Christ bore our infirmities and our sorrows. It was the passing deacon – who learned the precise dimensions of the Roman cross from his father, a tombstone carver – who traced it on the fallen beam to the gratitude of the man with the torch. The faith within him was called forth by a fellow traveler who shared his story, and now enabled him to pass along the message of Jesus to the widow whose “husband was on one of the planes.”

It was an act of evangelization carried out in the context of a narrative. It was facilitated by a deacon who, if he had maintained a reporter's professional distance, would otherwise not have become part of the story. It might be tidier to add, "but 9/11 had changed everything for me." That is not entirely true, however. I was ordained a Roman Catholic deacon in 1995 and, like most deacons, I was uncompensated by the church for a ministry of service to the People of God. That ended in 2013 when the Archdiocese of Newark hired me as associate publisher of its publications unit: *Advocate Publishing Corp.*; and the editor to bring about a new magazine, *New Jersey Catholic*. Until then, for most of my professional life, I was a newspaper reporter and my church service was an extension of my vocations of husband, father and professional. We deacons do not leave our clerical status behind in those other roles; hopefully our commitment to Christ and his Church is reflected in our actions as husbands, dads, neighbors and employees and inject *diakanoia* (see glossary, page eighty-four) as a kind of leaven to those relationships. The Ground Zero story is an example of this. Because most of us are married and have jobs outside the church – and don't wear clerical collars – many such opportunities present themselves as we interact in our communities. This can enable a deacon to provide living testimony to the practical ways one can live the Gospel.

Even so, I always felt that when my professional career ended I would have then liked to dedicate myself to full-time ministry. This opportunity presented itself when I – and 140 other editorial employees – accepted buy-outs from *The Star-Ledger* in 2008. That year, the twelfth-largest newspaper in the country threatened to close if many of us did not voluntarily give up our jobs.

It is obvious the debut of the magazine five years later turned out to be the fulfillment of my goal of further placing my diaconate and my talents at God's disposal. A magazine aimed at the 1.2 million Catholics of the Church of Newark is a great pulpit for offering stories of faith and catechetical tools for living same. To shepherd the process as a writer and a deacon, seemed a perfect fit.

Why? The concept of diaconate has its scriptural foundation in Acts 6 – where practical demands compromised the evangelizing duties of the Apostles:

Now during those days when the disciples were increasing in number, the Hellenists complained against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution of food. And the Twelve called together the whole company of disciples and said, 'It is not right that we should neglect the word of God in order to wait on tables. Therefore, friends, select from among yourselves seven men of good standing, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may appoint to this task, while we, for our part, will devote ourselves to prayer and to serving the word.

What they said pleased the whole community, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit; Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolaus a proselyte of Antioch. They had these men stand before the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them.²

I will discuss this more in chapter two but the solution was to lay hands on seven worthy disciples who would “serve tables” by acting as ministers to the practical needs of the community. According to the text, that left the Apostles more free for praying and preaching. However, in the same chapter and those immediately following, deacons like Stephen and Philip also preached. The mix is significant, because whatever the ministerial order (deacon, priest, bishop), the mention of Phoebe in Romans 16:1,³

² Acts 6:1-6

³ “I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deacon of the church in Cenchreae.”

1 Timothy 3:8-10,⁴ and post-Apostolic writers, such as Ignatius of Antioch's Letter to the Trallians (2:3)⁵ and the Epistle of Polycarp (5:2)⁶ stress the service offered in the name of Christ.

In early church history, the seven deacons who attended the current pope frequently elected his successor as Bishop of Rome. Some gave their lives for the faith, like Lawrence, who enraged the Emperor Valerian.

In 258, after first executing Pope Sixtus II and deacons Felicissimus and Agapitus, Valerian ordered Lawrence to produce the treasure of the church. When Lawrence

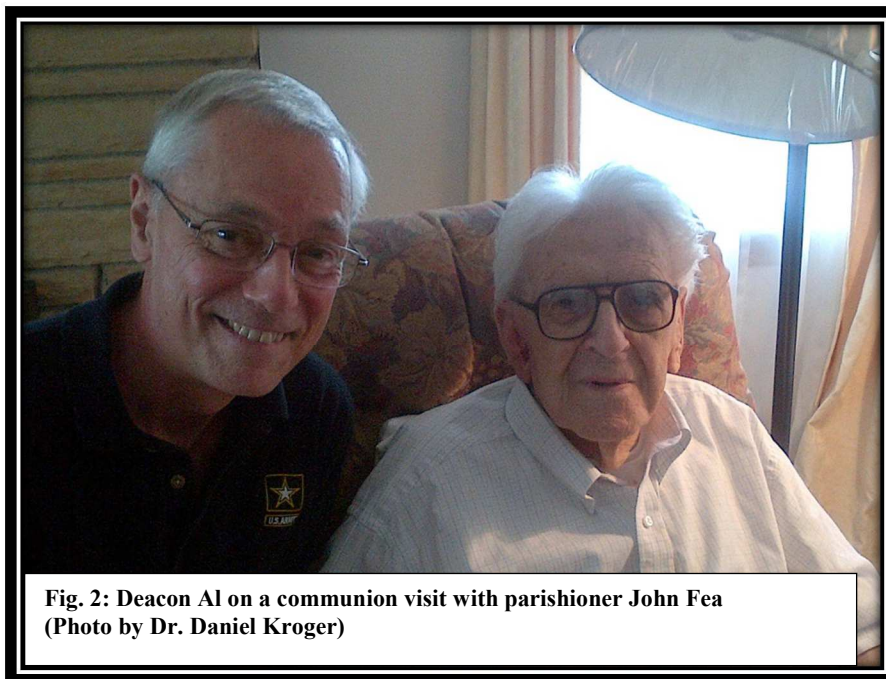


Fig. 2: Deacon Al on a communion visit with parishioner John Fea (Photo by Dr. Daniel Kroger)

showed up with the poor of Rome, Lawrence was sent to the gridiron where he impishly told his executioners to turn him over after he considered the

⁴ “In the same way, deacons are to be worthy of respect, sincere, not indulging in much wine, and not pursuing dishonest gain. They must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience. They must first be tested; and then if there is nothing against them, let them serve as deacons.”

⁵ “And those likewise who are deacons of the mysteries of Jesus Christ must please all men in all ways. For they are not deacons of meats and drinks but servants of the Church of God. It is right therefore that they should beware of blame as of fire.”

⁶ “In like manner deacons should be blameless in the presence of His righteousness, as deacons of God and Christ and not of men; not calumniators, not double-tongued, not lovers of money, temperate in all things, compassionate, diligent, walking according to the truth of the Lord who became a minister (deacon) of all.”

flames had rendered his flesh well-done on his body's other side.⁷

The enduring thread, however, is conformity to the Christ, who came to serve, not to be served (Mt. 20:28). As 12th Century scholastic theologian Peter Lombard observed, the deacon's distinct office is signified by the peculiar way his stole is worn sash-like on the left shoulder, leaving the right side to freely bestow service to the Church of Christ.

These are called deacons in Greek and ministers or servants in our language because, as consecration is found in the priest, so the dispensing of service is in the deacons....

When they are ordained, only the bishop is to place his hand over them, because they are ordained for service. The bishop places an orarium, that is, a stole over their shoulder, so that they understand that they have taken up the Lord's sweet yoke, by which they may bear in godly fear the adversities that pertain to the left side. They also receive the text of the Gospel, to understand that they are heralds of Christ's Gospel. Before these are ordained, as the Apostle teaches, let them be tested and serve, if they have no crime.⁸

Unlike the Eastern Church, deacons fell into obscurity in the Western Church for 1,000 years until revived in 1967 at the behest of Vatican Council II. With sacramental and preaching roles combined with those of service, the church has since been blessed with dedicated ministry from mostly married men who work in a diversity of professions. Their tables-of-service are varied and far-flung as they minister in manifold venues that the number of available priests could never reach. In my parish ministry, I preach at Mass, baptize, witness marriages, journey with adults preparing for Baptism and pray with the families and friends of the deceased. Outside the church, my service has ranged widely: visits to the homebound, pre-op and hospital emergency room chaplaincy, communion calls and nursing home prayer services.

⁷*The Catholic Encyclopedia*. Accessed Oct. 9, 2014, <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/09089a.htm>.

⁸ Peter Lombard, *The Sentences* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2010), 144.

While a new venue for me, and markedly different from the customary ministries I have described, the magazine draws on my theological training and ministerial skills in service to the Church of Newark, while also utilizing my professional skills as writer-editor.

I found the model exciting. Channeling my reportorial skills through my ministry, I would plan themes, find and interview archdiocesan story subjects, write, take photos, and package the stories. These, and other local features, would provide the core content



for our monthly. A package of standing advice columns that *Faith Catholic* offers on practical implementation of Catholic values in the

workplace, in marriage, in relationships as well as catechetical columns on theology, saints and worship would augment the local content.

The features of the magazine would also seem to address the Archbishop of Newark's desire to offer a new and engaging tool for meeting the goals of the New Evangelization. First, Archbishop John J. Myers wanted to provide a vehicle for continuing faith education to adults who, in the aftermath of Vatican Council II (1962-

1965), either did not receive the same catechetical foundation as their parents and grandparents and/or, have had no additional catechetical education since they prepared for Confirmation in high school. Second, by showcasing local Catholics telling stories of how they practice the faith, Myers hoped these stories would have a ripple effect to inspire other Catholics to better live their faith.

The Archdiocese of Newark launched the magazine five months after it stopped printing its newspaper (which now appears on line) and laid off four of its eight employees. The archdiocese has classified my position as ministerial because of the understanding of church and the perspective on New Evangelization that I bring to the job. This classification also gives me latitude throughout the work week to accommodate pastoral duties, such as funerals, weddings, teaching and the like.

The idea of publishing a magazine may seem counterintuitive. Why close a money-losing newspaper and open another print medium? I found out, however, that niche publications like this (compared, say, to general interest news magazines) are actually flourishing. We see evidence of this in the growing number of *Faith Catholic* clients and the early success of *New Jersey Catholic* subscription sales. However, I will shortly turn to documenting this latest development in the context of a succinct history of Catholic journalism. I hope my research will demonstrate an evolution from Catholic newspapers as dominant sources of church news to a disparate and ever-expanding media – both print and electronic – also engaged in the New Evangelization. I will cite Church documents in Chapter Two to chart this change in emphasis and explain how Pope Francis has introduced a new dimension to the context.

The pontiff's straight talk, humility and simplicity and focus on the essentials of charity and love of neighbor have captivated not only Catholics but also the world at large. We have not seen such enthusiasm since Pope John XXIII, who died in 1963. Pope John sought to broaden the church's embrace by calling the first ecumenical council in a century and specifically aimed its efforts at self-renewal and better relations with the "separated brothers (and sisters)" – both churched (temples/mosques), and unchurched. As such he was widely known as *the Good Pope*. Francis, who was elected in March 2013, has caused similar excitement.

Coincidentally, as I was finalizing Drew University's requirement of a prospectus for this project, Francis published *The Joy of the Gospel*, which reaffirmed that the New Evangelization is a summons addressed to all.

The Road to Drew

The Star-Ledger buy-out offers were completely unexpected and, initially, I was not sure what to do. After evaluating our finances, my wife, Nadine and I decided to accept the package. December 9, 2008 was my last day; it was exactly twenty-six years after I first walked into the Newark newsroom. Having experienced a good run, I was confident in my decision. But leaving was sad, because I loved the news business and the new, web-driven paradigm for journalism meant so many of my talented, younger colleagues would never enjoy what now looks to have been the last golden years of newspaper reporting. Truly, I always came home tired but I don't think I ever truly worked a day in my life; the job was bliss. I now faced the challenge of finding a similar job in ministry.

Ultimately it led to my unexpected recruitment by the Archdiocese of Newark but that was not until four years had elapsed from my semi-retirement. Initially I had thought of teaching religion in a Catholic high school but not one of my feelers paid off. Offering my services to my home Diocese of Paterson and even to Saint Ann, my parish, was equally fruitless. In the interim, I held part-time writing and tutoring jobs at Seton Hall University, where I eventually became an adjunct professor in English and religion. During that period I explored and sought admission to the Doctor of Ministry program at Drew. My appetite for further academic and professional development had been sharpened by the work at Seton Hall on my Masters degree in theology. The Drew program was unique and especially appealing. It aimed to capitalize on ministerial skills I had acquired since 1991, when I began training for ordination. Moreover, Drew's stress on practical theology meant it was in sync with my long-held goal to be of true service in my ministry to others.

A more conventional academic exercise, while enjoyable, would not have provided this singular and extraordinarily broadening opportunity. The bonus was to enjoy a heartening experience in ecumenical collegiality with mostly non-Catholic instructors and a cohort of classmates from a range of faith backgrounds in a Methodist school of storied tradition.

Near the end of my first spring semester, however, came the job offer from the Archdiocese of Newark. I was confident I could juggle all my responsibilities. Especially gratifying was how the archdiocese supported my doctoral work with generous time off to pursue the degree. For example, barely two months into my employment I was given paid time off for the three-week, summer colloquium in 2013.

Yet, in discerning a project during those three weeks, I lost sight of the emphasis on practical theology. One of my ideas, for example, included an investigation of how our church cry rooms might betray the “all-at-the-table” ideal of Eucharist among the Baptized (no matter what the age). Only mentors Doctors Daniel Kroger and Kathryn Stoner-Lasala could see the obvious and cajoled me to utilize my magazine ministry context as a project.

Purpose of the project

Perhaps it was because I was making a false distinction between my job and my doctoral work that I initially failed to see how the two were inextricably linked. It became obvious after some discerning that *New Jersey Catholic* could serve as the basis for a very appropriate exercise in practical theology that might reveal a preferred future for the Church of Newark. Surely its story-telling format was a platform tailor-made for narrative research in ministry. It’s no accident that story-telling is at the heart of the Gospels and passing on the story of Jesus is the heart of evangelization.

As for the New Evangelization, that was church terminology I only vaguely heard about but never fully understood until after the fall colloquium. As we discussed my project, my classmates provided valuable brainstorming. I quickly understood that non-Catholics had different concepts when discussing terms like “evangelism” and “evangelization.” For Roman Catholics, evangelization is not only bringing people of no faith to conversion but fostering ongoing conversion as well. That is, reinvigorating people of faith to move themselves and others in their worldview to deeper faith by the example of their lives and how they talk about their personal faith journeys.

One classmate termed it re-evangelization, which my proclivity toward the tabloid converted to revangelization. That turned out to be a needless exercise, because in researching the prospectus I discovered what the Roman Catholic Church meant by the New Evangelization – and that turned out to be exciting, as well as perfectly in keeping with what Archbishop Myers already knew when he decided to publish the magazine. The monthly magazine, of course, is only a tool to help Catholics practice the New Evangelization. But as the Four Evangelists quoted their Master’s stories, this magazine would tell the stories of his disciples two millennia later.

The project’s purpose aimed to facilitate that dialogue. It would create opportunities for Catholics to tell faith stories that have shaped their personal devotion, and stories of how they remained faithful despite personal or even ecclesial challenges. I hoped the process would also reveal how Catholics might become more enthusiastic in individual practice and reinforce their bonds to their parish community and the church at large.

While my project’s objective was to determine whether this story-sharing could generate better stories for the magazine, I suspected the research process could lead to heightened self-realization by parishioners that their Baptismal enrollment in the common priesthood was truly a call to evangelize. The deacon-editor would be just like the passing deacon-reporter at Ground Zero. By observing, listening, and responding, the message of the cross could come to life and could be entrusted to another. In the role of deacon-editor, I hoped the magazine could extend the reach of those personal faith stories by re-telling them so they might elicit a faith response from readers who, in turn, might themselves evangelize.

Converting to the Catholic Press

As a reporter for a general circulation newspaper, it was unusual to “write myself into” the Ground Zero story, because reporters are supposed to maintain a detached objectivity that assures readers they are getting the facts, and just the facts, from a trained observer with no agenda to promote. In some ways this is a fiction. The very way a story begins or ends, the order the reporter relates the facts and the particular quotations he/she selects to bolster or expose vulnerable points of view demonstrate the reporter’s view of what the story is about. Otherwise, journalism would be just a mundane listing of random facts.

The process is not that different in Catholic journalism, although its objective is to promote the Catholic faith. As an example, faith was just a tiny component in the background of the Ground Zero story. If written for Catholic media, it would have been at the forefront, although the other details and descriptions would likely have been included as well.

So in my journey from reporter for a general circulation newspaper to editing and writing *New Jersey Catholic*, I needed a form of conversion. But it would be one requiring that I inject the emphasis necessary for a magazine that has the objective of conveying the Catholic notion of evangelization. Yet the basic skills of journalism remain critical to that task: finding the story, listening to the teller and then framing it in a way that others would find interesting and informative – and inspirational.

Some background

While diocesan newspapers have been around in the U.S. almost since the founding of the republic, and wider-circulation Catholic magazines and other publications almost as long, the diocesan magazine is a relatively new creature. In large measure, that is due to *Faith Catholic*, a publishing company that grew out of the pioneer attempt to not only replace the Diocese of Lansing's flagging newspaper, but also to provide a vibrant forum to promote the New Evangelization.

After the success of the local 2000 launch, *Faith Catholic Publishing and Communications* began offering its columns, graphics, printing and mailing services to other dioceses so, at this writing, it is publishing twenty-eight diocesan magazines, including *New Jersey Catholic*.⁹

The idea was to provide a new medium in an era when diocesan newspapers were feeling the same stresses as their general interest counterparts: lost advertising and declining circulation mostly as a result of competition from the internet with perhaps some blame going to tired formats emphasizing news of hierarchy and clergy. From a decade ago, when magazines only made up about three percent of the U.S. diocesan market, readership of Faith periodicals now tops 1 million (twenty percent) “with its vibrant, attractive, full-color magazines, its emphasis on personal faith stories, and its social media savvy.”¹⁰

Why replace one printed medium with another? Although it may seem counter-intuitive, various research shows magazine readership is growing and magazines are read

⁹ Dan Morris-Young, “Publishing Company a Game-Changer in the World of Catholic News,” *National Catholic Reporter*, June 17, 2014, 1.

¹⁰ Morris-Young, 12.

by ninety percent of adults and college students, thanks in large part to niche specialties in, say, travel, electronic gaming, food – and, yes, religion.

Print magazines readership is more consistent across generations than other media. Adults under age 35 read more magazines per month than adults age 35 and older. Plus, magazines beat the Internet and television for engaging and influencing their audiences.¹¹

The earliest publications, however, served another purpose: presenting news from a Catholic perspective, according to Fr. Apollinaris Baumgartner, who conducted a study of Catholic publications from 1789-1930 for his master’s degree in journalism at Columbia University.¹²

Tracing the roots of a disparate Catholic press from the *Courier de Boston* in 1789, he says “a long series of papers” combined church and political news. But their quality reflected the journalism of their times. “The earliest Catholic papers printed in this country were feeble. They appeared when the standards and methods of the American press in general were chaotic,” Catholic author Allen Sinclair Will wrote in the book’s foreword.¹³

The introduction of professional editors and writers between 1900 and 1930 began to change that, as did the bishops of the United States, when in 1920 they founded an independent news service, the predecessor of today’s Catholic News Service to serve far-flung independent weeklies and magazines.¹⁴ (The National Conference of Christians

¹¹ No author, “What the Church Can Learn from the Latest Research on Media,” *Content Evangelist* (Summer 2014), 17.

¹² Apollinaris W. Baumgartner, *Catholic Journalism: A Study of its Development in the United States, 1789-1930* (New York, AMS Press, Inc., 1967).

¹³ *Ibid.*, vii.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, ix.

and Jews founded the nonprofit and nonsectarian Religion News Service in 1934.) Other Catholic weeklies – both magazines and newspapers that continue to publish today – were founded, beginning with *The Wanderer* in 1867; the Jesuit weekly, *America* in 1909; the laity-run *Commonweal* in 1924; *The National Catholic Register* in 1927 and *National Catholic Reporter* in 1964.

The story of the founding of another weekly, *Our Sunday Visitor*, which also continues to publish, is an instructive frame-of-reference for this project because Archbishop John F. Noll of Fort Wayne, Indiana, was one of the pioneers of using media to evangelize both Catholics and the unchurched in the U.S. In the first years of his priesthood in the Midwest, Noll frequently challenged those who spread anti-Catholic sentiments by claiming to be ex-priests or nuns at tent-meetings.

At the same time, Father Noll realized that Catholics wanted to defend the Church, but they knew so little about their own faith that they were reluctant to speak out. Nor were there books and pamphlets readily available to hand out to non-Catholics....¹⁵

He started to write some and, in 1908, founded a monthly magazine (still published as *The Family Digest*) and, in 1912, he founded *Our Sunday Visitor*. Its circulation is now about 50,000, a fraction of the record 1 million it had in 1961. The venture also includes producing a host of materials for parish religious education programs and ancillary faith enrichment services. “The church of God must depend upon her laity to infiltrate society with the right principles of morality,” said Noll, who died in 1956.¹⁶

¹⁵ Matthew E. Bunson, "'The Bish.' The Life and Legacy of Archbishop John F. Noll," *The Priest* (September 2012): 10.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*,12.

In 1939, there were 139 Catholic newspapers with a circulation of more than 2.6 million and 197 magazines with a circulation of 4.6 million. Almost eight decades later, circulation of 126 newspapers stood at 4.8 million, while just seventy-two magazines have a total circulation of five million.¹⁷

But as a Catholic journalist for more than 30 years, Gregory S. Erlandson said the numbers do not tell the whole story. He notes that many diocesan newspapers are subsidized, or have their costs covered by a parish assessment. Meanwhile, expenses continue to rise as the Internet erodes circulation and advertising revenue. Among the other challenges facing the Catholic press, he cites “the changing demography of the Catholic readership, with fewer young people interested in Catholic news.”¹⁸

But there are three additional – and crucial – factors that tend to be overlooked in the discussion of the state of the Catholic press: One, a decline in knowledge about the faith; two, a growing distrust of institutions; three, a resulting decline in Catholic identity.¹⁹

Erlandson’s prescription is for a “transparent and honest” Catholic media, shaped by what he says is a new generation of Catholic editors, writers, and publishers who are not propagandists but: “. . .collaborators with the Church, recognizing that professional news coverage and solid features and special reports can genuinely help form adults in their faith and help them better understand their world.”²⁰

¹⁷ No author, “2013-14 Annual Report,” *Catholic Press Association of the U.S. and Canada*, accessed Aug. 28, 2014, http://c.ymcdn.com/sites/www.catholicpress.org/resource/resmgr/Annual_Report/CPA_AR_final_reduced_size.pdf. 14.

¹⁸ Gregory S. Erlandson, "The Role of Catholic Media Today," *New Oxford Review* (March 2011), 22.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 22.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 24.

There is almost a ministerial quality to his description, one captured by the term “content evangelist,” as coined by Patrick M. O’Brien, president and chief executive of *Faith Catholic*.

We are publishers, journalists and editors... We produce the content others use to evangelize – they retell a cover story over the dinner table, they pass on an issue to an out-of-state relative, they forward an advice column to a coworker, they share a link to a Catholic teaching with a questioning nephew, they learn how to be a presence of Christ to a friend in need or a grieving neighbor who questions where God is in the midst of pain and sorrow. As Content Evangelists we do more than report news and information – we are critical, irreplaceable, current and effective parts in the Church’s evangelization efforts.²¹

Faith Catholic offers a new paradigm for Catholic journalism and the Archdiocese of Newark is attempting to use it to meet the local church’s need for vivid examples of how the New Evangelization can be lived and spread, while also providing substantive catechetical resources to readers of *New Jersey Catholic*. I will outline how in Chapter Three. First, in the next chapter, I will discuss the background and theological basis of the Catholic Church’s concept of the New Evangelization.

²¹ Patrick M. O’Brien, “Content Evangelists” *The Catholic Journalist* (September 2013): 1.

CHAPTER 2

NARRATIVE OF CONCERN

Liz Rotunno, a parishioner of St. Rose of Lima in Short Hills, N.J., told how her brother Jimmy has been suffering from spinal cancer for two years. He lives in Rochester, N.Y., so she cannot visit him as much as she'd like but, thanks to texts, phone calls and video chats "the family is pretty good at keeping in touch." His ordeal, however, is unfathomable. "He's in so much pain and, for me, it got to the point of near-despair. I'd say, 'where's God? Why this pain?'" She just could not get that out of her mind "so I called him to discuss my struggle. And then I asked him the question, 'Is God paying attention?'"

Jimmy's answer: "The only peace I get is when I think of you guys and what you're doing for me." Liz said her brother's response left her speechless – as it did all of us when she shared the story. "It's like Jesus: the giver and the gift," she said.

In a way, the story captures the dilemma of a Roman Catholic Christian in recognizing and living our call to evangelize. To Roman Catholics, evangelization is not only reaching out to the unchurched but a continuing, interior conversion that reinforces personal commitment to living the Gospel and setting an example that encourages others to do the same.

So often there is a sense of helplessness or, “who me?” when discipleship makes its demands to live, or proclaim as Christ taught. Likewise, the faith lessons which we receive from others sometimes go unrecognized.

Despite scriptural injunctions, from the Great Commission (Mt. 28:16-20), Lk 24:47, Jn. 20:21 and Saint Paul’s exhortations in Colossians (3:16), living and promoting the Gospel is often a private matter in Roman Catholic minds, according to sources cited later in this chapter. This attitude persists even though the ritual for infant Baptism asks parents twice whether they are ready to undertake the responsibility of raising their child in the faith, “to keep God’s commandments as Christ taught, by loving God and our neighbor.”¹

This lack of awareness may be a product of years when the top-down hierarchical structure dominated the Church, when laity more than ceded the responsibility for the religious formation of their children.

That changed with Vatican Council II when the bishops proclaimed the Church as the people of God, and said it was a mechanism through which all were called to holiness and to live and spread the faith.

Before the council, we thought God spoke directly to the Pope and that he passed the word down the ecclesiastical pyramid to the bishops, then to the priests, then the nuns, and, properly filtered, to us. After the council, we learned a new geometry. The Church wasn't a pyramid. It was more like a circle, where we are all encouraged to have a voice. We are the Church. We have a right and a duty to speak out about the kind of Church we want.²

¹ No author, *The Rites of the Catholic Church* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1990), 377, 387.

² Blair Kaiser, “Don't Let Anyone Tell You the Council Didn't Change Much,” accessed Aug. 18, 2014, <http://www.thetablet.co.uk/other/kaiser-vatican-ii-lecture>.

This revised understanding has manifested itself in many ways, including lay rejection of Catholic teachings on artificial birth control and rules prohibiting divorce and barring those who divorce and remarry from communion. Recently, sentiments have grown in favor of gay marriage. Yet, as the innate sense of the laity for what is relevant to core belief has grown, the Vatican hierarchy remain the rule-keepers. That is why the more open Pope Francis, who called for synods in 2014 and 2015 to discuss the above issues and others, may prove a catalyst for institutional change. In a unique move, the laity was asked – along with clergy – to answer questions from Rome; the answers formed the basis of the first synod’s discussion.³

While such pastoral issues on marriage and the family are important, the duty of actually transmitting and encouraging faith – evangelization to both the unchurched and all in need of continuing conversion, has for some time been expected of all the Baptized. Council documents, and subsequent pronouncements by Popes Paul VI and John Paul II, made repeated calls for a New Evangelization.

I will discuss these documents later in this chapter, along with the role the U.S. Catholic press plays in this mission. First, though, a brief look at the Catholic press in the Archdiocese of Newark is important in setting a context for the research project.

I am the editor of *New Jersey Catholic*, which began publishing in October 2013. Archbishop John J. Myers’ vision for this monthly is to provide readers with a tool of evangelization. He and his staff hope the magazine might accomplish this mainly by showcasing Catholic laity whose faith stories could promote the New Evangelization.

³ Al Frank, “October 2014: Extraordinary Synod” *New Jersey Catholic* (September 2014): 20-21.

Hopefully those stories might show readers how others live their faith, leading readers to understand how they can do the same. Other magazine features would be instructive: a *Theology 101* column for those who completed their formal religious training but might want to update their knowledge of church teachings and how-to columns showing how to inject faith practices in actual situations in the family, at work and in social surroundings.

The process for selecting stories for the first issues of *New Jersey Catholic* was a typical, top-down command structure. Heeding the post-modern criticism of the world-view, doing-it-as-it-has-always-been-done methodology can lead to skepticism and mistrust, I was concerned about the typical way editors do their jobs. At *New Jersey Catholic*, I implement the vision of the publication by finding stories to illustrate pre-conceived themes, centering on programs, events, the liturgical calendar among other topics that would hopefully fulfill the New Evangelization objective.

For example, the first three issues featured Catholics who explained why/how their faith: made it important to them to send their children to Catholic schools; helped emergency workers do their jobs as first responders; motivated other teens to participate in outreach to the homeless.

The next three issues focused on couples who attended men's or women's spirituality conferences sponsored by the archdiocese and reinvigorated their faith; Catholic dockworkers in Port Newark-Elizabeth who find solace and community in a small chapel in that busy marine cargo hub and couples who concluded there could be no better option than a Catholic wedding.

Even though my colleagues and I bounced ideas off each other, I was concerned about this top-down approach. Would this approach strike an evocative chord with our

readers? Could we come up with a better and more effective template that might better fulfill the magazine's mission to evangelize?

Instead, I wondered what would happen if we asked readers about their stories of faith? How might gathering ideas from parishioners generate better stories and show how evangelization could occur in their telling of those stories? Would stories of how lay Catholics came to faith, and how those stories help them live (and promote) their Christianity, produce better magazine articles and prompt other readers into discernment that might lead to enriching their faith and motivate them to evangelize?

It is appropriate here to acknowledge the contribution of sociological researchers Richard Hester and Kelli Walker-Jones to my thinking. In *Know Your Story and Lead with It: The Power of Narrative in Clergy Leadership*, they discussed a minister-to-minister project where pastors would meet in a group to tell their story in a non-judgmental setting in an attempt to develop more confidence in themselves and to bolster their colleagues.

Understanding and leading with one's personal story and taking a not-knowing position go hand-in-hand. When clergy know their stories, they become more secure in their own skin. As they have told us, they have a greater sense of authenticity – they are self-defined. This gives them the freedom to embrace diversity and enables them to appreciate the authenticity of other people and groups.⁴

Although my project does not deal with fellow clergy, I will describe in the next chapter how I extrapolated on the Hester and Walker-Jones model to provide a framework for narrative research I hope will produce similar results for my project.

⁴ Richard L. Hester and Kelli Walker-Jones, *Know Your Story and Lead with It: The Power of Narrative in Clergy Leadership* (Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 2009),105.

The sentiment Jimmy expressed at the outset of this chapter goes a long way to summarize much of the potential success personal stories can play in the New Evangelization. Perhaps by telling stories of people just like ourselves, *New Jersey Catholic* might provide some of the material needed to help us discern where we all are on the journey of faith and enable us to lovingly provide direction to our fellow-travelers.

The New Evangelization

The New Evangelization program of the Roman Catholic Church was an outgrowth of the Second Vatican Council, a meeting of the world's 2,500 Catholic bishops. Comprised of four sessions convened in Rome between 1962 and 1965, it was the first ecumenical, or universal, council held by the Roman Catholic Church in 90 years.

Among the twenty other ecumenical councils, Vatican II was unique because its purpose was not to formally condemn errors but to demonstrate the Catholic Church's engagement with the world.

Instead of perpetuating a fortress theology, the council's engagement with the world was manifested in numerous ways. Most notably was its commitment to dialogue, with ecumenical outreach and rapprochement with other Christian churches and non-Christian religions. Part of that engagement included a heightened awareness by the Baptized of their call to evangelize.

“Catholics rarely used ‘evangelism’ or ‘evangelization’ before Vatican II,” according to theologian Fr. Robert J. Hater.⁵ When he wrote in 1987, Benedictine theologian Cyprian Davis said “the word ‘evangelization’ has been a word in Catholic

⁵ Kenneth Boyack. *The New Catholic Evangelization* (New York: Paulist, 1992), 15.

usage for only a little more than a decade.”⁶ Even so, it still seems an alien concept to many Catholics.

Unfortunately for many Catholics, the word ‘evangelization’ evokes images of television evangelists and door-to-door canvassing to invite people to make a personal decision for Jesus Christ Fundamentally, however, the most significant challenge for the American Church today is to develop within the heart of each Catholic, and within parishes and dioceses, an evangelizing consciousness.... If a new era of evangelization, a new Pentecost, is to have a profound effect on Catholics in the United States, the first step requires a continuing conversion of mind and heart, a conversion based on a spiritual awakening that each baptized Catholic Christian is a responsible, co-missionary with Christ. An evangelizing consciousness includes an awareness of the power of the Holy Spirit working everywhere as well as the need for a more explicit sharing of the Gospel.⁷

Yet, it has been an uphill effort, even after the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops made evangelization a national priority in 1992. Of particular relevance to this project is how the bishops acknowledged the role of stories in the task of evangelizing:

We all have—and are—stories of faith, for through the Spirit, the Gospel of Jesus Christ takes hold of us in the proclamation of his word, and Jesus touches us in the celebration of his sacraments. When this genuinely happens, we are all set ablaze by his love. We can understand evangelization in light of these stories of faith: namely, how we have been changed by the power of Christ's word and sacraments and how we have an essential role in sharing that faith through our daily lives as believers. Looked at this way, evangelization is what we are all about! Being involved in the story of salvation is what faith is all about! Evangelization is the essential mission of the Church.⁸

⁶ Kenneth Boyack, *Catholic Evangelization Today: A New Pentecost for the United States*. (New York: Paulist, 1987), 25.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 6, 7.

⁸ U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. *Go and Make Disciples: A National Plan and Strategy for Catholic Evangelization in the United States* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1992), Sections 7 and 8.

Even so, eleven years later, Cardinal Joseph Bernardin said one of the greatest challenges continued to be:

to convince all believers that they are evangelists, sacraments of God's presence and love to the rest of the world... (To) reclaim evangelization as our central mission (requires) "two simultaneous processes...ongoing evangelization and conversion of ourselves as a Church and the movement in the world to share the good news."⁹

Resistance is strong. William L. Portier, who chairs the religious studies department at the University of Dayton, attributes that to the long-held U.S. tradition separating church and state and, more recently, to its pluralism.

The greatest obstacle to Catholics becoming more evangelical is their general acceptance of American religious pluralism as a kind of ideal natural state in which people are best left alone with their beliefs. This secular-pluralist approach to church-state separation dates to the beginning of our century and ignores the need for public discussion about the deepest shared basis for this culture. In such a view, imagining effective ways to share faith life with inactive Catholics or the unchurched appears as somehow in poor taste, an impolite invasion of privacy or even un-American.¹⁰

In 1964, Vatican II's *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church* said the foremost mission of the Church is "'to proclaim and spread the Kingdom of God.' It does so through the 'priesthood of the People of God,' who hold a prophetic office that 'give(s) living witness to God by means of a life of faith charity and praise.'"¹¹

Elaborating on the prophetic function of the laity, the constitution specifically mentions its distinct evangelizing character. "Evangelization by the laity, in word and life, has special force in that it is carried out in the ordinary surroundings of the world" adding

⁹ Boyack, *Catholic Evangelization Today*, 1-2.

¹⁰ Boyack, *The New Catholic Evangelization*, 39.

¹¹ Virginia Mary Heffernan, *Outlines of the 16 Documents: Vatican II* (New York: Long Island Catholic, 1965), 3,6,7.

that “marriage and family life has an especially important prophetic function.”¹² It adds that a special grace conferred at Baptism, known as the sense of the faithful, contributes in a singular way to the development and spread of church teachings. Known by its Latin term, *sensus fidelium*, it is “the instinctive sensitivity in matters of faith exercised by the whole body of believers whose appreciation and discernment of revelation is guided by the Holy Spirit. This sense of faith gives rise and manifests itself in the *consensus fidelium* (a consensus of the faithful).”¹³

The 1965 *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World* exhorts the Baptized not to separate their faith life from the so-called mundane.

“The split between faith and daily life is an error,” adding that there should be “no false opposition between professional and social activities on the one part, and religious life on the other.” That way the church can be fully engaged with the world in a quest for peace, social justice and marriages that do not “exist solely for procreation but as a whole manner and communion of life.”¹⁴

So the council has defined a Church engaged with the world and not spurning it and the bishops say all media need to be employed to spread this message. We can find this in the council’s 1963 *Decree on the Instruments of Social Communication*, which states that the Church welcomes diverse means to preach the Gospel.

The Church must preach the Gospel with the help of the media of social communication... (and) claims as a birthright the use and possession of all

¹² Ibid., 15

¹³ Gerald O’Collins, S.J. and Edward G. Farrugia, S.J., *A Concise Dictionary of Theology* (New York/Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press, 1991), 219.

¹⁴ Heffernan, 45.

instruments of this kind which are necessary or useful for the formation of Christians and for every activity undertaken on behalf of our salvation.¹⁵

Those means have recently expanded to a diverse Vatican website and even papal

Facebook and Twitter accounts: www.vaticanstate.va,

<https://www.facebook.com/PopeFranciscus> and [@Pontifex](https://twitter.com/Pontifex).¹⁶

In the 1965 *Declaration on Christian Education*, the Vatican Council's bishops call catechetical instruction of the baptized something of primary importance, because it "enlightens and strengthens the faith, leads to intelligent, active participation in the liturgy, and motivates apostolic activity."¹⁷

After approving these documents, Pope Paul VI amplified their teachings in his 1975, *Evangelization in the Modern World*, in which he laid out a twenty-five-year plan for "a new period of evangelization" that he said was in response to a call from the Bishops of the Third Synod the year before.¹⁸ It quickly became known as "the New Evangelization," the very term used by Pope John Paul II in 1990, when he elaborated on the concept in his encyclical, *On the Permanent Validity of the Church's Mandate*.

In his exhortation, Paul VI acknowledged the traditional interpretation of evangelizing as proclaiming the Gospel to the non-baptized. At the same time, he says the role of evangelizing applies to all the Baptized, who are called to continuous deepening of faith and commitment to Christ and the Gospel.

¹⁵ Ibid., 53.

¹⁶ Historically it is interesting to note that one of Guglielmo Marconi's first radio stations was established at the Vatican in 1931 and its newspaper *L'Osservatore Romano* was founded in 1861.

¹⁷ Ibid., 100.

¹⁸ Pope Paul VI, "Apostolic Exhortation: Evangelization in the Modern World" accessed December 3, 2015, <http://www.papalencyclicals.net/Paul06/p6evan.htm>. Section 2.

The person who has been evangelized goes on to evangelize others. Here lies the test of truth, the touchstone of evangelization: it is unthinkable that a person should accept the Word and give himself to the kingdom without becoming a person who bears witness to it and proclaims it in his turn.¹⁹

The aim is to grow in the priestly and prophetic offices conferred by Baptism so Christian life in the Gospel serves as an inspiring example that encourages or leads others to faith. *New Jersey Catholic* is meant to be a tool to aid that process. By showcasing stories of individual faith, readers may recognize the worth of their own stories and use them to promote the Gospel.

It is interesting, but not surprising, to see the continuity among three popes in conveying teachings about the New Evangelization. As archbishop of Krakow, the future John Paul II was the official note-taker at the 1974 synod that prompted Paul VI to issue his exhortation. Interestingly, when Pope Francis issued *The Joy of the Gospel*, it too was the product of a synod and the document followed the same structure used by his predecessors: a formal program of self-renewal, catechizing and evangelizing that coexists with the traditional understanding of evangelization as preaching the Gospel to the un-churched.

In the November 2012 *Joy of the Gospel*, Pope Francis specifies the components of the new evangelization. First, he noted that the Thirteenth Ordinary Synod of Bishops held in October 2012 “reaffirmed that the new evangelization is a summons addressed to all,” and a duty of all Christians.

Evangelization is first and foremost about preaching the Gospel to those who do not know Jesus Christ or who have always rejected him. Many of these are quietly seeking God, led by a yearning to see his face, even in countries of ancient Christian tradition. All of them have a right to receive the Gospel. Christians have the duty to proclaim the Gospel without

¹⁹ Ibid., Section 24.

excluding anyone. Instead of seeming to impose new obligations, they should appear as people who wish to share their joy, who point to a horizon of beauty and who invite others to a delicious banquet. It is not by proselytizing that the Church grows, but by attraction.²⁰

All along, bishops in their dioceses throughout the world sought to promote the New Evangelization through their national conferences, through diocesan commissions, major events, parish ministries and communications. As noted in the last chapter, the latter tool, utilizes newspapers and magazines for evangelization.

Before discussing the project's implementation, it is interesting to briefly note the parallels between the Catholic view of evangelization and that of non-Catholics. In an overview of what he terms evangelism, H. George Anderson, second presiding bishop of the Evangelical Church in America and a former professor of Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary, notes an evolution of thought in the Protestant denominations. Citing multiple studies, he said "a new climate" has shifted emphases from a ministry formerly aimed strictly toward the unchurched. While Jesus remains at the center, there is now another element familiar to all us engaged in narrative research ministry:

The content of evangelism, then centers on the story of Jesus of Nazareth, who both taught and brought the lordship of God among men. To that basic message, which characterizes all Christian proclamation, the individual evangelist then should add his own biography on God. Thus evangelism is really two stories: His story and my story. Both are necessary. The first without the second is mere historicism. The second without the first leads to sentimentalism, subjectivism, and rigid patterns of Christian experience. A story should be open-ended, with no single response expected or desired. Each reaction will be different.²¹

²⁰ Pope Francis, *The Joy of the Gospel*, November 26, 2013, Section 14, accessed December 3, 2014, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html.

²¹ H. George Anderson, "Evangelism in a New Climate," *Lutheran Quarterly* (Nov. 1969), 385.

Liz Rotunno's brother, Jimmy, gave her an unexpected answer to the question she asked him in his suffering. It was one that inspired her and shaped her story. Now, as she shares that story, we who hear it are inspired and are more willing to use our stories to evangelize. As Liz said, "It's like Jesus: the giver and the gift."

CHAPTER 3
PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

Lori Anthony, already the mother of three special needs children, was pregnant for the fourth time and things started to go terribly wrong when she began gaining a



Fig. 4: Lori, far left, fills out the evaluation at St. Philomena

startlingly unusual amount of weight. Consulting doctors, the parishioner of St. Philomena in Livingston, N.J., learned her son had a blocked intestine so his waste was

continuously filling her womb. After the diagnosis she had to be drained of four pounds of fluid every week.

Finally the boy was born; but that was not the end of his ordeal and he was remanded to the neonatal intensive care unit for what turned out to be a stay that lasted seventy-four days. Prayers were nearly incessant but one day, when things looked their most bleak, she decided to no longer petition for Albarico's health. "If it is your will, take him," she prayed. "At that moment he turned around."

Confident – and reinforced with a refrigerator filled with 200 bottles of breast milk – Lori took Albarico home against the doctors’ advice. She is absolutely certain the nutrition in the milk, and faith invigorated with surrender to the Divine, made a difference. Albarico is now ten years old.

Lori says affirmation came from her Jewish doctor, who performed Albarico’s C-section. He later told her he did not believe in miracles and had no faith but felt “someone was doing the work for me there” during the complicated delivery. Her other three children have heart conditions. “Really, you don’t have any control,” she said. “I was forced in each case to let go.”

As Lori’s story suggests, and as we have seen earlier, I too needed to let go of my preconceptions for this Doctoral project to come to reality and to proceed, because the natural inclination of an editor is to embrace the typical journalistic model of control from the top: identifying stories that conform to ideas generated by current events in the Church, the liturgical calendar or other themes typical of a religious magazine. To be an effective tool of the New Evangelization, *New Jersey Catholic* would have to be different by enlisting Catholics to tell stories illustrating how they put their faith into practice.

Through discernment with my Drew faculty mentors and cohort it became clear that the magazine itself could serve as a first-rate basis of narrative research. The project was to be an attempt to determine whether adult Catholics could be drawn into that process through a series of discernment sessions in which they would tell their stories to one another and in so doing, provide potential stories for the magazine. The intention of the project was to engage readers into a story-development process normally reserved to

editors and staff. That notion underscored the ministerial role of my dual position as editor and deacon.

As discussed earlier, my particular *diakanoia* calls for serving the Church as editor of *New Jersey Catholic*. It's a ministry in which we conform to journalistic standards in layout, graphics and story delivery that will hopefully appeal to readers with the aim of providing a resource for the New Evangelization. As discussed in the last chapter, by relating to the published stories we hope readers will discern how telling and living their own stories can also serve as models of faith. By relating their experiences of faith to others might the New Evangelization take greater root?

This is where the thinking of Hester and Walker-Jones came into play. As described earlier, their project involved ministers telling personal stories to other ministers and thus bolstering all in the group. The format they used offered a template for my project.

First, we would attempt to make the research sessions in the parishes and at the university a liminal space, where my parishioners and students could speak freely with a leader acting from a “not knowing stance” and perhaps enabling each to later say they “met Jesus again for the first time.”¹

When you take a non-knowing position, you break out of the theology of conventional wisdom, which is *a knowing theology* [authors' italics]. It is a theology of certainty (as opposed to) an alternative theological narrative of curiosity that embraces the uncertainty of trusting God.²

Savage and Presnell discuss the postmodern leader/researcher as one assuming “a kenotic position” in handling people's stories:

¹ Hester, Walker-Jones, 135.

² Ibid., 102.

...to the extent possible, the researcher empties her/himself of preconceptions, paradigms of interpretation, or presumptions about the stories that emerge. In addition, the research looks within the tangled and sometimes confusing mass of intermeshing narratives for clues that may guide interpretation of a narrative of concern or opportunity. Specifically, the researcher keeps an especially sharp eye out for moments when a community or persons reveal their emerging, preferred story and break into their new song, however fleeting these moments might be.³

Hester and Walker-Jones say this attitude contributes to a state of liminality, a kind of sanctuary where stories shared without fear or criticism might allow perceptions to change. The authors draw on the work of anthropologist Victor Turner in their description of a liminal space:

In that state, normal social activities and ways of relating are suspended, and people lay aside roles and statuses that ordinarily separate them from each other. In a liminal state, without their customary roles, statuses and practices, people experience something quite different from their ordinary walk through life.⁴

Not to jump too far ahead, but the research sessions turned into such places. All identified themselves by first and, maybe, last name. No one called attention to their profession and the LAC members and myself sought to minimize our leadership status in favor of listening and sharing with open hearts.

In developing a format, other objectives would be to discern transformation in the congregation (of parishioners, students the Lay Advisory Committee) and in myself as deacon-editor. I describe the results in Chapter Four and will subsequently speculate on the implications of the project for the wider Church of Newark as this very new magazine continues to grow.

³ Savage and Presnell, 76.

⁴ Hester, Walker-Jones, 23.

So, with the LAC, we sought to design a series of meetings that would encourage the telling of such stories and in so doing generate possible story ideas for the magazine. Three meetings would be held with parishioners of the Archdiocese of Newark and a fourth among students at Seton Hall University.

We wanted the telling of personal faith stories to be at the heart of the sessions but we felt it important that they grow out of spiritual reflection. At the time, Pope Francis was much in the news and the so-called Francis effect was beginning to captivate the attention of Catholics and non-Catholics alike for the pontiff's breezy, humble style, which contrasted to the more solemn, even reserved papacy of his predecessor. In fact, Pope Francis himself stressed themes of joy and mercy as the heart of evangelizing in his *Joy of the Gospel*, published about the time the project was under development. Because of the timely nature, we decided to use excerpts as part of the sessions. We also selected the Emmaus story, to be read in dialogue fashion, as an introductory meditation.⁵ The phrase at the heart of this story: "were not our hearts burning within us" became a rhetorical touchstone for us as we re-cast it into one of the reflection questions we asked before opening the story-telling at each session. "When did our hearts last feel such a burn?" That was our preliminary plan, here's what transpired.

Methodology

We billed the session as: In 90 minutes your stories of faith: How I can build bridges with Pope Francis as a *New Jersey Catholic*. Pre-meeting set-up included table/chair arrangements and putting out refreshments we brought.

⁵ Luke 24:13-35.

The LAC and I followed a script that included these highlights: following expressions of gratitude for coming, I began the sessions with introductions of the LAC and myself, a thumbnail explanation of the magazine, how the gathering would contribute to the editorial process and the several steps in the evening's format. The groups were told that their names and comments would be used in my dissertation but we would seek their explicit permission if anything was to be published in *New Jersey Catholic*. At no session did any participants express reservations or objections to the ground rules and all willingly provided contact information, including cell numbers, on the evaluations they completed at the conclusion.

LAC members introduced thoughts from Pope Francis' exhortation in which he described his vision for the church.

The Church which 'goes forth' is a community of missionary disciples who take the first step, who are involved and supportive, who bear fruit and rejoice. An evangelizing community knows that the Lord has taken the initiative, he has loved us first (cf. 1 Jn 4:19), and therefore we can move forward, boldly take the initiative, go out to others, seek those who have fallen away, stand at the crossroads and welcome the outcast. Such a community has an endless desire to show mercy, the fruit of its own experience of the power of the Father's infinite mercy. Let us try a little harder to take the first step and to become involved.⁶

I then offered a prayer asking a blessing on our gathering. Then, I asked everyone to break into groups of two or four, depending on the attendance.

Attendees, whom we asked beforehand, then read the Emmaus story in dialogue fashion. We divided the passage into eight sections, and highlighted each reader's part. After the reading, I invited everyone to reflect quietly on the story and especially on when they felt such a burning in their hearts. After a few moments, members of the LAC

⁶ Pope Francis, Section 24.

asked additional questions from their places around the room, enhancing the meditative aura evoked by the Emmaus story and leading to the next part of the process. These questions were: what is your most vivid memory that keeps you Catholic? How has your faith helped someone who was in need? How has another person strengthened your faith: by deed, example, or generous action? How has your faith changed someone's life? What stories about your faith life need to be told?

I announced that these questions would initiate the small group discussions. LAC members and I joined different groups to make notes about the stories told, reactions and responses, using the qualitative methods suggested by narrative research authors Carl Savage and William Presnell.

...the researcher becomes a 'participant observer,' joining the faith community as a kenotic or empty, listener....(whose) personal reflections in the form of journals, process notes, field notes and verbatim accounts of relationship encounters are valuable data for ethnographic study of ministry sites.⁷

This part of the session took about twenty minutes, which gave each person within the small group time to tell her or his story. Afterward, I invited those who wanted to share their stories with all of us to do so. During the lively discussions that followed, I asked occasional questions in which I tried to thicken and embellish the stories with additional details: have you shared this story previously with anyone else before today: spouses, parents, children, grandchildren, parishioners, co-worker or neighbors? What makes this particular story stand out? Was this the kind of story that shaped not only your faith but could also inspire others?

⁷ Savage and Presnell, 108-109.

To underscore the point of how we pass on faith through such stories, the sessions concluded with an LAC member reading the verses on evangelization from Romans:

But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him? And how are they to proclaim him unless they are sent?...faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes from Christ.⁸

Then another LAC member read a quote from Pope Francis before I offered a final spontaneous prayer.

Jesus washed the feet of his disciples. The Lord gets involved and he involves his own, as he kneels to wash their feet. He tells his disciples: ‘You will be blessed if you do this’ (Jn 13:17). An evangelizing community gets involved by word and deed in people’s daily lives; it bridges distances, it is willing to abase itself if necessary, and it embraces human life, touching the suffering flesh of Christ in others. Evangelizers thus take on the ‘smell of the sheep’ and the sheep are willing to hear their voice. An evangelizing community is also supportive, standing by people at every step of the way, no matter how difficult or lengthy this may prove to be.⁹

Before beginning our sessions, the LAC gave the format a test-run and afterward commented favorably on its ability to elicit their own stories and make the point that such stories can be the basis for evangelizing. They also suggested the time period for the initial, story-sharing be reduced to fifteen or twenty minutes from the thirty minutes we initially proposed. I also experimented with a solo dry-run at Seton Hall with swimming-diving team students that Jane Ehret, a pool colleague, arranged for me.

In the meantime, I made arrangements for meetings at three New Jersey parishes: St. Rose of Lima in Short Hills, St. Joseph in Bogota, and St. Philomena in Livingston. I chose St. Rose because Sister Donna Ciangio, O.P., who serves as parish Director of

⁸ Romans 10:14-17.

⁹ Pope Francis, Section 24.

Adult Education and Small Group Ministries, is an alumna of Drew University's Doctor of Ministry program and continues as an adjunct professor. She graciously agreed to set up a meeting with members of her St. Rose ministries.

Pastors were the other prime contacts. I had met Fr. Timothy Graff shortly after joining the archdiocese and, when I asked him to host a group, he readily agreed and offered the evangelization team of St. Joseph parish. Msgr. Thomas Nydegger, was an administrator at Seton Hall and had written a recommendation letter for my Drew application. He was later appointed pastor of St. Philomena, so when I requested his help his enthusiastic support manifested itself again. His parish had begun the *Discovering Christ* evangelization and spiritual renewal series and he offered members of the coordinating team. Anticipating that a younger cohort would contribute greatly to the research, I invited some students at Seton Hall, the archdiocesan university, where I am an adjunct professor of religion.

Although we had an unusual amount of snow after New Year's, fears of weather postponements proved unwarranted and we were able to hold all four of the project sessions as scheduled.

Results

To document any transformation that might occur at the four sessions, the LAC and I distributed pencils and pre-printed evaluation forms that included the *New Jersey Catholic* logo. We provided space for name, phone number and email address. It asked two questions: What story of personal faith, or about the Church, would you like the magazine to tell and: Did tonight's experience change the way you think about your faith

and how you practice it? If yes, how? If no, was anything about your faith practice affirmed?

In consultation with the project's mentors, the LAC and I carefully phrased these questions to be as objective as possible and to best implement the ethnographic research method, as outlined in *Narrative Research in Ministry*. As per Savage and Presnell, observing change and discerning transformation precluded hasty interpretations of the stories we heard during the sessions.

There are two parts to our notion of evaluation: observing change and discerning transformation. As previously we employed analyses of varied types to de-confuse the context, we now employ techniques of evaluation to represent that context in its new intersection with the narratives of participants, surrounding external groups, tradition, and biblical story. This evaluation emphasizes the aspect of storytelling that is informative, but as we know, in its telling the story may also be transformative to the reader as well.¹⁰

To generate those stories, we needed to provide parishioners the opportunity to reflect on their experience during the sessions. The tabulation of the replies to the second question among the forty-nine parishioners and students showed thirty-five responded yes as to whether their experience of the session changed the way they thought about their faith and how they practiced it. It is clear the familiarity the group members at the three parishes felt among themselves was a factor. Yet, while most of the individuals already knew each other, they had not all heard one another's stories.

Using "discernment in lieu of measurement," the evaluation sought to find perspectives suggested by Savage and Presnell:

What is the Spirit doing? What is emerging? What has been called forth? What stories highlighted a faith moment? Was there a common denominator in those stories? What was the reaction of others as

¹⁰ Savage and Presnell, 123-124.

individuals told their stories? Did the reaction elicit a similar story? Was there agreement or incomprehension when asked whether these kinds of stories not only shaped our faith but could inspire others? What responses were evoked when asked if the stories were shared with others?¹¹

Before addressing some of the specific questions, it is appropriate to acknowledge the fourteen who responded “no” to the second question mentioned earlier. Among the parishioners, the most frequently cited reason was jaded familiarity with the small-group sharing process, although two confessed other factors: “I couldn’t ‘fall in line’ with the exercise and group experience,” one St. Joseph parishioner said. For another, the exercise seemed to plant a seed: “Perhaps I need to be more conscious of faith stories.”

The majority, however, reported genuine excitement. Personal stories demonstrate the “unrecognized influences individuals can have on others,” said Irene Langley, a St. Rose parishioner. “My faith was affirmed by the conversation thread, where one person’s story triggered an ‘aha’ memory in another and, at the end, a whole cloth was woven,” said Nancy Perley, also of St. Rose. “It brought out how connected we are to God and each other.” Helen Diskin, a parishioner of St. Philomena wrote, “It affirmed that faith needs to be shared as in the Emmaus story.”

From such comments – plus the observations of the LAC and the candidate – it was clear the Spirit was present during the sessions and moving the parishioners to greater awareness of the value of their stories. They knew they had been enriched by the personal experiences they related and how those experiences – when shared – could help others recognize a similar story of their own and use it to demonstrate the importance of their faith to others. They acknowledged the ripple effect stories have in reinforcing and promoting the practice of the Gospel.

¹¹ Savage and Presnell, 125.

As they shared their stories, the narratives elicited recognition in the hearers. For example, after seeing *The Passion of the Christ*, Ms. Diskin of St. Philomena told of an unsettling aftereffect. The movie's graphic portrayal of the devil had disturbed her. The next morning, doing housework, the images haunted her until a random thought of God suddenly filled the mother-of-five with peace. Laura Nisivoccia responded by telling of such a moment while tending to her dying husband. In a large hospital on Long Island she felt terribly isolated when suddenly she felt God's presence. "It overwhelmed me and I no longer felt lonely."

Seton Hall student Holly Fitzpatrick traced her faith story to what she was told of a car crash that happened when she was two years old. Her grandmother had fallen asleep at the wheel and their vehicle was demolished by a tractor trailer. Strapped in an infant seat, she was ejected from the car. Emergency responders found her upright and uninjured by the side of the road. "I don't know how I got there" but she says her family always credited an unseen angel. "That's a big part of why I believe," she said. "I've actually been touched by this; I'm special." Fellow students at the session nodded in acknowledgment – none scoffed or rolled their eyes. In his evaluation, Kevin Neary said he would like to see the magazine tell what he termed miracle stories.

In parish groups, acceptance was the general reaction too; there were no skeptical comments. Moreover, the students obviously appreciated the discussion because when one student told a story, another student invariably responded with their own.

This happened in the parish groups too. This mutual recognition, Christine Brown of St. Rose called "'holy crap' kinds of experiences" and explained that "God put all of us in these places. He could have put any person there. But God put *you* there." That is

why there is no doubt in her mind that these are precisely the ways each of us directly experience the Divine.

“The story is not a story, it’s an experience,” said David Rodriguez at St. Joseph, “and now you’re telling the story and it’s an experience for someone else. Christ told stories for three years. It made no sense for him to go to heaven unless his disciples continued to tell the stories.”

The consensus among most parishioners was that each can be personally touched by the Spirit of God and that the particular experience can play a big part of how they live their faith. It grew clearer that as small groups can serve as a collection and dispersal point for faith stories, *New Jersey Catholic* magazine could perform a similar role on a wider scale.

In evaluating the *no* replies to question two on the evaluation, it seemed significant that the greatest number (seven of fourteen among the four sessions) came from the Seton Hall students, although those responses were outnumbered two-to-one by the fourteen affirmative student replies.

In an important way, the students constituted a singular group. Compared to the older adults in the three parish sessions, the students were unique in the sense that few considered themselves regular church-goers; indeed, most had left church behind. None cited a major reason for the breach; perhaps, it was largely a manifestation of the drift that has been documented among youth. A 2013 report by Pew Research, the highly regarded polling and research organization on religion issues, reveals one set of such data.

The number of Americans who do not identify with any religion also has grown in recent years; indeed, about one-fifth of the public overall – and a third of adults under age 30 – are religiously unaffiliated as of 2012,” according to the report. “Younger adults also are less likely than their

older counterparts to be affiliated with a religion,” it continued. “However, the association with age tends to hold even among those who have a religious affiliation.¹²

Raised a Catholic and a graduate of a Catholic high school, student Connor Diamond said he stopped believing in second grade because he wanted proof. Now he describes himself as “on the fence; there are signs there is a God but sometimes not.” His Dad goes to Mass once a week and his Mom goes to church twice-a-day after he said she found God after years as an agnostic.

Jake Newton needs “to see it to believe it,” he said. “My friends did CCD and sometimes I wonder why, but I didn’t care, I believe in logic.”¹³

Connor and Jake were like many within the Seton Hall group who said their parents did not practice religion, or were of mixed religion, or divorced.

Student Kevin Franey said he considers himself an agnostic. Although baptized Methodist, he said his parents were “not hugely religious.” He summarized his ambivalence this way: “I don’t disbelieve but there are cases that make me question.” Kevin told this story: a neighbor survived pancreatic cancer but lived to see his son (a year older than Kevin) die in a car crash. Now the father is bedridden with a debilitating fungal disease that will likely kill him within a year. “It makes me question how this can happen,” Kevin said. God saved him to watch his son die and – if that wasn’t enough – is now killing him?”

¹² “Growth of the Nonreligious,” *Pew Research Religion & Public Life Project*, July 2, 2013, accessed June 10, 2014, <http://www.pewforum.org/2013/07/02/growth-of-the-nonreligious-many-say-trend-is-bad-for-american-society/>

¹³ CCD is the acronym for Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, the name long used for Roman Catholic parish religious education programs.

From my ministerial experience, this is not a unique concept; yet, there is almost an underlying assumption by Kevin and his peers that such questions are to be hashed out solo, or with a close friend, but not in a church setting. It is not that he is dismissive of religion; it's just that he and his peers are usually not even considering that religion, or a church, are places to seek answers.

In the context of the New Evangelization, this presents a challenge, according to Cardinal Walter Kasper in *Gospel of the Family*. The practical theologian quotes Pope Francis' warning in *Joy of the Gospel* that "the rupture of disintegrating family structures is preventing faith to be passed on to new generations."¹⁴ Elaborating on Pope Francis, Kasper emphasizes the critical need to strengthen and broaden family ties into an effective evangelizing force within the greater Church.

Understanding the Church as a domestic church is therefore fundamental for the future of the Church and for the new evangelization. Families are the first and the best messengers of the gospel of the family. They are the way of the Church.¹⁵

The problem is another dimension of what Saint Paul was discussing in Romans 10:14-17 and, as Kasper notes, this obliviousness threatens the New Evangelization like little else.

...a wide gap has developed between the church's teaching concerning marriage and the family and the lived convictions of many Christians. The church's teaching appears, even to many Christians, to be out of touch with the world and with life. But we must also say and say it joyfully: there exist very good families, which do their best to live the faith of the church and give witness to the beauty and joy of faith...In view of the rupture in passing on the faith to the next generations, they have the important catechetical task of leading people to the joy of the gospel.¹⁶

¹⁴ Pope Francis, Section 70.

¹⁵ Cardinal Walter Kasper, *The Gospel of the Family* (New York: Paulist Press, 2013), 25.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 2, 24.

Despite their detachment, the students were neither scornful, nor dismissive of religion during the research session. Many had come to non-traditional faith understandings that may not include a church but did countenance prayer, meditation and personal moral codes as part of individual spiritual practices. That they articulated their thought processes in coming to these personal tenets was in some ways more impressive than those who accept tenets simply because that is the way they were brought up.

When she turned eighteen, Nicolle Segarra said she visited her brother in Colorado where they got into deep discussions. He told her it was ok “to wander from Catholicism,” she said. This coincided with her growing feelings that God and religion were too big for one sect. She said nothing overt instigated the search but she decided to explore. She likes Buddhism and how she says it can find the divine everywhere; she likes to meditate. She concluded that it was more important to have faith in humanity and that human beings should care about one another. Nicolle gave her father as an example of this kind of living. He came to the US from Ecuador when he was twenty-four and he “is unstintingly generous and loving” in supporting her and her dreams.

While this is only one example of the questioning many young adults go through, these non-traditional approaches to faith would seem to fit the unexpected of the structuralist approach outlined by Savage and Presnell, as discussed in the next chapter.

While more traditional responses could be expected from the parish groups, especially due to their prior involvement in a small-group process or evangelization, the responses from the Seton Hall students suggest a new pattern. It is one the church would likely find difficult to address because these students attend sporadically at best.

Having two teenage sons themselves, LAC members Rosemary and Bob Taibi, easily grasped what the Seton Hall students were saying and professed no concern at the alternative thoughts they heard that night. Instead, they were energized by the young adults. They said the experience confirmed their parenting methods and they found stories of the students exhilarating. “Although we were raised in traditional Catholic families, we don’t think questioning faith or church matters is irreverent or out-of-bounds,” Rosemary said. “No,” Bob agreed, “it’s important to ask questions, because finding the answers – or that there are no answers – deepens your appreciation for God, so we encourage our sons to do that.”

No matter which group they observed, each of the LAC members said they grew in appreciation of their own faith stories as they heard the stories of others. LAC member Mike Santo said it was “humbling and awesome how they (the St. Rose group) freely shared their stories with total strangers.”

“There was such a sense of community when we first got together but I thought that was because we were all from St. Ann,” LAC member Adele Santo said of the LAC’s initial session. “But that sense only grew after we told our stories to each other and grew even more at the (subsequent parish) meeting.”

Outside the LAC meeting at St. Ann, not all were moved. Just like the parishioner at St. Joseph, LAC member Eugene Morris said he “did not have any inspiring revelations” from his time with St. Philomena parishioners. However, Louise Morris said she was “enthralled by the experience. (As members of the LAC) We kind of knew each other from church but we got to know each other better after telling our stories. Then to see and hear other parishioners go through it was inspiring.”

Likewise, the magazine stories that participants suggested in answer to the first question pointed toward a transformation in thinking: from how a personal story can take one to a wider-Church/faith point of view. When I constructed the May issue about priesthood ordinations, the suggestion by Michele Palladino of St. Joseph was on my mind: tell stories of how individuals responded to a call to ministry. “That could be effective,” she said, which is why I opened the account with forty-six-year-old Pedro Repollet’s narrative of how, as a successful real estate executive, everything felt shallow and unrewarding until he responded to God’s call to the Catholic priesthood. It easily conjured the image of the rich young man of Luke 18:18-23.¹⁷

Among the other story suggestions: Nancy Perley of St. Rose said she “would like to see stories with examples of what people are doing that connect with Pope Francis’ vision and guidance,” while Liz Rotunno said she would be inspired hearing how young adults in their 20s and 30s “embrace the church as well as their faith.” The latter was something we tried to do in the September issue when we highlighted the outstanding community service of Seton Hall students in its DOVE (for Division of Volunteer Efforts) program.¹⁸ Also from St. Rose, Chuck Klena offered his “journey back to faith after 40 years away” as part of a larger article telling the stories of similar returnees.

Seton Hall students, Caitlynn Guinto, Maria Makil and Dakari Paul all singled out the story Sibohan McGirl told at the session about how her and her mother grew stronger in faith after her father was diagnosed with MS.

¹⁷Al Frank, “Called to Holy Orders: Priesthood Ordinations 2014,” *New Jersey Catholic* (May 2014): 14-19 (Appendix 3).

¹⁸Melissa McNally, “Seton Hall Students Making a Difference,” *New Jersey Catholic* (September 2014): 14-19 (Appendix 4).

Dave and Patty Rodriguez of Saint Joseph, who have special needs children, suggested a multi-faceted look at how the Church welcomes those children and their parents in their struggle might help parents in similar situations, while informing other parishioners of the challenges and the opportunities to help.

That these comprise a kind of to-do list for the magazine is itself the very difference I sought in the project prospectus, in which I expressed hope of changing the process of selecting stories for *New Jersey Catholic*. By asking readers about their stories of faith, it is clear the project has taken steps toward replacing the typical, world view of a top-down editor. It also seems clear these stories could evangelize by encouraging readers to use their own stories to do the same. In the next chapter, I will provide details on the impact, as we evaluate in a more formal way how the project turned out.

CHAPTER 4

EVALUATION

It was a brief reaction to what someone else had said during the group-sharing at St. Joseph Church in Bogota, N.J. The research session was winding down and it seemed nearly off-hand when Carol Bobat offered a short story. As soon as she told it, however, we were all struck at how profound the observation was.

“I had been praying for such a long time about something, so I had a feeling the prayer had gone unanswered,” she said. One day while drying her hair, though, she said she had a keen sense of God’s presence and heard an almost-audible voice: “Did you ever think *you* were the answer? I keep forgetting we’re tools God uses,” Carol said. “That stuck with me for a month. It was the most amazing thing.

Carol was saying that we sometimes need to cultivate a greater awareness that each of us have particular talents as parents/singles, working people, students – in whatever vocation. These individual talents – and the personal stories that lead to their discovery and usage – comprise the tools God has provided each of us to help bring about the reign of God.¹ That is likely the common thread the research project revealed to the parishioners, students, LAC members and the candidate. In effect, and as we saw in the previous chapter, it is a story of transformation. In this section I will use the Savage and Presnell template summarized in the last chapter to analyze how that came about, the

¹ Gerhard Lohink, *Jesus of Nazareth: What He Wanted, Who He Was* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2012), 24-38.

practical effect of this realization, and what it portends for my ministry and my denomination.



From the perspective of Carol's story, we can hopefully understand my own transformation when I began to view the

editorship not as a job but as a ministry. As discussed in the previous chapter, I continued to use journalistic skills, but began to discard the role of an editor who decides what stories he will feature in favor of a servant role that – through collaboration – goes to the heart of the definition of *diakonia* (see glossary, page eighty-four).

That transformation began with the research sessions. Although I led them, I assiduously sought to assume the role of the kenotic, or not-knowing listener. As described in the last chapter in citations from Savage and Presnell and Hester and Walker-Jones, I came with no preconceived notions.

Predisposed to listening, I discerned another dimension to Carol's story. The hair dryer was blowing loudly – just like the earthquake and fire in 1 Kings 19 – but like Elijah, Carol heard the whisper. I attempted to do so as well, believing a willingness to listen more than to talk was conducive in eliciting stories and comments of significant

depth. Even though the LAC and I were from outside the particular communities, we were welcomed with intimate narratives which, in turn, emboldened us to inject snippets of our own stories, while at the same time being careful not to wrest the conversation away from the parishioners and students. That encouraged other parishioners and students to share their stories, which enriched feelings of empathy and kinship.

That was only one element of discernible change; the other occurred within the LAC. The initial planning for the research sessions seemed like an academic exercise. We were assembling the right material that, through scripture and quotes from Pope Francis, would create the ambience which we hoped would encourage participants to share their personal stories. Beyond that we hoped we could encourage them to journey to a point where they understood how valuable those stories were to them personally and to those with whom they share those stories.

But when we tested the process, we not only got the point but found ourselves spiritually invigorated by the experience. That was just us, we reasoned, because we all know each other and are from the same parish. But, as the research sessions progressed, we realized something more was happening.

The call by Pope Francis to be “a community of missionary disciples who ...are involved and supportive...an evangelizing community” combined with the meditative reading of the Emmaus story, made all our hearts burn.²

The organizational meeting of the LAC “was the first time I was asked to participate in something like this,” said Eugene Morris. “It was really something,” added Adele Santo. Mike Santo said it “was a little like” a one-day, faith-sharing men’s retreat

² Pope Francis, section 24.

“only shorter and more to the point,” Art Petitt added. In general, they said the research sessions reinforced a sense of the common ground they share with fellow Catholics.

For the LAC, the two-fold experience of doing the project themselves and experiencing it again with the four groups reinforced their appreciation of their own stories, as well as their place in the larger Church, as they found common ground – and rich faith – among those whom they were meeting for the first time. “Hearing the stories in other parishes made me more aware of the spiritual links we have in common,” Bob Taibi said.

Rosemary Taibi said her understanding of the New Evangelization grew. “The telling of personal faith stories reminded me of what personally grounds my faith and the process made me appreciate how sharing that story or other experiences can help others grow in their faith.” Mike Santo said he “never really thought about it that way before.”

As mentioned earlier and which will be discussed more fully later in this chapter, the structuralist approach described by Savage and Presnell was offering opportunities to discern unforeseen patterns. In this case, the research sessions were yielding rich discussions and uncommonly perceptive comments. At no time did anyone confess some kind of *Eureka* moment but almost everyone acknowledged the significance of their faith story, and explained why it was worth telling.

“Tonight’s experience changed the way I think about my faith because it made me realize how many students look at bad situations,” said Caitlynn Guinto of Seton Hall. “Realizing now...(other) people’s faith in God has made me want to better my personal relationship with faith and go through the ‘journey’ that will help me find what I truly believe.”

Meanwhile, student Robin Nagel revealed her ambivalence about religion:

Discussions centered around religion such as this cause me to question and think about my experiences in the church and my faith. In the end, I do not intend to change my religious practices at this time, but these discussions do allow me to process my thoughts and perhaps learn/recognize something new about me or my faith.

“Hearing about the many stories that everyone went through that helped them restore or even strengthen their faith with God helps reinforce my strong faith with God,” said Maria Makil of Seton Hall. “Yes, the way, people think about their faith inspires me in my own faith journey,” said Siobhan McGirl.

“With the different stories, God is working always through his Church and using us to spread the Gospel,” explained Carol Bobat of St. Joseph.

I know I was deeply affected by the testimonies I heard.

As I listened, I was sometimes embarrassed to be taking notes as parishioners and students told their deeply personal stories. I was awed by their witness and the trust they had in me to repeat their stories truthfully and to interpret them with full fidelity to their context and meaning. Acting in the story broker role defined by Savage and Presnell I had to work as both servant to the story tellers and, later, to those who read this recounting of the project.

As the research progressed, I grew to a fuller realization that – like other pastors – I had been called to this particular ministry. I was no mere editor, casting about for material to fill space, but the “content evangelist” described earlier by *Faith Catholic* publisher Patrick O’Brien.³ I was seeking inspiring and enlightening material to enflame

³Patrick M. O’Brien, “Content Evangelists” *The Catholic Journalist* (September 2013), 1.

hearts already touched by the Lord. This personal transformation added an estimable dose of humility to the project.

My new understanding of a collaboration of service between the story-teller and the minister-editor would seem to have all the attributes of *diakanoia* traditionally rooted in Acts 6, as quoted in Chapter One.

Most commentators agree the neat division between table service and liturgical service is totally contradicted by the narrative that follows, showing deacons Stephen and Phillip doing more preaching than table waiting.

Citing other examples from Luke, scripture scholar Sister Barbara Reid, O.P. suggests *diakanoia* in the early Church was ministry that took multiple forms.

The verb *diakonein* occurs eight times in the Gospel of Luke and twice in Acts. The noun form *diakanoia* occurs once in the Gospel and eight times in Acts....The basic meaning of the verb *diakonein* is to act as a ‘go between.’ It applies to persons who perform errands, deliver messages, execute tasks for another, or attend to another person.⁴

Reid says the dual use of *diakanoia* to describe ministry and table service in Acts 6 is only one of many such examples in the New Testament. She says it used in the context of leadership, noting how Jesus describes himself as “one who serves” (Lk. 22:26) or, in 12:37, where the master waits on the watchful servants on his return. It is also used to describe the apostolic ministry in Acts 1:25. The Gospel of Luke also uses the imperfect verb *diekonei* to describe how Peter’s mother-in-law rose from her bed after being cured of fever and served Jesus and the disciples (Mt. 8:14). Reid suggests that the story was included because the evangelist sought to honor the ministerial role the woman likely rendered to the later Christian community. Reid cites financial support as another

⁴ Sister Barbara E. Reid, O.P., *Choosing the Better Part: Women in the Gospel of Luke* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1996), 98.

example of *diakanoia*, in describing the women who provide for Jesus out of their resources (Lk. 8:3) and the mention of Paul's relief mission to famine-stricken Judea in Acts 11:29 and 12:25.

It is very important to remember that the ministries of the early Church were still very fluid at the time of Luke's writing. There were no set job descriptions. In the Pastoral Letters, written not long after Luke and Acts, the qualifications for *diakonoi*, "deacons" (1Tim 3:8-10) are essentially the same as those for *episkopoi*, "overseers" or bishops (1Tim 3:2-7) and *presbyteroi*, "elders" (Titus 1:5-6; 2:2-3). Titus 1:5-7 uses *presbyteros* and *episkopos* interchangeably.⁵

The image of Christ kneeling to wash the feet of his disciples at the Last Supper and his self-description as "one who serves" is also used often as a symbol of the deacon's service to others in the Church. While liturgical and preaching roles are part of that service, the principle role is tending to the needs of the community. As described earlier, there are deacons who carry this out in soup kitchens, hospitals and prisons – areas in which I have occasionally served in the past while working the full-time job I needed to support my family.

But with the buy-out at *The Star-Ledger* came the long-hoped for opportunity to work in ministry full-time. What form this would take was not evident at the start. As mentioned in Chapter One, I made unsuccessful overtures in various venues for ministerial employment. In the meantime, I worked in part-time jobs tutoring, teaching and writing at Seton Hall University.

The latter did not seem the ideal fit but I was not disheartened. There was sense of serving Christ by serving others. More importantly, like Lori Anthony in Chapter Three, I remained confident that by remaining ready to answer, a call to ministry would

⁵ Ibid., 100.

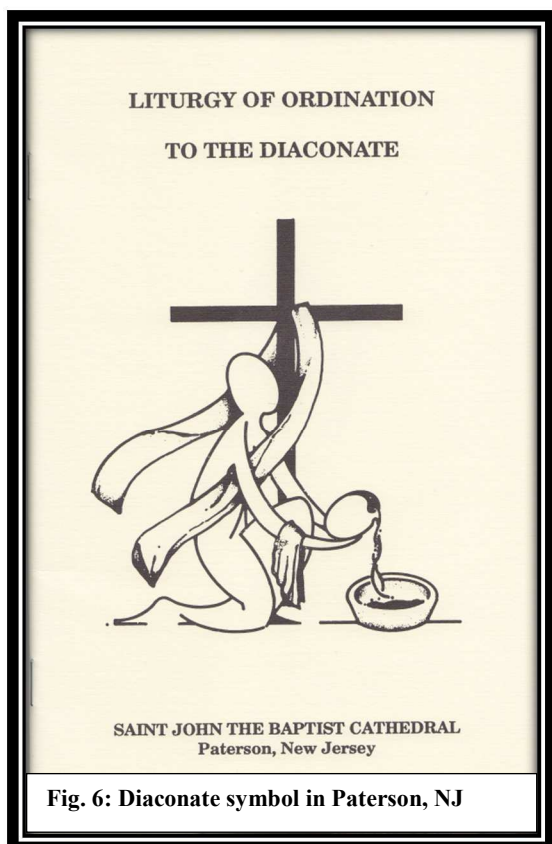
eventually come. It was during this time I felt that starting the Doctor of Ministry Degree at Drew University would enhance my skills and broaden my spirituality.

Yet, when the magazine offer came it was not only unexpected but also the complete opposite of what I was hoping for. Return to the grind of finding stories, meeting deadlines and dealing with resistant sources? On top of that, I needed to learn the work of production and design to say nothing of staffing and management duties. This seemed like a whole new career and not a ministry.

But discernment, assisted in great measure by my Drew mentors and cohort, began to change my perception. The image of the towel-clad, Christ-like figure on my ordination program, and the injunction about Him who “came not to be served but to serve” (Mk. 10:45) offered further encouragement and the research project tied it all

together. As Lori reminds, “I am the answer.”

The answer to what? No less than my brother deacons who feed the hungry, visit the sick, imprisoned or homebound, the content evangelist described in Chapter Two bears the light of Christ too. In the stories the magazine presents, readers immobilized by doubt, or yearning for spiritual enrichment, can find inspiration, encouragement, and renewal. It is one kind of ministerial service in a Church that offers so many, as St. Paul related:



Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone.⁶

This involved personal transformation. As I mentioned earlier, the skill set for writing and editing a religion-focused magazine is nearly identical to my earlier career as a reporter/writer for a general circulation newspaper – eye for a good story, ability to collect relevant facts and to accurately report them in a lucid style. New elements include translating these stories into tools for the New Evangelization through the collaboration necessary to tell them effectively to achieve that goal. As a reporter for a general circulation newspaper, I hope I was always a good listener and evinced compassion when the circumstances required. The minister-editor must add to those skills by highlighting the Gospel values a given story promotes. However, the narration must avoid off-putting polemics, or mawkish stereotypes – which is why the professional journalistic eye is essential to the process.

Listening and observing carefully were critical to getting the story during my newspaper career. Now, getting the story is important but only in the sense that it provides an example of faith and an opportunity for personal reflection; to find that requires not “just the facts” but listening and observing with the ears and eyes of faith. A “gift of tongues,” if you will, is also necessary so the re-telling affords the reader opportunities of self-recognition, conversion and evangelization.

How this affects the wider Church is humbling as well. The Archdiocese of Newark has 1.2 million Catholics but, at this writing, the magazine has only about thirty thousand subscribers. While some parishioners say they miss the printed newspaper,

⁶ 1 Cor.12:4-6.

more comment on the glossy attractiveness and the readability of *New Jersey Catholic*. The most repeated endorsement is of how the magazine tells stories about “regular Catholics” or “people just like me” and does not focus as much as the paper did on hierarchy and organizational issues. It is important to caution that these are comments as random as criticisms; no formal reader survey will be taken for another year. Yet I suspect even then it will be impossible to measure whether *New Jersey Catholic* will make a discernible difference to anyone’s faith life. However, the results of the research project would suggest great potential and, after all, the initial proclamation of the Gospel began small too.

What is certain for now is the unexpected that Savage and Presnell say the research should disclose in ways unforeseen at the start of the project.

The structuralist approach looks for unconscious patterns that may shape the context. This may have remained unobserved during the development phases of the project, when narratives were being listened to and a project was being proposed, only to come to the fore as resistive elements to the changing of the story of the future of the context, team or researcher. The post-project structure may instead be an emerging new structure. New patterns arise to replace old ones, or new textures are applied to old patterns.⁷

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the hope of uncovering a new pattern for an editorial *modus operandi* showed signs of early success. It did so through the engagement of the participants in the research sessions as well as among LAC members. Their receptivity to the project led many of these parishioners and students to offer a preferred story to the traditional, world view of a magazine. Best of all the minister-editor found himself transformed in a way he prays will continue to well serve our denomination.

⁷ Savage and Presnell, 129.

The project also demonstrated “the reciprocal relationship” that such story-sharing groups can bring about. Hester and Walker-Jones discussed this dynamic in the context of what the narrative clergy peer groups can yield in the relationship between pastors and congregations. So, we again extrapolate from their book to the story telling that went on within our four research groups. It is clear a reciprocal relationship grew among the participating parishioners, students, LAC members – and myself, one that led to individual transformations but which also brought about elements of change to the magazine context. Some of the attributes, according to Hester and Walker-Jones:

Start by forming a safe and trusting (clergy) peer group that creates a liminal space. Within the group practicing narrative conversations characterized by not-knowing and curiosity. Finding one’s own story in early memories....The group responding playfully to different (congregational) situations – laughing, lowering anxiety, not taking themselves seriously. Reflecting on these narrative (leadership) activities in the group; the group asking curious questions, thickening stories....⁸

The parentheses were added to the citation to eliminate the clerical references and to demonstrate the serendipitous applicability of Hester and Walker-Jones’ methods to this project.

The impact of *New Jersey Catholic* on the Church of Newark is not easily measured. In December 2012, when the magazine was only three issues old, *Faith Catholic* conducted a reader survey which came back with glowing results. Few respondents missed the old newspaper and most raved over the magazine. I was buoyed that they were spending an average of thirty minutes or more reading *New Jersey Catholic* and how their favorite features were the ones generated locally while those features provided by Faith Catholic publishing ran a close second. Why am I not being

⁸ Hester, Walker-Jones, 93.

specific? Long ago I realized percentages can be deceptive and what *Faith Catholic* did not provide, until I insisted, was the actual number of surveys returned from the mailing. It was eighteen and most were from readers sixty-five or older.

Until *Faith Catholic's* next survey in 2016, we will have to measure the impact of *New Jersey Catholic* anecdotally. Archbishop Bernard A. Hebda, who frequently suggests story ideas, regularly sends commendatory emails; pastors and other priests I have worked with are as enthusiastic. In parish gatherings, including the research forums, people say they enjoy reading about other Catholics just like themselves. They appreciate a diocesan publication that includes practical tips on how to practice their faith at their jobs and in family life. They also like the easily digestible articles on theological or church matters and they appreciate the lavish use of photos. When someone simply says they like the magazine, I always ask “what do you like best?” and I am pleased when the responses are either, “it makes me think more of why I am a Catholic” or “it helps me live my faith.”

Not all is positive, of course. I received one written letter from an elderly couple who miss the newspaper. When I told them it was still available on-line, they said they did not have a computer. One priest told our advertising director that he despised the product for all its canned features. Other parishes reduced their bulk subscriptions, because the price for the magazine turned out to be four-times higher than the newspaper cost; so we just initiated a subscription drive that solicits parishioners (on lists provided by their churches) in exchange for a three-dollar rebate to the parish for each subscription generated by that approach.

It's anybody's guess where all this is leading but in the next chapter I will hazard a few predictions and elaborate on the ways the project will affect the second year of *New Jersey Catholic*.

CHAPTER 5

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

James Flaherty, a student at Seton Hall University, said he was raised in a nonreligious family and his parents told him that he could choose a religion once he had become an adult – but it was up to him. By the time I met him, that time had not yet come.

“I’ve been to various churches for weddings and I really like going on Christmas, because it adds to the season – I like the trimmings,” he said. “Maybe it’s my scientific background but the Bible seems so unreal to base a religion on.” Yet, even with science, he said he finds himself “praying in moments of desperation.” This is the prayer: “God if you’re there, help!”

The tentative language James uses, expresses almost an unspoken sense that he knows he is missing out on something; that the Divine within him is beckoning him to “come and see” no less than that burning bush did to the curious Moses (Exodus 3), or the living Jesus did to those first disciples (Jn. 1: 39). Today, the invitations come neither by fire nor through an incarnate Christ but through disciples who themselves responded at some earlier point to the call to follow the Lord.

This is the New Evangelization which, as we have discussed, also entails continuing conversion by the already-churched, as they extend invitations to the unchurched. Yet, as we have seen in the research, this continuous process does not necessarily entail extending direct invitations so much as providing examples of Christian

behavior in the way Christians live the Gospel – and in the stories they share that explain how they have discovered for themselves the “pearl of great price” (Mt. 13:46).

As I have attempted to reveal in this research, the telling of such stories can be compellingly evangelistic. What Hester and Walker-Jones promote in their research among groups of pastors who met to share their stories, we attempted to re-create with laity in the specific forums convened for the research project. The story-sharing Hester and Walker-Jones demonstrated as an effective tool in bolstering pastoral leaders, seems to parallel the research we have revealed as equally effective for laity who participate in



Fig. 7: Research session at Seton Hall University

the New Evangelization. Likewise, it seemed to indicate that by providing a forum for widely disseminating

such stories, *New Jersey Catholic* could contribute to the New Evangelization in the Archdiocese of Newark. By aiming to forge a community among its readers, they could be inspired to live and promote the Catholic faith through the stories provided under Patrick O’Brien’s memorable phrase, content evangelization.

In the quest to create a true community between readers and the editor, the research component asked those who participated in the sessions what stories they would

like *New Jersey Catholic* to tell. As described in Chapter Four, we have already published two of these suggestions: youth involvement in works of altruism and what motivated young men to become priests. Others are on the to-do list.

A natural result of the research process would be to establish a plan for continuing engagement with parishioners and readers of *New Jersey Catholic* in order to reinforce the diaconal role the magazine attempts to take to serve the people engaged in the New Evangelization in the Archdiocese of Newark.

As outlined in my narrative of concern, I questioned whether thicker, more resonant stories might be produced by replacing the typical, top-down journalism world view of editors coming up with their own ideas and then finding the people who would fit those pre-conceived themes. The research seemed to confirm that participants have deeply personal and compelling stories that, when shared, are not only an inspiration to hearers but lead the hearers to tell of their own compelling experiences of faith. As I look toward the future of my involvement with *New Jersey Catholic*, let us turn to some ideas that might evolve to maintain this methodology.

After the research sessions, it seems obvious that the most productive avenue might be to convene *New Jersey Catholic* events in individual parishes. Churches are always in need of facilitators for adult education, or spiritual enrichment programs. With its prayer, scripture and sharing components, the format we used for the research sessions could easily meet such a request. Pastors would have to be assured this is not a disguised attempt to drum up subscriptions but a direct outreach by the archdiocese on behalf of the New Evangelization. The goal, rooted in the call to discipleship found in scripture, is to

show how personal faith stories can be transformative and, in turn inspire others to see how their stories not only enrich their faith practice but move others to do the same.

The deacon-editor, as kenotic listener, would again discern stories that might be told in the magazine. Back-up would come in the form of the evaluation that could be adapted without change. What would require minor tweaking are introductory remarks that, of course, no longer need to discuss the Drew University research – except for telling the story of how it uncovered a whole new approach to publishing a unique magazine for the Catholics of the Archdiocese of Newark. For its ability to create a spiritual aura and the provocative “were not our hearts burning within us” question, the Emmaus reading remains core; also appropriate are the quotations from Pope Francis, who continues to attract substantial attention inside and outside the Roman Catholic Church. The evaluations remain appropriate for gauging the effectiveness of the session, but particularly for question two, which, as you recall, asks the participant for the story or stories they would like *New Jersey Catholic* to publish.

Another important contribution to the preferred future of *New Jersey Catholic* within the Archdiocese of Newark is Archbishop Hebda. In 2013, he was named by Pope Francis as the successor of Archbishop Myers, who reaches the mandatory retirement age of seventy-five in 2016. Until that time, or when otherwise relieved of the position, the archbishop retains full pastoral and executive authority, while Hebda is a “coadjutor,” or assistant archbishop with the right of succession.

Hebda, who discerned his priestly vocation while practicing law, is a native of Pittsburgh and was formerly bishop of Gaylord, a rural diocese in Michigan with 66,000 Catholics. On his appointment to Newark, he said he was glad he had time before fully

assuming leadership – “the coadjutor’s cushion,” he called it – because it is providing him with the opportunity to get more acquainted with the vast archdiocese that counts 1.2 million Catholics within some of the most densely populated counties of northeast New Jersey.

As part of that effort, he has made numerous visits to parishes, schools, institutions and events. The episcopal “boots on the ground” have been particularly advantageous to *New Jersey Catholic* for the steady stream of potentially story-worthy leads he provides. Few weeks pass that I do not receive an email, or encounter him in the halls of our building, that he doesn’t suggest people and events as worthwhile subjects for the magazine, as well as its sister publication, *The Catholic Advocate Online*. Among them: Cedar Grove parishioners who donate one hour a week in direct service to the poor; a group of Bergen County parishes who have banded together for weekly prayer sessions; a college graduate who has begun a ministerial career that blends her music and storytelling skills to inspire other women; a Cliffside Park man who served in the papal household of Pope John XXIII.

After we publish a new edition, I can expect the first email about it to come from him. He fully endorses the format of showcasing regular Catholics telling their faith stories. His conviction that *New Jersey Catholic* serves as a valuable tool of the New Evangelization was also manifested after Hebda requested my appointment to the archdiocesan Evangelization Commission, which he chairs. The commission is a kind of board of directors for the Office of Evangelization, which serves as a resource for workshops, materials, courses and consultations that can aid evangelization throughout the archdiocese. Among its specialized committees are those that focus on Bible study,

faith sharing groups, and outreach to disaffected Catholics. With membership on the commission comprised of pastors, laity and representatives and institutions directly engaged in evangelization, like the Immaculate Conception Seminary School of Theology, the symbiosis with the archdiocesan magazine engaged in the same mission opens vast opportunities for productive sharing of ideas and potential stories.

As previously stated, *New Jersey Catholic* is not the only answer but a single tool of the New Evangelization. It can help readers visualize and tell faith stories and locate catechetical tools that can help them - and others through their example - to better practice the Catholic faith. The above three-prong approach can help with that mission, because it will provide a sense of kinship with the magazine among the parishioners of the Archdiocese of Newark. As the Church has “many members, and all the members do not have the same function,” it is when they collaborate with one another that we become one body in Christ (Rom. 12: 4-7). Through such collaboration, evangelization may become more effective, perhaps helping people like James Flaherty, whom we met at the outset of this chapter, discover that there need be no “if you’re there” when articulating a prayer.

EPILOGUE

It is one thing to be a doctor and quite another to be a surgeon, says Pete Dinglasan, a urologist. “You stand out because you have to go in (into the human body) and have to do something,” he said on the night of the research session at St. Philomena in Livingston. “I know I’m good but on several occasions, what I studied wasn’t there and I called on Jesus.”

He described one incident when the X-ray clearly pinpointed two kidney stones. But after cutting open the patient and feeling with his hands, “there was nothing. For more than thirty minutes I looked for the stones. Then I stopped and began praying. I called on Jesus and said ‘this is something I cannot do without you.’” Resuming the surgery, he said he immediately located the stones. “That’s what makes you humble. It’s not me. I’m being used.”

In earlier discussing my own story, I mentioned how life after my departure from *The Star-Ledger* was not clear, except for a hope for full-time ministry of some kind. As a deacon, I had years ago placed myself at the service of the Lord but, even when the future seemed murky, I remained confident a clear path would manifest itself. And it did: through Seton Hall, to Drew and the Archdiocese of Newark, I find myself, in Pete’s words, “being used.”

In the middle of its second year, *New Jersey Catholic* remains a new ministry of the Archdiocese of Newark. It seeks to promote the New Evangelization in which all the

baptized live the Gospel and preach it through their daily life. The magazine does this by showcasing the stories of lay Catholics doing just that. It's clear, an editor-writer is only the conduit, or facilitator, in the process. Only when the story teller and the "content evangelist" collaborate can we further the mission of invigorating and promoting Catholicism through this particular medium.

The Doctor of Ministry research project has been immensely valuable in developing this new ministry and spawning deeper theological and spiritual thought among all of us engaged in that mission.

It has made a difference to my execution of *New Jersey Catholic*. The probing questions and comments by mentors and cohort; the collaboration with archdiocesan personnel and – especially when I meet with research groups and story subjects – all the above took on a spiritual dimension that I doubt would have been as pronounced without the research project. The research also gave me a greater appreciation of this magazine as a ministry in providing a practical tool for every reader to use to better practice the New Evangelization.

Cover stories have demonstrated how lay Catholics have been transformed by their faith. Among them: dockworkers at Port Newark; police, firefighters and EMTs; couples who say the Sacrament of Matrimony continues to strengthen their marriages; and a lawyer who helped start a legal clinic for the disadvantaged.

LAC Chair Michael Santo said these stories could not have been told without my ministerial touch. "He had a great career as a professional journalist for a mainstream newspaper. But it is his spirituality – broadened by his Drew experience and this project – that looms large in the magazine's initial success," Mike wrote in the site visit report.

The research project honed my listening and interpretive skills. The stories participants told were uniform in the sense that we all felt we were hearing people narrate sacred moments in their lives when they felt particularly close, or even distant, from God and how those times helped them grow in faith and now influence the way they practice their religion and invite others to share the treasure they have discovered.

I think this insight was due to the structure of the sessions, which we hoped would provide a spiritual experience, to both participants and observers. The LAC members properly fulfilled their roles as observers and recorders of the stories of faith narrated by the participants. However, the depth of the narratives was so moving, the evaluations generally indicated the parishioners/students grew in awareness of the power of their personal stories in inspiring others to live the Gospel. Thus it was no surprise that committee members – and I as well – were similarly moved. This was especially evident after the sessions, when the team and I would debrief, averring at how awestruck we were at what we had been privileged to share. This carried through in the notes LAC members later submitted about the stories they heard and in the responses some made to the evaluation's second question: Did tonight's experience change the way you think about your faith and how you practice it? If yes, how? If no, was anything about your faith practice affirmed?

Of course, the narratives also provided ideas – and sources – for stories in the magazine: the new life taken on at Easter Vigil after celebrating the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults; the support found in a ministry to bereaved parents by bereaved parents; the individual witness of those who returned to active faith practice after a period of drift for any number of reasons. The list continues to grow, as I did during my Drew

experience, and as I hope to continue to do so – by remaining in faithful service to the Lord.

GLOSSARY

Archdiocese/Diocese: In the Roman Catholic Church, a geographic area governed by an autonomous bishop. An archbishop heads an archdiocese, which is the leading diocese of a province but he has no authority over its other dioceses or bishops. New Jersey is such a province and the Archdiocese of Newark includes Bergen, Essex, Hudson and Union counties. The Diocese of Paterson takes in Morris, Passaic and Sussex counties. The Church divides the state's remaining fourteen counties among the dioceses of Metuchen, Trenton and Camden, each headed by a bishop. A bishop has full ministerial orders; priests and deacons share in those orders to lesser degrees and are bound to their bishop by a promise of obedience. By Canon Law, priests and deacons are incardinated, or counted among the clergy of one diocese, although they can secure faculties to function outside the diocese from the bishop, or official designee of another diocese. While I am incardinated in Paterson, I have been granted faculties to function in the Archdiocese of Newark.

Diakanoia: Greek for service. In the context of this paper, it is the specific way editing *New Jersey Catholic* relates to my ministry as a deacon, along with traditional liturgical service (assisting the presiders at Mass, Baptizing, bringing Eucharist to the homebound and nursing homes, officiating at weddings and funerals/wake services.) The biblical roots – and the broader sense of the term – are described by theologian and scripture scholar Sister Barbara E. Reid, O.P. as described in chapter four.

New Evangelization: In the development of the prospectus, research uncovered the Catholic Church's formal term for a forty-year-old program that combines the traditional concept of converting the unchurched and a continuing growth in the faith awareness of the baptized that provides others with inspiration to better live their faith. Pope Paul VI first used this term in 1975 in his "Apostolic Exhortation: Evangelization in the Modern World" and Pope John Paul II elaborated upon it in 1990 in the encyclical "On the Permanent Validity of the Church's Missionary Mandate." We can see the roots of this concept in Vatican Council II documents such as: the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church; the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World; the Decree on Instruments of Social Communication and the Declaration on Christian Education. The historic meeting of more than 2,500 of the world's Catholic bishops from 1962-65 was unique among the 20 other ecumenical councils in that its purpose was not to formally condemn errors but to demonstrate the Catholic Church's engagement with the world. Part of that engagement includes a heightened awareness by the Baptized of their call to evangelize.

Synod of Bishops: Established by Pope Paul VI in 1965 as a continuous, consultative body. Periodically, bishops from various parts of the world are invited to Rome to discuss issues of universal concern (an ordinary assembly) or urgent issues in a particular area (extraordinary assembly). The conclusions are usually summarized in a document later promulgated by the pope. Usually called an apostolic exhortation, the latest – *The Joy of the Gospel* – was issued by Pope Francis in 2013 and another is expected following the synod of October 2015.

APPENDIX 1

SCRIPT FOR RESEARCH SESSIONS

**In 90 minutes your stories of faith:
How I can build bridges with Pope Francis as a *New Jersey Catholic***

DEACON AL: My name is ... and I thank NAME and all of you for coming out tonight. Our session, which will take about 90 minutes, has a two-fold purpose. One, it will help us at New Jersey Catholic to spread the word about what we're doing but, more importantly, to hear from our readers about their faith stories, which may generate great stories for the magazine. The magazine's format highlights stories of everyday Catholics practicing their faith. The idea is that Catholics realize the sharing of such stories deepens our faith and empowers us share our faith with others. In a nutshell that's what the New Evangelization is about, growing in personal faith and practicing it in such a way others do the same.

Now you may wonder why there are two other people in the room you don't know. They are INTRODUCE from my home parish, Saint Ann in Parsippany. They have two roles. First, they will help facilitate our session. Second, they are on my parish committee of advisors as I work on a doctorate in ministry at Drew University.

One of the requirements is to conduct a project in practical ministry and my mentors thought what New Jersey Catholic is trying to accomplish would fit the bill. So

in addition to helping the magazine, you are also helping me personally, which is why we'll pass out forms that ask a few questions that I hope you won't mind filling out.

First, though, let's divide the people at our tables into pairs/fours so, when it comes time, we know who we will be telling a personal story that was significant to us in terms of our faith.

(Pause) To start, let us listen as NAMES read from Pope Francis' first exhortation in which he described his vision for the church.

MS: The Church that "goes forth" is a community of missionary disciples who take the first step, who are involved and supportive, who bear fruit and rejoice.

MR: An evangelizing community knows that the Lord has taken the initiative, he has loved us first (cf. 1 Jn 4:19), and therefore we can move forward, boldly take the initiative, go out to others, seek those who have fallen away, stand at the crossroads and welcome the outcast.

MS: Such a community has an endless desire to show mercy, the fruit of its own experience of the power of the Father's infinite mercy.

MR: Let us try a little harder to take the first step and to become involved."

DEACON AL: Gracious Father, we are grateful for this opportunity to gather this evening. May your Spirit guide us as we tell the stories that helped bring us closer to you and to one another. May we listen with your Son's heart and open ourselves to the Spirit who calls us to stir the embers of faith within us so that we can inspire others to do the same. We ask this through Christ our Lord.

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Luke:

Parishioners read the Emmaus story

DEACON AL: For a few moments, let us reflect quietly reflect on the story and perhaps recall a time when we last felt such a burn in our hearts?

(After a few moments, at Deacon Al's signal)

MR: What is your most vivid memory that keeps you Catholic?

MS: How has your faith helped someone who was in need?

MR: How has another person strengthened your faith: by deed, example, or generous action?

MS: How has your faith changed someone's life?

MR: What stories about your faith life need to be told?

DEACON AL: We'll now take about 30 minutes to tell each other our story.

(After about 30 minutes) invite those who want to share their stories with all of us to do so. Deacon Al interjects occasional questions: were those stories shared previously with anyone: spouses, parents, children, grandchildren, parishioners, co-worker and other neighbors? What makes a particular story stand out? Are these the kind of stories that shape not only our faith but can also inspire others?

Conclusion

MS: But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him? And how are they to proclaim him unless they are sent?...faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes from Christ.

MR: Jesus washed the feet of his disciples. The Lord gets involved and he involves his own, as he kneels to wash their feet. He tells his disciples: "You will be blessed if you do this" (Jn 13:17).

MS: An evangelizing community gets involved by word and deed in people's daily lives; it bridges distances, it is willing to abase itself if necessary, and it embraces human life, touching the suffering flesh of Christ in others.

MR: Evangelizers thus take on the "smell of the sheep" and the sheep are willing to hear their voice.

MS: An evangelizing community is also supportive, standing by people at every step of the way, no matter how difficult or lengthy this may prove to be.

DEACON AL: We now invite you to fill out the information forms, which are only for my project, not the magazine but I'm asking for your contact information in case I have a question. We're not in a hurry so if you have questions or want to chat or enjoy more of the cookies, please feel free.

APPENDIX 2

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR RESEARCH

NEW JERSEY
CATHOLIC

Name:

Best phone number:

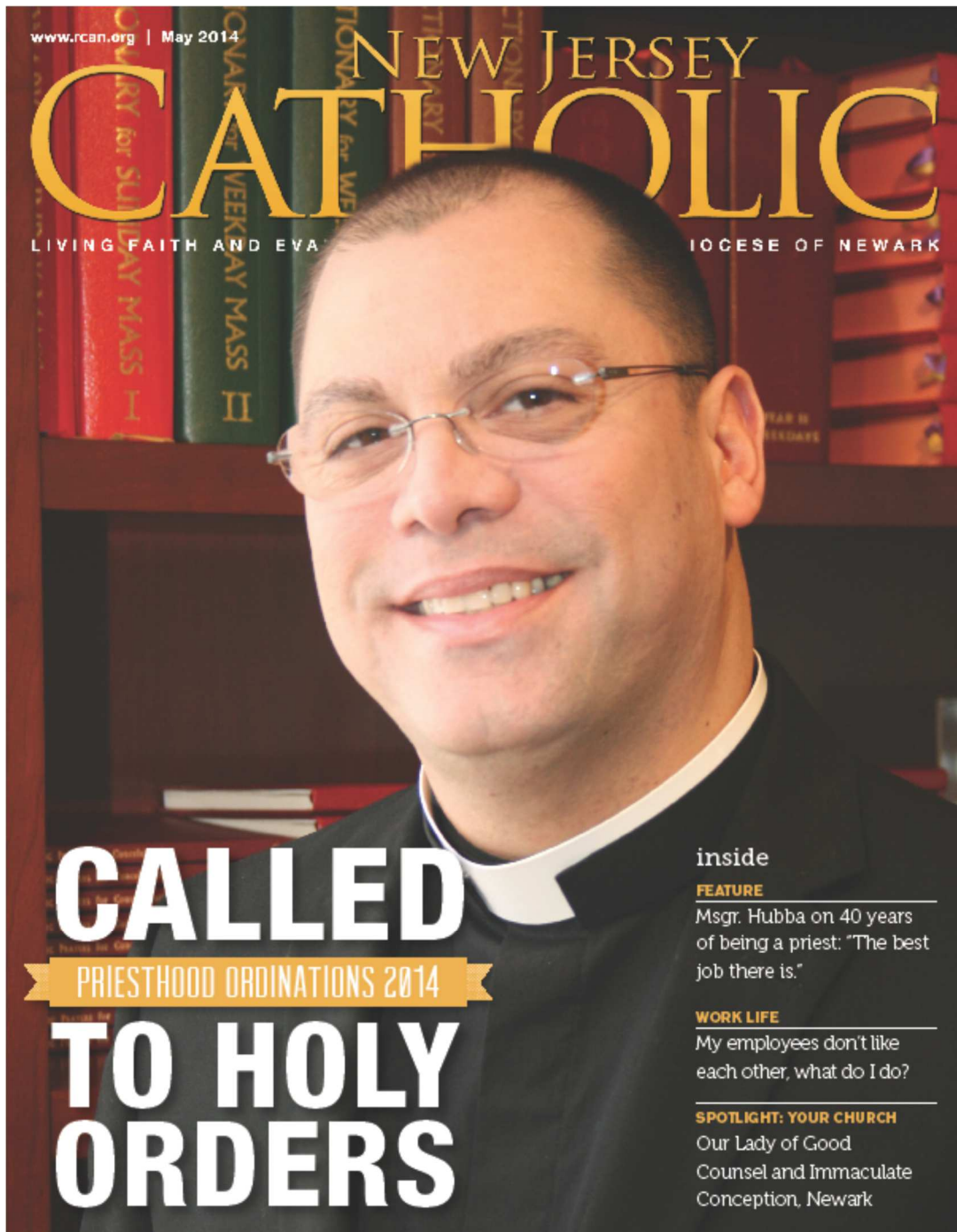
Email

1. What story of personal faith, or about the Church, would you like the magazine to tell.

2. Did tonight's experience change the way you think about your faith and how you practice it? If yes, how? If no, was anything about your faith practice affirmed? Feel free to write on the other side.

APPENDIX 3

NJ CATHOLIC: CALLED TO HOLY ORDERS



inside

FEATURE

Msgr. Hubba on 40 years of being a priest: "The best job there is."

WORK LIFE

My employees don't like each other, what do I do?

SPOTLIGHT: YOUR CHURCH

Our Lady of Good Counsel and Immaculate Conception, Newark



Fr. Abhinav Kumar



► **AD ALTARE DEI:** In the seminary chapel, from left, Deacons Eugenio Palileo de la Rama, Jose Robinson Valencia and Nelson Yobani Oyola Garcia

CALLED TO HOLY ORDERS

By Al Frank

Working as a well-paid executive with one of New Jersey's prominent real estate companies, Pedro Repollet Acosta owned gorgeous homes in the Forest Hill section of Newark and in Puerto Rico; rolled in a Mercedes E500; and filled a social calendar with dates with attractive women in expensive restaurants and chic clubs.

About 12 years ago, though, he began to feel something was lacking. Noticing his funk, his mother suggested he attend a healing Mass. Having nothing to lose, Pedro set foot in a church for the first time since his baptism.

"Every word was stirring my heart," he says of the sermon he heard at St. Michael in Newark. Then, as the priest was moving through the church with the monstrance, he stopped in front of Pedro and said, "The Lord is bigger than any struggle in your life."

That triggered a faith journey that led Pedro to give away the homes, return the Mercedes and enter the seminary. On May 24, Deacon Pedro, 45, will be the oldest of the 12 deacons Archbishop John J. Myers is to ordain to the priesthood in the Cathedral Basilica of the Sacred Heart in Newark.

The men come to this point after four years of spiritual formation and post-graduate work in theology that earned most of them master of divinity degrees from Immaculate Conception Seminary in South Orange. After being ordained deacons last year, most served in parishes, preaching, baptizing and performing other ministries.

With an average age of 34, they reflect the national trend of older men discerning priestly vocations later in life and after working in other jobs, as half of this year's ordination class did.

Deacon Sung Gye Stefano Hong, 39, of Maplewood, was an interior designer; Deacon Duberley Salazar Gonzalez, 34, of Colombia, was a journalist and Deacon Zachary Swantek, 34, of Clark, was a sales rep and trainer for Cutco Cutlery.

Deacon Elvio Esteban Batista, 32, of Jersey City, sold Hondas until a 2009 pilgrimage to France, where he brought the prayers of friends from the U.S. to the various shrines. "When I came back, some of those prayers had been answered," Deacon Elvio says, and he realized he had a vocation. "I was acting like a priest, called to be a bridge between God and his people."

INFLUENCE OF OTHER PRIESTS

Life also changed abroad for Deacon Eugenio Palileo de la Rama, 32, of Jersey City, after he decided against a career in public service or law and became a lay missionary in Latin and South America. Yet, even while evangelizing, he says he never seriously considered priesthood until he grew in admiration and respect for the missionary priests he lived and served with as his one-year commitment stretched into five years of service.

"When I was able to see what they really did all the time, I knew the Lord was calling me to seminary, and I should at least take a look at it," Deacon Eugenio says.

Similarly, Deacon Jose Robinson

LOOKING BACK

A JUBILARIAN REMEMBERS

Msgr. David Hubba is celebrating his 40th year as a priest of the archdiocese. Here are some of his memories.



Msgr. David Hubba

I'm sure our new priests will find that their job is the best one there is. I certainly have. I've met some of the Church's finest modern writers at adult education programs in my parishes: Father Richard

John Neuhaus, Peter Kreeft, Father John Hardon and the great lay theologian Frank Sheed, whose stories about a lifetime's speaking and writing about the faith were fascinating.

There have been hundreds of funerals. Thomas "Porky" O'Shea pitched to Babe Ruth and Lou Gehrig before injuring his arm. He got his nickname chasing a fly ball into a briar patch, emerging looking like a porcupine. Another man retired to Arizona, then died his first night there. I offered Mass for Captain Richard L. Williams, one of five Hackensack firefighters who died in the 1988 auto dealership fire, and for a Paramus man who survived Pearl Harbor, D-Day, and the Battle of the Bulge, only to die shoveling snow from his sidewalk.

Among the many emergency calls was for a girl of 12, who died after becoming ill at home; I couldn't finish the Gospel for the next morning's Mass, because it included Luke 17:34. (Look it up, and you'll see why.) One man I anointed was to begin studies for the priesthood the following Monday, but died before he could report. Another time, when the ER called in the middle of the night because of a death, the staffers were so busy they just gave me the morgue key and directions to the subbasement. On the way, I think I remembered every horror movie I'd ever seen. Another time, the ICU personnel were all in masks and gloves, looking very anxious, because a mysterious new malady called AIDS had arrived.

Work also had lighter moments. A man called to ask whether the cham-

pagne he'd just finished would break his Communion fast for the 12:10 Mass. I told him I thought it would, but why not go to the 12:30 instead? He said he didn't know we had one, but that would solve his problem. "In fact," he added, "I think I'll have another glass." Then I still remember presiding at one of the most elaborate weddings ever. As it came to an end, I couldn't believe it when I saw the Goodyear blimp through the open doors. To my surprise, it was merely headed for Teterboro Airport and had not been hired by the couple.

Over the years, there were the countless times when it was not hard to see the Lord's hand. A mother needed \$562 to take her son for surgery at a hospital down South. That afternoon, someone donated \$600 to our St. Vincent de Paul Society. And there are the many encounters with the Lord each time we celebrate the Eucharist and the Sacrament of Penance.

Any priest knows that his life strangely combines his necessity and his dispensability. He knows that he represents God, but that he is inescapably an odd and puzzling choice to do so because God could have chosen many others to do his work, and will find other useful instruments to do it as soon as the priest is gone.

Blistered by his sins, the priest knows he must sometimes seem like a cheap, inept impersonator of Christ. He is comforted that most of his errors are correctible, and all of his sins are forgivable. And he is thankful for the goodness of his parishioners, once beautifully expressed to me, when I was about to be transferred. The man, to whom I brought Holy Communion, said: "We will write your virtues in our memory and your faults in the sand."

Msgr. Hubba is pastor of St. Joseph in Oradell. Previously, he was pastor of St. Mary in Nutley and served at Holy Trinity in Hackensack, Our Lady of the Visitation in Paramus and St. Michael in Palisades Park. He also was a spiritual director at the college seminary from 2010 to 2013. ■

Valencia Valencia, 32, credits his vocation to a suggestion by Father Oscar Gonzalez Villa, his pastor in Colombia. "I felt in my heart something good whenever I thought about serving the Lord in this way and it motivated me to enter the minor seminary when I was 17," Deacon Robinson says.

The son of a professional tennis player, Deacon Jeong Gyeong (Silvano) Kim, 33, began pursuing that career at age 6. But, after 10 years, his hopes were dashed by shoulder surgery.

While wondering what to do with his life, he sought advice from his parish priest, Father Hong Won Kim. "He taught me a man's worth and a priest's sense of values," Deacon Silvano says, and he entered the seminary after graduating from high school.

Deacon Doroteo Bernaldes Layosa 2d, 33, grew up in the Philippines with three sisters and two brothers in a family that gathered for the rosary every night. But it was the example of Monsignor Dominador Galicia that led him to enter the seminary.

"I served his Masses many times," Deacon Doroteo says. "I witnessed his simplicity, humility, great patience and joyful heart in his priesthood and most of all his dedication to prayer. He was a powerful preacher in words and actions."

"Until his old age, he visited patients in the hospital, said Masses for the nuns and was spiritual director for the Legion of Mary, charismatics and others," Deacon Doroteo continues. "He was a dedicated and holy man who loved and served God and his people until he breathed his last. I told him that I would want to be like him."

INFLUENCE OF FAMILY

Deacon Sung Gye Stefano Hong, 39, says the seeds of his vocation were nurtured by his mother, who led lay ministry in their parish, and his grandfather, a lay minister who assisted Western priests serving in Korea.

On another continent, Villahermosa Tolima, in Colombia, offered a perfect environment for fostering his call, says Deacon Nelson Yobani Oyola Garcia, 32. It was a place "where faith and love of the Church are deeply shown" and, encouraged by the priests and Daughters of Charity who serve in his parish, Deacon Nelson says. "I always wanted to be a priest."

Deacon Emmanuel Otusorunchi Agu,



Courtesy of Zach Swantek

▶ **STUDY ABROAD:** Deacon Zachary Swantek, of Clark, studied theology in Rome, where he was ordained a deacon in St. Peter's Basilica.

35, who grew up on a farm in Nigeria, traces his vocation to his mother's invitation to attend a session of the parish charismatic group.

Until then, "I wasn't ready to embrace the priestly vocation," he says. "But my experience that day drew me much closer to God than I had ever imagined." As he began to pray more and attend daily Mass, "it became clearer to me God might be offering me his grace to discern a priestly vocation."

Likewise, his mother's mention of a healing Mass, started Deacon Pedro on a quest to learn the faith he had ignored for so long and to steep himself in prayer, during nightly visits to church. Soon he joined a missionary group and offered his story as a witness in talks and retreats locally and in other cities and outside the U.S.

Yet, the self-described Prodigal Son resisted the call to priesthood.

"I felt I could sell one house and live comfortably for two or three months, while continuing the retreats and talks," the former real estate executive says. "I didn't need to commit myself totally and renounce all the things I had."

His prayer sessions before the Blessed Sacrament brought a different message. "I fought it. 'No,' I said, 'I want to marry and have a kid.' But the Lord was stronger."

IS JESUS CALLING YOU TO BE ONE OF HIS PRIESTS?

▶ In addition to praying, why not do some research and ask some questions?

Check out www.newpriestnj.com or contact the Vocations Office of the Archdiocese of Newark

Phone: 973.313.6190
Email: newpriestnj@gmail.com

Finally Deacon Pedro decided on the seminary after realizing how much the Eucharist had changed him and how he wanted to share that gift with others – as only a priest could. "I knew I could give more as a priest, living a celibate life. At that point I felt complete joy."

Deacon Dubertey Salazar Gonzalez, 31, likewise discerned his vocation to the priesthood while praying before the Blessed Sacrament. As a journalist, he was struck by the angel announcing "good news of great joy" in Bethlehem. "God wanted to make me a messenger of Good News, a journalist of the biggest and greatest Good News that mankind has ever received," he says.

In the seminary, the men found their

call to the priesthood affirmed by their various ministries.

For Deacon Zachary Swantek, 34, it was his opportunity to lead a Bible study group at Queen of Heaven (Regina Coeli) Prison in Rome, where he studied.

"While I shared with them God's love and mercy, I came to realize more deeply how in my own life I had often become imprisoned by my sins," he says. "My time with these men challenged me to not judge others but to love them all the more. I came to see the possibility of conversion for even the hardest of hearts. While these men entered the prison as criminals, through the grace of God many were transformed into men of prayer."

Deacon Archibald Lindo Mabini, 31, a member of Redemptoris Mater community, said his best times were spent serving missions in Belize and in St. Croix.

"It was a challenging experience, because the sufferings of these people were quite visible," he says. Yet, they also confirmed his commitment to "the adventure of the life of a priest ... by announcing the Gospel, catechizing, visiting houses and simply by being present in the midst of the people, as a witness to God's existence." ■

Al Frank, a Roman Catholic deacon, is editor of the *New Jersey Catholic*.

APPENDIX 4

NJ CATHOLIC: SHU STUDENTS MAKING A DIFFERENCE



DOVE STUDENTS HELPING AT HOME AND ABROAD

By Melissa McNally

W

While serving meals at a Philadelphia food pantry, Melissa Santos remembers how helpless she felt as she watched workers scramble to aid a homeless man after he collapsed from a stroke. The experience left her determined to find a way she could fight for social justice.

"I called my parents crying," says Melissa, of Union City. "I wondered how many people like him are ignored. What if he doesn't have anywhere to go? Who would help him? Who can he turn to? I'm from an urban area so I know that there are people who are hungry, but the experience opened my eyes to how much need there is in the world. I realized that I'm meant to serve."

A parishioner at St. Augustine, Melissa was visiting the soup kitchen with Seton Hall University's Division of Volunteer Efforts, or DOVE. With an eye on her career goal, she has volunteered since she was a freshman. Now a junior, she plans to enroll in law school after graduation.

"I want to defend people's rights and have a positive impact on their lives."



Seton Hall University/DOVE



Sophomore Nicole Archibald of Franklin Lakes is already making a difference, too.

While some college students spent spring break at the beach, Nicole worked at a soup kitchen that served the elderly in El Salvador.

"People were living in homes made of cardboard. Certain villages were really distraught. But the positivity and faith of each community was overwhelming," Nicole recalls.

Accompanied by two priests on the trip, the university students prayed and reflected daily. "It was a pivotal experience for me; faith is such an important part of daily life for the people in El Salvador. It made me feel like serving God. Religion is now a part of me."

Like many colleges, Seton Hall requires public service of its undergraduates. But DOVE becomes home for the many hooked by the spirit of giving as they log the minimum 10 hours. Almost 2,000 students—or about half of

all undergraduates enrolled at the archdiocesan university—volunteer for local and international service with DOVE.

"This generation has a heart for service," says Michelle Peterson, DOVE director. "We have everyone from frat boys, to atheists, to people who regularly attend Bible study in the program."



Michelle Peterson

One key to success is the array of service opportunities DOVE offers. "We have weekly programs, whether it's playing bingo at a nursing home or tutoring in a prisoner assistance program," Michelle explains. The week-long trips overseas – which cost students \$1,300 each – run three or four times a year.

Long Island native Danielle Crooks, a DOVE graduate assistant, has traveled to Haiti and El Salvador while studying for a dual

degree from Seton Hall's School of Diplomacy and International Relations. Following graduation, she would like to work in international development programs for the Caribbean and Latin America.

"When I first went to Haiti in 2013, the abject poverty hits you immediately," Danielle recalls. "I was also struck by the joy and the hope of the people. You can't help but to compare their circumstances with your own life. I wondered, 'Why don't I have that joy but I have much more than they do?'"

Danielle came to Seton Hall after graduating from Messiah College, a private Christian college in Mechanicsburg, PA, which stresses the importance of social justice. It was not something new to Danielle. "Growing up, my parents always sought to help others. We had so many blessings given to us so we were taught to give back."

In El Salvador, Danielle witnessed the power of forgiveness. The country's civil war lasted

OPPOSITE PAGE: DOVE volunteer Kylie Jimenez provides a comforting shoulder during nap time at an orphanage in Santa Tecla, El Salvador.
ABOVE: Danielle Crooks and Melissa Santos

decades and in "La Matanza," the 1932 peasant massacre, thousands of impoverished indigenous people were killed.

"Even through all of the atrocities, the people of El Salvador have learned to forgive each other. They made me think of all the areas in my own life where I can't forgive," she recalls.

Resources in the country are stretched. Three teachers and a cook were responsible for a daycare center with 150 children. Having a group of students provide a helping hand to the local volunteers "reignited their passion for service,"

according to Danielle.

In the kitchen, the cook was "so moved," she called the students "a blessing. ... You realize how much work the people at the center do for so many children."

Michelle says many students "change in a profound manner" upon returning home from the trips. She says a former business major switched to international community health after the El Salvador trip and, after graduation, another student booked a one-way ticket to return to Haiti to serve.

"Once you immerse yourself in poverty, once you've seen the

plight, you can't turn your back on the poor," Michelle says. "You view the world differently."

Melissa agrees. As a pupil at St. Augustine School, she helped raise money to build a school in Africa.

As a work-study student with DOVE, Melissa coordinates programs, contacts volunteers and drives students to local service sites. She also continues volunteering. Last year, she worked at an after-school program for children with cerebral palsy.

"DOVE allowed me to flourish," she says. "My love of service has evolved. I have a passion for it."



SERVICE AT OTHER LOCAL COLLEGES

- ▶ **Caldwell University** students can participate in after-care tutoring at Our Lady Help of Christians School in East Orange, or Horizon High School of Cerebral Palsy in Livingston. During winter break, students make repairs to homes for families with substandard housing in rural West Virginia. During spring break, students travel to Eastern Kentucky for WorkFest.
- ▶ **Felician College** offers service trips to local food pantries and soup kitchens. This fall, the college hopes to participate in Midnight Run, a volunteer organization that distributes food, clothing, blankets and personal care items to the homeless on the streets of New York.
- ▶ **St. Peter's University** students can choose from local, national, and international volunteer opportunities. Annually, more than 700 students volunteer on 50 or more projects at 30 different sites in Hudson County. For at least five hours a week, students can tutor in local schools in the America Reads Program, or volunteer 30 hours per semester, or 10 hours a month, in the Loyola Volunteer program. ■ MM

▶ **A:** Alexandra Demetriades at the Santa Tecla Daycare Center in El Salvador in March. **B:** DOVE volunteers recruit fellow students on the Green

Although the overseas service trips are rooted in prayer and reflection, volunteers do not have to be Catholic. About 20 students travel to San Miguel, El Salvador and are assigned to orphanages, a special education school, a center for sexually abused girls and a nursing home. Since 2008, groups of a dozen students travel annually to central Haiti. Housed at the Matson Fortuné Orphanage, they play soccer with the children, teach English and help in other ways.

Overseas volunteers leave behind familiar conveniences, like smart phones and other electronics.

"The international trips are like a retreat," Michelle explains. "When you take away their phones, it is a quick, condensed lesson on how the rest of the world lives. We don't go there to build anything or have a specific agenda. Through the ministry of presence, the volunteers do whatever is asked of them."

A parishioner at St. Anthony of Padua in Passaic, senior Denisse Reyes was looking forward to disconnecting from technology for a week and "trying something different." She made her first trip to El Salvador in her sophomore year. Although DOVE staff members

hold meetings to prepare students for what to expect, Denisse says she was not prepared for how the trip transformed her.

"The volunteers told us that we were going to be different after the trip," Denisse recalls. "You think you're setting out to change the world but you are the one who changes. I was sad when the week was over; I didn't want to leave." She returned to El Salvador again last year. ■

Melissa McNally is editor of *The Catholic Advocate Online*.



Seton Hall University/DOVE

at Seton Hall C: Melissa Santos at Raphael's Life House, a transitional residence for homeless and pregnant women in Elizabeth.

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