

**Theme:** Everyday Evangelization

**Question:** How are you called to spread the Good News?

# Teens and parents in conversation HomeWord

Volume 7, Number 9

## Teen Talk *by Leann Barden*

I learn best by doing. A chemistry lab helps me learn a lot more about elements than reading about them in my textbook. In religion, I feel closer to Jesus when I perform service work than when I sit at Mass.

I think the best way to spread the Good News is to take what you hear at Mass or what you study in the Bible and apply it to life. Last December, my school's campus ministry program sent students to Clement Manor, a local nursing home, on Christmas Eve morning. A friend and I signed up together, thinking that a little service work would warm our hearts in the spirit of Christmas giving. As it turned out, we were the only two to volunteer.

When we reached Clement Manor, we were asked to help the most dependent residents unwrap the gifts that Santa was passing out to them. For the next three hours, we did all the unwrapping for the residents, showed them their gifts, and took their gifts back to an adult volunteer who placed them in a bag so they could later be labeled. At the end of the day, there was no warm, fuzzy feeling. Instead, all we felt was sad.

We felt that we had not brightened anyone's day. Because we were

not familiar faces nor part of an established routine, many of the residents were too afraid of us to take joy in their gifts. Several residents could not respond at all because they were hooked up to respirators or other machines or because they were just too confused. I was amazed that on Christmas Eve only a few residents had family visiting them. I wondered why a family visit had been replaced by a gift-wrapped sweater.

When we returned to school after vacation, our chaplain asked how our work at Clement Manor had gone. We told Father Michael how the event kind of put a damper on the holiday season. Father Michael, having gone through similar experiences repeatedly, was not phased. He told us that we did more good than we could ever imagine. "While they might have been scared while you were there," he said, "think of how happy they must have been afterwards. In the company of familiar faces, they could finally begin to realize the joy of the day's events."

It took awhile for his words to sink in. The bewildered faces that ▼

## Parent Talk *by Kat Hodapp*

*Evangelization.* The word may conjure up images of people walking around neighborhoods, knocking on doors, and asking, "Are you saved?" or "Have you accepted Jesus as your personal Lord and Savior?"

I hear that those very questions stun Catholics and render them speechless. What causes some of us to hesitate when asked those questions?

A couple years ago, at a workshop for high school theology teachers, one of my colleagues said that we need to answer those kinds of questions with a loud, clear, passionate, bold, "YES!" No hesitation. No doubts.

One of my favorite stories from an older woman I know centers around a time when she was asked if she had found Jesus. She replied, "I'm Catholic. I've never lost him." I love the quiet pride and knowledge in that response.

There are few "easy" answers, but many big life questions. While I do believe in absolute truths, I also believe in many shades of gray. I always tell my students to "turn and run" when someone claims to have all the answers to their faith questions!

I think evangelization is sometimes associated with black-and-white answers. Evangelization isn't about quoting the Scriptures or finding easy answers, but it is about living the Gospel message each day in our thoughts and actions.

As the case of Elian Gonzalez unfolded two years ago, my daughters and I watched the news together. When Elian was taken from his Miami relatives, my daughter, Anna, asked me, "Is what they're doing right?" We talked about the situation and how complex it was. The conversations continued that weekend and beyond, and I quickly became tired of

talking about it, but I felt very proud of Anna. She asked a question and tried to see it from a faith perspective and from a moral perspective. And though the answer wasn't as black-and-white as she would have liked (or as I would have liked, for that matter), I felt that this was a moment of evangelization.

A quote that helps me understand my life and my faith comes from Rainer Maria Rilke, one of my favorite poets:

Have patience with everything unsolved in your heart and . . . try to love the questions themselves. . . . And the point is, to ▼

## Teen Talk *continued*

I thought showed fear may have only been showing surprise that someone they did not know cared enough to visit. The small grandmother who received Clinique makeup that day probably smiled when she put it on, thinking that her age did not separate her so much from the rest of society. After all, the girl who helped her unwrap it was wearing the same brand!

In the company of people I was familiar with, I was even able to laugh about the old priest who resisted all help to open his present. He bitingly told us volunteers that we could throw the gift at the ceiling for all he cared, he glowered at anyone who tried to wish him a merry Christmas.

I had expected instant gratification from my work that day, and when it did not come, I felt let down. Father Michael helped me realize that even the little things we do in life for another can help brighten that person's outlook. No matter how it is said, it often takes awhile for the full meaning of an important message to sink in.

Standing up for a kid who is being bullied or listening while someone vents may seem like a decent thing to do at the time, but after you perform these deeds, you might realize that it's exactly the kind of thing Jesus calls you to do.

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## Parent Talk *continued*

love everything. Live the questions now. Perhaps you will then gradually, without noticing it, live along some distant day into the answer. (in Stephen Mitchell, translator, *Letters to a Young Poet*, [New York: Random House, 1972]).

I think the way I embrace and live the questions can be evangelization. Maybe this is what it means to gradually "live along the answer."

Evangelization doesn't need to be showy. It takes place in the quiet moments of our families when we teach, not just by words, but by our actions. It may mean sharing questions as well as answers. Evangelization happens as we go about our lives—at home, at work, on committees, on the ball field, and at school.

We must also continually educate ourselves about our Catholic Tradition. The primacy of conscience, Catholic social teaching, a contextual approach to the Scriptures—these are areas that call us to apply faith-based values to our lives. Not easy, of course, but our God and our Church believe in us.

Our children, neighbors, colleagues, and friends need us and want us to live our faith authentically. Are we up to the challenge? I hope the answer is a loud, clear, bold, passionate, "YES!"

*Kathleen "Kat" Crawford Hodapp lives in Louisville, Kentucky with her three children, who are constant reminders of God's grace and life's questions. Before working as a development editor for Saint Mary's Press, Kat taught for seventeen years.*



## I Will Follow

If you lead me to travel to other nations,  
I will follow, Lord.

If you lead me to write to glorify your name,  
I will follow, Lord.

If you lead me to preach of your heavenly Kingdom,  
I will follow, Lord.

If you lead me to show others your way,  
I will follow, Lord.

If you lead me to use my actions to declare your Gospel,  
I will follow, Lord.

Because you are always with me,  
I will follow, Lord.

Brian Singer-Towns, general editor, *The Catholic Youth Bible*,  
(Winona, MN: Saint Mary's Press, 2000), p. 1166.

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## Are Your Feet Beautiful?

"Spread the word!" "Attention all shoppers!" "Special Announcement!" Companies trying to sell a product, and organizations trying to attract new members go to great lengths and expense to get their message out. Without this effort, they will reach few people and fail in their mission.

The church has undoubtedly the most important mission of all—to share with others the saving power that comes from faith in Jesus Christ. The promise in Romans 10.11–15 is that all who know and call on the name of Jesus will be saved. God is great!

How do others hear about this Good News? Paul says only through us. And he adds, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!" (verse 15). In your prayer, reflect or journal on the following questions:

- Who brought the Good News to you? What made you trust what they had to tell you about Jesus?
- Which of your friends need to hear this Good News about Jesus? How can you share your faith with them, perhaps through a message of hope, forgiveness, healing, or encouragement?

Brian Singer-Towns, general editor, *The Catholic Youth Bible*,  
(Winona, MN: Saint Mary's Press, 2000), p. 1337.