

*St. Mary Parish, Davenport Iowa Conversation*

*June 8, 2019, 10:30 am*

*1. What did we hear?*

*Learn*

*Ask & Listen to Faith Stories*

*Develop goals for the future*

*Celebrate our baptism*

*2. What does it mean for our parish?*

*Need to be one church*

*Hospitable*

*The Mass of the Spanish community consider themselves a family*

*All of the other Mass communities should also consider us one family*

*One of the ways to combine the communities is to have a communal gathering*

*This gathering would allow us to share and pray together as one community*

*Examples could be a Pot Luck or church BBQ. No fund raising allowed*

*Each group should not worry about losing their identify*

*We would still be unique but unified*

*3. What help do we need?*

*Support from all groups*

*Need better communication between all communities*

*Need definite time for Parish Council meeting*

NOTES FROM THE VISION 2020 CONVOCATION  
JUNE 6-8, 2019

Key texts:

*Documents of Vatican II: Gaudium Et Spes*

Pope Francis. *Evangelii Gaudium: Apostolic Exhortation On the Proclamation Of the Gospel In Today's World*

Delegates from the parishes of the Diocese of Davenport met over three days. We discussed a number of topics related to evangelization, with an aim toward reenergizing our church in southeast Iowa. This was done in three general sessions and a number of breakout sessions.

At the end of the three days the delegates met in groups consisting of other delegates from their parish. We were asked to submit a written summary, presenting answers to three questions:

- What did we hear?
- What can we do about it?
- What help do we need?

Some impressions, some key words:

**EVANGELIZATION:** meaning, roughly, being and showing the loving presence of Jesus Christ to others, proclaiming the Good News. The term can refer to bearing witness to those who do not identify as Christian. But we saw many statistics showing an alarming dimming of commitment within our own membership, and demonstrated a need in our Church for strengthened internal evangelization.

**JOY!** Simply put, a Gospel presented without joy is no Gospel at all.

**ACCOMPANIMENT:** One cannot make the Christian walk alone. "Accompaniment" means that we, as members, assume responsibility for being companions for others on that walk. Another word that goes with this is "relational."

Action possibility: A breakout session, entitled "Evangelization Teams - Now What?" was presented on Thursday afternoon. The presenters are on the staff of St. Paul the Apostle Church. They described the formation of what they referred to as "core groups", and which any Methodist would recognize as similar to their own small group approach.

Could St. Mary's adopt something similar? The Latinx parishioners already are in this habit, in their prayer groups, as one example. What would it take to encourage a similar attitude and approach among our English speakers? Prayer groups may be an idea. So, too, could small study groups, the occasional community celebration. A speaker who was addressing youth issues described something they had done after

religious ed classes: "Java and Jesus." This was done at a coffee shop; the presenter emphasized the importance of getting away from the parish.

The biggest challenge to the process of building a stronger, better, more welcoming community may well be current habits. One overcomes habit by forming new habits. A community celebration has been suggested for August 15, the Solemnity of the Assumption. That could serve as a kickoff for other projects, and, over time, the building of a strong set of core groups.

The help we need: engagement from all - ALL - involved with the parish. Also, no giving up after one try. It may be beneficial to learn from approaches used by other denominations. The presenters were from a large parish, yet they have two such groups, one of which is for staff. For Methodists, small groups are part of the DNA.

**YOUTH.** Two of the breakout sessions I attended concerned evangelization of youth. The speaker of the general session on the first day mentioned items that present a challenge to us.

Most youth who decide to leave the church have made that decision by age 13. We use ideas like "They have jobs," or participation in school activities. But if they have decided, by age 13, that Confirmation is the end for them, then they made this choice before there were jobs or activities. Many have so chosen before we see them in Confirmation class.

It seems telling that, of the St. Ambrose University student body, 55% self identify as Catholic. The second largest group, at 38%, are the "nones."

A few reasons suggest themselves. One seems to be mistrust of institutions. The Church is seen as just another such organization, and a survey has said that only 38% of Catholics trust their church. Another may relate to a quote from Pope St. Paul VI, quoted in one of the breakout sessions:

"Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses."

All catechists - in fact, all people presenting matters of our faith in our parish - should constantly ask ourselves if we are just presenting, or if we are witnessing to the joy of the Gospel - if we are only giving material to memorize, or if we are showing how this material matters to us on a personal level.

During one of the breakout sessions there were a number of young people from the diocese. A question under consideration was, "Why do our young people leave in such large numbers?" A story was told of a cyber startup company. Their company was called Burbn, and its focus was its customers' online posting of photos. The company quickly got to 10,000 users - next to nothing in the cyber world - then leveled off. The founders asked themselves, "Why can't we get more than 10,000

users?” It wasn’t until they encountered a certain venture capitalist that they realized that they had been asking the wrong question. The right question would be, “Why do these 10,000 stay with us?” The answers to that question provided marketing data, and momentum grew, as did the company. A new name helped, too. The new name was Instagram.

In asking why we lose kids, we find an abundance of answers, many of which are issues that must be acknowledged and fixed by the Church. But another question needs to be asked. St. Mary’s has youngsters who have stayed with us. Why do they? I wonder if we could arrange a session where adults involved in religious ed talk with the young people who have stayed to see what they have to say. For adults present, the main task is to ask a few questions, then listen. And listen. NO correcting of the young people is allowed! It’s also a time to use our active listening skills.

Summary of what’s needed:

- Be witnesses for our youth, from an early age.
- Ask the right questions, and pay attention to the answers.
- Youngsters and their concerns must be respected and taken seriously.
- Wholehearted support for religious ed, for youth ministry, for efforts to reach youth.

**A GLIMPSE INTO THE FUTURE**, or READING THE SIGNS OF THE TIMES. Our final general session speaker was Dr. Hosffman Ospino, Associate Professor at Boston College School of Theology. The actual title of his presentation was “The Joy Of the Gospel and the Vocation To Evangelizing Discipleship In a Time Of Change.”

Dr. Ospino made some general observations, then presented statistics; his presentation was informed by sociology. At Boston College he is the Director of Graduate Programs in Hispanic Ministry. He discussed the need to use any available tool to come to an understanding of our Church, its present and future, and necessary approaches to its mission.

General observations:

Hope is an embodied trait. It is active.

We need to acknowledge our gifts, leading with the gift of faith, which is always and only a gift. It is in a God who wants to save us, in the risen Jesus Christ, in the Holy Spirit who acts in history.

Young people who leave the Church have not deserted their curiosity about what comes after this life. They’ve largely replaced what we offer with stories of zombies and vampires. The growth of interest in Eastern religions and spirituality is also a suggestion that, although they self identify as nones, they have not dropped us to replace us with nothing. The questing does not stop.

The Roman Catholic Church does not look backward. It always moves forward.

Christianity did not emerge with the United States in mind. The wave of anti-immigrant rhetoric is not helpful.

Some data, to situate us in the Roman Catholic Church, in the United States, in 2019:

In 1991, those who self identified as “nones”: 3%. In 2019, it is 25%.

In the 1960s 90% of the Catholics in the United States were white, of European extraction. Now, that’s 47%. The average age of U.S. Catholics: Whites, 55; Hispanic, 29; Asian, 32. 2/3 of the baptisms in the U.S. church are for Hispanics. 90% of the funerals are for whites.

As Dr. Ospino noted, “To see the future of the Church, see who is having the babies.” Were it not for immigrants, the Church would have already experienced a significant net loss since 1960.

At St. Mary’s we may be in a good position to help in this area. The parish has the only Spanish Mass in the Iowa Quad Cities, and our parish membership is about 2/3 Latinx. The Diocese’s Vocations Director presides over the 12:00 Mass at St. Mary’s. And the Church and the Diocese have a need for priests (and Sisters) who are fluent in Spanish. What can we do to encourage our youngsters to hear the voice of the Spirit when She calls?

#### **KEY WORDS AND CONCEPTS**

Evangelism

Joy

Accompaniment

#### **AND THE CONCEPT TO AVOID AT ALL COSTS**

“We’ve always done it this way.”