Beyond Informing Parishioners: Conversion, Enthusiasm and Sharing the Faith

The commercials are likely to have 3 effects on the average, active Catholic:

1. **Catholic pride and enthusiasm increases.** The commercials affirm Catholicism and all components of our faith. Seeing our faith depicted favorably in the popular media helps Catholics feel good about their faith, bolstering self-esteem and good will.

2. **They feel more comfortable talking about Catholicism.** The commercials will be noticed by virtually everyone in Northeast Wisconsin and they are likely to get people talking. Just like non-football fans (is there such a thing? Lol, laughing out loud) still chat about unusual Superbowl outcomes, so too will everyone be talking about the commercials. One caveat here: people will talk about the commercials, but not necessarily about their faith. We’ll have to help our typical Catholic take that step.

3. **They become more interested in learning about their faith, growing closer to God and to others.** Whereas returning Catholics do not immediately flock to adult faith formation (AFF) opportunities, active parishioners do. Why? Active Catholics have been going to Mass every Sunday for years and years of their lives. However, the commercials often foster a new awareness in active Catholics that there is much more to know about their faith.

Fostering Conversion: Building on Enthusiasm & Desire for Catechesis

Have a favorite AFF program? Always been wanting to try “X program” in your parish? Now is the time to schedule it! Just before the commercials air, during Lent, and summer of 2010 will be a unique time for faith formation in the parish. Some of the topics of particular interest to Catholics in light of CCH:

- Understanding the Mass
- Scripture, Tradition and role of the Magisterium
- Role of Eucharist for Catholic Faith
- Role of Reconciliation for Catholic Faith
- Why Catholics Have Annulments
- Prayer in the Catholic Tradition
- How to Read and Understand the Bible

Recommendation for faith formation on these topics: Parishioners are likely to come to one stand-alone session as opposed to a multi-session “program.” Even if you offer sessions on multiple topics in light of CCH, we recommend you offer each session as a unique, one-time opportunity. Offering the same session on different dates and times also helps them know this is a topic in which they ought to try to participate.
Helping Catholics Share Their Faith: Evangelization 101

Catholics feel more comfortable sharing their faith after the following takes place:

First, they must find their own answers to these questions:
1. Why do I go to Mass?
2. Why am I Catholic?
3. What do I know about Jesus?

While every single Mass exposes Catholics to answers to these questions, they must be given the opportunity, space and encouragement to answer these questions for themselves. Until they can articulate this in their own words and based on their own life experiences and faith journey, the typical Catholic is unlikely to talk to anyone (not even family, friends or co-workers) about their faith.

Second, they must be assured that they do know enough about the faith to talk to others.

If asked, the typical Catholic will say they feel uncomfortable talking to others about their faith because they don’t feel like they know enough about Catholicism. They don’t feel “qualified” like the priests and staff who receive formal training.

To counter this misconception, Catholics need to be told in a variety of venues and with a variety of methods that the most important part of our faith to share with others is what they know extremely well – the Creed. The acronym G.A.S.P. can even teach them an easy way to talk about the basic story of our faith:

G = God
Everyone has some idea of God they can share. God who created everything. God who said I AM WHO AM.

A = Actual Sin
Without focusing on various doctrines of sin, everyone knows and can share how they personally have done “stuff” that they wish they had not done and wishes they had done some things they did not do. We all have actual experience with our less-than-best-self, regardless of the language a person feels comfortable using to describe this.

S = Savior
As we help people articulate what they know about Jesus, (see above) they become more comfortable speaking about this core part of our faith. Most people have a special affinity for 1-2 aspects of the Jesus event, whether that is the incarnation, Jesus’ life and ministry, his passion and death, or the resurrection. Help people identify what part of the Jesus event they really love, and they will be more comfortable talking about our Savior.

P = People of Pentecost
The story does not end at the resurrection. We believe that God resides within and between us, that we all must journey together, as church, as community, as People of Pentecost, towards the end of time and life eternal. Once Catholics are reminded of “P” they can talk about this too.
**Third, they must have opportunities to practice.**

We don’t allow doctors to get their license until they get lots and lots and lots of practice in their specialty area. We don’t expect parents to know the best way to get their newborn to stop crying without lots of opportunities to learn from experience. Similarly, how can we expect Catholics to feel comfortable talking about their faith if we don’t give them chances to practice doing this?

How can Catholics practice talking about their faith? Assuming that that they have done steps one and two above, ask people to start with small and safe situations, practice these on multiple occasions until they feel comfortable and then build to “riskier” situations of approaching a friend, family or co-worker after the commercials air or being approached by someone who knows they are Catholic.

Safer situations include but are not limited to: coming to church and practice sharing What they Know about Jesus (for example) with someone else at church; sharing Why they Go to Mass for 10 minutes with their family at home before the next Sunday Mass; calling a friend on the phone and asking to practice sharing with them for 10 minutes about Why they are Catholic.

Any practice opportunity needs advance preparation on the part of parish staff or volunteers – you cannot simply ask people to go home and talk to family about the Catholic faith without giving them very concrete, user-friendly guidelines.

**Pulling it all together:**

**Ways to Offer “Evangelization 101” Prior to CCH Commercials Airing**

- Have parishioners attend a regional workshop. (See next page for details.)
- Schedule a Diocesan-trained representative to offer a workshop for your parishioners. Contact Leah at lgabielson@gbdioc.org or 920-272-8281 **after December 4** if you’d like a list of trained representatives and guidelines for hosting a session at your parish.
- Parish Staff can host a workshop at your parish. Contact Leah at lgabielson@gbdioc.org or 920-272-8281 **after December 11** if you’d like a session outline your parish can use in its entirety or adapt for use as you host your own workshop(s) on this topic.