

By Father Charles Bowes

Isaiah 42:1-4,6-7
Acts 10:34-38
Matthew 3:13-17

We're all part of spreading the good news.

A young couple was walking by a lake one summer evening. It was a beautiful night—the stars sparkling in the clear, dark sky, the moonlight illuminating the lake water like jewels, a soft breeze whispering through the trees. The young man became so caught up in the romance of the moment that he suddenly blurted out, “Honey, I love you so much. Will you marry me?”

She did not hesitate. “Oh, John, of course I will marry you!” she said joyfully.

The couple continued their walk along the shore, neither saying anything for a long time. Finally she squeezed his hand, “Dearest, why don’t you say something?”

He looked at the ground and shuffled his feet.

“I think I’ve said too much as it is,” he said.

Romance tends to vanish once reality hits. For example, a baptism is a wonderfully happy time, a celebration of hope and promise—but baptism does not end with the pouring of water; the reality is that baptism is the beginning of an ongoing commitment to live the life of the Gospel—and we do this almost without

thinking—the weekly Mass; the prayer; the sacraments; the deeds of kindness; the fasting—the “whatever” leads us, nourishes. How often I cannot count the times people visiting my office say: “I got to talking at work with a Catholic friend and she or he suggested I come ask some questions.” So we live our Faith, the faith planted in Baptism; a faith we share and spread as simply as we breathe.

Yet, as I explained some weeks ago, we are called by our Baptism and by the Pope and Bishops to share and spread our faith in an even more open fashion—even by visiting folks in our neighborhoods—and not just the people we know either, but everyone over the course of several years. That’s what it means to be a welcoming, reconciling community. That’s what it means to live our baptism commitment...it’s all part of our pastoral plan.

“What!...me visit door to door?” I can hear folks say. “Not me. Why that’s...that’s fundamentalist stuff...that’s making a nuisance of yourself...not me!”

And my response is: “OK...not you. Maybe you’re not called to go door to door, but some of us will, including me...but we’re all called to support this missionary effort—support this effort in many ways of which we can all be a part—because when one person in our parish visits another or speaks to another about the faith, it’s really an action of the whole community—even though

only one person may be there at the moment—the prayer, the support—all that is there too.

Let me give an example: For several years I visited an old woman—Teresa was her name and she was 97 when she died—a member of my parish. We often talked about resurrection: Jesus' and our own. But during the last few times I was with her, I thought she might want to talk about dying, feeling lonely or fearful. She didn't seem to want or need to. It was life that interested her. "Teresa," I finally asked, do other people come to visit you?" "They come when you come," was her answer.

What a great affirmation of the Body of Christ!...that when any one of us speaks in the Lord's name, we all speak; we all visit; we all touch with the Lord's own healing spirit. We've been gearing up for our outreach to the neighborhoods which begins February 14th, and today I wish to invite all to participate according to whatever inclination the Spirit gives. Please make available to yourselves a copy of the page(s) at each pew's end. There's a page of job descriptions and a sign up/time schedule sheet. Do follow along as we review the opportunities.

- MISSIONARY OUTREACH - JOB DESCRIPTIONS
- DELIVERING FLYERS
- DAY CARE FOR MISSIONARIES' CHILDREN
- MISSIONARIES
- HOSPITALITY MINISTRY & PROVIDING FOOD
- BUSINESS OFFICE
- GATHERING HOMES
- GATHERING HOME EVANGELISTS
- GENERAL GATHERING ON SUNDAY EVENING

FEBRUARY 28TH

- SHEPHERDS
- MUSIC
- USHERS
- CHILD CARE
- SNACKS/COOKIES

- MEDICAL, COUNSELING, LEGAL ASSISTANCE OR SMALL HOUSEHOLD REPAIRS FOR SHUT INS
- INTERCESSORY PRAYER
- EUCHARISTIC ADORATION
- OTHER
- DONATIONS

Feel free to sign up for anything you can—drop the papers off after Mass or bring them back next week. Please come to the back of the church to sign up for prayer, fasting, and Eucharistic Adoration. For these we have master lists so that people are able to see what times are available and fill in where needed. Our goal, keep in mind, is to have prayer in place 'round the clock—a powerful witness and force for good, supporting our missionary outreach. As a reminder, we'll be passing out prayer cards during the collection. These have a picture of what we're about: visiting, house to house, door to door—and all of us have a part in it.

So that's our enterprise, folks—our outreach—flowing from the Baptism we have received and recalled especially on this the feast of the Baptism of the Lord as we bring to a close the Christmas Season. Remember the words of Saint Luke's gospel read so short a time ago: "So (the shepherds) went in haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the infant laying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known the message that had been told them about this child." You just can't keep the story of Jesus quiet. And later in Jesus' ministry, despite his instructions to the contrary, those he cured (such as the leper in Mark 1) had to "spread the report abroad". The Christmas season is a beautiful reminder that the Word was meant to be proclaimed, spoken, sung. Remember the lyrics of the Quaker hymn, [sing] "If Love is Lord of Heaven and Earth/How can I keep from singing?" Indeed, If Love is Lord of Heaven and Earth, how can we keep from singing?

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