

“May we share a word of the good news of Jesus with you?” the two young men dressed in black trousers, white shirts, dark ties and wearing name tags that identified them as members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints politely asked me one day a couple of weeks ago as we met each other during my daily walk. Not wearing my usual black clothes, Roman collar or my name tag, I greeted and introduced myself to them. On hearing I was pastor here at St. Cecilia’s they said, “Oh, we’ve heard about you!” Visiting a bit about our mutual efforts to bring the gospel to people we offered a word of blessing to one another and set off on our separate ways.

In today’s gospel Jesus sends out a further seventy-two disciples along with the twelve apostles to proclaim the good news of the Kingdom of God. At the end of the passage they return with a report of all they had accomplished in his name. There is urgency to this mission as Jesus tells them that the harvest is great and the laborers few. A frequent, and not totally inaccurate application of this scene, is to apply it to the need for all of us to promote vocations to the ordained ministry or membership and work in one of the many religious communities of the church. And while we must continually do this, we miss the point of today’s scriptures if we see them as applying only to professional church ministry. In his choice of the seventy-two other disciples, Jesus expands the nature and scope of missionary work beyond the “inner circle” of the twelve. Bearing witness to the Kingdom, planting its seed, working for and bearing its harvest, is the responsibility of every baptized member of the church.

Pastor Rick Warren, author of the popular book “The Purpose Driven Life”, also wrote another book, “*The Purpose Driven Church*” which I recently read. While not sharing a common theological perspective in certain areas, one statement he made has been a source of reflection for me. “I believe” Pastor Warren asserts, “that you measure the health or strength of a church by its *sending* capacity rather than its *seating* capacity. Churches are in the sending business. One of the questions we must ask in evaluating a church’s health is, ‘How many people are being mobilized for the Great Commission?’ (the command of Jesus at the end of St. Matthew’s gospel to ‘go forth and baptize all

nations’.)” Blessed Pope John XXIII put it this way: “The Church exists not to guard a museum but to cultivate a verdant garden.”

As Catholics we are not very comfortable with the mandate to “evangelize.” Perhaps this is due to a negative experience with someone who tried to “ram” their theology or interpretation of the Bible down our throat on the street, some social or business event, or at our door on a Saturday morning. That is one way of doing ‘evangelization’. But it is not the only, and I would suggest, the best way to do it. St. Francis as he sent out his brothers to evangelize the neighborhoods and villages around Assisi is said to have stated: “Preach the gospel wherever you go. If necessary, use words.”

Opportunities for ‘evangelization’ exist everywhere, everyday, at home, at work, at the Rec center, the golf course, the pool, wherever life takes us: listening to someone pour out their burdens and offering to pray with and for them; speaking or writing a word of encouragement to someone; publicly witnessing to church teaching regarding the sanctity of human life on issues such as—abortion, embryonic stem cell research, capital punishment, just immigration law reform, access for all people regardless of class or economic standing to life’s necessities; food, shelter, clothing, and health care. Serving food at the “Food at First” program, involvement as a catechist in our parish religious education programs, participation and promotion of church sponsored marriage and family life enrichment programs, taking Holy Communion to the sick and homebound, bereavement ministry, serving as greeters or ushers at Mass, and the list of opportunities here in the parish could go on—all are ways we “evangelize.” What we do is not as important as that we all can, and must, do something. Jesus is counting on us.

Like the two young missionaries I met; to whom is God sending me to share the Good News today?