

Knock, knock... who's there?

A Catholic evangelizer. Yes, this time it is not a Jehovah's Witness, or a Mormon, or a Seventh Day Adventist at the door: it's a Catholic, coming to share God's love and the riches of the Catholic faith. For years now, Catholics around the world have realized that they too are called by Christ to leave their comfort zone and bring their love and faith to someone else's home and heart. Home visitation programs vary in style, but play an important role in the overall work of evangelization of a parish and a diocese. Though it is not the only way in which we evangelize, it is a worthwhile means of outreach.

The Diocese of Rochester's Diocesan Parish Visitation Program Manual explains its value and aim: "*The Parish Visitation Program is an organized, practical approach for a parish... to identify baptized Catholics within their geographical sphere of influence in order to determine their pastoral needs and talents. It also provides the opportunity to invite unchurched people and inactive Catholics to join (or rejoin, as the case may be) the parish*

faith community ... Parish leaders, staffs and parishioners work together to organize this program and to do the very important work of following up on its results." (*Reaching Out Into Our Future: Diocesan Parish Visitation Program Manual*, Roman Catholic Diocese of Rochester)

Five major goals are discussed:

The first goal is to spread the good news of Jesus Christ by reaching out to unchurched and inactive Catholics, inviting them to join the parish community (aware that) "there is a very large number of baptized people who for the most part have not formally renounced their baptism, but who are entirely indifferent to it and not living in accordance with it." (*Paul IV, Evangelization in the Modern World; 1975*) The Parish Visitation Program provides fertile opportunities to evangelize, connecting or reconnecting with those within the geographical boundaries of a



Photo provided

Martha Fernández-Sardina with participants at the Southwest Urban Deanery workshop in August.



MARTHA FERNÁNDEZ-SARDINA

parish. Done well, it can uncover an abundance of opportunities to reach out to those who, for whatever reason, are separated from the church. Each parish visitor is a living witness for Christ and the parish family's concern.

The second goal is to provide members of the parish community with an opportunity to deepen their own faith by witnessing the good news to their neighbors. Ideally, after a successful parish visitation, the pastoral leader will have a large group of committed, renewed and energetic volunteers, eager to pursue the next opportunity to bring the good news of Christ to the world.

The third goal is to identify the pastoral needs of individuals in the parish faith community that can be monitored and responded to by the parish staff as well as the rest of the parish community. "In fulfilling their office as shepherd, pastors should take pains to know their own flock ... They should visit homes and schools to the extent that their

pastoral work demands." (*Vatican II, Decree on the Pastoral Office of Bishops in the Church: 1965*) The pastoral leader of a parish faith community is not only responsible for the pastoral care of those who come to the church, but for all people within the boundaries of the parish. This responsibility, however, does not fall solely on the shoulders of the pastoral leader, but is to be born by all the Catholic faithful. One of the most efficient ways to become acquainted with the needs and talents of the parish is to conduct a parish visitation.

The fourth goal is to discover the time and talents that parishioners wish to contribute to the lifeblood of parish service and ministry, also known as stewardship. Those who participate in the parish visitation and are inculcated with the spirit of evangelization can come back to the parish anxious to continue their service to the church. As additional people are brought into and back to the church through this effort, infused with the spirit of God manifestly present in the community, there will be a larger pool of potential lay ministers.

Finally, it is the goal of the Parish Visitation Program to gather up-to-date,

HOME VISITATION TRAINING WORKSHOP (SIX HOURS TOTAL)

For all parishioners. In Spanish and English. Light meals included. Two sites: St. Mark the Evangelist Church Christopher Hall, San Antonio: Oct. 13 (9 a.m.-3 p.m.)

St. Mary Church Hall, Fredericksburg: Oct. 15 (6-9 p.m.) and Oct. 16 (6-9 p.m.)

LEADERS HOME VISITATION REPORTING AND EVALUATION AND PLANNING MEETING

For priests, deacons, parish staff, Parish Evangelization Team members, Home Visitation Ministry leaders, and other parish leaders. In Spanish and English. Light meals included. Two locations:

St. Henry Church Hall, San Antonio: Oct. 23 (6-9 p.m.)

St. Mark the Evangelist Church Christopher Hall, San Antonio: Oct. 30 (6-9 p.m.)

To register or for information, contact the Office for Evangelization at (210) 734-1990 or MFernandez-Sardina@archsa.org.

accurate, and readily retrievable data concerning baptized Catholics and their families.

The goals and vision of "*Reaching Out Into Our Future: Diocesan Parish Visitation Program Manual*" are as valid for the Archdiocese of San Antonio as they are for the Diocese of Rochester, as demonstrated by the fruitful home visitation efforts of a good number of our parishes over the years.

Currently, several more parishes are organizing for outreach, receiving training and resources with which to be and bring good news to all of their neighbors.

Whether in New Braunfels or Devine, Pearsall or Fredericksburg, Helotes or Converse, or the four corners of the city of San Antonio, a spirit of commitment to evangelization outreach continues to spread across the archdiocese. And for this we are glad.

MARTHA FERNÁNDEZ-SARDINA IS DIRECTOR of the archdiocesan Office for Evangelization and an international bilingual speaker and teacher. She has previously served as director of Evangelization efforts for the Archdiocese of Washington, D.C.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Call to pray the rosary more in families

Saturday, Oct. 13, will mark the 90th anniversary of the miracle of the sun. In 1917 Our Blessed Mother appeared to three children near Fatima, Portugal on the 13th of each month for six months beginning in May and ending in October. She asked the children to pray the holy rosary each day and to do penance. She also had them see a glimpse of hell.

She promised them that she would reveal who she is on Oct. 13, 1917, along with a miracle

that would prove that what she told them is true.

It rained all night and throughout the morning until noon on Oct. 13 with 70,000 people standing in mud and drenched in rain. Some had umbrellas. After the rain had stopped, Our Lady appeared and revealed that she is the Mother of God. The sun then began dancing in the sky and seemed to be falling down to earth. People were very, very much in fear.

After the sun stopped dancing and went back to its place in the sky the people found themselves all dry and so was the ground all

dry. Such was the miracle of the sun.

To commemorate this great event, perhaps over 2,000 small prayer groups will assemble in public places throughout the United States to pray the holy rosary between noon and 2 p.m. on Saturday, Oct. 13, promoting the devotion to the Immaculate Heart of Mary and that her requests be fulfilled.

Everyone is encouraged to come to the Oblate Grotto at 1:30 p.m. when retired Auxiliary Bishop Thomas Flanagan will offer Mass in honor of Our Lady.

Milton Schmitzinsky
Fredericksburg

Effect one incident has on a person's life

The article in *Today's Catholic* of the 20th anniversary of Pope John Paul II's visit to San Antonio brought many pleasant memories to me. I was one of the 5,000 ushers. I remember many of the things that the Boerne resident wrote in his article, such as seeing the crowd go from nothing to thousands in less than an hour, how well the crowd behaved, etc. However, I was lucky to be assigned next to the road where the pope entered the grounds. He passed no more than five yards from me. We were told to face the crowd and not look back at the pope so that we could

see if anything suspicious was going on in the crowd. I could not help myself when the pope passed by me and I looked back at him. At the moment when he raised his hand to bless us, I had this overwhelming feeling come over me. It was like I was at peace and nothing else mattered. I never before and never since had felt that way. However, every time I think about his visit I remember that special feeling. I know that it will stay for me until I leave this world. After the Mass I realized that my family was very special and wrote them a letter telling them so. It's amazing the effect one incident like that has on a person's life.

Ruben Villafranca
San Antonio