

THE MAGAZINE

OF THE CATHOLIC

DIOCESE OF

SAGINAW

Issue 4, 2022

faith

Saginaw

FROM THE BISHOP

Synod data uncovers opportunities for growth

IN THE KNOW WITH FATHER JOE

Why did Jesus ascend to Heaven?

'GO WHERE THE SPIRIT LEADS'

Diocesan coordinator of evangelization says we are primed for a 'culture of evangelization'

SPECIAL REPORT

Diocesan Synod Report reveals themes to direct future planning

FEATURE

'Team Thelen' makes Y.E.S. a family affair

'GO WHERE THE SPIRIT LEADS'

Diocesan coordinator of evangelization says we are primed for a 'culture of evangelization'

STORY AND PHOTOGRAPHY BY
DANIELLE MCGREW TENBUSCH





cover story

Don Buchalski sees his whole mission in Jesus' Great Commission: "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:19-20).

The desire to bring others to Jesus brought him out of early retirement from Dow Corning and into the diocesan lay ministry program. He then served as a missionary for the Archdiocese of Detroit before discerning a call to apply for the newly-created position of coordinator of evangelization for the Diocese of Saginaw.

His first assignment in the evangelization role was to oversee the diocesan synodal process.

Don sees how listening to people from across the diocese has readied him for the work ahead. During the synodal process, he heard a widespread call for faith formation and evangelization—a call that he is ready to answer.

COMMITTING TO CHRIST

Growing up, Don's family was involved at St. Michael's Church in Pinconning, and he attended the parochial elementary school, serving at daily Mass. He then attended public school and remained active in his parish.

"Middle school was a time when I remember struggling with my faith, when I saw some people I knew doing drugs and moving away from the Church," he recalled. "I remember meeting Bishop Ken Untener after he was appointed Bishop of Saginaw, and his charisma drew me to stay active in the church. During high school, the church youth group was my comfort zone where I was able to grow my faith and personal relationship with Jesus."



As coordinator of evangelization, Don Buchalski works with parishes to discern the best evangelization strategy for their flock.

Don was active at St. Albert the Great University Parish while attending Michigan Technological University in Houghton, Michigan. He liked to party with friends, but continued faithfully attending church. He moved to Midland after graduation and joined Blessed Sacrament Parish. He also met his future wife, Chris.

“She was not Catholic but had a strong faith in Jesus, which caused me to evaluate what being a Christian versus being a Catholic meant,” he said. “We agreed that we wanted to grow in our faith together and needed to find a church that worked for both of us. Exploring religion together helped me to grow in my faith and learning from Chris’ early faith journey

has given me a stronger appreciation of the Bible.”

They visited different churches, and eventually Chris attended Blessed Sacrament Parish, where she describes being welcomed where she was. She began RCIA (the Rite of Christian Initiation, now OCIA), and she converted to Catholicism. The two married and began raising a family.

Don experienced a defining moment early in his marriage when a family member suffered from alcoholism. Don did his best to help the family member, who was in and out of rehab. Sadly, the family member was never able to overcome addiction to alcohol. Don realized he needed to make a change himself.

“I made that real

commitment that my faith and my family were going to be the center of my life,” he said.

Since then, that’s what he has done. He dove deeper into his faith. He and Chris trusted in the Lord by committing to a life of stewardship, offering their time, treasure and talent to the Church and other organizations—and discovering that God always provides. Don said he attributes their family’s strong faith life to committing that God would be “the center of our home”.

SENSING A CALL

One day, Chris began reading “Forming Intentional Disciples” by Sherry A. Weddell and recommended

it to Don. That sparked a passion for evangelization.

Don devoured evangelization books and excitedly shared ideas with Chris during their evening walks.

“All of a sudden, it was pouring out of him,” she recalled. “That’s all he would talk about evangelizing and how different people need different things. . . . He couldn’t hold it in. And I thought, ‘You need someplace to funnel that. You’re overflowing!’”

Don answered the call to join the lay ministry formation program along with Chris in 2017, and they were commissioned in 2021.

“As I read more and more of these books, I started to see more of what the crisis was

**WE JUST NEED TO LIVE OUT OUR BAPTISMAL CALL OF THE GREAT COMMISSION,
AND THE HOLY SPIRIT WILL WORK TO GROW THE CHURCH.”**



The Buchalski family includes Don, Zac, Katie, Josh, wife Chris, Joe and Billy. Courtesy photo

in the Church, ... not having the young people and young adults. We're an aging church. Churches were closing. And that kind of hit my heart," he said. He made a decision. "I need to see how I can contribute to help."

"He was actively searching for some way to use this [passion for evangelization]," Chris said. "He said, 'God's put me on this path for a reason at this time— And I wish he would show me!'"

He began working as a missionary in the Archdiocese of Detroit. At first, Don thought that we needed to learn how to "revitalize the Church."

"Now I realize ... We just need to live out our baptismal call of the Great Commission, and the Holy Spirit will work to grow the Church," he said.

WINNING SOULS FOR CHRIST

Don believes he already sees the Holy Spirit at work.

Missionary disciples are formed by first bringing people to Jesus, building up their faith and knowledge, and then sending them out on mission to begin the cycle again. Don summarizes it as "win, build, send."

To win souls for Christ, the faithful must build trust and curiosity in others so their hearts are open to the message of Jesus. Then, they must commit to following Christ. The 'build' phase begins with teaching what we as Catholics believe, then moves through why we believe these things. With this firm foundation of faith, these disciples can become leaders helping others grow in relationship with Jesus.

SYNOD UNCOVERS DESIRE FOR EVANGELIZATION

Don believes it was providential that he was tasked with leading the synod effort, as it helped him understand more about the people of the Diocese and their desire to learn about evangelization.

"I think the number one thing that I learned is that it's about listening, not talking," he explained. "Most people want to be able to tell their story to us and tell us where they're at. And then have us relate how God fits into that story."

The synod reinforced the importance of supporting parishes' evangelization efforts.

"The parish is where the heartbeat of the Church is at," he said. "I feel my role is to help equip the parishes to be evangelizers ... helping the leadership of the parishes to develop a culture of evangelization."

A culture of evangelization includes being inviting and hospitable, bringing people to Christ, deepening their understanding of the Faith and then supporting and accompanying them as missionary disciples.

"[The decision to follow Jesus] is where we touch people's hearts," he said. "Once Jesus touches their heart and they give their life to Jesus, everything else is just a process to get them to the point where they're missionary disciples. ... They want to give back to

Jesus because of everything that he's done for them, how he suffered and died and gives them a chance at eternal life."

"GO WHERE THE SPIRIT LEADS US"

Synod reports across the diocese expressed a desire to reach out to others, but also recognized a need for guidance in effective evangelization. (See related story, page 18.) Parishes asked for advice and direction on how to be successful.

That's where Don, as coordinator of evangelization, comes in. He's currently partnering with Father Nate Harburg and his envisioning team at Good Shepherd Parish in Ubly/Argyle/Sheridan Corners.

Don points out that evangelization models are not one-size-fits-all. Parishes should offer opportunities for people at different stages in their faith journeys. For example, many churches will focus on the "growing disciples" stage by offering Bible studies or classes. This is a good and important piece of the puzzle— but parishes will likely see the same attendees at all the events. By intentionally providing opportunities for people at different stages, parishes will be more well-rounded in their offerings and reach more parishioners.

"It's not going to happen all at once, but we can get started somewhere and continue to go where the Spirit leads us." †