

Polish National Catholic Church
Thirteenth Annual Mission & Evangelism Workshop
“Stained Glass Faith”

Hosted by Saint Stanislaus, Bishop & Martyr, Cathedral Parish, Scranton, Pennsylvania
April 12 -14 , 2013

Sixty participants, clergy and lay people, recently attended the PNCC’s **Thirteenth Annual Mission Workshop**. Mission-minded people from four dioceses gathered at St. Stanislaus Cathedral in Scranton, PA, to consider practical ways of demonstrating the love of Jesus. The workshop officially began with Holy Mass, celebrated by **Rt. Rev. Bernard Nowicki**, Bishop Ordinary of the Central Diocese. The homilist for this mass was the **Most Rev. Anthony Mikovsky**, Prime Bishop of the PNCC. Music for this liturgy and for Sunday mass was provided by the Cathedral Chorale, ably led by their organist Anthony and cantor/director Barbara Nowicki.

After Mass and dinner, **Rev. Raymond Drada**, Chairperson of the Mission and Evangelism Commission, welcomed participants and introduced **Rt. Rev. Stanley Bilinski**, Bishop Ordinary of the Western Diocese, who led participants in some fun-filled and challenging **ice-breaking activities**. This session always produces laughter and light-hearted interaction between “veterans” of past mission workshops as well as “first-timers.” We finished our day with **evening prayer** in the chapel before departing to the hotel.

Saturday’s activities began at shortly after 8 AM with a continental breakfast at the Youth Center, followed by **Morning Prayer**. In the first session of the day, Ron DeLuca encouraged us to put our faith into action, stating that “the **truth** of our salvation, expressed through our **work**, survives because of our **struggles**.” He emphasized that the life of faith, enriched by the Holy Spirit, is a journey in which we are participants, not spectators. Our job, in these challenging times, is to openly express our belief in Christ and bring Him to a world that is desperately in need of Him.

Bishop Bernard Nowicki spoke next about the variety of people with whom Jesus interacted during His life and ministry. Many of His encounters with people took place outside a religious setting, and He missed no opportunity to speak to them about their relationship with God. Jesus is our “template for outreach;” like Him, we may find it necessary to teach, lead, guide, correct, or show compassion, depending on the circumstances of the people we meet. Bishop assured us that we don’t need any “agenda”. **Jesus is the message**, and if we bring people to Him, He will take care of the rest.

For the final session of the morning, **Prime Bishop Anthony Mikovsky** addressed us and elaborated on the Eleven Great Principles of the PNCC as an expression of our faith. In this document, Bishop Hodur reinforced the idea of **human dignity**, as all people are made in the image of God. This is important as we come to faith in Jesus, grow in the love and knowledge of Him, and share Christ with others. He is Redeemer (the One Who saves, in a one-time event) and Regenerator (the One Who sanctifies, in an ongoing process). Throughout his presentation, Prime Bishop Anthony reiterated that treating others with respect must be the priority as we interact with them.

We took a break for lunch and reconvened with a session led by **Bruce and Barbara Bogzevitz**, called “**Faith and the Family**.” They highlighted the many challenges facing families today in a world which has become more secular, and they stressed the **importance of faith and worship in strengthening the family and society**. Barbara and Bruce engaged all of us in a small-group activity using “conversation buttons” (badges with catchy phrases) in which we applied the messages to incorporating faith in everyday life.

Katie Rencewicz presented “**Broken Pieces of Beauty**,” and addressed the reality of many in the 18-35 age group leaving the church. Some of the reasons given for their departure (in their own words):

not enough people my age, church is too early, no one wants to change, I don't fit into any of the groups, I'm not needed as a participant or leader, I can't connect with anyone. Often people in this age group have not been shown how to make the transition from being a teen to being an adult, and they are ill-prepared spiritually (by instruction and by example) to put their faith into practice in real life. Katie urged us to overcome the "generation gap" by being better listeners, less quick to speak and judge. **"Attitude is the mind's paintbrush - it can color any situation."** We must give young people the room they need to grow and consistently lift them in prayer. By exhibiting the joy, grace, love, hope, and peace of Christ, we have the opportunity to be **"a bridge" to Christ**, rather than to be "dynamite," causing young people to be hurt and to scatter. Katie encouraged each of us to be a "safe person," one who keeps his word; to respect the thoughts, feelings and values of others; and to seek to understand them. She alluded to the workshop's theme of "Stained Glass Faith" and made it clear that **Christ is able to make something beautiful out of the broken pieces of our lives** - the shattered relationships, the painful experiences, the dark times. In the life of the believer, none of these things is wasted, because through them, His glory can shine.

Very Rev. Rick and Karen Seiler presented a session called **"Keeping Holy the Sabbath for You and Your Children."** This means more than simply attending Mass each weekend, although that is an important piece. We were challenged to define what this meant for each of us and to describe how our lives were lived differently from the lives of non-believers. Key concepts of the Sabbath include **rest, worship, family and community**. Areas of concern included children who are over-scheduled, sleep-deprived, and engaged in too many activities involving electronics; and decreased interaction between parents and children within the family. Father Senior Rick and Karen urged each family to carefully consider how we use the time that's been given to us, to set priorities that are in line with what we believe as Christians, and to make commitments accordingly. **The way we allocate our time reveals much about our heart.**

Rt. Rev. Paul Sobiechowski, Bishop Ordinary of the Eastern Diocese, spoke to us next about various ministries in the church and a pastoral approach in outreach. He presented several short and humorous videos about the **ministry of greeters**, which involves hospitality. The greeter is the first contact that some people have with our churches, and it is important that those who welcome visitors (and regular attendees) take their work seriously. It is, indeed, a ministry, and, as such, requires **preparation**. All Christians are part of the "royal priesthood" (different from the sacramental priesthood) with a specific role to play in the body of Christ. Those who welcome people to church should not have the goal of signing up a new member, but rather of helping that person experience the love of Christ. With prayer, perception, and the joy that comes from a vibrant relationship with Jesus, a greeter can help **create a climate of hospitality** that will draw people to our churches and, more importantly, to Christ.

The final two sessions of the day focused on **"Contemporary Expression, Channels of Communication, Social Media/Internet."** **Deacon Jim Konicki**, who has much experience in hosting church websites, spoke of the appropriate and inappropriate uses of social media in communicating with others about our church. Technology is neither miraculous nor a single solution to all our problems, but it is an important tool in communicating with members, the homebound and distant, and seekers. Above all, it is a vehicle for **witness to Christ**. Deacon Jim summarized the "do's" and "don't's" for church websites. In short, "a church website works well when it **informs, connects** people to community, **increases engagement of people** in community, and **reflects who you are** as a congregation. When these things happen the website serves its purpose." [Justin Wise, *Four Common Church Website Mistakes (and how to fix them)*]. Deacon Jim gave many helpful steps that congregations can take to get a website up and running and positive ways to maintain it, along with a number of resources for further information.

Fred Aebli, host of the PNCC website and a college professor, continued along the theme of "Contemporary Expression..." but moved in another direction, illustrating the preeminent role of social media and technology in the lives of many young people. He showed a video, **"A Vision of Students Today"** which was put together a few years ago by Michael Wesch and 200 students at Kansas State University. This made

clearer the cultural divide between the current generation of students and those of us who are older. We in the church need to be aware of their interests, preferred methods of learning, and the challenges facing them in a rapidly changing world in order to better understand them and reach out in meaningful ways with the love of Christ .

After a very full day of learning and interacting, it was time for dinner and fellowship. An **evening prayer and commissioning service** followed, during which all participants received a certificate, candle, and pin, equipped with God's blessing and the instruction to go out and sow the seed of the Gospel.

On Sunday, we gathered for morning prayer and Holy Mass, with Prime Bishop Mikovsky as celebrant and homilist. Following a continental breakfast at the Youth Center and a short session and final blessing, we were sent on our way with many helpful tools for sharing the message of Jesus in our own communities. In 2014, the Mission Workshop will take place in the Eastern Diocese, hosted by Our Saviour PNCC in Woonsocket, RI. It is my prayer that many more Polish National Catholics will attend and catch a vision for what God wants to accomplish in us, for His glory, and the building of His Kingdom. All things are possible as we let His love shine in our lives.