

Proclaiming and Witnessing the Gospel in our Neighborhoods

Joan Meeder from Three Lakes, Wisconsin

I think that proclaiming and witnessing in our neighborhoods is important. It is good to be involved in building up community—local, statewide, countrywide and/or worldwide—and that prayer is a vital buttress for these endeavors. It is very important to discern what to involve oneself in, as there can be so many demands clamoring for our attention. What can aid our discerning is the Holy Spirit speaking in a “still, small voice.” Sometimes this voice doesn’t seem to make much sense at the time, but through intuition we can know what is being asked of us. I have read that in decision-making, our head and heart must agree. Well, God is also God of the gut. We do well to hear and heed this prompting.

In deciding on actions to take, we, and others, can assess where our God-given talents, interests, values and needs lie. We can look at needs—spoken and unspoken—that are unmet and be alert to opportunities to do good. Dorothy Day said, “We are all called to be saints. God expects something from each one of us that no one else can do. If we don’t do it, it will not be done.” Emily Dickinson believed that if we help another, we will not have lived in vain.

God wants us to be whole and holy. So balance is really important. We can balance our outside interests and activities with prayer, healthy relationships with God, self and others as well as wholesome diversions. It is an ongoing process.

In reflecting on this in my own life, I felt very close to God in my twenties. I was joyful and sought out space and solitude, discerning God’s way. And what a way it was! I was like Abraham and his tents, feeling led and moving from place to place, never owning much. When I got married at 33, I think I owned 17 boxes of “stuff” and two pieces of furniture—not even a television. In my thirties, I still felt led in many ways but now there was more consideration of others’ needs and a letting go of my own way and ways of doing things, of familiarity and security. In my forties I became more settled and adjusted from a faster pace of life to small town life and its different level of interactions and relationships with others. Now at 52, after living in Three Lakes for 14½ years I have a stable base of operations second only to living in my hometown for 17 years.

I recently read *Mid-Course Correction* by Gordon MacDonald in which he spoke of Paul’s transformation and how we can continue throughout our lives to reach for growth beyond our fears. Mr. MacDonald stated, “We are called to a life of reaching. To extend ourselves for the purposes of growth, service, a deeper knowledge of God.” I was challenged by some of the book’s questions, such as, do I love God more than ____? (“Do you truly love Me more than these?” John 21:15) He spoke of God’s hidden purposes in our lives.

So what do I “do” in the community? My volunteer work consists of singing at church and with an ecumenical choir as well as serving as secretary of the Northwoods Youth Futures Board. My work consists of a household of five—three teenagers—and juggling part-time jobs with seven different employers—it’s the Northwoods Way! These revolve around my love for people, teaching, flexibility and the arts: substitute teaching K-12 including a long-term music position with 4th and 5th graders, after school study teacher grades 3-6, activities director at a time-share condominium, freelance writer for the local newspaper and continuing education instructor in calligraphy and soap-making.

This Lent, I have tried to regain more of the centering of prayer by returning to meditation and Bible reading. I worked to clear out my body temple so that God’s energy can zing through me to others. I always want to live each day in gratitude for God’s gifts and challenges and am humbled by feeling my limitations and witnessing the rising to the occasion of daily life in people who have been struck down.



How do you proclaim and witness the Gospel in your neighborhood?

Vicky Freybler from Madison, Wisconsin

As I reflect on the question, "How do you proclaim and witness the Gospel in your neighborhood?" I have to be honest and say that I don't intentionally seek out opportunities to proclaim and witness the Gospel but rather, the opportunities seem to present themselves to me. Living Gospel values is an outpouring of the heartfelt belief in the life and teachings of Jesus and the openness to respond to the guidance of the Spirit.



I would never have guessed ten years ago that I would be serving grieving families within the Catholic Cemeteries of Madison, but I accepted

the position of Family Service Counselor based on the "tugging of my heart." The work has proved more satisfying and fulfilling than I could ever have imagined. Being new to the Madison area at that time, one opportunity led to another, engaging me in parish volunteer experiences, I was connected with the JustFaith ministries, and involvement in community programs such as Dane County United. Each of these experiences gives witness and proclamation to the Gospel challenge of caring for each other, especially the poor and oppressed. I never cease to be amazed at the opportunities and situations in which I find myself, but hope and pray that I adequately proclaim and witness the Gospel in response to the stirrings of my own heart.

Lueretha Tillman from Claxton, Georgia

Yes, I enjoy proclaiming and witnessing about Jesus everywhere I go. One of my neighbors is a young married woman with a son; I encourage and assist her and the whole family. We are so close, her son calls me "Granny." I am so blessed by them as I try to be a blessing to them. When I help people at the local food bank, I can witness to my faith in action, telling them about the church. As Catholics, we are a small parish, so when others see us, they want to learn more. For example, on Ash Wednesday, our neighbors want to understand the importance of the ashes on our foreheads. Then I can proclaim to them as I explain the reason why. I visit the nursing home



residents and bring Holy Communion to the Catholic residents. I also interact with all the residents, exercising with them and talking about things of the past. They saw the cross I wear, so they all got a cross necklace. I tell them when they look at the cross to remember Jesus and his death and resurrection—all Jesus has done for us. I really enjoy sharing God's word with others.

Mary Calkins from La Crosse, Wisconsin

"Who is my neighbor?"

Many people do not know their neighbors. It happens in every neighborhood. There was a sad incident in my neighborhood this winter where the morning paperboy found a lady who had fallen getting out of her car the night before. How could this happen?

I often feel I have a "ministry of presence" in my neighborhood because many of neighbors are older. It is a privilege, and I believe my devotion to eucharistic adoration strengthens me to reach out to others, whenever or wherever there may be a need. Many times a neighbor may just need a ride to Mass or something from the grocery store. They know they can count on me whenever. It may be as simple as taking them a bowl of soup, but I know that the visit is as important. Sometimes it is just a word when getting the mail, or asking if I will pray for a family member. I have a new neighbor whom I invited in for coffee, and also invited her to come to "praise and graze," a free meal at our church.



Mary Ann Lipska from Dodgeville, Wisconsin

I take food to families in the neighborhood when some one dies, either relatives or friends.



Krista Clements Orlan from Elbow Lake, Minnesota

Recently I have been involved in community organizing and advocacy in my neighborhood.

I live on the Westside of Elbow Lake, Minnesota. Our neighborhood is the oldest part of town and demographically consists of elderly and young working families. There is definitely a perceived, and somewhat real, economic division in our town: the newer Eastside is more affluent and the Westside has been called the "slum." Back in the 1990s our community began a plan to totally update the existing infrastructure in town, beginning over on the Eastside even though their water and sewer utilities and streets were newer than those on the Westside. When it came time to update the infrastructure in our neighborhood the city decided to postpone the work because they had run out of money. Needless to say this

angered residents on the Westside and we made it known to the city council that we wanted and needed our infrastructure updated as soon as the city could afford it.

Ten years passed and the city decided to go forward with the Westside infrastructure project because it is way past due, needing improvement. However, they have not made any progress in finding a way to pay for it responsibly. The city decides to assess all property owners in our neighborhood to pay for the project. However, these proposed assessments are very high, to the tune of \$50,000 in some cases, in a neighborhood where the average property value is around \$40,000. My neighbors were up in arms again because the city's proposals were going to force people out of their homes. The elderly, living on fixed incomes, cannot handle a bill of this size. Young families, who are living paycheck to paycheck, cannot afford to take on an assessment that amounts to a second mortgage on their home. Something had to be done.



Our neighborhood began a grassroots organization called the Westside Association. We worked together to get the word out in our neighborhood about what was going on and what the city was proposing. We organized calling campaigns to city officials letting them know how their proposals would affect our families. We did research and found out that the city's proposals was actually infringing upon our constitutional rights. We garnered support from the rest of the Elbow Lake community as more and more information came to light about frivolous city practices.

Going in to the first public hearing we all felt that the city was set in its plan, but we were determined to make our voices heard. And we were heard! Because of our neighborhood coming together and telling our personal stories to the city council people they realized how devastating these proposed

assessments would be to us. The project was put on hold once again. However this time the Westside Association is encouraging the city to actively pursue responsible ways to pay for the project without placing the burden on the backs of people who can't afford it. In the three months since the public hearing the city has already made progress towards saving money, becoming eligible for grant funding, and paying off existing debt. Hopefully this story will end showing that grassroots efforts can be forces of positive change in their communities.

Marilyn Domke from Genoa, Wisconsin

The following are some ways that I have seen the Gospel put into practice in my neighborhood:



- A group of people organized and ran a very successful fundraiser for a family which lost its barn and milk cows in a fire.
- People give appreciative waves and smiles to our village maintenance workers.
- Parishioners volunteer to be lectors, eucharistic ministers, musicians and servers for our Sunday liturgies.
- People volunteer to drive older persons to appointments when needed.
- People visit persons who are grieving the loss of a spouse, parent or child.
- A group of people who were given a \$50.00 stipend for helping to tape Masses for shut-ins unanimously chose to send the money to the missions.
- Teachers in our Catholic and public schools give extra time and attention to students who are underprivileged.

2008 Franciscan Living Challenge:

By the end of 2008, affiliates and sisters will no longer use plastic shopping bags.

Another reason why we should stop using plastic shopping bags is that the world's plastic trash has congregated to the middle of a Pacific Ocean to form a massive, floating garbage dump. Mark Morford, a San Francisco Gate columnist, wrote about it in a recent column:

"It's called the Great Pacific Garbage Patch (or Pacific Trash Vortex, among other awesome nicknames) and it's a staggering phenomenon indeed and after reading up on it, I fully believe we must now revise our master list. Because surely this thing must be one of the New Seven Wonders of the World, the grand sociocultural melting pot of our time. Except for the fact that it's, you know, revolting.

"It certainly is impressive. At least 1,500 miles wide (give or take, could be much larger, no one's quite sure because it's a bit difficult to measure), 30 meters deep, 80 percent plastic, and 100 percent appalling. Truly, there is nothing else quite like it on Earth."

If you are interested in learning more, there is a short video explaining more about the plastic vortex on the internet. The link is <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZXVw19bP0tw>.

If you need more reusable green shopping bags, they are available in the Affiliation Office and the Franciscan Spirituality Center for \$5.00 each.

Caring Hearts/Helping Hands

Linda Kerrigan invites someone to join her in volunteering at Marywood Spirituality Center. She will be helping with the cooking May 25-30, 2008, for a watercolor retreat. She would love to have company. If you are available and interested, give her a call at 507-895-8442 or lkerrigan@fspa.org.

Sister Joyce Blum (Storm Lake, IA) invites anyone interested to join her in the Diocese of Sioux City, Iowa, to minister to Spanish-speaking folks in parish setting. She is glad to team with them and would connect them with the pastors. "This is a very needy ministry. Some Spanish is necessary and the more the better." If you are interested, give S. Joyce a call at 712-732-3119 or e-mail her at jblum@iw.net.

We are all here to assist one another in ministry and can best do so by being aware of needs. Call or e-mail your information to "Caring Hearts, Helping Hands" directly to Marci at mmadary@fspa.org/phone 608-791-5610.

Congratulations!

- Mary Finke and Mary Theresa Postlethwaite on the renewal of their prayer affiliation.
- Tom Skemp, Joyce Thompson and Mollie Williams on the renewal of their covenant affiliation.
- Karen Donaldson on the birth of her granddaughter, Kyra.
- The family of Earl Madary for Earl receiving the Distinguished Alumnus Award from Wausau Newman High School and the Pope John XXIII Award from Viterbo University posthumously.
- Marilyn Pedretti for being elected as La Crosse's 27th District County Supervisor.

Did You Know?

FSPA was named 2008 Catholic Charities In My Name award recipient?

The Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration accepted the 2008 Catholic Charities *In My Name* award at a luncheon on March 5. Catholic Charities of the Diocese of La Crosse initiated the annual *In My Name* award in 2007 recognizing both an individual and a parish, group or organization of the diocese for their hard work in Christian Charity. To hear or read Sister Marlene Weisenbeck's acceptance speech, visit www.fspalive.org or go to www.youtube.com/Franciscansisters.

Living Simply, Living Franciscan

Mary Ellen Dunford from Hiawatha, Iowa

This month I invite you to continue to make a difference in reducing the use of plastic bags in your shopping routine. Past articles may have touched on some of these facts about plastic bags, but they are worth repeating. The facts still exist as does the challenge to change our lifestyles.

More Plastic Bag Facts:

- A quarter of the bags used in wealthy nations are produced in Asia.
- Americans throw away each year over 380 million plastic bags.
- Target purchases 1.8 billion plastic bags a year.
- Plastic bag making requires 12 million barrels of oil each year.
- Plastic bags do not biodegrade, they photodegrade, breaking down into small toxic bits that contaminate soil and waterways.
- Plastic bags take up to 1,000 years to photodegrade in the landfills.
- Fewer than 5 percent of plastic bags are recycled.
- 4 out of 5 grocery bags in the U.S. are plastic.
- If all the bags produced in the world in one year were tied together, they would wrap around the Earth 760 times.

Please remember to use your "Living Green, Being Franciscan" bag when you shop. You can make a difference!

Pray for...

- ∞ Husband of Tammy Barthels
- ∞ Mother of Chet Corey
- ∞ Mother of Mary Lee Folkedahl-Meehleder
- ∞ Wife of Joe Leuck
- ∞ Mother of Janene McCollough
- ∞ Gene Portz on the death of his father
- ∞ Daughter of Jan Prokes
- ∞ Mother of Katie Richel
- ∞ All of the family members of affiliates who are serving in the military in the Middle East

Dates to Save in 2008

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| May 30-June 1 | North American Conference of Associates and Religious in Vienna, VA |
| June 17-27 | Sister and Affiliate Mexico GATE |
| July 20-24 | Affiliate Live-In |
| June 22 | Sister and Affiliate Picnic |
| August 7-10 | Affiliation Retreat at Prairiewoods Spirituality Center |
| October 10-11 | Fall Sister and Affiliate Gathering |