

Polish National Catholic Church
Nineteenth Annual Mission & Evangelism Workshop
“Identity: Who We Are in Christ”
Hosted by Holy Trinity Parish, Plantsville, CT
March 29-31, 2019

Polish National Catholic clergy and faithful from four dioceses gathered recently in **Plantsville, Connecticut**, to participate in the PNCC’s **Nineteenth Annual Mission Workshop**. All received a warm welcome from the host pastor, **Very Rev. Joseph Krusienski** and the **parishioners of Holy Trinity Parish**. The **Very Rev. Jarosław Nowak**, newly-appointed chair of the PNCC National Mission and Evangelism Commission, and the Prime Bishop, **Most Rev. Anthony Mikovsky**, greeted the body and introduced this year’s Workshop theme, **“Identity: Who We are In Christ.”** All who are baptized into Christ’s Church are being remade in His image, and during this weekend, we would explore various models of the church from several presenters.

Rt. Rev. John Mack engaged the participants in several icebreakers to help Workshop “veterans” and “newbies” get better acquainted. After dinner, Mission Commission member **David Kost** facilitated a session during which we discussed a book entitled I Am a Church Member which figured prominently in the sessions of the 2018 Mission Workshop. Participants had taken the book home to their parishes and implemented it in various ways, in small groups or parish wide. Our task was to share the results of these efforts and report back to the 2019 Mission Workshop. In some settings the response was enthusiastic and positive: increased attendance of senior SOCL students who were engaged in the study, lively discussions about faith, an increase in community outreach, and extra volunteers for parish/community events. In other places, people were ambivalent, negative, or slow to get started. Folks in these parishes were determined to continue their efforts, hopeful for a better outcome with their small groups. More than half of the people present in Plantsville had missed the 2018 Workshop, but they also had some ideas to share. Father Senior Krusienski purchased PNCC catechism books for his congregations, and they have begun reviewing the basics of their faith this Lent. One of his newer parishioners said that the study of what our Church teaches was “eye-opening and refreshing” and led the men’s club of his parish to begin meeting again. (The personal invitation of a parishioner is what brought this person to Church). The **clergy** who were present **encouraged Workshop participants to remain optimistic, persevering in their efforts to invite others** to grow in their faith.

The day’s activities closed with **Evening Prayer and Penitential Devotions**, led by Prime Bishop Mikovsky.

We reconvened on Saturday at 8:45 AM, when the **Rt. Rev. Bernard Nowicki, Ordinary of the Central Diocese**, led us in **Morning Prayer**. Prime Bishop Mikovsky briefly explained that the day’s sessions would present **different models of the Church**. The Greek word, *ekklesia*, which is translated as “church”, has nothing to do with buildings. It is, rather, an **assembly of God’s people**. As the **Body of Christ**, we are the hands and feet, eyes and ears of Jesus. All parts are vital and important to the health of the whole body. The Church is also described as **Servant**, and as the **Herald of the Gospel**. Our identity as the church is not static, but active and responsive.

Very Rev. Robert M. Nemkovich, Jr., elaborated on several of these models of the Church. He opened with a video from The Skit Guys, presenting the message that **“You are God’s idea, whether you realize it or not.”** Father Senior Rob further stated that **the Church is God’s plan and our responsibility.** The first model he described is the Church as **Sacrament.** Using the definition found in our catechism, he showed this to be true, because the Church makes Christ present. We encounter the saving action of Christ in our liturgy, and the Church is where we commune with God and with one another. It is a sign and instrument of God’s grace. The Church is also the **Body of Christ, the People of God.** It has past, present, and future dimensions. The Liturgy of the Word retells the story of the Jesus. In the Eucharist, we receive Jesus in the form of Bread and Wine in the way that God planned. As the Church makes Jesus present for us, we need to make Him present in our world. We live out our identity in a communal way, making His teachings real to those we meet. This brings about transformation in us and allows us to offer hope to a world desperately in need of Jesus. Father Senior referred to the catechism question about our duties as members of Christ’s Church. He connected this to the commitments that are a part of I Am a Church Member in this Year of Discipleship, closing with a song “We Are the Body of Christ”.

Rev. Robert Koerber’s session, the **Church as Living Witness**, opened with a song, which described the “great things” that God has done for the believer. He shared some of the ways that God has encouraged and strengthened him personally - through a song on the radio, or a seemingly coincidental encounter with a fellow believer while traveling. (This newfound friend joined him for part of his Workshop presentation). Father Koerber explored with us the meaning of the word “witness” which appears in the Scripture as the Greek word “martus,” the source of our English word “martyr.” He defined living witnesses to Christ and His Good News as **those who have “personal knowledge...who have experienced His presence and His love [who are] ready to testify to what He has done for them in their lives.”** The Scriptures provided in the handout served as items in our “toolbox” for sharing the Good News.

At midday, we gathered outside for a group photo and then had a break for lunch.

Kathryn Nemkovich of Fall River, MA, presented the first afternoon session, the **Church as Servant.** She created a **video** with scenes from the many outreach activities of her parish, set to the music of Matthew West. **“Do Something”** was the theme, and she gave us many practical suggestions on **how we can serve. The Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy are the best roadmap.** Kathy urged us to recognize that each one of us has a gift; to understand God’s instructions on serving (1 Peter 4:10), to identify who / how to serve, to take the **Servant’s Pledge**, and go. We can come up with any number of excuses not to serve when an opportunity arises, but in Kathy’s words: “When reason wants to ignore it, tell reason to be quiet and **roll up your sleeves.**” A short Q & A followed her presentation.\

Rev. Victoria Triano, a local pastor and a member of the Southington Town Council, emphasized the importance of Church. As believers, we are **called, redeemed, and equipped** by God for a purpose, both individually and as the Body of Christ. Connected in this way, we receive strength and vision from God **to accomplish the things that He calls us to do. In the Church, we are in position to hear the Word and then go forward.** Speaking from powerful personal experiences of answered prayer, Pastor Victoria stated that there is a reason for everything that

happens in our life: the purpose is “**to draw us closer to the living God.**”

Larry Gagnon, a member of **Holy Trinity Cathedral** in Manchester, NH, shared some of the work he has done as a part of the Eastern Diocese Strategic Planning Subcommittee, in his session **Being Online; Social Media Awareness**. In studying the parishes in his diocese, he discovered that 74% have a website and 58% have a Facebook page. Larry has conducted several online Facebook training sessions for those who are interested and has provided a list of **Facebook do’s and don’ts**. Since so many people of all ages are online, Larry emphasized the importance of **embracing social media** as one tool for expanding our parishes’ outreach,; **identifying and developing social media team members**, and **engaging parishes in recording their activities and in community involvement**. In our culture, there is a battle of good vs. evil, and by presenting online content that is positive in our parishes, we can **be the good**.

A general Q & A time took place in the Church, then we adjourned to the parish hall for the **Celebration Panel**. We had the opportunity to hear about some of the positive outreach work that PNC faithful are doing in rural, urban and suburban settings. These included

- providing school supplies for inner-city students
- helping Toledo’s Tent City with a yearly clothing drive
- hosting a monthly soup/cookie dinner, with free will offerings directed to homeless feeding programs
- providing a weekly “soup for seniors” during the cold weather season
- building a community playground in memory of little boy who had died
- converting an unused parish building into space for hospice patients and families
- addressing food insecurity by discreetly providing food for needy rural families
- making space available for meetings of support groups (AA, NA)
- using parish events for opportunities to educate and inform visitors about our church.

Dinner was served, and we had some time to converse before gathering in the sanctuary for an **Evening Prayer and Commissioning Service**, led by Bishop Sobiechowski, assisted by Prime Bishop Mikovsky, Father Senior Krusienski and Father Senior Nowak. All participants received a candle, commemorative pin and certificate for the work completed during the weekend.

On Sunday morning, participants joined with Holy Trinity Parishioners for **Morning Prayer**, led by Bishop Mack, **and Holy Mass**, concelebrated by the bishops. Prime Bishop Anthony preached on the well-known parable of the Prodigal Son. We tend to focus on the dramatic reconciliation between the father and younger son in this story, but we would do well to consider the older son, Often we can find ourselves in his shoes, questioning and resenting the Father’s mercy on those we think of as undeserving of it. Prime Bishop urged us as the Church to be “God’s loving, reconciling, forgiving people,” and to be grateful to God each time someone has come to know Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. At the conclusion of Sunday Mass, we participated in Holy Trinity Parish’s Lenten practice of celebrating the Stations of the Cross, with a different person reading each station.

During brunch in the parish hall, Father Senior Nowak presented a gift from the PNCC Mission and Evangelism Commission to Father Senior Krusienski and parish chairperson Marilyn Folcik, with gratitude for the gracious hospitality shown to Workshop participants. Prime Bishop

Anthony echoed this sentiment in his closing remarks. To summarize, “Identity: Who We Are in Christ” is important, because we are connected to God and to the whole Church. It’s not “just me and Jesus.” We cannot be mere consumers of religion; this was never God’s intention for the Church. Each part of the Body of Christ has a particular role, and we are to use our gifts in service to one another and to the community. We are equally loved and treasured children of God and have something to contribute at every age and stage of life - even the prayer warrior in a hospital bed or nursing home.

Father Senior Nowak extended an invitation to the Western Diocese in 2020 for the next Workshop, as the participants from his parish in Temperance, MI, volunteered to host. Prime Bishop Mikovsky gave the benediction to dismiss us.

In closing, I would like to encourage you to plan now to attend a Mission Workshop, even if you never considered doing so before. There is much we can learn from one another, and the faith and enthusiasm of some participants energizes us all. May God strengthen us to use the gifts He has given to “do something” right where we are, so that the people in our world will come to know Jesus, as displayed in us, His Church..

Karen Sobiechowski,
Chair, Eastern Diocese Mission/Evangelism