



Impact

Discipleship. Stewardship. Evangelization.

February, 2017 In this period of Ordinary Time, our focus for Impact is the light of Christ, which shines brightly in the face of darkness. Jesus tells us we are the light of the world, the salt of the earth. We must encourage one another to bear the light of Christ, to bring the light to all forms of darkness, in our own lives, and the lives of others.

A note for all who use Impact Leaders: we have included additional ideas for practical things to share with parishioners, rooted in the Sunday readings, ideas for families, and encouragement for pastoral staff in this month's issue. These additional materials will vary from month-to-month, as they are borne from our reflection on the Sunday readings.

— Leisa Anslinger and Amberly Boerschinger

Homily Connections

February 5: We are called to let our light shine before others, that they may see our good deeds and glorify our heavenly Father. (Mt 5:13-16). How is this light shown? By sharing bread with the hungry, shelter with the oppressed and homeless, clothing with the naked, removing oppression, false accusation and malicious speed. (Is 58:7-10) In other words, we are to act as Christian people in the world.

Connecting with everyday life: Today's readings provide concrete, focused guidance for all who are ready to live as Christians in the world. Encourage parishioners to stretch and grow in their willingness to offer direct service to others, or to support parish ministries that offer such service. Include examples of such Christian living in daily life. For example, what do people do when they meet a homeless person on the street, or are asked for assistance by a stranger? How do people respond to the many requests for charitable giving? Do they prayerfully discern which groups to support, or simply throw all requests away? In what ways are parishioners committed to serving others?

Today is a good day to feature parish service and outreach ministries and opportunities. Consider inviting a parishioner to share personal experience in serving the poor, homeless, or refugees in your area. Ask the parishioner to include in his/her witness the impact of such service on him- or herself as well as on the recipients. Additional ideas for parish life this week:

Bulletin/Large Screen/End of Mass/Website/Facebook Challenge: As you evaluate your service and charitable giving, consider these ideas:

- Keep \$5 gift cards to local fast food restaurants in your wallet or car for unexpected solicitations for help or support.
- If you already provide a meal for someone or chose to purchase a meal for someone in need of help, consider asking to share a meal with them. Sometimes people need the gift of companionship as much as they need the physical sustenance.
- Buy a pack of socks and a box of granola bars to keep in your car or office for when you encounter someone in need. You'd be surprised by how many people, even those who are seemingly well-off, need a pick-me-up. (How many of you suffer the "hangries" every once in awhile?) A snack and dry, warm socks will brighten the day of just about anyone.

February 12: “If you choose, you can keep the commandments, they will save you; if you trust in God, you too shall live.” (Sir 15:15-20) Christian discipleship is a choice, and the choice to follow Christ has direct bearing on the ways in which we live our daily lives. In today’s Gospel, Jesus calls us to take to heart God’s law of love. In doing so, we live as people who share Christ’s light with others.

Connecting with everyday life: Putting aside anger, reconciling with those who have hurt us, letting our “no” mean “no” and our “yes” mean “yes” are signs that we have taken Christ’s merciful, forgiving way to heart. None of us succeed in this way all the time. We all fail, and we all need to be forgiven and shown mercy. Choosing to live as Christian disciples means that we recognize ourselves as people who stand in need of God’s mercy, and with this recognition, to share great mercy and forgiveness to others.

The long form of the Gospel is painful for those who are divorced, separated, or have family or friends who are. If this form is used, consider overtly recognizing the pain of those who are touched by divorce and offer pastoral support. Such offers of God’s mercy speak volumes to all who will hear the message, and model the very sort of love to which the readings point.

- Check your parish website to see if resources are readily available for those searching for God’s mercy – information about divorce, annulment, healing from poor choices, reconciliation times, pastoral support. Your website is your digital front door – is it hospitable to those who don’t know those living inside?

February 19: It all comes down to this: “Be holy, for I, the Lord, your God, am holy.... You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” Love God, love neighbor. Throughout this month, we are challenged to embrace the essence of Christian living in an extended section of the Gospel of Matthew. Today, Jesus again calls us to the larger, merciful life of discipleship. In taking up Jesus’ way, we stretch toward holiness, toward perfection.

Connecting with everyday life: It is easy to set aside our call to holiness, seeing it as an impossible standard, unreachable by the average person. Yet, each of us is called to holiness, to love God with all our hearts, and to love our neighbor as ourselves. How will we do this in our daily lives? By intentionally putting God first, asking God for direction and strength when we face difficult situations or need to make challenging decisions. When we recognize ourselves as the temple of the Holy Spirit, this one-day-at-a-time life of faith takes shape, and makes growing in holiness truly possible.

Invite parishioners to:

- Say hello to someone new – at church, at work, at the grocery store.
- Stretch yourself to do one random act of kindness – pay for the person behind you, drop a note and a candy bar at your neighbor’s front door
- Learn a new prayer and commit to praying it this month

February 26: “You cannot serve God and mammon...do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink, or about your body, what you will wear...seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness.” (Mt 6:24-34) It is easy to get caught up in the constant striving for material things. Today’s Gospel puts such ambition in perspective, and asks us to place our trust in God. We are called to be “servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.” Trustworthy stewards are responsible with all of our resources and gifts, sharing much out of gratitude for all we have been given.

Connecting with everyday life: How much is enough? How much is too much? When our minds seem always pointing toward some new thing that we desire, it is time to step back and separate our wants from our needs. Doing so results in a life of freedom, in which we embrace God's care for us, and care for others in return. We are sure to see glimpses of God's kingdom through such stewardship.

- Saint John Paul II wrote extensively on the wealth of being versus the wealth of doing.
 - “It is by responding to the call of God contained in the being of things that man becomes aware of his transcendent dignity.” *Centesimus Annus* #13
 - “It is not wrong to want to live better; what is wrong is a style of life which is presumed to be better when it is directed towards "having" rather than "being", and which wants to have more, not in order to be more but in order to spend life in enjoyment as an end in itself. It is therefore necessary to create life-styles in which the quest for truth, beauty, goodness and communion with others for the sake of common growth are the factors which determine consumer choices, savings and investments.” *Centesimus Annus* #36
- What does that look like in a world which defines people by their work and their monetary wealth?
 - If your members were to look at their checkbook (or online banking records), their calendar, and their digital/social media queue (or most recent news/reading material), what would those things say about their way of “being”? What do those things tell them about their priorities and who they are becoming?

At Parish Meetings or in Adult Faith Formation this Month

Opening Prayer

Rest in God alone, my soul.

Only in God is my soul at rest; from him comes my salvation.
He only is my rock and my salvation, my stronghold; I shall not be disturbed at all.

Only in God be at rest, my soul, for from him comes my hope.
He only is my rock and my salvation, my stronghold; I shall not be disturbed.

With God is my safety and my glory, he is the rock of my strength; my refuge is in God.
Trust in him at all times, O my people! Pour out your hearts before him.
—(Ps 62:2-3, 6-7, 8-9)

Listen to Sacred Scripture: Mt 5:13-16 (Gospel, Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time)

Read: “Turn on the light” from the February issue of *Impact*

Share: your thoughts, using these questions to guide your reflection:

What darkness comes to mind in your life, city, or world? Share as you feel comfortable.

What light may you bear, to diminish the darkness around you?

Commit: Make a commitment to one specific, light-bearing action in the coming month.

Offer one another a sign of Christ's peace.

Turn on the light

Sometimes it seems that darkness is everywhere. Turn on the light.

Daylight hours are short this time of the year. The absence of the sun in the early morning and late afternoon reminds us of other forms of darkness in our world. Newscasts are filled with reports of violence and war. Too many people are touched by poverty, racism, abuse, injustice and hatred. Conflict at home, work, and local communities wears us down.

YET, ONE LIGHT CAN PIERCE THE DARKNESS.

Jesus Christ is the light of the world. Christ's light shines even in the darkest hour. Especially then. When we are touched by sadness, anger, or grief, we are reassured that Jesus has experienced these very feelings. No matter how dark it may seem, Christ's light shines through.

ONE LIGHT TRANSFORMS DARKNESS INTO DAWN.

Jesus tells us how to live in the light: Be reconciled with those who have hurt you. Love your enemies. Pray for those who persecute you. Feed the hungry, clothe the naked, care for the least ones among us. This is how God's love is known. It is how Christ's light is shown.

THE GLOW OF ONE CANDLE IS ALL IT TAKES TO START A FIRE.

Each of us has a light within us. In baptism, we are immersed in Christ's light and life. The burning flame of love of the Holy Spirit dwells in our hearts. The light of faith illumines our minds, providing clarity when the darkness of confusion and turmoil threatens to overtake us. When we fear the darkness may win, we look deep within ourselves, rely on the nourishment of the sacraments and prayer, the support of faithful friends, and we are assured that God's light is there. With this assurance, we reach out and share the light with others.

THE LIGHT IS NOT DIMINISHED WHEN IT IS SHARED, IT IS MULTIPLIED.

The light we have is uniquely ours. It is a reflection of Christ's light, which we are called to bear. Each of us is given particular gifts, qualities, talents, and strengths. If we do not do what we can in the world, something is missing. Darkness will not be dispelled. Christ's light will not be known. Christ's light shines brightly when we offer care and service, advocate for justice, seek peaceful solutions to conflict, generously give of resources, and stand up for what is right, true, and beautiful.

DARKNESS IS EVERYWHERE. TURN ON YOUR LIGHT.

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As close as your next-door neighbor

Even the simplest task, when done in love, shines with Christ's light. The parent who answers a child's cry in the middle of the night is love for the child, showing God's ever-watchful love. The teenager who helps a classmate with homework, even when he or she would rather be visiting with friends witnesses to Christ's mercy. The one who serves in the soup kitchen and the one who receives the food with gratitude give evidence of the mystery of the presence of the Holy Spirit who compels, strengthens and inspires us in times of bounty and in times of need.

We know that many times our actions are not filled with light. Whether out of haste, impatience, anger, or sheer disregard for others, we often fail to be vessels of God's presence, even when we could easily do so. Here is the rub: the light never stops shining. God will never stop loving you no matter how busy, stressed, or stubborn you are. God sends his son Jesus, to show us how to live in the light, and Jesus sends the Holy Spirit to give us the inspiration and the tools we need to share the light.

We are called to tip the scale more each day toward loving, serving, and giving. Recognizing our blessings, being mindful of God's grace, and responding with our lives, even (especially) when doing so calls us to sacrifice...that is the pattern of a life through which darkness is cast away and Christ's light is shown.

Who needs your light?

This month, be attentive to those who need care, compassion, and companionship. Notice the neighbor who goes out of his or her way to be nearby when you return from work. Or the family member who texts right at dinner time. Or the co-worker who lingers at the end of the day. Think of the new resident in your city or neighborhood, the people in the nearby care facility, or the homeless and hungry. Plan now to visit, call or share a simple meal; reach out beyond your comfort zone; make a difference in someone's life.

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Salt, service and stewardship

"Thus should one regard us: as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God." (1 Cor 4:1-5) When we speak of mystery in our Catholic faith, we are not speaking of an unsolved riddle. The mysteries of God are the truths of God's love and mercy, the depths of which we cannot fathom. How, then, are we to be stewards of these mysteries? Through our words and actions, as "servants of Christ." We who serve Christ do so through the ways in which we reach out to others. "You are the salt of the earth... the light of the world... your light must shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your heavenly Father," Jesus says (Mt 5:13-16). Salt gives flavor and preserves food; even a single light pierces the darkness. When we give of ourselves in even the smallest of ways, we add the flavor of care; preserve the goodness in which all is created; bring the light of compassion. In doing so, we steward well the mystery of God's love and mercy.

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Impact this month

How will you bring Christ's light to the world? Use Isaiah 58:7-10 as a guide for your reflection and commitment to action:

- Share your bread with the hungry: How will you give to those who do not have enough food? In what ways may you grow as a person who hungers for peace, compassion and justice?
- Shelter the oppressed and the homeless: What parish or local forms of outreach could benefit from your participation? How may you become more sensitive to those who are oppressed, un- or under-employed, or homeless?
- Clothe the naked: What clothing do you have that can be given to those who are in need? How might you adopt a simpler lifestyle?

Ideas to “Light Up” Family Life

- Have a device-free family/friend dinner. Encourage family members to bring a friend and sit down together. Make it easy – pizza, tacos, hot dog or baked potato bar – and sit down for just ONE device-free meal!
- Ask your young people to create a social media hashtag for your family and encourage them take charge of it! #shimmeringschmidtfamily or #hoppinhansenfamily (in our extended family it’s #wearetheweird-estherd) - something that can be used all year-round in a new tradition! Let your young people teach you how to follow the social media feed and photos.
- Take advantage of some of the awesome group games and conversation tools available for getting to know one another better. We keep a set of Table Topics on our dining room table and a set of Rory’s Story Cubes in mama’s purse. Here are some suggestions:
 - o TableTopics Series
 - o Rory’s Story Cubes Series
 - o Untie Your Memories Napkin Ties (www.p31bookstore.com/collections/featured-items/products/untie-your-memories-napkin-rings)

Inspired to Impact: Encouragement for the Pastoral Staff

As pastoral staff, sometimes we are so familiar with the lessons of light that our familiarity allows our own lights to grow dim. When our light dims as a leader, it is easy for our ministry and our efforts to shift into maintenance mode or “event” mode, letting the calendar and daily tasks take precedence over the message – the Gospel. Some call it the “tyranny of today”.

Take heart! God doesn’t call the equipped, God equips the called. You were made for this moment and created to receive that which God has to give you. As those we see anointed with oil in the scriptures, you have been chosen and anointed to do this work. In addition to fragrant sign of blessing, oil is used as a fuel. Remember the oil of your baptism, the oil of your Confirmation, the oil of your Holy Orders, and for some of you, the oil of your healing. Let God set you aflame once again with the oil of His promises.

There are ways to brighten your light without a ton of extra effort and as a bonus, this energy, this fuel, these strategies can also be shared with your members who might also be looking for some fresh oxygen in their flame! Here are three ideas to brighten your light:

1. Instead of reading the entirety of your daily scripture reflection which can sometimes keep you from hearing God’s specific message for you, consider reading only one word or line from the reflection and spending 5 minutes in quiet to hear what God wants you to know about it. If you don’t use a daily reflection, consider doing the same with the daily scripture – choose one phrase or word from the scripture, write it on a piece of paper and sit with it for just 5 minutes.

2. Sometime this month, pour yourself a big glass of ice water or a hot cup of your favorite tea and light a candle. Sit with your candle lit, preferably in the quiet (parents and grandparents, you might consider locking yourself in the bathroom for this if you have kiddos around!), and rest with the light until your beverage is gone.
3. God's light and love is meant to be shared. Our very Cross represents God's love come down and shared across. Do something for another person in the parish office or co-worker in the vineyard. As pastoral leaders we are so good at taking care of our members that we often forget to take care of one another. Jot a quick card, bring in an extra cup of coffee when you stop for your own, or make a big pot of soup for the staff to warm themselves with. Doing something small for someone else will brighten your own light.