

GENESIS MISSION EM PARISHIONERS

to evangelize through encounter



POWERS

George Sutherland, Fred Mroczek, Michele Mroczek, Thomas Gallagher, Rebecca Guza, Claïressa Guza and Desirae Guza were among the Genesis Mission participants at Holy Family Parish.

cover story

BY DANIELLE MCGREW TENBUSCH

As soon as she heard Father Jon Bielawski and Michele Thompson's presentation at the 2019 New Evangelization Summit, Peg McEvoy knew they were on to something special.

"I walked away and said, 'Oh my gosh. This is a gamechanger on how to help regular folks share their faith,'" recalled the director of faith formation for the Diocese of Saginaw.

Father Jon Bielawski and Michele Thompson had co-founded Genesis Mission, a grassroots organization that empowers everyday Catholics to share their faith, in their home diocese of Plymouth, England. The practical, down-to-earth approach of connecting with people makes evangelization seem attainable.

"Anybody can do this. Anybody can learn to share their faith in a comfortable way. It doesn't take a theology degree; it doesn't take years of training," Peg said.

Working with Michael Dopp, founder of the New Evangelization Summit, Peg arranged for Father Jon and Michele Thompson to come to Saginaw on their 10-day North American tour discussing Genesis Mission.

Fred and Michele Mroczek of Holy Family Parish, Marlette/Sandusky/Peck, had also heard Father Jon and Michele Thompson speak. When they saw the two and Michael Dopp were presenting at the Center for Ministry, they made plans to attend and brought along about 20 others from their parish, mainly young adults.

"We receive the Holy Spirit, and we have a calling to go out and make disciples of all nations. But a lot of times ... I felt unsure of myself bringing Jesus Christ into a conversation," Fred said. "The Genesis Mission is totally relying on the Holy Spirit to fill you with the words that God wants you to speak at that time."

In conversation with Father Bob Schikora, then-pastor of Holy Family Parish (he is now a senior priest), Fred discerned a calling to lead a Genesis Mission group at his parish.





Matt Leen, Rebecca Guza, Claressa Guza, Fred Mroczek, Michele Mroczek and Desirae Guza strengthened their faith through the Genesis Mission at Holy Family Parish.

After Fred and Michele Mroczek attended the “How to Share Your Faith in Daily Life” seminar at the Center for Ministry, they learned practical strategies for evangelization.

Building a faithful foundation

During the shelter-in-place order, Peg hosted four faith formation groups virtually with 18 people representing eight parishes. Normally, these would be in-person gatherings.

The seven-week introductory course focuses on where everyone is in their faith journey, writings from recent popes discussing evangelization and stories from Father Jon, Michele Thompson and Michael about their experiences sharing the faith. There is prayer and, when possible, eucharistic adoration. Gatherings also include Scripture readings and the opportunity for everyone to share.

“I was amazed at how open people were, and open to learning and changing and growing in their faith,” Peg said.

After formation and training with Peg, Fred and Michele Mroczek met with nine young adults from their parish and the surrounding area, invited by Father Bob. Father Bob felt a “nudge” from the Holy Spirit to reach out to each of them, whom he knew to already have a strong faith.

“In the present climate that we’re in, culturally and theologically, I think (young adults are) one of the groups the Lord wants to use that has not been utilized,” he said. They split into two smaller groups and began, using the same format and materials provided by Genesis Mission.

“The whole program in general gave me a deeper understanding of the identity of the church and how we’re called to proclaim the Gospel,” said Rebecca Guza, a Bad Axe native now living in Snover and attending Holy Family Parish. “Every Sunday we go to Mass, and at the end of the liturgy, we’re told to go out and proclaim the Gospel of the Lord.”

The Genesis Mission, she said, helps embolden her to do that with concrete steps, guidance and the understanding that encounters won’t always go as planned.

“Don’t be afraid,” she said. “You don’t see the end result, but God always does.”

Sharing in the Spirit

“With the Genesis method, the main focus is about sharing and listening. It’s not about explaining, but the sharing of what’s on one’s heart through the Holy Spirit and listening intentionally to what the other person’s saying,” Fred said.

Some encounters end in prayer. At a store, Rebecca spoke with a woman who was struggling with a divorce. After listening to the woman share her story, Rebecca offered kind words about God’s presence in difficult times.

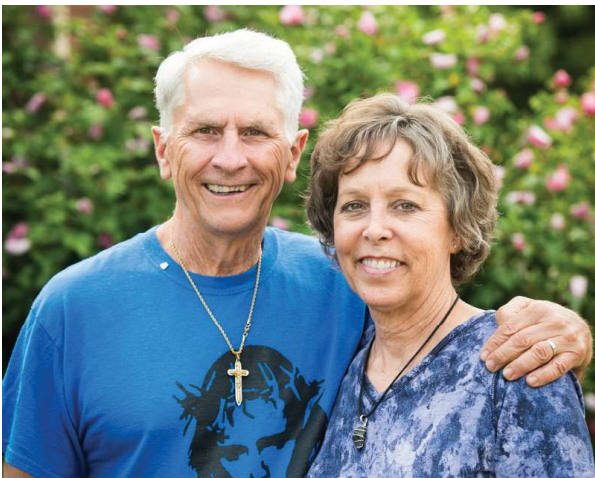
“I actually got to pray over her. It was really beautiful, because when I left she had tears streaming from her eyes, but she was so peaceful. It was incredible,” she said. “We’re called to strengthen people who are in the faith, too, not just people who don’t know about Christ. It’s about lifting up each other so we can challenge each other to all grow in our relationship with Christ.”

Fred said a common theme in the group’s discussions was a greater awareness of Jesus in one’s life and the awareness of needing to share the Gospel with others.

“Too many times we think evangelization is standing on a street corner and proclaiming theology,” he said. “Evangelization is really just another word for encounter, and encountering people where they’re at, letting them speak and finding out what’s really on their heart.”

For example, Fred encountered one man in his early 20s simply because he was wearing a crucifix while getting gas.

“A young man came up to me and said, ‘Hey, I like the dude,’” Fred recalled. After a few confused moments, it was clear the man was



A DAILY PRAYER:

“Lord, bring me someone today to share the Gospel with.”

“The Genesis Mission is totally relying on the Holy Spirit to fill you with the words that God wants you to speak at that time.” – Fred Mroczek

referring to the person on the cross. “I said, ‘Do you know who that dude is?’ He said, ‘I have no clue, but I do have one at home.’ So it gave me the opportunity at that time to share a little bit about who the dude was in his terms.”

The lesson: “Sometimes, we think as Catholic Christians that everyone has heard about Christ, but in society today, a lot of people don’t know who Jesus is.”

In another example, Fred recalled a conversation he and Michele Mroczek had with a woman whose heart was aching with her spouse’s recent death and the coronavirus lockdown.

“There was a lot of anxiety in her life,” he said. “It gave us the opportunity to bring up faith and Christ and how he worked in our lives.”

Despite the pandemic limiting and changing our interactions, Fred believes there is always an opportunity to talk with somebody as long as one trusts the Holy Spirit and places that trust over pride of doing your own will.

“It’s not about me, it’s about the Holy Spirit and how the Holy Spirit will work,” he said. “When you trust in the Holy Spirit, then all the pressure is off you.”

Building up the Church

After completing the seven-week faith formation course, the Genesis group continues to meet once a month in a similar format.

“The Genesis Mission is a great step of deepening your Catholic faith,” Fred said. “It’s really just a great catechesis for us, especially dealing with the Holy Spirit.”

Father Bob likens the group participants to the parable of the yeast that leavens a batch of dough; the Lord uses small groups to move his Holy Spirit through everyone.

“I think they can make an astounding difference,” he said. “I think when people see the young adults who are authentically excited and realize how important our faith is, it draws them in.”

Since the group began, Father Bob has noticed a difference in the young adults who participate in Genesis Mission.

“I could tell there had been a real change in the intensity of the fire in them since the first meeting. I was so excited to see and hear the authenticity,” he said. “It’s the Holy Spirit.”

Father Bob said he was thankful to see the young adults’ friendship and faith growing together, noting



that those strong relationships can help in evangelization as well.

“It excites me,” Rebecca said. “We get to share God’s love. We get to be part of someone else’s love story with God. We get to be used as God’s instruments to convey the truth to people, and hope and love and joy.”

Michele Mroczek hopes they can continue to grow the Thumb region’s Genesis Mission group and do a second round of faith formation.

“That’s what it’s going to take to really build the parish, I think, to have a ground level of evangelizers,” she said, adding that it includes both those who have never been to church as well as those who have fallen away from the faith. “So often we want to evangelize and help somebody on their walk of faith, but (the Genesis Mission) is actually holding our feet to the fire. We need to be doing it and encourage others to do it, too.”

That’s exactly what Peg hopes will happen.

“My goal is that... there will be people ready and willing to share their faith in every parish in this diocese,” Peg said. “The ultimate goal is to live our discipleship by sharing our faith. The Genesis Mission can be an important tool in helping us do that.” †

Michele Thompson of Genesis Mission, Michael Dopp of the New Evangelization Summit, Father Jon Bielawski of Genesis Mission, and Peg McEvoy, director of faith formation for the Diocese of Saginaw, collaborated to bring the Genesis Mission to the diocese. The Diocese of Saginaw is one of the first in the world to use the Genesis Mission model. Michele, Father Jon and Michael spoke at the “How to Share Your Faith in Daily Life” seminar on Feb. 15 at the Center for Ministry in Saginaw before the COVID-19 pandemic.

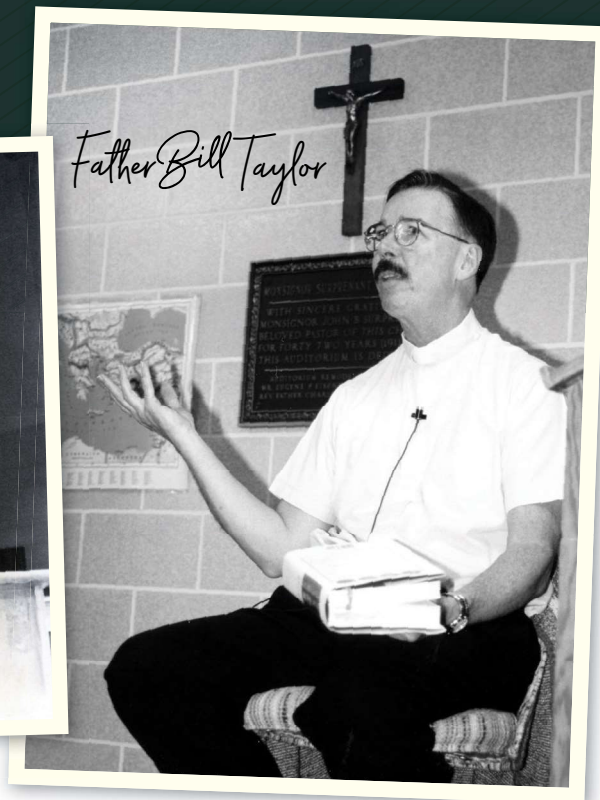
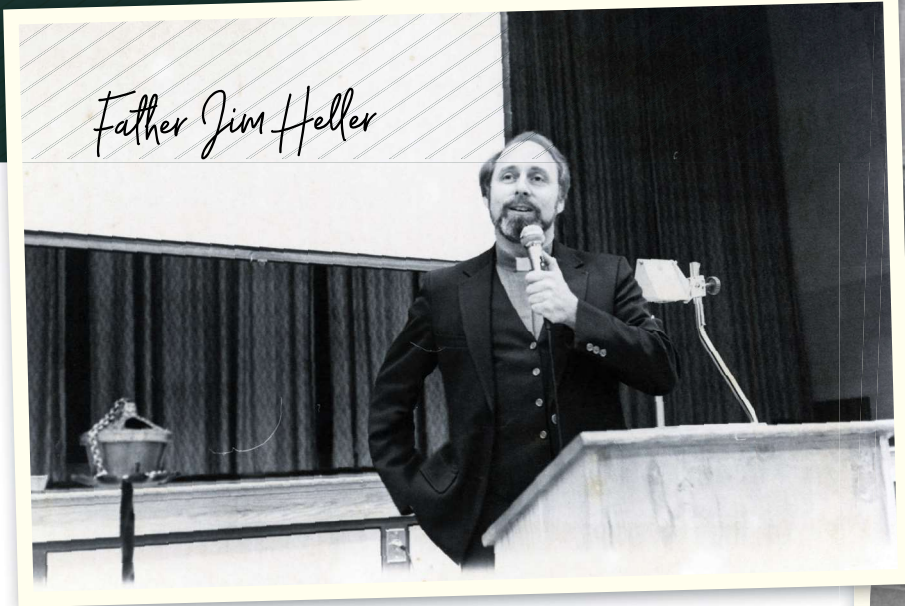
WHAT IS GENESIS MISSION?

Genesis Mission equips and trains people to evangelize in everyday life by being in tune with the Holy Spirit, listening attentively and having meaningful conversations. Everyday interactions can be opportunities for evangelization.

Learn more at www.saginaw.org/genesis

BEST FRIENDS

CELEBRATING THE LIVES OF FATHER BILL TAYLOR AND FATHER JIM HELLER



Father William Taylor and Father James Heller met in the 1980s, when both served as priests in the Diocese of Saginaw.

BY STACEY TRAPANI

Father Jim and Father Bill were great friends throughout their ministry.

They were born two years apart: Father Jim in Bay City in 1942 and Father Bill in Saginaw in 1940.

They attended Catholic schools (both taught by the Sisters of Mercy), attended seminary and were ordained within two years of the other – Father Jim in 1969 and Father Bill in 1967.

Both were priests for more than 50 years and they passed to their eternal home two months apart. Father Jim died May 7 and Father Bill on July 13.

For these two with so much in common and such parallel paths, theirs was a story of brotherhood, camaraderie and a shared love of Jesus Christ that developed over years as pastors and spiritual guides.

“As new priests, they kind of grew up together,” said Father Andy Booms, pastor of St. Brigid of Kildare Parish in Midland.

“Father Jim was more the quiet, spiritual individual. Father Bill was more of the scholar. His degree of knowledge on all things was incredible and his memory was incredible,” said Father Steve Gavit, pastor of St. Dominic Parish in Saginaw, who knew the priests for more than two decades.

Bound by Scripture

For both men, their first love was sacred Scripture. Father Jim memorized the Gospel each week, choosing to recite it by heart during the Mass. During the homily at Father Jim’s funeral liturgy, Father Bill said of his longtime friend, “Jim’s life’s work was proclaiming the wonderful word of God. He proclaimed that word by the words he spoke and the way that he lived.”

“Father Jim’s homilies were always based upon the Scripture and how it applied to our lives,” Father Steve said. “When someone proclaims the Gospel based upon memory, I find myself paying even more attention.”

For his part, Father Bill was a self-taught Scripture scholar. His love of God’s word was nurtured over a lifetime of learning. He was a teacher of Scripture, church history, preaching and ecclesiology for the Lay Ministry Formation Program since its beginning in

