



# Witness to Christ in Parishes and Schools

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I spent a year volunteering with Mother Teresa's Missionaries of Charity in a small village in rural Armenia. I served alongside the sisters, participating in their daily prayer, assisting with long-term care for twenty young people with disabilities, and supporting their efforts to provide basic needs to people in the village.

The sisters' faith made sense to me. They said they saw the same Christ in the poor as they did in the Eucharist, and they lived like they believed it! Each day was filled with equal parts prayer and service. Their care for those most in need was not merely a good idea Mother Teresa had come up with decades before, but a faithful response to our Christian call to build a more just and peaceful world.

One place we hear this call is in the Gospel of Matthew (25:31-46), where Jesus tells us that whenever we care for the hungry, thirsty, naked, sick, prisoner, and stranger, we care for Christ himself. Our very salvation is riding on our ability to find Christ in the outcast and to respond accordingly (see Mt 25:34-36). For the Missionaries of Charity, there is no separation between their Christ-centered prayer life and the

work they do. Devotion to Scripture and Sacrament sends them into the streets of the most neglected communities in the world.

Even though I was already committed to my Catholic faith when the sisters welcomed me, the Missionaries of Charity engaged me more deeply through a New Evangelization. They could not profess their faith without serving, and they could not serve without rooting it in faith. Their witness to an authentic, holistic faith in action eventually inspired me to pursue the University of Notre Dame's Echo Faith Formation Leadership Program and a career in Catholic social justice ministry.

Three years after leaving Armenia, as director of young adult ministry for Romero Center Ministries in Camden, New Jersey, I helped develop a regional ministry for young people in their twenties and thirties. The hope of this ministry is to provide opportunities to integrate faith with life through service, prayer, and reflection, in the spirit of the New Evangelization that the Missionaries of Charity live out daily.

This ministry introduced me to a recent college graduate named Jenna.

Jenna has a degree in communications and video production. Like many new graduates, she could not find a job, so she moved back home. Jenna attended Sunday Mass at her home parish with her parents, but that was the extent of her involvement in church.

As a part of our regional outreach, our young adult ministry program partnered with Jenna's parish for a three-week Advent series that explored how we encounter "God among us"—in our families, workplaces, friendships, and wider community. The associate pastor of the parish asked Jenna to be on the series' leadership team. Although she did not exactly know what she was getting into, Jenna accepted.

After getting to know a bit about Jenna, I invited her to produce a freelance video to promote an upcoming retreat in Camden. She accepted the offer (even though she had never been on a retreat before), and we worked closely together for a few months as we developed the video. Jenna's work on the video landed her a

spot on the planning team for the retreat. Soon after she began working with the retreat team in Camden, she committed to helping out at a weekly tutoring program at a Jesuit nonprofit in the city.

How can we welcome our peers, like Jenna, into a faith community through a New Evangelization? Invite them personally. Enter into genuine, mutual relationships. Find out what they are interested in and encourage them to take on leadership based on their interests and gifts. Make faith meaningful and relevant through service to and with people on the margins of society. Finally, we must do all this while remaining open to our own ongoing evangelization, aware that our encounter with others is always an encounter with Christ.

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