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From the Seminary to the Streets

Cardinal Champions the New Evangelization

By Joseph Pronechen

Cardinal Adam Maida has come up with a bold educational initiative he hopes will prepare his archdiocese, Detroit, to preach the Gospel more vigorously in the years ahead: He's launched a new curriculum at Sacred Heart Major Seminary with the New Evangelization in its very name.

The program, the Licentiate in Sacred Theology with a specialization in the New Evangelization, offers a graduate-level degree to seminarians, priests, religious and laypeople. As it's the first of its kind, students may soon be drawn to Detroit from across the country.

"Since the beginning of his pontificate, the Holy Father has called for a 'new evangelization,'" Cardinal Maida explained to the Register via e-mail. "Sacred Heart Major Seminary in Detroit is responding directly to his call with the License in Sacred Theology focusing on the New Evangelization. This first-of-its kind degree is an important milestone for the Church in the United States."

The first class set out into the deep in September, after the Vatican approved the program. Sacred Heart will grant the STL-New Evangelization degree through the Pontifical University of St. Thomas in Rome (the Angelicum).

Ralph Martin, director of graduate programs in the New Evangelization at the seminary, says he's excited that Cardinal Maida has decided "to prepare heralds to the New Evangelization. This is guiding the principle for the program." Martin, a popular author and speaker, is best known as host of the EWTN program "The Choices We Face."

Dominican Fr. Steven Boguslawski, Sacred Heart's rector and president, says he hopes the new STL program will bridge the divide between doctrinal study and pastoral

service. “Theology is really pastorally oriented; pastoral care at its very heart has to be doctrinally informed,” adds the priest. The New Evangelization is “about the engagement of the culture with the values of the Gospel and the teachings of Jesus,” Father Boguslawski says. “The Holy Father has led us in that direction.”

The STL-New Evangelization program has three parts: doctrine, method and mission. The doctrine component focuses on the person of Christ with “a happy emphasis on Christology,” says Father Boguslawski. “How is Christ presented in the Gospels?” The method component surveys the history of Catholics in the United States, taking into consideration the particular challenges and opportunities in specific dioceses and cities.

For mission — presenting Christ and the Gospel to the culture — Father Boguslawski stresses: “We are most precisely guided by the teachings of John Paul II and the documents of Vatican II.”

Because the licentiate isn’t meant to be an ivory-tower degree, Father Boguslawski believes “the program should have a payoff immediately at the local level in the parish and diocesan setting. They’re immediately user-friendly.”

Tailored Approach

With more than 100 different ethnic groups in metropolitan Detroit, the archdiocese becomes a model launching pad for this type of seminary program. The rector points out that, because of Cardinal Maida’s leadership and exhaustive preparation, “we’re able to identify the specific challenges ... so somebody can come here, learn about evangelization, improve their theology, and create a strategy to address those immigrants (recently) arrived in their diocese. The way you evangelize people from Central America is not the same way you evangelize people from the Middle East.”

There’s yet another challenge. “We live in a time in which growing secularization and materialism in our society make it more difficult for the Gospel to be heard,” says Cardinal Maida. “With a world-class faculty, this innovative program will challenge both clergy and lay students to deepen their own relationship with the Lord and enable them to spread the Gospel more effectively in the midst of today’s culture.”

“Based on a solid theological and pastoral foundation,” adds the cardinal, “we expect that graduates will be on the cutting edge of developing new and creative evangelization programs in their own local settings throughout the country and throughout the world.”

Gospel Goals

Fr. Gerard Battersby, pastor of St. Christopher Church in Detroit, enrolled in the first STL-New Evangelization class.

“We’d been doing door-to-door evangelization when I saw the licentiate offered at Sacred Heart,” he says. “I thought this might be a great compliment to what were trying to do at the local-parish level.”

His parish, once predominately Polish, has evangelization outreach to a neighborhood now about 50% African-American and 30% Middle Eastern Muslim.

Father Battersby sees multiple reasons why this New Evangelization degree is important. “Evangelization is more than just reaching different cultural groups,” he explains. “It’s also about reconnecting with our own people. The Gospel is ever new. We have to continually propose it not only to our own people but also to a skeptical world. And of course we have to be converted ourselves.”

According to Father Boguslawski, part of the program’s immediate payoff will be in answering how we reconvert those who are nominally Catholic. “The people who are properly trained should be able to identify the cultural trends in local areas impeding their return to the church,” he says.

Laity will benefit along with priests and seminarians (with the cardinal’s encouragement) working on the licentiate. Martin points out that, often, people assigned evangelization responsibility in diocesan offices don’t have the necessary training. The STL-New Evangelization program, he says, will provide a real solution to that problem.

Martin also notes that the program will offer courses in life issues and in “family evangelization,” with teachers such as distinguished bioethicist Dr. Janet Smith. And for those who don’t require a licentiate, there’s a corresponding masters-level degree specializing in the New Evangelization.

There are also six endowed, permanent chairs to support these new efforts in the New Evangelization, notes Father Boguslawski, such as The Fr. Michael McGivney Chair in

Life Ethics. The Knights of Columbus in Michigan and the Supreme Council in New Haven, Conn., are supporting the McGivney Chair endowment to the tune of \$1.5 million. (Father McGivney is the founder of the Knights.)

Father Boguslawski sees the STL-New Evangelization program permeating the seminary. “We expect greater and greater things — more evangelical formation for our seminary population,” he says. “The priests produced from here will be precisely the priests required for the new millennium. We’re forming the Church for the next 75 years.”

(Joseph Pronechen writes from
Trumbull, Connecticut)