Pope says Christians can be missionaries to those near and far

By Cindy Woodren

VATICAN CITY (CNS) — All Christians are called to be missionaries, sharing the good news of God’s love in their families, workplaces, or in far-off lands, Pope Benedict XVI said.

“Mission starts from the heart,” the pope said during his midday Angelus address Oct. 22, which was World Mission Sunday.

“The love that moved the Father to send his Son into the world and [moved] the Son to offer himself for us to the point of dying on the cross, that same love was poured by the Holy Spirit into the hearts of believers,” he said.

Converted and saved by love, every Christian is called to proclaim “good news that God is love and, in this way, save the world,” the pope said.

Because mission is a matter of sharing the love of God, every Christian can and must be a missionary, he said.

Missionary work is not limited to traveling far away to proclaim the Gospel to people who have no heard the message, he said. Missionary work also can be striving to make one’s family life holy, living one’s professional life “with a Christian spirit,” or dedicating one’s life to God in the priesthood or religious life.

Bishops from Americas discuss threats to life, U.S. border fence

By Cindy Woodren

VATICAN CITY (CNS) — In addition to denouncing threats to human life, council members — from North and South America as well as from the Vatican — also offered a harsh assessment of plans to construct a fence along the U.S.-Mexican border.


“The wall along the United States border is a barrier to the poor, the extremely poor, and the most vulnerable,” said the letter.

Speakers at Canon Law convention say there’s room for improvement in church consultation

FORT WORTH (CNS) — There’s room for improvement in church consultation, said speakers at the annual convention of the Canon Law Society of America.

The Code of Canon Law prescribes various structures for church consultation, but they are not always effective in practice, the speakers said during the Oct. 9-12 meeting in Fort Worth.

The theme of the convention, “Consultation in the Life of the Church: In Service of Community,” was inspired by Pope John Paul II’s 2001 apostolic letter, Novo Millennio Ineunte (At the Beginning of the New Millennium).

In it the late pope called for strengthening a “spirituality of communion” by effectively using the structures of participation and consultation provided for in church law.

In an Oct. 9 keynote address, Cardinal Oscar Rodriguez Maradiaga of Tegucigalpa, Honduras, identified consultative bodies on all church levels, from the Synod of Bishops and College of Cardinals assisting the pope, to various lay and priests’ councils helping diocesan bishops, and finance and pastoral councils aiding parishes.

“Truly, the Code of Canon Law proposes perfect structures for consultation,” Cardinal Rodriguez said. However, they will be effective only if those who request and offer advice have the ability to listen, especially to “listen wisely,” he added.

Mons. John Strzyinski, former executive director of the U.S. bishops’ Secretariat for Doctrine, said consultation is “a gift that should be cherished.”

VATICAN NEWSPAPER — Pope Benedict XVI reads the Vatican newspaper, L’Osservatore Romano, which corresponds to Catholic teaching and positions taken by the pope. An exhibit on the 145-year history of the Vatican newspaper is currently on display in Rome.

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SIM helps get much-needed projects off the ground

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"During this, our 24th campaign, the generosity of our Catholic families in the diocese continues to inspire me," says John Honaman, director of Stewardship and Development. Through the continued prayers of all of us, I am hopeful donations will set an all-time record this year."

For Hymel and the 229 students who attend St. Rita School, assistance can't come soon enough. The school's flat roof enables rainwater to pool for several days before the sun dries it up.

"Parent volunteers have patched the roof many times, but some of the leaks are hard to find," the principal explains. "Moisture gets beneath the shingles and moves."

Estimates to repair or replace the roof range from $3,000 to $90,000. The school community is appreciative for any help from Staying in Ministry it can receive.

"Money is always an issue in Catholic schools. We operate on a very tight budget," the educator points out. "Tuition wouldn't begin to cover the cost of fixing the roof. Without help from the diocese, we would just keep patching the problem."

Although the Annual Diocesan Appeal supports a myriad of causes—from Catholic Charities to faith formation programs—one-third of the money donated is given directly to parishes or schools for specific projects. Catholic families in the diocese are generous when the collection basket is passed each Sunday, but "for many communities, the support is not enough to meet their needs, and that's exactly where funds from Staying in Ministry come in," Honaman explains.

The Sunday offering, supplemented with money donated to the diocesan appeal by families throughout the diocese, can make a tremendous impact on the lives of thousands of people. In past years, Staying in Ministry helped repair a rural church severely damaged by a spring storm and provided another country parish with a much-needed paved parking lot. Most recently, Catholics living in Morgan, a small town at the southern tip of the diocese, were grateful for the assistance, given in building a $282,000 parish hall for Our Lady of Guadalupe Church.

"Fort Worth Bishop Kevin Vann joined parishioners in celebrating the new religious education community space during dedication ceremonies Oct. 3. The new building is the culmination of five years of planning and sacrifice by the struggling rural community of 65 families that manages to collect $367 in offerings each week."

"Everyone in Morgan was so thankful to their 'angels' in the Diocese of Fort Worth who contributed to the project through Staying in Ministry," Honaman says. "They want everyone to know how grateful they are."

Parishioners of San Mateo Mission in Fort Worth are working hard to raise $100,000 in order to receive a matching grant from Staying in Ministry. Plans are to tear down these two older structures to make way for a new religious education building. (Photo by Donna Frykaen)

"We have to take pride in our parish, get involved, and show the diocese we can raise the money," he says. "SIM money is an incentive to 'get people pumped up and give them the drive to accomplish this.'"

Plants are in the early stages, but Barbara is confident that the 200 families registered at San Mateo will work to make a religious education building a reality.

"We're going to do it," he promises, adding he's not sure of the timing at this point.

"Raising thousands of dollars is a monumental task, but the needs are there," admits Mgr. Hubert Neu, St. Patrick pastor. Two buildings currently used by San Mateo for meetings and administrative purposes—an old house and an old church building—should be torn down because of age, space, and design considerations.

"With help from Staying in Ministry, places like San Mateo would never be able to afford the buildings they need," Mgr. Neu explains. "I'm encouraging the people to work toward it."

Making necessary improvements or adding staff is always a struggle for small parishes. Nobody knows that better than Father Steve Berg, who has juggling the demands of four rural churches for the past four years. On a typical weekend, the priest travels 40 miles to say Mass and hear confessions at St. William in Montague, St. Joseph in Nocona, St. Jerome in Bowie and St. Mary in Henrietta. Add sick and bereavement calls, administrative tasks, and counseling to his list of appointments, and the schedule is exhausting.

Help finally arrived last spring in the form of Russ Detviller. Ordained a permanent deacon in the diocese 11 years ago, Detviller moved back to Michigan in 2001 to be closer to relatives. He and his wife, Cecilia, returned to the Metropex last spring and agreed to assist at Henrietta. Sharing in Ministry will cover a portion of the expenses incurred by the deacon as he assists the rural pastor with his cluster of parishes.

"For the past four years, I've relied on volunteers to help almost exclusively," Fr. Berg explains. "When I came here, the only paid employee was the priest."

Since his arrival, Deacon Detviller has spent time visiting the sick, helping with religious formation, and cataloging inventory at each parish for insurance purposes.

"Having him here is a real blessing," the pastor says. "He's somebody I respect, who shares my concerns. We have a similar outlook toward people, and the parishes are benefiting from his good management experience."

This extra pair of helping hands provides a sense of balance to the rural community that serves 450 households, three hospitals, seven nursing homes, and two jails.

"I can be more proactive than reactive now," Fr. Berg notes. "There's more time to plan, and we're planning farther ahead."

The Sharing in Ministry grant, which will pay the deacon's travel and other expenses, is a gift appreciated by the rural Catholics.

"Sharing in Ministry is the connection between the diocese and these struggling parishes," Fr. Berg adds. "The people feel included and less isolated."

Detviller, who serves Sacred Heart Church in Watauga Falls before moving away, is enjoying the country lifestyle.

"It's busy, but not fast-paced," he says. "They're beautiful little parishes, and the people are very dearful. A deacon is supposed to serve, so I'm here to do whatever they need."