

Bringing the missions home

As Christians, we are all called to be missionaries, bringing Christ's message to those around us. But sometimes, in the clutter of everyday life, that missionary call can get lost. That is why Ruth Oakley, the director of the diocesan Office of Missions / CRS, launched the Mission Ambassador Program, intended to keep the missions ever present in parishes and among parishioners.

"Mission is really about setting hearts on fire for Jesus. So, how do we get hearts set afire for mission at the local parish? Because, when the local parish is on fire, it spills over across the ocean," she says.

The Mission Ambassador Program grew out of The Great Commission, a one-day event held in 2013 to ignite the missionary spirit in the Diocese of Portland. Parishioners who sign on to be mission ambassadors will represent the diocesan missions office in parishes by sharing the message of the missions, making sure mission

announcements are placed in weekly bulletins, welcoming missionaries who visit their parishes, praying the mission rosary, and promoting mission-related events.

Most recently, that included the Holy Buckets program, which was offered this Advent. Sponsored by the Pontifical Society of the Missionary Childhood Association, the program was intended to teach children the importance of their baptismal call to mission.

"It really is to engage families, especially children, in Advent reflection," says Ruth.

Although the Mission Ambassador Program is just getting under way, 80 people have already signed up to be ambassadors. Many of them attended a Mass celebrated by Bishop Robert Deeley



Ruth Oakley,
Director of
Missions / CRS



World Mission Sunday Mass

on World Mission Sunday, during which the program was officially launched.

They included Doug and Danielle Fogg from Bangor

who, in the past, were involved in mission work in Guatemala.

"We have a heart for missions," says Doug. "Through mission work, we learned so much more from them than they learned from us. They shared their faith with us, and their faith has to be a daily thing because their lives depend on blessings from God. It was transformative for us and can be for others."

"We have such a passion for it and love the idea of promoting it in parishes," says Danielle.

Gary Carr, a mission ambassador

who lives in the town of Wayne, says his interest in mission work grew out of a job that gave him the opportunity to experience the cultures of 40 countries.

"I took a catechesis course because I figured it was time to make a difference in spreading the word to other people," he says. "The key to effective missions' work is finding what is equal with whomever you are talking, to find that equal ground and then build on that."

Deborah Blais, who attends Prince of Peace Parish in Lewiston, describes a mission trip she took to Africa as eye-opening.

"It is definitely a life-changing experience. So when Ruth asked me to participate in the Mission Ambassador Program, I was all in," she says. "I feel like the Lord put me here for missions."

Ruth says she hopes the Mission Ambassador Program will help parishes become more engaged in mission work, not just abroad but here at home.

"I want the mission program to be integrated into the life of the parish because the parish is all about mission but not just in a narrow sense," she says.

Barbara Snowadzky, a parishioner at St. Michael Parish, Augusta, says she is committed to helping make that happen. She says she's always had a strong propensity for social justice and has been looking for ways to become more involved in her parish since her husband died three years ago.

"This seemed like something that really appealed to me and where I might be able to make a contribution. I think raising awareness is critical. We tend to live in a bubble in our culture, in our society. We are so blessed, and I don't think that we have a grasp of how such a high percentage of people on earth live, in terms of struggling for basic necessities," she says.

At age 72, Snowadzky stresses that it's never too late to get involved in mission work. She sees the Mission Ambassador Program as a perfect way to start.

"We're all called to evangelization, but this is a way to do it through channels that are well-established and very effective," she says. "This is an ideal opportunity for making a contribution."

If you are interested in becoming a **mission ambassador**, please contact Ruth Oakley at ruth.oakley@portlanddiocese.org or 207.773.6471, ext. 7817.