

‘Bible Geek’ shares his love of Scripture with today’s teens

WASHINGTON – Mark Hart, executive vice president for Life Teen International, also goes by another name: “Bible Geek.”

That’s the moniker he’s been using for more than 10 years in his weekly “Spread the Word” e-mail messages, answering questions about the Bible, and his weekly podcasts called “Sunday, Sunday, Sunday,” focusing on the upcoming Sunday Mass readings.

He says the name was “Spirit-led” and just came to him when he was a parish youth leader and e-mailed a Bible study to teen parishioners when he was out of town.

“Instead of writing my name, I just wrote Bible Geek,” he said, adding that everyone who got the e-mail not only liked it but wanted more. That initial e-mail has since grown to a weekly epistle distributed through Life Teen, an international Catholic youth ministry program based in Mesa, Ariz.

More than 15,000 subscribe to the e-mail, but Mr. Hart said the final count is “impossible to track” because so many people forward the message to family members or friends.

Mr. Hart, author of the “T3” interactive DVD Bible study series for teens published two years ago by Ascension Press, also speaks at Catholic youth conferences. But he wasn’t always a Bible expert. He said he came to his knowledge as a youth minister while searching for ways to defend the Catholic faith to youths being drawn in by evangelical groups.

To answer youths’ questions, Mr. Hart said he read the Bible with the “wrong posture” of a defensive mode. But he soon found he “fell in love with it.”

“I stopped reading books about the Bible and just read the Bible and let it read me,” he told Catholic News Service Aug. 7. “I fell in love with a God I didn’t really know,” he added, noting that so often “people have in their minds a version of God who’s

not the God of Scripture.”

He likens the newfound love of the Bible he experienced to “a new springtime” that changed his life. “I couldn’t put (the Bible) down, and then I read everything else so I could fill the hole with as much knowledge, such as the saints or church fathers. I was voracious; I couldn’t stop,” he said.

Now he focuses his energy on sharing his enthusiasm for the Bible with young people as a way to give back for the blessings he has received.

In addition to explaining a Scripture passage via e-mail, he usually responds to at least one question a week on the Life Teen Web site, www.lifeteen.com. The theme of questions runs the gamut from “is there truth and what is truth?” to very specific questions about morality and sexuality.

Through talking to teens in person and in cyberspace, Mr. Hart said he is “more encouraged than discouraged,” especially because young people are actually reading the Bible and attending Bible studies.

The first step for young people to embrace Bible reading is “to get over apathy,” he said; he is convinced that is already happening.

“There is a huge groundswell of young people trying to read Scripture,” he added.