

# ChristLife national training coming to Linthicum parish, renews evangelization

**By Karen Sampson Hoffman**

*Special to the Review*

It is typical for Catholic evangelists to attend the ChristLife National Training Conference, then wait a year to bring it to their home parish. That was not the case, however, for Deacon Lee Benson and his wife, Debra, when they brought the ministry to St. Ignatius, Hickory.

"We felt like we didn't want to wait a year," Deacon Benson said. "It was less than a year when we launched our first one at our parish."

For the fourth straight year, the Bensons will attend the ChristLife National Training Conference, April 26-28 at St. Philip Neri in Linthicum.

He has seen Baltimore-based ChristLife help parishioners at St. Ignatius grow in their faith and form close friendships with other participants. The parish has its own group of ChristLife program leaders, who have impressed Deacon Benson with their creativity and dedication in the program. He always brings them new ideas from the national training conference

"The first time we went, we had the deer in the headlights feeling, and we're just trying to lap up as much as we can," Deacon Benson said. "We've always come back with something people are doing in other parishes that we can use to improve our program."

According to Peter Ascosi, assistant director, ChristLife is a hospitality-centered approach to evangelization, one that helps to create and support a sense of community among participants, creating a place to discuss personal relationships with Jesus while offering a way to deepen those relationships.

ChristLife participants share a meal, pray and followed by prayer time and a learning video themed to that session's component. Small groups discuss the component's lesson and share their faith experiences. The national conference will provide training for all three steps in the series, and how to present ChristLife as a welcoming experience in parishes.

"ChristLife is a means for Catholics to do the work of evangelization and an opportunity to invite people who are on the margins of faith to come closer," Ascosi

said. "ChristLife begins with inviting parishioners to a personal encounter with Christ."

More than 70,000 people in 730 parishes in the U.S. and nine other countries have offered ChristLife. The program is offered in three, seven-week series: Discovering Christ, Following Christ and Sharing Christ.

With local and national speakers, workshops and discussions, Ascosi said conference organizers are hoping to inspire enthusiasm among the attendees for the new evangelization using the ChristLife series. Last year's conference drew more than 200.

"We hope they feel that they've found a real practical means to do the new evangelization in their parishes," he said. "The practical tools are the how - how do we actually do this? And community, that they build relationships with people from around the country, and even from overseas. That they find brothers and sisters who are doing evangelization and can be of support to them."

The Bensons, meanwhile, are again looking forward to spending time with other local ChristLife leaders, describing the national training conference workshops as an opportunity to "recharge" their own excitement for evangelization.

"As leaders of these things you find yourself giving, giving, giving," Deacon Benson said. "There are people we're looking forward to seeing from all over the country. It's just a nice dynamic. It's a great time, and we come back and feel refreshed."

"I always come back feeling Spirit-filled and ready to continuing serving," Debra Benson said. "I really feel my calling in bringing people to Jesus Christ. This truly is the work of the Holy Spirit. We're going to do this as long as the Lord continues to call us to it."

### **ChristLife National Training Conference**

April 26-28

St. Philip Neri, Linthicum Heights

Speakers include :

- Dave Nodar, founder and director of ChristLife
- Ralph Martin, president of Renewal Ministries
- Father Mathias Thelen, spiritual director and instructor of theology at Sacred Heart Major Seminary
- Father Erik Arnold, pastor at Our Lady of Perpetual Help in Ellicott City
- Father Mike Saporito, pastor of St. Helen's Parish in Westfield, N.J.
- Father Dale Picarella, pastor of St. Patrick's Parish in Havre de Grace
- Dianne Davis, New York Regional Director of ChristLife
- Jennifer King, communications director of ChristLife
- John Messina, worship leader
- Corrie Dubyoski, worship leader

For more information, visit [ChristLifeConference.org](http://ChristLifeConference.org)